

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

17th June 2014

JOINT WORCESTERSHIRE REGULATORY SERVICES (WRS) SCRUTINY TASK GROUP – COVERING REPORT

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor John Fisher, Portfolio Holder for Corporate Management.
Portfolio Holder Consulted	The Portfolio Holder was consulted by the group during the review as an expert witness. However, he has not been consulted about the group's recommendations.
Relevant Head of Service	Steve Jordan, Head of Regulatory Services
Ward(s) Affected	All wards
Non-Key Decision	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

This report provides a summary of the work of the Joint WRS Scrutiny Task Group. Members are invited to consider, based on the content of the group's final report, whether to endorse the group's recommendations.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to RECOMMEND to the Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee that

**the 12 recommendations of the Joint WRS Scrutiny Task Group be endorsed;
and**

to RESOLVE that

the report be noted.

3. KEY ISSUES

Background

- 3.1 The Joint WRS Scrutiny Task Group was originally proposed in summer 2012 by Wychavon District Council. Terms of reference for the review were developed and by spring 2013 the lead Overview and Scrutiny Committee at each local authority in the county, including Redditch Borough Council, had decided to participate in the exercise. Each local authority agreed that Bromsgrove District Council, as the host authority for the shared service, should also host the scrutiny review.
- 3.2 Participating Councils were invited to appoint a lead Member and a substitute Member to the Joint Scrutiny review one of whom had to be either the Chair or Vice

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Chair of the Council's main Overview and Scrutiny Committee. In Redditch Councillor Alan Mason was appointed as the Council's lead Member and Councillor Gay Hopkins, Vice Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2013/14, was appointed as the substitute Member.

3.3 The first meeting of the group took place in September 2013. Members subsequently met 15 times during the course of the review. At each of these meetings Members aimed to address the group's key objectives which were to:

- review the final business case for Worcestershire Regulatory Services (WRS) and the extent to which the current operation of the partnership compared to proposals contained within the business case;
- compare previous services levels at each partner authority with current service levels;
- compare performance of services both prior to and since the introduction of the shared service;
- compare levels of customer satisfaction with Regulatory Services both prior and subsequent to the introduction of the shared service; and
- consider the governance arrangements between partner organisations and the shared service.

3.4 The group gathered evidence in a variety of ways during the review. This included:

- scrutinising relevant documentation, including the original business case for the shared service;
- interviewing senior operational Officers, including the Head of Regulatory Services;
- interviewing elected Member representatives from partner organisations who had been appointed to the Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee as well as observing meetings of the Committee;
- interviewing representatives of the Management Board for the service;
- interviewing relevant Officer representatives from the host authority, Bromsgrove District Council;
- reviewing customer satisfaction data;
- visiting Wyatt House, the base for Worcestershire Regulatory Services, located in Worcester; and
- consulting other elected Members regarding their experiences of working with Worcestershire Regulatory Services.

3.5 At the end of the review the group proposed 12 recommendations which are designed to address some of the main challenges for the service that Members identified during the course of the review. These recommendations, together with further information about the evidence basis for the group's proposals, are detailed within the group's final report.

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Report Route

- 3.6 Members will be aware that generally the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider and approve recommendations from Task Groups which are then referred directly to the Council's Executive Committee for determination. However, the initial decision making body for Worcestershire Regulatory Services is not the Council's Executive Committee but, rather, the Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee, to which two representatives from every partner authority, including Redditch Borough Council, are currently appointed each year. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is therefore being asked to consider whether to endorse the Joint WRS Scrutiny Task Group's recommendations and to refer their conclusions to the Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee in the first place.
- 3.7 The Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee has the power to make some decisions on behalf of all partners, though in other cases, particularly where a decision requires a change to policy, recommendations may be referred to Executive Committees at participating Councils. The report is not due to be considered by the Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee until 2nd October 2014. It is unlikely, therefore, that the scrutiny Task Group's findings will be considered by the Executive Committee until October 2014 at the earliest.
- 3.8 The Overview and Scrutiny Committees at each Council in Worcestershire will be considering the Joint WRS Scrutiny Task Group's final report at meetings during June and July 2014. The exception to this arrangement will be consideration of the report by Bromsgrove District Council's Overview and Scrutiny Board. To ensure that feedback from every partner can be taken into account by Members at the host authority alongside the group's findings it has been agreed that the Board will consider the report in September 2014.
- 3.9 The Scrutiny Task Group recognises that it is possible that some Overview and Scrutiny Committees may wish to suggest alterations to the report and / or to reject some of the recommendations whilst endorsing other recommendations. To avoid the need to reconvene the Scrutiny Task Group to consider and respond to feedback potentially from seven different scrutiny Committees, which could elongate the reporting process, the group is proposing that in cases where Overview and Scrutiny Committees wish to highlight concerns or differing opinions these should be attached as addendums to the group's final report. All addendums will then be presented for the consideration of both the host authority's Overview and Scrutiny Board and for the consideration of the Worcestershire Shared Services Joint Committee.

Financial Implications

- 3.10 There are a number of financial implications to the group's recommendations as detailed in the report. There is also a specific chapter in the report dedicated to financial considerations.

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- 3.11 The group has highlighted the fact that financial pressures are having a significant impact on the shared services. These pressures and the suggestions proposed by the group to ensure that effective services remain available to residents living in Worcestershire, including Redditch Borough, should be considered carefully when responding to this report.

Legal Implications

- 3.12 There are a number of legal implications to the group's recommendations which are detailed in the main report. In particular, Members should note that there are a significant number of legal implications in relation to the group's proposals concerning the future governance structure of the shared service.

Service / Operational Implications

- 3.13 The group's recommendations have a number of service and operational implications which are all detailed in the report. This includes a specific chapter in the report which is devoted to performance and operational matters.

Customer / Equalities and Diversity Implications

- 3.14 Many of the group's recommendations will have an indirect impact on the service received by customers. However, a number of the group's proposals, particularly those relating to the future business model for the service and communications, have direct implications for the customer. In both cases these implications are detailed within the main report.
- 3.15 There are no specific equalities and diversity implications.

4. RISK MANAGEMENT

The group is suggesting in their report that if action is not taken to implement their recommendations and to enact change within the shared service there is a risk that the partnership will become unsustainable and the future role of Regulatory Services within the County and Borough will become uncertain.

5. APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Joint WRS Scrutiny Task Group – Final Report

AUTHOR OF REPORT

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