

# JOINT PUBLIC PROTECTION COMMITTEE

## Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 16 DECEMBER 2024

### Bracknell FOREST COUNCIL, TIME SQUARE, MARKET STREET, BRACKNELL, RG12 1JD

**Present:** Nick Allen, Justin Pemberton, Cherise Welch, Howard Woollaston and Mary Temperton (Substitute) (In place of Iskandar Jefferies)

**Also Present:** Rosalynd Gater (Team Manager - Commercial), Sean Murphy (Service Lead - Public Protection) and April Peberdy (Service Director - Community Services), Moira Fraser (Public Protection Partnership), Damian James (Bracknell Forest Council) and Stephen Chard (Democratic Services Manager)

**Apologies for absence:** Councillor Jeremy Cottam and Councillor Iskandar Jefferies (Bracknell Forest Council)

**Absent:**

#### PART I

#### 1 Appointment of the Vice-Chairman

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

#### 2 Minutes

The Minutes of the meetings held on 10 June 2024, 7 October 2024 and 11 October 2024 were agreed as true and accurate records and signed by the Vice-Chairman.

#### 3 Outstanding issues from previous meetings

Moira Fraser (Principal Officer – Policy and Governance) reported that updates would be provided on the two remaining actions arising at the March 2025 meeting of the Committee.

#### 4 Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

#### 5 Notice of Public Speaking and Questions

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

#### 6 Forward Plan

A report, following the outcome of the ongoing PPP Peer Review, was scheduled for the Committee in March 2025. Should this prove too tight a timeframe then a special meeting would be arranged to consider the report.

**RESOLVED** that the Forward Plan be noted.

**7 Public Protection Partnership Service Update and Q2 Report for 2024/25**

The Committee considered the report (Agenda Item 8) which outlined the performance of the Public Protection Partnership (PPP) in line with the operating model and business plan, and provided a performance update following the second quarter of 2024/25.

**Finances**

The year end budget forecast was for a zero outturn. This took account of the £90k pressure at Bracknell Forest and the management of income pressures.

**Risk**

The current key risks related to operational and management capacity due to the number of vacancies being held across the PPP and the financial pressure which affected the ability to cover off the resource gaps. The focus of the service remained on priority areas.

**Human Resources**

The report outlined successful recruitment since the last meeting. This included:

- Enforcement Officer for Age Restricted Products (one year fixed term post).
- Two Environment Health Officers.
- Principal Officer for Private Sector Housing.

It would however be necessary to go back out to advert for the Strategic Manager – Case Management Unit.

An officer had qualified as a practitioner for Age Restricted Sales.

**ICT Update**

Procurement for the new ICT system had commenced.

**Governance**

Officers had attended a number of community events during Q2.

**Building Safer Communities**

Event safety and noise monitoring work was ongoing, as were operations covering areas including offensive weapons and 0% nicotine disposable vapes.

**Improved Living Environment**

A number of unlicensed Houses in Multiple Occupancy (HMOs) were in the process of being inspected and the report outlined serious concerns for some of these.

The number of service requests for housing were detailed in the report and the proportion of those that related to Registered Social Landlords.

There had been 227 domestic nuisance service requests in Q2.

**Safety in the Workplace**

Officers had dealt with 54 health and safety at work requests during Q2, with 33 workplace accidents reported.

Further investigation was being conducted into hygiene and sterilisation in hairdressers and barbers.

**Safe and Healthy Food Chain**

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Food hygiene inspections were close to getting back on schedule.

### **Compliments**

Compliments were outlined in Appendix B. The number of compliments far outweighed the number of complaints.

### **Questions**

Members asked a number of questions of Officers and received the following information in response:

- The workload had increased across the PPP, resulting from an increase in demand in a range of areas and the need to catch up on some areas of work. Workload was a key factor in determining the priority areas for the service.
- Work was ongoing to increase resource levels to help meet the increased demand. This was via a combination of recruiting new members of staff and developing existing officers.
- The recruitment of the Strategic Manager for the Case Management Unit had proved problematic as there was a very competitive market for this type of post. An option moving forward could be to evaluate and update the job description.
- A particular issue, with vacant posts, was the fact that additional work fell on existing officers thereby lessening their capacity to do their day job.
- Government funding had been received to conduct a full review of vaping products. A number of non-compliant products had been seized and a significant level of variation had been found in terms of nicotine levels. The Government would be banning disposable vapes from 2025/26 and the enforcement of this would be for the PPP to conduct.
- The level of abatement notices served in Q2 was noted as being low and it was explained that an incremental approach was taken in line with the Nuisance Policy. Efforts were also made to deal with nuisance complaints via mediation, lessening the need for abatement notices.
- Hairdressers and barbers needed to be registered and inspections found that some were not. A public health survey would be undertaken to better understand hygiene and sterilisation levels in these establishments.

### **RESOLVED that the Committee were informed about:**

- The 2024/25 Q2 data for the Public Protection Service as set out in Appendix A.
- The update on service delivery.

## **8 Air Quality Status Reports 2024**

The Committee considered the report (Agenda Item 9) which informed Members of the submission and results of the annual air quality reports for Bracknell Forest and West Berkshire Councils. The reports covered the monitoring data and action planning update for the calendar year 2023.

The Committee was also advised that the annual air quality report for Wokingham Borough Council had also been submitted and the results passed to them, which was in accordance with the shared service arrangements effective from 1 April 2022.

The annual reports were submitted to the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA).

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Air quality improvements had been made and some Air Quality Management Areas (AQMA) had been revoked. Within Bracknell Forest, the Crowthorne AQMA remained in place as did another for Wokingham.

DEFRA had provided commentary on the reports and this was largely positive. As well as the revocation of some AQMA, the Crowthorne AQMA had been reviewed and updated.

There were no AQMA within West Berkshire, however monitoring activity still took place.

In conclusion, air quality across the three local authorities was good.

In terms of next steps, the published AQMA for Crowthorne needed to be implemented and the West Berkshire Council Air Quality Strategy development had commenced. The latter document would need to be developed alongside other strategies and plans, and would be produced in consultation with the Director of Public Health.

Councillor Howard Woollaston queried why reference was made to the Wokingham report when they were not within the Public Protection Partnership (PPP). Sean Murphy, Service Lead – Public Protection, noted the point but explained that it was to highlight this joint area of work which was part of the shared service arrangements with Wokingham Borough Council.

Councillor Justin Pemberton queried the time period for the Crowthorne AQMA (2024-2029). Damian James, Assistant Director – Contract Services, explained that this was set by DEFRA. However, he added that officers were working on a number of actions to improve the issue with the hope that the AQMA could be revoked prior to 2029. Improvements were already being made in Crowthorne.

Councillor Pemberton queried progress being made with anti-idling campaigns. Mr Murphy described work being undertaken, particularly in the vicinity of key premises such as schools. Pollution levels in those locations were found to be in a good place, but work continued to publicise the benefits of anti-idling. Mr James added that PPP officers worked with parking enforcement in Bracknell Forest to help encourage drivers to switch off their engines around schools and other key locations. Councillor Mary Temperton expressed thanks for the improvements made on anti-idling by taxi drivers.

Mr Murphy explained that work to reduce pollution went beyond vehicle emissions. He gave the example of wood burning and explained that controls were in place for the sale of wood for this purpose.

### **RESOLVED that:**

- The Committee had been informed about the contents of the two Air Quality Annual Status Reports for Bracknell Forest Council and West Berkshire Council.
- The Committee had been informed about the feedback from DEFRA on the reports.
- The Committee had been informed about the progress made on the measures to improve air quality set out in each report.
- The ongoing and planned future measures to improve air quality be approved as set out in each report.
- The Committee had been informed that the Air Quality Status Report produced by the PPP on behalf of Wokingham Borough Council had been submitted to DEFRA and feedback received, with both passed to the authority for processing under their governance arrangements.

## **9 Update on fraud and unfair trading**

The Committee considered the report (Agenda Item 10) which provided an update on the work of the Public Protection Service in tackling fraud, unfair trading and financial abuse.

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This work was conducted across Bracknell Forest, West Berkshire and Wokingham and was a priority area for all three local authorities.

Fraud offences accounted for approximately 40% of all crime. Unfair trading covered regulatory and fraudulent offences.

Much of the criminal activity was linked to organised crime groups and therefore the service worked closely with organisations including Thames Valley Police and the South East Regional Crime Unit to help tackle the issue. Work would go beyond boundaries as necessary. Funding was received for cross border work.

This criminal activity, including scams, had a severe impact on its victims, and officers sought to support and advocate for victims.

The Public Protection Service delivery model was based on the National Intelligence Model. This covered preventative actions, intelligence gathering and enforcement.

The majority of victims were older residents and the service worked closely with Adult Social Care as part of prevention work and work to support victims.

Investigations could highlight safeguarding concerns and officers received safeguarding training.

The service was able to access greater levels of intelligence and a rapid response protocol was in place when it came to enforcement. The purpose of the protocol, which involved Thames Valley Police, was to attend incidents and take action as rapidly as possible.

Work to identify money laundering from the proceeds of crime took place and this could identify sizeable sums.

In terms of doorstep crime and householder incidents, a loss of £946k had been identified since April 2024 from 131 incidents. £221k had been recovered to date. 19 incidents were part of ongoing operations.

It was felt likely that offences across this area were under reported and work took place to encourage a growth in reporting.

Councillor Cherise Welch queried the work undertaken by banks to support older residents and help tackle the issue. Sean Murphy (Service Lead – Public Protection) explained that banks took a very proactive approach. There were instances where banks alerted the service and/or the Police if they identified concerns.

Councillor Mary Temperton queried what more could be done to publicise the risk of scams etc and encourage reporting. Mr Murphy explained that a targeted approach was employed which included giving talks and providing reports to different organisations and groups of residents. Leaflets were also distributed.

It was unfortunately the case that vulnerable people were targeted in their own homes and could be a victim of repeat incidents. Therefore, prevention was of high importance and publicity was a big part of that.

### **RESOLVED that:**

- The Committee had been informed about the contents of the report.
- The approach being taken to tackle fraud, unfair trading and financial abuse was approved.
- A further update would be received in December 2025.

*(The meeting commenced at 7.00 pm and closed at 8.10 pm)*

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**CHAIRMAN** .....

**Date of Signature** .....