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# PPP Response to Covid19

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<b>Committee considering report:</b>	Joint Public Protection Committee
<b>Date of Committee:</b>	24 <sup>th</sup> June 2020
<b>Date JMB agreed report:</b>	JMB approval: 15 <sup>th</sup> June 2020
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## 1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To provide the Joint Public Protection Committee with an overview of the work undertaken by the Public Protection Service in response to Covid19.

## 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee considers the report and NOTES the work undertaken by the Public Protection Service in response to the Covid19 pandemic.

## 3. Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
<b>Financial:</b>	<p>The Covid19 pandemic has presented a number of financial challenges for the service particularly with respect to income from licensing. Many sectors of the licence trade including hospitality, taxi and private hire, street trading and licensed animal establishments have been significantly hit by the combination of the Covid19 business restrictions and the restrictions around essential travel. This has resulted in a number of licences being surrendered or 'paused'. We continue to receive requests from various aspects of the licensed sector for financial relief.</p> <p>At the time of writing the impact in terms of lost income from licence receipts is estimated to be around 40K for April although some of this may return.</p> <p>It is unknown at this stage how many will return to business as restrictions are eased. Within hospitality and retail a number of national chains have been or are currently in administration and looking to reduce the number of outlets / brands etc. Time will tell what the impact of this will be locally. Some sectors were already contracting in terms of high street presence. This includes betting shops licenced under the Gambling Act 2005.</p> <p>In order to mitigate the effects of this until the picture becomes clearer a number of steps have been taken. These include</p>

	<p>delaying recruitment to vacancies in other parts of the service. The essential travel restrictions have had impact on travel spend within the service. This has yet to be assessed in detail but this will also be used to mitigate losses.</p>
<b>Human Resource:</b>	<p>Staff across the service have faced the same challenges that staff in other local authority services and beyond have faced. Working from home became the norm from the outset. Staff were designated 'key workers' given the nature of the services provided and some have availed themselves of the support of schools with respect to childcare. Others fell into the defined Covid19 vulnerable categories and a small number have contracted the infection and have thankfully made full recoveries.</p> <p>The individual needs and circumstances of staff were taken into account when introducing the service delivery arrangements that took effect on the 1<sup>st</sup> April. These are explained in more detail in the report.</p> <p>Some staff have by necessity had to carry out essential visits to traders and respond to community issues such as nuisance. Risk assessments were introduced early on to guide decisions in these areas. Others have also had attend offices where work cannot be conducted entirely from home.</p>
<b>Legal:</b>	<p>Trading Standards and Environmental Health were designated by the Secretary of State for Health as the primary enforcement body for the business restrictions contained in The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020. The Regulations have been amended several times as restrictions are gradually lifted.</p> <p>Within PPP this has been led by trading standards officers from the Investigations Team and working with environmental health and licensing officers.</p> <p>The interpretation of the law and relevant guidance for staff have been developed by the Joint Case Management Unit.</p>
<b>Risk Management:</b>	<p>Risk management has been at the heart of service delivery throughout this period. Whether that is risk assessment to protect staff health or assessing risks to the wider community of operational decisions.</p>
<b>Property:</b>	<p>Council buildings have remained open to a lesser or greater degree for essential access where work cannot be conducted at home. Staff have been allowed to attend offices on a co-ordinated and as necessary basis. The PPP office at Theale which is the base for Response and central teams has now been made Covid19 compliant and capacity has been significantly reduced.</p>

<b>Policy:</b>	The role of the Joint Committee includes consideration of reports relating to performance and service delivery matters. This report addresses that requirement by setting out the service delivery arrangements of the PPP during the Covid19 pandemic.			
	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
<b>Equalities Impact:</b>				
<b>A</b> Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		x		This is not a decision report.  The report does however set out the steps taken to protect vulnerable staff and address community need during this period.
<b>B</b> Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		x		The level of service will be improved with competent and appropriately qualified staff delivering to our customers, from initial contact through to enforcement action. Staff will also have the opportunity for personal development and self worth.
<b>Environmental Impact:</b>	x			There has been an unquantifiable environmental impact from the new service arrangements as travel has been significantly reduced. Longer term it is anticipated that this impact will be maintained as new ways of working are embedded in service delivery.
<b>Health Impact:</b>	x			Where there are direct impacts on those suffering from ill health or who fall into Covid vulnerable capacities these have been managed. Internal communication has played a significant role as steps have been taken to mitigate the effects of isolation.
<b>ICT or Digital Services Impact:</b>	x			The use of ICT on service delivery has been transformational. Telephone conferencing, MS Teams and Zoom have all been employed in the day today running of the service but also in the delivery of democratic decision making. Staff have engaged in planning meetings remotely

				and all three PPP authorities have held virtual licensing panels where the technology has delivered effectively.
<b>PPP Priorities :</b>	x			The service arrangements put in place are designed to deliver against the JPPC priorities particularly around health protection, protection of vulnerable people and environmental protection. The priority relating to effective and efficient service delivery has been at the core of arrangements.
<b>Data Impact:</b>		✓		None
<b>Consultation and Engagement:</b>	<p>Staff and JMB and have been engaged in the setting and delivery of the service through the interim arrangements. Managers have met with JMB on a fortnightly basis and regular reports delivered on implications and progress.</p> <p>Members have been kept briefed through a series of PPP Covid19 Member briefings and a briefing was also delivered for Town and Parish Councils.</p>			

## 4. Executive Summary

- 4.1 By definition Environmental Health, Trading Standards and Licensing are protective services and would be called on to play an active role in aspects of the local response to the Covid19 pandemic.
- 4.2 This report summarises the Public Protection Partnership ('the service') response from mid-March to date. Elsewhere on this agenda is a report setting out the recovery plan for the coming period. More specifically this report looks at the following aspects of the PPP response:
- Interim Service Structure
  - New Ways of Working
  - Health Protection
  - Community and Environmental Protection
  - The role of Communication
- 4.3 Members are asked to note the report.

## 5. Supporting Information

### Interim Service Arrangements

- 5.1 The service is complex with a broad skills and knowledge mix. This breadth meant it had a significant offer to the overall local response to the pandemic. In order to maximise this a decision was taken in March to bring into play a new delivery structure at the beginning of April. The rationale for this was as follows:
- Some staff were no longer able to perform their existing roles due to health protection measures in place.
  - Managers anticipated a significant increase in Service Requests
  - There was a clear need for proactive communication to protect and provide assurance to residents and businesses
  - Some elements of 'business as usual' would need to continue.
- 5.2 In essence Partnership Support (Customer Delivery, Applications and Finance) were kept along with the Joint Case Management Unit. The remainder of the service was split into two operational functions:

### Response

The Response function is the reactive element of the service. Response handles the vast majority of incoming service requests and consists of staff from all PPP disciplines. A significant number of staff were moved into Response to manage not just 'business as usual' enquiries but also those relating to the Covid business restrictions and prohibitions. In April the service received 1341 service requests which equated to an increase of 26% on 2019 and in May we received 1400 service requests representing an increase year on year of 27%. Within that figure were 286 service requests relating primarily to Covid19 business restrictions and over 400 relating to bonfires (in 2019 this figure was 68). Other areas that saw significant increases were fly-tipping (with 28 cases where evidence existed and referred for investigation) and 322 relating to noise nuisance (an increase of around 30% year on year).

The service also had a large volume of enquiries received from a variety of licence holders driven in large part by the effect that the wider business and essential travel restrictions were having on their businesses.

The animal warden service within Response continued to operate throughout collecting stray dogs and re-uniting them with owners.

The Partnership Support Team continued to handle the large volumes of calls and undertake the licensing applications function by dealing with new and renewal applications.

### Community

The Community function managed a number of work streams. These included business as usual matters such as air quality monitoring (which continued throughout the period), private water supply sampling, private sector housing and ongoing investigations of which there were a significant number at the point of going into

lockdown. The other primary function of the team initially was the provision of advice to the community and business. Throughout this period all government, professional body and local advice was considered and interpreted for local delivery. This included areas such as scams, business restrictions, food safety, licensing and animal health. Welfare calls were made to known scam and fraud victims along with calls to farmers to provide advice and support.

Latterly this team has managed the contribution of the service towards care home safety, business re-opening and track and trace. These matters are dealt with below.

A small number of staff who were restricted through shielding requirements etc. were assigned to review the PPP databases (of which there are currently 3) in readiness for the transfer to a single system as part of the overall efficiency programme and to update quality management processes and documents.

- 5.2 In consultation with the Joint Management Board the impacts of these interim measures have been monitored through a routine of virtual 'scrutiny' meetings, establishing levels of risk, business continuity issues and considering the longer term impacts of projects that were put on hold.

### **New Ways of Working**

- 5.3 With the offices closed (to all but essential need) and the vast majority of staff working from home the service rapidly engaged new ways of working. This included the use of telephone conferencing and the use of Teams and Zoom. These tools weren't just engaged for internal purposes but also in service delivery. Examples of this include:

- Virtual licensing panels that have taken place in all three authorities
- On-line talks and videos on scams
- Training provided for care home staff on infectious disease controls
- On-line safeguarding training for taxi and private hire drivers
- Public health work around tobacco control

- 5.4 There have been some issues arising from the fact that two authorities (BFC and Wokingham) have operated from a Microsoft Teams platform whilst West Berkshire adopted Zoom as its main platform. This has again highlighted the need to move to one authority for the delivery of ICT support and to this extent work continues with BFC.

- 5.5 Whilst some essential travel was necessary to maintain service delivery e.g. business closure enforcement, doorstep crime response, nuisance, air quality monitoring, private water supplies, animal warden etc. there has been a significant reduction in travel. Whilst some will return in due course as food premises, animal health and other audit work starts again there is no intention of resuming travel between offices for meetings and briefings. It is proposed that savings arising from this will be used to deliver investment in technology to provide further service efficiencies.

### **Health Protection**

- 5.6 The service, by its very nature, has a substantial public health remit and has a number of officers whose work routinely involves regulation of the food chain from farm to fork, the same officers are also involved in the enforcement of health and safety provisions in shops, offices and other workplaces.

- 5.3 This work includes investigating accidents and crucially carrying out contact tracing, along with Public Health England, to manage infection outbreaks primarily around food borne infections.
- 5.4 These staff (unable to carry out routine inspections due to the legislative changes), along with other professional staff, were initially moved into providing business advice where they continued to operate. The advice was aimed at ensuring that businesses operated in manner that reduced risk to employees and customers. Alongside this trading standards officers enforced the prohibitions in the Covid Regulations to ensure that businesses that should not be operating weren't doing so and that those that were did so lawfully e.g. click and collect. A number of prohibition notices were served and many businesses were advised.
- 5.7 Whilst the focus on business advice has continued in recent weeks the service has become involved in a number of other key areas. Two members of staff have been carrying out advisory visits on behalf of the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG's) to care homes to look at the implementation of clinical guidance on infectious disease control. We have also been providing remote (via Teams) training from groups of care home staff on infectious disease control.
- 5.8 In the last few weeks the service has become significantly involved in the local arrangements around Track and Trace. Integrating with all three Public Health Teams our officers will become the first responders for local referrals from the national system. The role will be to work with colleagues from Public Health to manage local outbreaks in pre-identified risk settings such as schools, care homes, transport, offices etc. The service has engaged in all local planning and has implemented new processes in order to be able to act as the local response is rolled out. This will see us represented on local Health Protection Boards and we are working with colleagues across Berkshire to develop mutual support and resilience. The service will need to be delivered from 8am to 8pm over seven days.
- 5.9 We have also been involved in other areas of significance. The Support with Confidence (SWC) Manager has provided advice and support to SWC Members (who provide care to often vulnerable residents) and also assisted them to access much needed personal protective equipment (PPE). We have also supported other public health work streams such as the stop smoking 'Quit for Covid' campaign and more recently have been contacting many businesses to ensure that they are taking steps to the reduce the risk posed by legionella on re-opening. This vital work will continue as we move towards the re-opening of hospitality, leisure and services such as hairdressing, beauty and treatments.
- 5.10 One other significant area is the support for town centre re-opening. This has included proactive pre-opening advice such as webinars, the legionella work and premise specific Covid safety advice. On the week commencing 15<sup>th</sup> June (as non-essential retailers opened). The service deployed officers to all high street and retail complex settings with a view to provide supporting advice to business and re-assurance to shoppers. Planning and work is underway to support other business sectors not yet open including hospitality, gyms, hairdressers etc. The service's approach to business re-opening is set out at Appendix A.

## Community and Environmental Protection

- 5.11 In addition to the business closure work, the service has stepped up its support for scam and fraud victims by actively contacting them to provide advice to ensure they don't become victims of new Covid related scams. The calls have also provided assurance and support to many who are often elderly and sometimes isolated. The Victim Support Officer has also delivered video updates as well as an on-line talk attended. A significant amount of warnings and updates have been issued via social media and by council corporate communication channels.
- 5.12 Investigation work has continued throughout this period and a number of existing investigations have been widened to take in new victims. Fresh investigations into doorstep crime incidents have also commenced and are progressing. As the restrictions on essential travel are eased it is anticipated that there will be further incidents requiring response, intervention and investigation. A number of cases have continued through the court system which is now operating largely remotely although trials are recommencing in the Crown Court.
- 5.13 In relation to environmental protection we have seen a number of new referrals with respect to fly-tipping and where evidence indicates the perpetrators these are being actively investigated. In addition we have also carried out a campaign on social media to discourage residents from engaging unlicensed waste carriers to remove waste as this often leads to fly-tipping. There has also been work undertaken to identify potential unlicensed waste carriers and a number of matters will be subject to further enquiries / investigation.
- 5.14 As previously stated air quality monitoring has continued via the fixed sites but also through diffusion tubes. The lockdown has given the opportunity to gather data on levels at a time when there has been significantly less traffic on the roads. In due course the impact of this can be assessed. Private water supplies have continued to be sampled and monitored. Finally we have responded to a large volume of domestic and commercial bonfire / burning issues. To support this information and advice has been provided through our own and wider council communication channels. As traffic has increased weight restriction enforcement checks have been re-introduced and enforcement of overloaded goods vehicles will be re-commencing as part of the recovery plan.

## Communication

- 5.15 Effective communication was identified at the outset to being at the heart of the service's response. To this end six groups were identified:
- Businesses
  - Residents
  - Elected Members and Parish Councils
  - Other Council Services
  - Delivery partners
  - Staff
- 5.16 A range of communication channels have been deployed. These have included:
- Staff briefing notes

- 3 x Members Bulletins
- Parish Council Bulletin
- Materials for businesses and residents distributed directly to businesses or corporate communication channels
- PPP website
- Social Media
- Press Releases

For reference the Members Bulletins, Parish Council Bulletin and communications evaluation reports are appended to this report as Appendix B, C and D respectively. These give many examples of the work undertaken by the service throughout the three months. They also show the significant rise in website use which has a whole section devoted to Covid related community and business support. A number of items have been carried by local press and media.

## **6. Concluding Comments**

- 6.1 This report is only a snapshot of some of the work carried out over the last three months. It has been an extremely busy time for the service as it has for many services within and beyond local authorities. The assessment is that the temporary structural arrangements have delivered the important services and some will remain in the coming months. A new round of work around the opening of hospitality and other retail sectors has commenced and many more proactive steps will be taken to assist businesses and support and protect residents.
- 6.2 Track and trace work will continue to feature over the coming months and will continue to work closely with colleagues from local public health teams and PHE.
- 6.3 The structure is again under review as we move into recovery phase. The expectation is that visits and audits such as food, licensing, animal health, housing etc. will recommence. The proposals around this are dealt with elsewhere on this agenda.

## **7. Appendices**

- 7.4 Appendix A – Business re-opening approach
  - 7.5 Appendix B – Member Bulletins
  - 7.6 Appendix C – Parish Council Bulletin
  - 7.7 Appendix D – Communication data and examples
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