

**TO: ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE & COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL
6 MARCH 2018**

**REGULATORY SERVICES – JOINT SERVICES PARTNERSHIP ONE YEAR ON
Director of Environment, Culture & Communities**

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This Council entered into a Partnership with West Berkshire and Wokingham in January 2017 to bring together all of the regulatory services functions. These functions were those discharged by the environmental health, trading standards and licensing services. This paper looks back at the learning, the progress and the challenges yet to be faced.

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **That the Overview and Scrutiny Panel considers the detail as presented to the meeting and reflects on the progress made to date.**

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 The Council has made a significant decision to enter into a Partnership with two other Berkshire authorities. The nature of that service is such that it provides for a wide range of mandatory functions that are now discharged as part of a wider group that is managed through a joint committee but administered through West Berkshire. The Council needs to be satisfied with the arrangements.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 None. The views of the Overview and Scrutiny Panel are being sought so as to inform the future decision making and reporting process. The Council needs to be confident that the arrangements ensure that it continues to meet its mandatory obligations as well as the delivery of quality services to its residents and businesses.

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 5.1 This Committee was asked on the 20th September 2016 to consider a proposal to set up a Public Protection Partnership with West Berkshire and Wokingham Councils. The proposal was put forward on the understanding that there would be a £150k saving in staff cost. In agreeing the proposal the Council accepted the way that the service would need to be delivered in the future would have to change if that level of cut were to be delivered. It meant that the nature of the service would change so that it was to be more intelligent led and be focussed around the delivery of the Agreed Strategic Priorities as determined a Joint Committee in whom delegated authority had been vested by all three partners. The consequence was the loss of the ability to use the service as had been custom and practice over the years to be as reactive as it had been. The proposals were agreed by all three councils and the new service came into operation just a few months later on the 9th January 2017.
- 5.2 The timetable for effecting such massive change was incredibly ambitious. The entire programme had been conceived and made operational within some 6 months. This was achieved outside and unaided by any 'transformation process' within any of the three councils. Whilst outside any such programme it is an example of significant achievement and opportunity for learning. One of the most significant factors is that

that this was set up as a 'Partnership' rather than a 'lead authority arrangement'. This has led to and continues to give rise to confusion from time to time in all authorities. The nature of the agreement is such that that staff within the Partnership (although paid by West Berkshire) remain in the employ of all three authorities acting for and making decisions on behalf of each Council under the direction of the Joint Committee and oversight of the Joint Management Board.

- 5.3 In order to 'go-live' in such a short timescale it was recognised that there would have to be compromise between the ideal and the practical. Staff were brought together largely under a best fit arrangement under two senior managers. That structure was always going to be an interim arrangement that would need to change over time to better reflect need. An early change has been effected initially on a short term basis, taking advantage of when one of the senior managers gained a promotion. The post was not replaced at that level. One year on the service is now looking at its management level with a view to effecting better service integration and the delivery of further service efficiencies. The challenges associated with merging three professional disciplines from three councils to form one common culture working from three locations are not to be underestimated. One unexpected consequence of the change has been to try to get former colleagues to understand that the PPP staff as still in effect employed by the council. They are not there on behalf of a private business there to make a profit for example.
- 5.4 During the early days there were also several other specific challenges to address; IT was and still is a big one. The current working arrangements require some double kitting of equipment as staff working in different offices cannot access each councils system via one PC. The service currently operates through three software systems. One of the priorities is to evaluate the cost benefits that might arise from a consolidation of the systems working from one not two operating systems i.e. Windows 7 and Windows 10 as currently is happening.
- 5.6 The other significant barrier to efficient working is accommodation. Mindful of all three partners requirements to maintain local 'drop in' facilities several options have been explored to date. One of the options that became available was for the use of some accommodation in Theale. The Partnership has been able to take occupation of three rooms that adjoin the local library and these have been fitted out to enable the PPP response team to be based from there. In addition it is planned to consolidate operational support staff there so that for example functions like licensing administration can be centrally managed. Doing so improves efficiency and resilience as well as improving the overall service offer with more reliable turnaround times etc.
- 5.7 In setting up the service, the governance model and learning BFC gained from its involvement with re3 (the joint PFI contract) has been invaluable. For the Partnership to work getting the governance arrangements right has been critical. Whilst there has also been a period of learning with that relationship the Joint Committee has met 3 times to date and their prime purpose is set up and monitor the delivery of the strategic priorities. They have control of a combined budget of circa £3.4m net and currently 105 staff. The funding arrangements are set so that each council pays an agreed percentage of the costs based on their original contribution. In doing so the risk is shared in the same proportions as would be any savings that may accrue. In practice it now means that should one partner wish to reduce its costs then the impact across the Partnership has to be considered and agreed by all. You could not have a situation for example whereby some common service is delivered to a lessor level than across the rest of the Partnership.

- 5.7 Looking back over the first year it is fair to say that the size of the task was underestimated. The service has had to face unexpected challenges in setting the operation up. That said the service to the public has continued to be delivered with few issues and to good effect. Some of the early common gains include having a joint training for all licensing members and a single contribution to the Safety Advice Group (SAG) process rather than one at each council. They are now working on the consolidation of common policies and moving towards having a single fees and charges structure. In conclusion it is fair to say that whilst there is still much to be done the efficiency of the regulatory function has improved through the better use of combined team resources and the Governance arrangements have become established to good effect.
- 5.8 A presentation will be given in support of this report that illustrates how the business is being managed proactively according to council priorities rather than the services functions.

6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

6.1

Borough Treasurer

6.2 There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

Equalities Impact Assessment

6.3 Not applicable.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

6.4 The PPP have been given delegated authority to discharge numerous mandatory duties on the Councils behalf. Should the PPP fail to do so then there could be liability to this Council.

7 CONSULTATION

Principal Groups Consulted

7.1 Not applicable.

Method of Consultation

7.2 Not applicable.

Representations Received

7.3 Not applicable.

Background Papers

Contacts for further information

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