
PPP Covid19 Response and Service Update 3

Committee considering report:	Joint Public Protection Committee
Date of Committee:	31 st March 2021
Chair of Committee:	Councillor Parry Batth
Date JMB agreed report:	JMB Approval: 22 nd March 2021
Report Author:	Sean Murphy
Forward Plan Ref:	N/a

Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To provide the Joint Public Protection Committee with an update on the service response to Covid19 as well as an update on other service delivery matters including performance and an update on the work of the Case Management Unit.

Recommendations

- 1.1 The Committee **NOTES** the role PPP are playing across the Councils with respect to Covid19 response.
- 1.2 The Committee **NOTES** the status of non-Covid related service delivery including the Q3 performance report.
- 1.3 The Committee **RESOLVES** to receive a further update at its June 2021 meeting on progress and priorities for 2021/22 including recovery.

Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	<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 significant number of licences being surrendered or not renewed.</p> <p>At the time of writing the impact in terms of lost income from licence receipts is estimated to have stabilised at around £70K for the period April 2020 – February 2021. This is lower than previously estimated. The primary losses have come from the taxi and private hire sectors but we have also seen some premises licensed under the Licensing Act 2003 close as well as some animal establishments / businesses cease trading.</p>

	<p>In relation to the new duties the PPP has obtained it has accessed a total £169K of the local outbreak response grant to cover the period July 2020 to December 2021. The commitment to this has been shared across the three PPP Councils. Grant funding has also been accessed to support the local tracing functions set out in this report.</p> <p>The service has also accessed grant funding with respect to Covid compliance work and specific projects relating to care settings. This has enabled additional staffing resource to support work around compliance checks, enforcement, business advice and events and safety advisory group.</p>
Human Resource:	<p>The service now has only three full-time / part time vacancies and at the time of writing these are in the process of being recruited too. We have around 18 agency and casual staff currently in the service. These are mostly grant funded for work around Covid and investigations as well as providing cover to long term absence such as maternity leave or are working on the single system project.</p> <p>Recently we have recruited to the Principal Officer – Policy and Governance role. The service is now effectively fully staffed.</p>
Legal:	<p>The service is the primary enforcement body for all three councils with respect to Covid legal controls.</p> <p>At the moment these controls fall into two categories. The first deals with business restrictions of which very few still exist. These can be re-introduced as a result of so-called local lockdowns.</p> <p>The second category relates to controls on Premises, Events (gatherings) and Public Spaces where the Councils have powers to issue directions and prohibitions.</p> <p>These are enforced under delegated authority from the Secretary of State or through the existing delegations to officers.</p> <p>It is a statutory duty to enforce many of the provisions in place to tackle Covid19 at a local level.</p>
Risk Management:	<p>We will continue to manage risk in line with the prevailing situation and corporate policies.</p> <p>The most significant risks relate to workload and income. In the former we are managing this through effective prioritisation of workload and the deployment of additional grant funded resource. The long-term sustainability of working a seven day service with evening / late evening working is a challenge but</p>

	many staff have come forward to assist with this to ensure that people can get effective breaks.			
	Lost income is being covered this year in part by government support schemes for local authorities. It is understood the lost income will be covered for the first quarter of 2021/2022. Beyond this we are looking at how lost income can be managed within the service whilst allowing time to see if this income returns as businesses may re-enter the market as lockdown restrictions are eased,			
Property:	There are no direct implications arising from these proposals. Each Council is taking its own approach to property issues.			
	The support elements of the service are largely operated from a central base at Theale and this has provided for efficiencies for example in the area of licence applications where we now have the ability to produce licences for all three areas from one central office.			
Policy:	The role of the Joint Committee includes consideration of reports relating to service delivery matters. This report addresses that requirement by setting out the approach to service recovery.			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:				
A 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 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.

Environmental Impact:	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.
Health Impact:	x			The proposals create no direct health impacts on staff. They do however set out community based health protection measures.
ICT or Digital Services Impact:	x			The use of ICT on service delivery has been transformational. Telephone conferencing, MS Teams and Zoom have all been employed in the day to day 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. The Joint Public Protection Committee has also met remotely.
PPP Priorities :	x			The proposal is to maximise the use of resource to deliver against the JPPC priorities particularly around health protection, protection of vulnerable people and environmental protection on a risk led basis. The priority relating to effective and efficient service delivery has been at the core of arrangements.
Data Impact:		✓		None
Consultation and Engagement:	Managers and JMB have been involved in the development of the service delivery proposals.			

1.0 Executive Summary

- 1.1 In June 2020, September 2020 and December 2020 the JPPC received reports setting out the service response to Covid as well as highlighting the steps taken to prioritise business as usual workloads. At its meeting in December 2020 the Committee resolved to receive a further update report at this meeting.
- 1.2 This report builds on those previous three reports as well as providing an interim performance update.

2.0 Local Covid19 Response

- 2.1 **Service Requests:** In the period up until the 28th February the Service received 11,155 service requests. This is a year on year increase of 32% compared with the same period in 2019/20. In addition we received around 4600 trading standards notifications from the national reporting system. This represents an increase of 27% year on year. Of the 11,155 service requests 1708 related directly to Covid19 matters. These

included requests for advice from local businesses as well as reports from the public and others of alleged non compliances. Business as usual areas that saw a significant rise included bonfires and other reports of burning with 883 reports (an increase of 246%), licensing related enquiries at 681 (an increase of 24%), fly-tipping referrals for investigation at 123 (an increase of 124%) and noise at 1650 (an increase of 13%). Other areas that saw increases were animal health related SR's (64% increase, doorstep crime and scams (31% increase) and matters relating to product safety (60% increase). Areas where service request numbers fell year on year included food safety and standards (fall of around 22%) – believed to be linked to many premises being closed and animal warden SR's (a fall of 34%). This has presented a significant challenge for the service but with the additional resource and redistribution of staff we have maintained a response. A summary of response times against performance indicators is set out at **Appendix A** to this report.

- 2.2 **Outbreak Planning and Local Outbreak Investigation:** Each local authority has in place a local outbreak control plan. These have recently been refreshed and where called upon to do so we have assisted with that refresh. The Public Protection Service has a significant role to play in investigating, managing and preventing outbreaks.

The period since the Committee last met has been the busiest yet for the service as the country went through the second wave of the virus. We provided support monitoring outbreaks all through the Christmas and New Year holiday period and since the last report have contributed as follows to outbreak related matters:

- We carried out weekday local contact tracing for West Berkshire and weekend contact tracing for West Berkshire and Wokingham. Since numbers have stabilised the service now also carries out weekend contact tracing for Bracknell. At the peak this saw the service carrying out upwards of 50 local contact tracing calls in a single day and apart from four days over Christmas when these were picked up by the national system (in line with agreed protocol) we have provided this service 7 days a week including the new year period.
- Monitoring and review of all Covid notifications from PHE as well as 'soft intelligence' notifications from businesses, employees and members of the public. These notifications increased significantly through the second wave period and the service carried out a number of investigations in high risk settings including retail premises, industrial settings and other work places. We also carried out investigations in care homes, learning difficulty care settings and early years when asked to do so. The service has been tailored to meet each individual authorities' needs and to respond in accordance with their outbreak plans.
- In addition we have carried out targeted pro-active advisory calls and visits to settings which saw increases in cases to look at how outbreaks were occurring and provide advice on how they could be reduced and contained. In West Berkshire specific work was carried out in care settings and across all three authorities we have carried out advisory calls and / or visits to early years settings. This work is ongoing as we follow up on the advice given.
- Since the last report nationally and locally we have overseen the implementation of a raft of business and other restrictions put in place. Through December we carried out both daytime and evening visits to businesses to ensure compliance with the Tier 2 restrictions affecting hospitality and other retail and business settings. At one stage

we were carrying out several hundred proactive and reactive visits per week. Towards the end of December we entered Tier 3 for one day and then Tier 4 (which latterly became national lockdown). Since we entered tier 4 we have continued with reactive and proactive visits to those premises still open and have carried out around 100 visits per week prioritising common exposure settings and in particular supermarkets where guidance changed in January. A small number of prohibition notices have been issued on businesses that should not have been operating. In cases where improvements were needed advice has been given and follow up visits have been made. Weekly activity on compliance has been routinely reported back to each authority. We have also provided advice on other restrictions to the PPP partner councils and to towns and parishes.

- The service has worked very closely with the Wokingham Covid Marshals and Bracknell Covid Ambassadors to provide a joined up approach to achieving compliance. More recently (mid-February) West Berkshire introduced Covid Marshals and this service is managed directly by the Public Protection Service. This ongoing relationship will be very important in the coming weeks and months as lockdown restrictions are gradually eased in line with the government roadmap.
- Events and gatherings were limited in the run up to Tier 4 restrictions but we continued through the Safety Advisory Group to oversee the events and carried out compliance and monitoring visits where needed. An example of this was the work carried out with Bracknell public health colleagues at the Lapland UK event until its eventual closure on entering Tier 4.

2.3 **Support for the Businesses:** As has been stated in the section on Service Requests we have carried out a lot of work to support local businesses through the provision of advice and advisory visits. This has included advice on what businesses or aspect of businesses can still operate but also advice on how they can operate safely within the legislative and guidance framework. Many compliance visits have been advisory in nature.

3.0 Business as Usual

3.1 In terms of business as usual work, outside of service request work, we have carried out a large volume of risk managed activity. The following, whilst not exhaustive, gives an indication of the work conducted since the last report:

3.2 From an Environmental Quality perspective we have continued with provision of advice on planning related matters, routine air quality monitoring, sampling and testing private water supplies, inspections relating to environmental permitting and responded to allegations of commercial related nuisance.

The team have also successfully been awarded a Defra grant for air quality work and there is more on this elsewhere on this agenda.

The team prepared a policy report for Bracknell Forest Executive on the introduction of activity in relation to vehicle idling as well as applying for authority to carry out roadside emissions testing in the Boroughs air quality management areas. Finally, in Wokingham we have overseen the soon to be introduced PM2.5 particulate monitoring in parts of the Borough to align with local priorities in this area

- 3.3 The Community and Trading Standards Team have continued to respond to a large volume of service requests on top of Covid-19 related compliance requests from businesses. Many of the business as usual service requests relate to nuisance, neighbour disputes, public health pest complaints, animal warden related matters and public health funerals. To date, the team has successfully supported 12 mediation cases as part of its work involving complex neighbour disputes.

Other work includes the provision of support for fraud victims, the reintroduction of animal health and animal feed visits on farms, responding to food standards matters, inspections of petroleum storage facilities, responding to product safety related matters, response to incidents of alleged fraud and doorstep crime.

So far this year, the team has put in place work to recover almost £250,000 for victims of fraud and has recently purchased 16 doorbell camera's that will be used to protect residents from doorstep crime as well as investing in 'call-blocker' equipment to help prevent exposure to telephone scams.

The team has also led a number of public health related matters relating to tobacco and alcohol around Covid related hygiene with primary school children. The Berkshire West Tobacco Control Plan has also been refreshed by the team. Support with Confidence also goes from strength to strength.

Finally the service ran an on-line webinar for local importers and exporters on managing the requirements post Brexit.

- 3.4 The Food and Health and Safety Team have primarily been focussed on Covid compliance work, outbreak investigation, local contact tracing and looking at forthcoming events as well as carrying out advice work in early years and care settings. In addition they have maintained some food work concentrating on new businesses as well as considering and responding to reports of workplace accidents and non Covid infectious disease related matters.
- 3.5 The Housing Team has carried on with a large volume of licensing related matters appertaining to Houses of Multiple Occupation and Caravan Sites. They have also dealt with a number of complex housing related matters including investigations into housing and caravan site standards breaches. There is more on the work of this team in the first Member Housing Bulletin at Appendix C to this report.
- 3.6 The licensing team have a dealt with a large volume of licensing related SR work. They have also supported Licensing Committee meetings in West Berkshire and Wokingham as well as conducting statutory consultations on taxi and private hire fees and charges.

Further work on vehicle standards is being prepared for consultation and in West Berkshire the team drafted a response to the RSPCA motion on fireworks which was considered by the Licensing Committee and a policy will be brought forward in due course. In addition the team have updated the Bracknell Forest policy under the Licensing Act 2003 which was recently approved by BFC Licensing Committee and Executive and Full Council.

The licensing team are now working with all three Councils to review and update the Statement of Gambling Policy which will be put before all three Councils later this

year. Finally meetings have been / are being arranged with all three taxi liaison groups.

- 3.7 Across the service a large volume of investigation work has continued throughout the pandemic. This covers a wide range matters including fraud, doorstep crime, housing, nuisance, fly-tipping and counterfeiting. Funding and other resources have been secured from regional and national sources to support a number of cases of national significance. This work is supported by the PPP intelligence team.
- 3.8 The Joint Case Management Unit has supported the work around investigations and Covid response as well as prosecuting a number of cases on behalf of the partner authorities and working with West Berkshire legal services on West Berkshire matters. They continue to support Oxfordshire County Council Trading Standards and Fire and Rescue Services as well as Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service. Cases successfully prosecuted with respect to PPP enforcement since the last meeting of JPPC are as follows:
- Bracknell case: Confiscation Orders of £16K plus £9K costs following conviction of Maidenhead based couple convicted of selling counterfeit goods.
 - West Berkshire – breach of an improvement notice under the Housing Act 2004. Ordered to pay £1280 fine and prosecution costs of £4725.50
 - Wokingham based landowner convicted of breach of a prohibition notice served under the Housing Act 2004 – fined £2800 and awarded costs of £1513 + £20 per day ongoing fine if breach continues.
 - Wokingham case – Reading based gas fitter ordered to pay £2000 compensation following conviction for unfair trading.
 - Bracknell based resident convicted of breach of abatement notice following a trial over two days. Fined £600 with £2500 contribution towards costs.
 - West Berkshire based retailer convicted of five offences in relation to food hygiene. Conditionally discharged for 12 months. Costs £1247.26 awarded.
 - West Berkshire – prosecution of a roofer for unfair trading. Ordered to pay £8870 compensation to two victims
 - Bracknell – supermarket fined £536K for two breaches of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act
 - Bracknell – London based seller of counterfeit goods ordered to pay £12,366.19 confiscation and £5K costs
 - In addition the unit prosecuted a number of matters under the Road Traffic Regulation Act for breach of weight restrictions.
- 3.9 In terms of other corporate matters the service has supported the introduction and delivery of both the new RIPA policy at Bracknell and the new CCTV policy for Bracknell Forest. Both of which were approved by Executive in February. We are now assisting with staff and member awareness sessions. We are also working to achieve

accreditation for a range of powers under the Consumer Safety Accreditation Scheme which will in due course assist us to deal with a range of community related issues. In Quarter three the following FOI / MP / Member enquiries were received:

Type	Bracknell	West Berks	Wokingham	PPP Total
FOI	26 (12 "land charges searches")	27 (32 "land charges searches")	24	77 (44 "searches")
MP/Cllr	9	11	7	27
Service	7	6	6	19
Authority Total	42 (+12)	44 (+32)	37	123 (+44)

- 3.10 The PPP one system project, which will enhance both investigation efficiency and customer journey has experienced a series of delays due to availability of specialist officers. This is a direct result of prioritising staff for the Covid response. Recent meetings with the supplier has also indicated that they are not able to provide additional support during 2022/23 to reduce the delay. Based on current progress the project is now looking at a 2022/23 Q4 deadline. The JMB has focussed additional resources at improving data quality and reducing file duplication in advance of the main data transfers due in the autumn.

4.0 Communications

- 4.1 Communication remains a key element of effective service delivery and is an important part of the delivery model which has a focus on prevention and intelligence gathering as well as enforcement. We use many channels to communicate including visits to businesses and residents, press releases, website and social media.
- 4.2 A range of communication channels have been deployed since the last update. These have included:
- Further staff briefing notes / briefing sessions
 - Presentation to Norreys Neighbourhood Action Group
 - Licensing Update Session for Members of all three Licensing Committees
 - 1 further Members Bulletins (No7) at Appendix B
 - PPP website / Social Media – Update at Appendix D
 - Members Housing Bulletin at Appendix C
 - Air Quality Update Bulletin appended to the report elsewhere on this agenda.
 - News releases – available on PPP website
www.publicprotectionpartnership.org.uk/news
- 4.3 We are finding there is a significant take up by local media and large amount of our press releases, warnings and court reports are reproduced on-line which help raise awareness of issues with a view to preventing harms and increasing reporting. We have also carried out a number of interviews on Radio Berkshire on subjects ranging from scams to the illegal sale of puppies.

5.0 Looking Ahead

- 5.1 In line with the national picture the number of reported Covid cases has now fallen significantly. It is not known at this time what effect there will be from schools returning and the gradual easing of restrictions against a backdrop of the vaccination programme roll-out. Local tracing continues and we still receive reports of outbreaks in workplaces and other settings but these are few.
- 5.2 One of the key priorities for the service (as it has been before) in the coming period will be to assist businesses and communities through the process of the gradual easing of restrictions. A communication plan is in place which will include several business briefings in all three Council areas along with sector specific advice aimed at hospitality, non-essential retail, close contact services, grass roots sports and public bodies who manage public spaces. Plans are in place to carry out regular daytime and evening checks as part of our compliance and advisory roles. In performing this role we will be, as we have been since restrictions were first introduced, holding the balance between supporting businesses and the economy and the overarching public health imperative.
- 5.3 A significant area for the service will be events. A large number of events have been notified already and more are being submitted every week. We are also seeing a significant number of Temporary Event Notices being applied for. The service is putting in place additional resource to consider risk assessments as well as policing events from the point of view of Covid compliance, health and safety, food safety and environmental nuisance. Attendance will be on a risk based basis.
- 5.4 Beyond Covid there is much to be done in terms of recovery. To assist with this the government have set out proposed priorities for recovery. By and large these accord with previous priorities set by this Committee. It is proposed at the June meeting to bring forward a full recovery plan for consideration proposals for local priorities to meet the needs of the PPP authorities.
- 5.5 Elsewhere on this agenda the decision of Wokingham Borough Council to leave the Partnership is reported. This will clearly feature significantly in management workload capacity issues in coming months but all steps will be taken to mitigate the impact on service delivery.

6.0 Appendices

Appendix A – Response Times

Appendix B – Members Bulletin no 7

Appendix C – Member Housing Bulletin

Appendix D – Communications Summary Report