

Covid-19 Briefing for Members

Public Protection Partnership

**Bracknell Forest
West Berkshire
Wokingham**

Within the last two weeks the Public Protection Partnership has significantly changed the way it functions to deal with the Covid-19 pandemic.

The structure of the service has been re-arranged and many staff within the Service are now in interim roles to deliver response to enquiries and service requests, the provision of essential services, specific communications and work which continues to support the service.

We are maintaining key functions as identified in our Business Continuity Plan including the investigation into highly infectious or life threatening foodborne/ airborne/ waterborne disease or product; Licensing process element that has a significant impact on safeguarding; investigating an immediate life threatening living condition in the private sector housing market; animal welfare matters; corporate risk (finance) and/or individual safety; and crime in progress report. Some work which cannot be carried out, e.g. routine inspection work, has meant staff have been redeployed. We are ensuring the PPP staff are safe and that vulnerable staff are shielded. Corporately we are involved with silver command and contingency planning meetings.

Our role is to preserve the health, wellbeing and safety of the communities we serve. Our aim is to provide information to residents and businesses to encourage self-service, to enable them to make informed

decisions and to understand their rights and responsibilities and update them on any changes to our processes, service provision and service status.

How are we dealing with the new powers?

The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Business Closure) (England) Regulations 2020 were brought in on 23rd March 2020 to step up the measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19. The trading bans that came in are designated to be enforced by PPP with the Local Authorities. We have developed an enforcement process for the new business closure controls. Our Environmental Health and Trading Standards Officers are monitoring compliance with these Regulations, with Police support provided if appropriate. Businesses and premises that breach them will be subject to prohibition notices, and potentially unlimited fines.

The Secretary of State must review the need for restrictions imposed by this Regulation every 28 days, with the first review being carried out before the expiry of the period of 28 days starting with the day after the day on which these Regulations are made. PPP will seek to ensure full voluntary compliance with the legislative requirements whenever possible, it will not hesitate to use its enforcement powers where necessary. In conducting our enforcement work we

will continue to develop and have regard to intelligence, whether from partner agencies or the wider community.

All complaints will be recorded and each case assessed on its own merits. Complaints will be investigated and where appropriate Police assistance will be requested to visit a premise for the purposes of determining whether there is a breach of the Regulations. If evidence is available that indicates that a premise is operating in breach of the Regulations consideration will be given as to the most appropriate course of action which will be one of the following:

- Verbal Warning
- Prohibition Notice
- Formal Caution and Prosecution.

The PPP recognises the importance of maintaining consistency in decision-making concerning enforcement action, which is why decision making will be in accordance with the Public Protection Partnership enforcement policy (found at : <https://publicprotectionpartnership.org.uk/media/1793/ppp-enforcement-policy.pdf>)

Potential new powers and emerging risks

In addition the government has suggested there may be further new legislation soon to control price exploitation with respect to scarce products. When we know more on this we will keep you updated.

We are also mindful of emerging risks such as businesses changing to on line ordering.

Response

The Response Team have received an increase in calls in the last 10 days, especially in relation to domestic nuisance and scams. The types of complaints and enquiries they have received include:

- Garden bonfire complaints, especially allegations of commercial burning
- Noise from children playing in the garden
- DIY noise
- Dog barking/howling
- Business premises still trading despite Government advice (i.e. Garage, pubs, industrial site), including from workers and or family members concerned about being able to work
- Can an Off licence trade?
- Pop up shops for local community and the viability to set up
- Hotel alleged to be still open and serving food to the public
- Profiteering, with everyday goods being sold at extortionate prices.
- The sale of PPE such as face masks and hand sanitiser which may not be safe.
- Legitimacy of food delivery firms, offering such services to consumers
- Report that a person handed over £400 cash for goods, but nothing was delivered

Staff are preparing Frequently Asked Questions for Response colleagues and further guidance for our website for residents and businesses.

Protecting vulnerable residents, and prioritising high risk/harm issues

Several Coronavirus related scams, frauds and trading malpractices have been identified either locally or elsewhere in the Country. Our approach to these is two-fold: to raise awareness and tackle those who are perpetrating the crimes. The nature of scams is that they change on a regular basis, and we will continue to monitor these and put out information.

Encouraging the reporting of issues is vital so that we can all stay safe at work.

Licensing

We are continuing to process existing applications and are able to receive new applications. Alternative arrangements have been put in place for the payments. Some application forms have been updated and available on line.

Governance

At the end of last week the Institute of Licensing produced guidance by Philip Kolvin QC that the holding of licensing sub-committees / panel hearings remotely is lawful. For the hearing to take place the following will be required:



1. proper notice is given, with all papers served timeously on the authority and published online;
2. the actual parties to the hearing are able to participate;
3. any member of the public can see or hear, albeit not participate in, the hearing.

We are in close communication with Member Services colleagues in each of the partner authorities regarding this issue and await the decisions as to how this will be implemented.

Communication

We have developed a Covid-19 Communications Strategy. Our website has been amended to provide one location for all Covid-19 related information, guidance and links to relevant government websites. We are regularly updating the site. We have noticed an increase in hits in the last two weeks. A spike in visits and views was seen in the week commencing 23/03/20. Overall for March there were 1500 visits with 2854 page views. See Covid-19 website page [here](#).

Our social media is being used to put out messages and share information from relevant partner agencies. We have seen an increase in followers on both Twitter and Facebook. We would really like you to follow us if you are not already doing so. Please encourage others, both residents and businesses, to do so too in order that we can broaden our community messages and advice, ensuring they are being kept up to date.

 [Facebook](#)
 [Twitter](#)

Snapshot of our Social Media Posts re COVID-19



12:42

SAMSUNG

Text Message
Today 13:12

GOV.UK CORONAVIRUS ALERT

New rules in force now: you must stay at home. More info & exemptions at gov.uk/coronavirus Stay at home. Protect the NHS. Save lives.

Keeping up to date with guidance

We are regularly receiving information and guidance from the professional bodies which our staff belong, most notably the Institute of Licensing and more now from the National Trading Standards Board.

We are regularly scanning communication outlets such as Chartered Trading Standard Institute (CTSI), Charter Institute of Environmental Health (CIEH), Institute of Licensing (IoL), National Trading Standards Board (NTSB), government departments and agencies. South East tier 1 authorities are sharing all examples of communication and good practice through Trading Standards South East Ltd (TSSE).

We are using these updates to assist in the advice for staff as well as the messages we are putting out.

Who to Contact

Reporting of complaints relating to Covid-19 can be made on the website via the Enforcement Form on the front page. [Link here.](#)

Due to current resource levels and a spike in demand contacting the service at this time is preferable via email.

Trading Standards:

Concerned residents or anybody with information about coronavirus related scams are being asked to contact Trading Standards directly via:
TSadvice@westberks.gov.uk

Environmental Health:

Environmental Health matters are to contact us by emailing:
ehadvice@westberks.gov.uk

Licensing:

Bracknell Forest Licensing matters are to contact us by emailing:
LicensingAll@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

West Berkshire Licensing matters are to contact us by emailing:
LicensingAll@westberks.gov.uk

Wokingham Licensing matters are to contact us by emailing:
LicensingAll@wokingham.gov.uk