

JOINT PUBLIC PROTECTION COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on Wednesday 24 June 2020

Present: Parry Batth (Chairman), Chris Bowring, Hilary Cole, James Cole, John Harrison (Vice-Chairman) and John Porter

Also Present: Paul Anstey (Head of Public Protection and Culture), John Ashworth (Executive Director - Place), Rosalynd Gater (Team Manager - Commercial), Suzanne McLaughlin (Principal Officer - Policy and Governance), Sean Murphy (Public Protection Manager), Anna Smy (Strategic Manager - Response), Councillor Paul Bettison, Stephen Chard (Principal Policy Officer), Kevin Gibbs (Bracknell Forest Council), Damian James (Chair of the PPP Joint Management Board) and Clare Lawrence (Wokingham Borough Council)

PART I

1 Election of the Chairman

RESOLVED that Councillor Parry Batth be elected Chairman of the Joint Public Protection Committee for the 2020/21 Municipal Year.

2 Election of the Vice-Chairman

RESOLVED that Councillor John Harrison be elected Vice-Chairman of the Joint Public Protection Committee for the 2020/21 Municipal Year.

3 Minutes from the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 30 January 2020 were approved as a true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

5 Public Questions

No public questions were submitted.

6 Future Plan

RESOLVED that the Future Plan, dated 15 September 2020 to 16 March 2021, be noted.

7 Public Protection Partnership Response to Covid-19

The Committee considered the report (Agenda Item 8) which provided an overview of the work undertaken by the Public Protection Service in response to Covid-19.

Sean Murphy (Public Protection Manager) introduced the report. He described the work undertaken by the service in recent months in response to the Covid-19 outbreak and future work.

Interim service arrangements had been put in place immediately prior to lockdown and it had been necessary to cease operating some aspects of the service. This would be

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covered in greater detail in the performance report, but included inspections of food premises and visits to farms.

New areas of work had also been introduced quite rapidly in response to Government regulations. The structure of the service had been analysed to see how best to deliver this work. This was taken forward in two ways.

Firstly, a reactive service was created to manage the increased demand in enquiries from, and provide increased support for, residents and businesses.

The second aspect was work within the community. This included the provision of messages to support businesses and more recently to support businesses to reopen. This also covered track and trace work.

Anna Smy (Strategic Manager for Response) provided further detail on the reactive/response work. This work had involved existing staff but officers who would normally undertake inspections and visits to premises had also been utilised.

Initially, there was work in relation to what premises could remain open, with non-compliance issues having to be resolved. This involved weekend visits to premises, sometimes alongside the Police. This was a heavy workload for a relatively small team.

There was a particular increase in the reporting, at the beginning of lockdown, of complaints relating to bonfires and noise nuisance. The priority for officers had been responding to issues linked to commercial activities.

There had been an initial reduction in work associated with complaints related to food premises as they were not operating. However, this was beginning to return to normal levels as businesses sought to operate, sometimes in different ways.

Noise complaints had returned with business reopening and many people continuing to work from home. Domestic noise had also resulted in complaints, again as people worked from home and children remained home from school.

There had been a strong focus on ensuring health and safety requirements were being met by businesses.

The team's workload had currently become a mixture of a return to business as usual (doorstep crime was increasing) and ongoing Covid-19 related work. This included working with businesses such as public houses and hair salons seeking to operate.

Sean Murphy added that when the regulations were issued for restrictions to businesses, Public Protection Partnerships (PPPs) were designated as the enforcement authority. A team of officers had been put in place although the impact at that stage was unclear. As an example of the impact, Sean Murphy explained that since this report was produced, 280+ enquiries/complaints had been received from residents, other businesses and employees of businesses. In response, officers had conducted a number of visits and all allegations had been followed up. This resulted in closure notices being issued in some cases, but in the majority of incidents it transpired that there was a misunderstanding on the part of businesses.

Rosalynd Gater (Commercial Team Manager) described the more proactive elements of the workload. A major area recently was work in relation to the national test and trace programme.

Work fell into three different tiers. Tier 1 work would be for those cases where there was a positive test in a high risk setting. Instructions would come from Public Health England to conduct further investigations and/or form incident control teams. The service was the front door for this work. Systems had been developed and implemented with Public Health Teams for outbreak control work.

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Officers were also involved in the formation of Covid-19 incident plans. The work of the team with high risk premises would impact on these plans. This included preventative work around what action to taken in the event of an outbreak. High risk premises included care homes, schools, hotels and pubs. Such premises were targeted and assistance offered with safety measures and test/trace systems.

Assistance was given to premises able to reopen. Information was available for businesses on council websites, including advice around risk assessments. Information was also shared via social media and mailshots.

Hygiene audits were held in care homes to ensure infectious disease control requirements of Clinical Commissioning Groups were being adhered to.

Sean Murphy added further details of communication work. This included advice to businesses and residents, as well as council staff and Members. He felt this had been successful and evidence of this was the significant rise in the use of the PPP website which had become a major source of information for businesses etc. Information included scam awareness.

To summarise, Sean Murphy stated that this had been a very busy period. While it was acknowledged that some activities had initially been reduced, the service had sought to maintain business as usual as much as possible alongside track and trace work, helping businesses to reopen and providing support to other council services.

Councillor Parry Batth gave thanks for the detailed report and presentation.

Councillor Chris Bowring was unaware of the PPP's role in test and trace. It was also his understanding that the work within care homes was managed by Adult Social Care rather than the PPP. He queried the governance arrangements in this area.

In relation to work within care homes, Sean Murphy explained that each local authority had handled this locally. The PPP was working in West Berkshire's care homes at the request of the Clinical Commissioning Group. The service had offered to do likewise across the three local authorities, but Wokingham had elected for its Adult Social Care service to take this forward rather than the PPP.

On the track and trace role, Environmental Health had traditionally been involved in the control of infectious diseases. Experienced staff had therefore been deployed to work in complex settings and this was the model across Berkshire. Rosalyn Gater added a further element to the track and trace role. This was to link with and support vulnerable groups.

Sean Murphy further explained that it had been possible to share best practice across the three local authorities, covering the work conducted in high risk settings and work across the three Public Health Teams.

Councillor John Harrison offered his congratulations to the PPP for all their hard work. He gave particular thanks for the proactive work undertaken with businesses in helping them to reopen which in turn helped the economy.

Sean Murphy explained that the work with businesses would help to build confidence among residents by reassuring them that businesses were being closely monitored.

Councillor Hilary Cole added her thanks for the work undertaken by the service across the three local authority areas, which included working closely with other service areas and outside bodies. She added a further thank you to officers for keeping Members well informed.

Councillor Hilary Cole continued by praising the thorough approach to supporting businesses to benefit the economy whilst keeping members of the public safe. She asked that thanks be passed on to the officers involved.

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Councillor John Porter echoed these points and added thanks for the updates that had been provided to keep parish and town councils informed. The increased use of social media had been positive and he hoped that would continue to be used as a way of sharing information and advice.

Sean Murphy advised that many new ways of working had been identified during the response to and recovery from Covid-19. This included communication and provision of online training. It was the intention for this approach to continue and be enhanced.

RESOLVED to note the report and the work undertaken by the Public Protection Service in response to the Covid-19 pandemic.

8 Public Protection Partnership Covid-19 Recovery Approach

The Committee considered the report (Agenda Item 9) which provided an overview on the approach to service recovery alongside the move from interim service delivery arrangements.

Sean Murphy (Public Protection Manager) introduced the report. He began by describing the balance to be struck between response and recovery work. A Recovery Plan was in place that included community protection work, protecting/improving health, and providing health and safety advice to businesses. The service had a role to play in economic recovery, by supporting businesses and helping to build residents' confidence by providing assurance. Regular communication would need to continue to help achieve that. Communication with businesses was at an increased level and it was the intention to build on positive working relationships.

However, it was also necessary to conduct business as usual as much as possible and progress service development priorities.

Part of the return to business as usual was to restart routine work around food safety inspections. This would help to provide the reassurance to residents. However, this type of work was also important for businesses in terms of receiving hygiene ratings and in following the advice of the Food Standards Agency.

The report outlined the approach to taking forward this challenging workload. Much of the work was a high priority, but work would be conducted with higher risk premises first.

One of the many challenges arose from the fact that court cases had been adjourned to the end of June 2020 and there would therefore be an increased workload once the courts reopened.

Anna Smy (Strategic Manager for Response) added that licencing applications continued to be processed. She explained that the opportunity had been taken during these challenging times to work more flexibly and undertake increased cross-authority work to become more resilient and widen the capability of officers.

Councillor Hilary Cole gave thanks for the very comprehensive Recovery Plan. However she questioned whether there was sufficient resource to implement the plan.

Sean Murphy explained that this was very much the challenge. For example, staff involved in track and trace work would normally be conducting food safety inspections and health and safety audits. However there was also the high priority of helping businesses to reopen safely to aid the economy.

It would not be possible to accommodate all areas of work and there would be an ongoing need to prioritise. Areas identified as being of greatest risk would come first. An update report would be provided at the next meeting of the Committee.

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Councillor Hilary Cole noted that the vast majority of the priorities in the plan were rated as high level, making prioritisation of work streams very challenging. She queried whether the priority list would be revisited with the aim of making it more manageable.

Sean Murphy acknowledged this point, consideration had been given to those areas of work that could be reduced and/or delayed. Adjustments were being made to the staffing structure to enable officers to work across different areas and different disciplines. New ways of working could also assist, telephone contact could be made with businesses in some cases rather than face to face contact.

Councillor James Cole highlighted that track and trace work could be a requirement for some time. He queried whether Government funds could be accessed to help meet the requirements for this work.

Sean Murphy explained that funding allocations had been made to each of the three local authorities and discussions had followed with Public Health Teams to identify what needed to be put in place and how best to put funding to use. Rosalynd Gater confirmed that an 18 month period was anticipated at this stage for track and trace.

Sean Murphy added that resource requirements were being and would continue to be looked at, but it was difficult to be clear on the requirements moving forward. It was also the case that the service often had to react within short notice to Government announcements about premises that could reopen.

Best practice had been shared between local authorities to see if further efficiencies could be put in place. Close working arrangements with other local authorities was an important aspect of that.

Councillor John Harrison noted that in 2019/20 the service was very close to being on budget, but there was a loss of income within 2020/21 and Councillor Harrison queried the impact of this. Sean Murphy reported that there had been a reduction in income in April and May. The longer term position was at this stage unclear with some businesses not looking to renew their licences or pause existing licenses. It was hoped that during the course of the financial year businesses would resume operations and would therefore require licences, and this had begun in some cases, but the level of need was uncertain.

Income levels would continue to be routinely monitored and this was often a challenge for the service. However, the budget had been balanced in all previous years of the PPP's operation. Budget discussions would continue at the September 2020 meeting when the situation would be clearer.

Mitigation grants were available and it was hoped that some lost income could be recovered via this route. However, pressures were being felt across council service areas and some pressures would need to be absorbed within services.

Councillor Chris Bowring was pleased that the meeting was being live streamed as it was a useful and more accessible way of publicising the PPP's many areas of good work. He felt that meetings should continue to be live streamed for this reason. Councillor Hilary Cole agreed, but raised the importance of finding a way to enable public participation within meetings if they continued to be held on a virtual basis.

RESOLVED that:

- **The approach to recovery be noted.**
- **The proposals set out in the report be noted.**
- **The Committee would receive a further update on progress at its meeting in September 2020.**

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The Committee considered the 2019/20 performance outturn for the Public Protection Partnership (Agenda Item 10).

Paul Anstey (Head of Public Protection and Culture) commenced his presentation of the report by explaining that fluctuations in demand had been closely analysed during the response to Covid-19 to try to understand whether these changed the basis of the Inter-Authority Agreement. The analysis considered demand across local authority areas and sought to ensure that the budget composition was fair.

The outcome of this work found that trends remained broadly in line with the Inter-Authority Agreement and it therefore did not need to be adjusted. This would aid the budget setting process.

A challenging set of performance indicators had been set for 2019/20. At year end, 24 were reported as Green, 9 as Amber and 11 as Red. It was the view that the Amber indicators would have been reported Green had it not been necessary, based on Government guidance, to make changes to inspection programmes.

Significant achievements included:

- A growth in social media and communications. Visits to the website and grown from 300 visits a month to 10,500 visits.
- £155k recovered for the victims of crime.
- £101k recovered from proceeds of crime.

Progress had also been made with the use of technology and it was the intention to expand this further as part of recovery work. Technological developments had benefitted the operation of this shared service.

The Joint Management Board spent some time challenging the 'Red' indicators and looked at ways to improve performance in these areas in future. A contributing factor was the level of staffing absence. Much of this related to the personal circumstances of officers during very challenging times.

Areas identified for improvement included:

- The production of quarterly absence data for the Management Board with a clear narrative on resulting operational risks.
- The Management Board would conclude contract matters with Tascomi to deliver the single case management system by April 2021.
- The Workforce Strategy would be concluded, this would identify the appropriate recruitment options and approaches to staff development to improve resilience and delivery of key targets.
- The service would produce an effective recovery plan, dealing with the lessons learned from 2019/20 and Covid-19 response work, specifically seeking to address management capacity issues.

Councillor James Cole questioned the time it had taken to agree a contract with Tascomi. Paul Anstey explained that Tascomi had been bought out by a competitor part way through contractual discussions. It had therefore proved necessary to renegotiate terms and conditions.

Councillor James Cole followed this by querying if this remained the correct approach. Paul Anstey confirmed his view that it was. The software in question was the most tried and tested product on the market, and it made sense from a financial viewpoint. If the procurement process was restarted then it would result in further delays which would become a problem operationally.

Damian James (Chair of the Joint Management Board) explained that while a contract had yet to be signed with Tascomi, work was taking place in preparation for the

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implementation of the new product. A small team of officers was involved in this work which included a transfer of data between systems.

RESOLVED that:

- **The report and associated areas for improvement be noted.**

10 Any other items the Chairman considers to be urgent

No urgent items were raised.

(The meeting commenced at 6.30pm and closed at 7.45pm)

CHAIRMAN *Parry Batth*

Date of Signature 28 September 2020