
West Berkshire Water Safety Partnership

Committee considering report:	Executive
Date of Committee:	15/07/21
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Richard Somner
Date Portfolio Member agreed report:	01/06/21
Report Author:	Jon Winstanley
Forward Plan Ref:	EX4107

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To gain approval for West Berkshire Council to help create and enter into a Water Safety Partnership for West Berkshire with Emergency Service organisations and the Canal and River Trust.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Executive approves the Council's participation as a leading member organisation of the West Berkshire Water Safety Partnership.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	Activities and interventions resulting from the partnership may require joint funding from the participant organisations. We would look to align these activities with the Council's Open Spaces and Environment Delivery budgets where appropriate. Where necessary request will be made for additional funding through the Council's Capital Strategy Group.
Human Resource:	None
Legal:	None
Risk Management:	The initiative is aimed at reducing the risk of accidental drowning throughout the District.

Property:	None			
Policy:	None			
	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		N/A
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		x		N/A
Environmental Impact:		x		N/A
Health Impact:	x			The proposed partnership is aimed at preventing future accidental drowning deaths.
ICT Impact:		x		N/A
Digital Services Impact:		x		Support may be required from the Council's digital team by way of the creation of a web page to host information on the partnership along with educational/promotional material and events.

Council Strategy Priorities:	x			Supporting everyone to reach their full potential.
Core Business:		x		N/A.
Data Impact:		x		N/A
Consultation and Engagement:	Sue Halliwell, Susan Powell, Gabrielle Mancini, Paul Hendry, Flo Churchill, Sean Murphy, Thames Valley Police, Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue, Canal & Rivers Trust, South Central Ambulance Service.			

4 Executive Summary

4.1 Following a tragic incident in March 2021, involving the loss of life of a young child in the Kennet and Avon Canal adjacent to Victoria Park, West Berkshire Officers and representatives from the Canal and River Trust and emergency services came together to look at measures that could be implemented to prevent future loss of life from accidental drowning. A proposal from this group is the establishment of a Water Safety Partnership for West Berkshire.

4.2 The objectives of the partnership being to:

- (a) Promote and develop water-safety education and initiatives within West Berkshire with particular emphasis on the most at risk groups identified through incident data and local knowledge;
- (b) Proactively promote public awareness of water-related risks and ensure a consistent message through campaigns and communications;
- (c) Share best practice and resources across the District (and beyond) highlighting a multi-agency approach to water safety;
- (d) To be the focus group in responding to water related incidents in West Berkshire;
- (e) Work with partner organisations to gather and improve data involving water incidents in West Berkshire in order to inform a targeted approach to water safety.

4.3 Terms of Reference, which have been approved in principal by Partnership member organisations, can be seen in Appendix A and membership of the group will include:

- WBC Officers (Environment and Communities & Wellbeing & PPP)
- Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service
- Canal and River Trust

- Thames Valley Police
- South Central Ambulance Service
- National Health Service
- Environment Agency

- 4.4 On average, around 250 people lose their lives in accidental drownings in the UK every year, with hundreds more having near drowning experiences, sometimes suffering life-changing injuries. Children can be particularly at risk.
- 4.5 One of the striking characteristics of the data on accidental drownings is that a large proportion of victims did not leave home on the day they died intending to go into water of significant depth. Roughly 40% of deaths happen whilst people were out walking or running, in comparison to approx. 20% who lose their life whilst swimming. It shows the importance of everyone being aware of the risks posed by water. West Berkshire is home to a number of significant water courses and bodies, some of which extend through our urban areas, which can significantly increase the risk of accidental drowning.
- 4.6 The incident in March 2021 has emphasised the devastating impact water related tragedies can have on our communities. Through the Partnership West Berkshire Council has an opportunity to play a leading role in helping prevent future incidents of accidental drowning. It is therefore recommended that the Executive approves the Council's participation in the formation and leadership of the West Berkshire Water Safety Partnership.

5 Supporting Information

Introduction

- 5.1 This report seeks approval from the Executive for West Berkshire Council to participate as a leading member of a Water Safety Partnership for the District.

Background

- 5.2 In March 2021 a tragic incident occurred involving the loss of life of a young child who fell into the Kennet and Avon Canal adjacent to Victoria Park. Shortly following this incident West Berkshire Council Officers along with representatives from the Canal and River Trust and emergency services came together to form a task and finish group to look at the cause of the incident and any measures that could be implemented to help prevent future loss of life.
- 5.3 Two main actions resulted from the meeting of this group:
- (a) That a safety review be undertaken of the Kennet and Avon Canal through Newbury Town Centre;
 - (b) That the group consider the formation of a Water Safety Partnership for the wider West Berkshire District to consider measures and initiatives to help prevent accidental drowning incidents across the District.

Proposals

- 5.4 A site safety review along the Canal in Newbury was carried out early May by representatives of Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue, Canal and River Trust and WBC. This has resulted in the planned introduction of a number of physical measures in order to improve safety along this part of the canal. These will be implemented jointly by West Berkshire Council and the Canal and River Trust in consultation with the wider Partnership. The proposals are currently being developed and will be published in due course.
- 5.5 A separate meeting was arranged to discuss the structure, terms and objectives of a potential Water Safety Partnership. The meeting was again attended by WBC Officers (Environment and Communities & Wellbeing), Canal and Rivers Trust, Thames Valley Police, South Central Ambulance Service, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue and NHS representatives. The view was unanimous that a Water Safety Partnership could provide an active role in helping prevent district wide accidental drownings. A number of clear objectives were established for such a partnership as follows:
- (a) Promote and develop water-safety education and initiatives within West Berkshire with particular emphasis on the most at risk groups identified through incident data and local knowledge;
 - (b) Proactively promote public awareness of water-related risks and ensure a consistent message through campaigns and communications;
 - (c) Share best practice and resources across the District (and beyond) highlighting a multi-agency approach to water safety;
 - (d) To be the focus group in responding to water related incidents in West Berkshire;
 - (e) Work with partner organisations to gather and improve data involving water incidents in West Berkshire in order to inform a targeted approach to water safety.
- 5.6 Full Terms of Reference for the Partnership can be seen in Appendix A.
- 5.7 Water Safety Partnerships have been successful in promoting the dangers posed by water and accidental drowning in other parts of the Country, namely Bath, Nottingham, Northampton, Manchester, Leeds, York and Bedfordshire..

6 Other options considered

- 6.1 None

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 On average, around 250 people lose their lives in accidental drownings in the UK every year, with hundreds more having near drowning experiences, sometimes suffering life-changing injuries. Children can be particularly at risk.
- 7.2 One of the striking characteristics of the data on accidental drownings is that a large proportion of victims did not leave home on the day they died intending to go into water of significant depth. Roughly 40% of deaths happen whilst people were out walking or

running, in comparison to approx. 20% who lose their life whilst swimming. It shows the importance of everyone being aware of the risks posed by water. West Berkshire is home to a number of significant water courses and bodies, some of which extend through our urban areas, which can significantly increase the risk of accidental drowning.

- 7.3 The tragic incident in March this year has shown that one drowning is one too many. Through this partnership the Council can take a leading role in helping prevent such tragic incidents occurring in the future. It is therefore recommended that the Executive approve the Council's participation in the West Berkshire Water Safety Partnership.

8 Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix A – West Berkshire Water Safety Partnership Terms of Reference.

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: ☒ No: ☐

The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval	<input type="checkbox"/>
Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council	<input type="checkbox"/>
Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position	<input type="checkbox"/>
Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or associated Task Groups within preceding six months	<input type="checkbox"/>
Item is Urgent Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Report is to note only	<input type="checkbox"/>

Wards affected: All Wards

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2			