

JOINT PUBLIC PROTECTION COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting held on MONDAY 10 JUNE 2024

BRACKNELL FOREST COUNCIL, TIME SQUARE, MARKET STREET, BRACKNELL

Present: Iskandar Jefferies (Chairman), Nick Allen, Jeremy Cottam, Cherise Welch, Howard Woollaston and Iain Cottingham (Substitute) (In place of Lee Dillon)

Also Present: Narinder Brar (Wokingham Borough Council), Moira Fraser (Public Protection Partnership), Damian James (Assistant Director – Contract Services), George Lawrence (Team Manager - Residential), Sean Murphy (Service Lead - Public Protection), Suzanne McLaughlin (Senior Environmental Health Officer), Councillor Jordan Montgomery (Wokingham Borough Council) and Stephen Chard (Democratic Services Manager)

Apologies for absence: Councillor Lee Dillon (Vice-Chairman)

PART I

1 Election of the Chairman

RESOLVED that Councillor Iskandar Jefferies of Bracknell Forest Council be elected as Chairman of the Joint Public Protection Committee for the 2024/25 Municipal Year.

2 Appointment of the Vice Chairman

RESOLVED that Councillor Lee Dillon of West Berkshire Council be elected as Vice-Chairman of the Joint Public Protection Committee for the 2024/25 Municipal Year.

The Committee agreed to suspend standing orders for the duration of the meeting in order to allow Councillor Jordan Montgomery, from Wokingham Borough Council, to speak.

3 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 March 2024 were agreed as a true and accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

4 Outstanding Items from Previous Meetings

Sean Murphy (Service Lead – Public Protection) gave an update on the outstanding action points from previous meetings:

Item 1 – Revenue Budget 2024/25 (Fees and Charges Schedule) - An update would be circulated following the discussions held at Berkshire Leaders and with the Berkshire Group of Officers.

Mr Murphy would also follow up on progress being made with the letter to be sent on behalf of the Licensing Chairs.

Item 2 – Water Safety Annual Report 2023/24 - The actions had been completed.

Item 3 – Service Update and Q3 Performance Report - A breakdown of the activities provided within the shared service arrangement for the relevant partners was included at Appendix C of the annual report.

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Item 4 – Young People and Vaping – This would be actioned when the item was next brought to the Committee.

5 **Declarations of Interest**

Councillor Iain Cottingham declared that he had a personal interest in Agenda Items 10 and 11, by virtue of the fact that he was a non-executive Director of the Trading Standards Institute and ITSA Limited, and the Chairman of Thatcham Town Cricket Club which was a licensed premises. As his interest was personal and not prejudicial, he determined to take part in the debate and vote on the items.

6 **Notice of Public Speaking and Questions**

No public questions were received which related to either a general issue concerned with the work of the Public Protection Partnership or to an item on the agenda.

7 **Forward Plan**

RESOLVED that the Forward Plan be noted with the following addition to be included:

- The annual vaping report would be scheduled for the Committee meeting on 10 March 2025.

8 **JPPC Terms of Reference (JPPC4370)**

Moira Fraser presented the Terms of Reference (Agenda Item 9) and noted that this was a standing agenda item at the first meeting of each Municipal Year.

While there had been substantial changes in the previous year, including an update of the membership of the Committee to include a Member of the Opposition from each of the authorities on the Committee, there were no proposals to change the Terms of Reference for the coming year.

RESOLVED that the Terms of Reference be noted.

9 **Public Protection Partnership Service Update and Q4 (Outturn) Report for 2023/24 (JPPC4371)**

The Committee considered the report (Agenda Item 10) which updated Members on the work of the Service in Quarter Four and which reported the end of year performance outturn.

Authority was sought from the Committee to carry forward the revenue underspend from 2023/24.

Finances and Resources

A deficit position continued in relation to income, creating a shortfall in the region of £100,000 in the 2023/24 financial year. It was necessary to hold vacancies in order to manage this shortfall.

However, at the end of the financial year there was an underspend of £61,000, made primarily of a £38,000 grant received at the very end of the previous financial year.

The report proposed that the underspend be carried forward into the 2024/25 financial year. This proposal had been discussed with Bracknell Forest and West Berkshire Councils.

Customer Satisfaction Rates and Information Governance Data

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There had been a reduction in customer satisfaction. The sample size was however very low, and in one quarter there had been no returns. Officers were reviewing how best to collate data moving forward.

Sean Murphy (Service Lead – Public Protection) reported that the number of vacancies was a contributing factor in terms of customer satisfaction.

A high number of Freedom of Information requests had been received by the service (an increase from the previous year to 371 requests).

The significant increase in the number of Member enquiries and MP enquiries was viewed positively as it showed the Service was getting the message out about the important work it did.

Human Resources

The Licensing Teams would soon be fully staffed following successful recruitment. This included a trainee becoming a full member of the team.

Three of the Level Four apprentices had successfully completed their qualifications. The fourth (and remaining) apprentice was also expected to complete shortly. The aim was for the apprentices to become full members of the Service.

ICT Update

Progress had been made since the previous meeting and the Service had been assigned more project support with the supplier. There was a plan in place to get the portal online, which would be used for temporary event notices, and then rolled out subject to it being successful.

Community and Trading Standards

George Lawrence (Residential Team Manager) provided an update on the work of the community and trading standards team, highlighting the following points:

- 2000 service requests had been processed in the last quarter.
- Scam intervention work had been successful. This work had helped 85 victims and potential victims of scams save money totalling approximately £43,000. Further savings had been achieved following work with banks.
- Successful funding bids had funded awareness campaigns regarding the safe use of scooters and electric bikes.
- Work on the delivery of food inspection and food sampling continued. All high risk food standards inspections had been completed.
- Officers had tested many products including vape products. Work on underage sales had included the purchase of lottery tickets.
- The most complained about sector was second hand car dealers. Officers were looking to engage with businesses of concern to try and achieve improvements for customers.
- The disease surveillance programme had been rolled out and there had been no invasive mosquitos in the area. However, work would continue after the identification of some yellow fever mosquito eggs along the M4 Corridor.

Commercial (Food Safety and Health & Safety)

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All high risk inspections for Category A, B and C food premises had been undertaken, 44% of D premises and 15% of the lowest risk premises. An increase to these percentages was limited by the level of resource and other competing priorities.

Licensing

The Bracknell Taxi and Private Hire Policy had been adopted. Consultations on gambling policies of West Berkshire and Bracknell were ongoing.

The report also listed the number of licensing hearings held in the past quarter. While the number had increased, it was currently at a manageable level.

Environmental Health Housing

A rise in the number of complaints from tenants of Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) had continued. Officers had been working with the RSL sector, holding regular case conferences.

Environmental Quality

The Air Quality Action Plan for Crowthorne had been agreed by Central Government. The Action Plans for Bracknell, Newbury and Thatcham had been revoked as resolved at the last meeting.

Investigations and Case Management

Section 16.5 of the report outlined a summary of the criminal cases since the last meeting and the legal actions that had been taken.

Questions

Officers were then asked a number of questions, and responses were provided as follows:

- Mr Murphy explained that where there were vacancies, efforts were made to cover them by utilising the available resource across the different teams. This helped to widen the experience of officers including trainees.
- The use of agency staff was restricted by cost, taking into consideration the premiums charged by agencies. Finances were constrained across the three local authorities. However, while this was the case, there had been no indication from the local authorities that the money could not be used to backfill posts, which was the intention.
- Efforts had been made to raise the profile of the service to Members. This had increased the number of Member enquiries and this was invaluable in terms of collating intelligence.
- Moira Fraser acknowledged that FOIs took a significant amount of resource. However, mitigation methods were being put in place, such as putting more information on the Council websites so FOI replies could be completed via the provision of a link to the website.
- Damian James added that the service was attempting to utilise and mobilise Members in liaising with residents and assisting with their issues. This could include meeting with RSLs on behalf of residents.
- ICT – data transfer had been completed for one of the authorities' systems which included the retention of legacy data. Remaining data transfer was ongoing.
- Regarding e-scooters, the service had been working with the Police and retailers in response to a recent legislative change in terms of improving safety. Damian James stated that Bracknell Forest had recently recruited town centre ambassadors, paid for through central government funding. A role of these ambassadors was to seek to

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reduce incidents of anti-social behaviour and this could include the impact felt from the use of e-scooters in the town centre.

- George Lawrence stated that the work of petroleum inspections had gone well and was aware of no issues of non-compliance. However, he agreed to confirm this point and provide further details to Councillor Jordan Montgomery.

Councillor Iain Cottingham commended officers on all their hard work for residents, covering a wide range of activity. He felt the PPP's work made them worthy of a nomination to the Chartered Institute annual awards for Trading Standards. Sean Murphy agreed to explore that point.

RESOLVED that:

- The 2023/24 Q4 and year end data for the Public Protection Service be noted.
- The update on service delivery be noted.
- £61.69K of revenue funding be carried forward to the 2024/25 financial year.

10 Public Protection Partnership Strategic Assessment 2024 - 2027 (JPPC4372)

The Committee considered the PPP Strategic Assessment (Agenda Item 11). The Strategic Assessment served to identify the key service functions, activities and priorities, and identify the resource challenges for the Service.

The Strategic Assessment also mapped the Service against local, regional and national priorities and risks.

Sean Murphy presented the report and highlighted the following points:

- Much of the work on the report was completed prior to the General Election, it was therefore the case that some priority areas may no longer be taken forward.
- The report set out all known demands on the service, however it was noted that the demands on the service were constantly changing. I.e. recently announced priorities in relation to knives and the sale of knives.
- The document set out the breadth of the work undertaken by the PPP, the demands placed upon it and the available resource.
- The Strategic Assessment would form the basis for the future prioritisation of work. Future discussion would take place at Committee post a period of consultation.
- It contained a number of cross cutting priorities as well as the inclusion of the more local priorities held by the PPP.

Councillor Iskandar Jefferies gave thanks to officers for all their hard work in the production of the Strategic Assessment. He fully acknowledged the difficult task of balancing the many priority areas and this was an area requiring further work.

Councillor Iain Cottingham queried the sharing of intelligence with other relevant agencies, i.e. HMRC, and whether funding could be accessed in order to increase this area of work.

In response, Sean Murphy explained that officers held a broad range of powers as investigators. This, and the growing access to data, was greatly assisting investigations.

Information sharing protocols were in place, for example with the HMRC, and there was a shared intelligence database accessed by many relevant organisations. The PPP had made a number of intelligence submissions in the past year.

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The Service had been able to access national trading standards funds for conducting cross border investigations.

RESOLVED that the updated Strategic Assessment would form the basis of the PPP priority setting for 2024/25 through to January 2027.

11 **Draft Nuisance Policy 2024 - 2027 (JPPC4451)**

The Committee considered the Draft Nuisance Policy 2024-27 (Agenda Item 12). Suzanne McLaughlin, Senior Environmental Health Officer, introduced the report and raised the following points:

- The Policy would enable the continuation of nuisance related work within the Service, both reactive and proactive, that benefited both residents and businesses. The work undertaken strove to improve the quality of life and the health of residents.
- There were a significant number of reactive complaints received in the last financial year, but proactive work was also undertaken to try to resolve areas of concern. For example, guidance was offered on the Council's website and made available through social media.
- The proposal was for the draft Policy to go out to public consultation for a period of six weeks. A report would then be provided to the next meeting of the Committee in October outlining the findings of the consultation together with the final Policy that would be proposed for formal adoption.

RESOLVED that:

- The draft Nuisance Policy 2024-2027 be approved for consultation.
- The Service Lead: Public Protection be authorised to proceed with a public consultation for a six week period between the 8 July 2024 and the 19 August 2024.
- Any comments on the draft Policy be brought to the 7 October 2024 Committee for discussion prior to the Policy being formally adopted.

(The meeting commenced at 7.00pm and closed at 7.55pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature