
West Berkshire Water Safety Partnership Annual Report 2021/22

Committee considering report:	Joint Public Protection Committee
Date of Committee:	14 th March 2022
Chair of Committee:	Councillor John Harrison
Date JMB agreed report:	28 February 2022
Report Author:	Jon Winstanley

1. Purpose of the Briefing

- 1.1 As agreed by West Berkshire Council's Executive on 15th July 2021, an annual report would be presented to the JPPC detailing the activities of the West Berkshire Water Safety Partnership.

2. Background

- 2.1 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 in Newbury, West Berkshire Council 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.
- 2.2 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.
- 2.3 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.
- 2.4 The incident in March 2021 has emphasised the devastating impact water related tragedies can have on our communities. Through the Partnership key stakeholders have an opportunity to play a leading role in helping prevent future incidents of accidental drowning
- 2.5 The objectives of the partnership being to:
- 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;
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- Proactively promote public awareness of water-related risks and ensure a consistent message through campaigns and communications;
- Share best practice and resources across the District (and beyond) highlighting a multi-agency approach to water safety;
- To be the focus group in responding to water related incidents in West Berkshire;
- 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.

2.6 Partnership member organisations include:

- WBC Service Director Environment (Chair);
- WBC Officers (Public Protection, Environment and Communities & Wellbeing);
- Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service;
- Canal and River Trust;
- Thames Valley Police;
- South Central Ambulance Service;
- National Health Service;
- Environment Agency;

2.7 The meeting has also been attended by representatives from Laura Farris' (MP) office and there are plans to invite representatives from other local unitary authorities as part of a knowledge sharing exercise.

3. Implications and Impact

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	None
Human Resource:	None
Legal:	None
Risk Management:	An objective of the partnership is to reduce the risk of accidental deaths from water related incidents.
Property:	None
Policy:	None
Consultation and Engagement	None

4. Current Status

4.8 The Water Safety Partnership meets every two months and the following actions have been completed over the last year:

- Terms of reference for the partnership have been written and agreed. These can be viewed in Appendix A;
- Joint audit and inspection has been undertaken along the Kennet and Avon Canal through Newbury by RBFRS, Canal & River Trust and WBC;
- Initial safety measures identified completed. Tree and root cutting carried out in the vicinity of Victoria Park and the sluice and to the west of Newbury. Further work planned adjacent to the Library car park in conjunction with the Town Centre Masterplan proposals;
- 2 x Water Rescue Cabinet on order for installation adjacent to the Canal in the vicinity of Victoria Park (delivery and installation has been held up during lockdown);



- Cabinet features rescue buoy with rope, solar powered beacon, and keypad entry to prevent vandalism;
- Water safety Incident database has been established for West Berkshire District. Database will be reviewed to identify hotspots for further intervention measures;
- Joint promotional activities around water safety week in May;
- Joint promotional activities around drowning prevention week in June;

- PR and promotional material around summer water activities linked to closure of swimming pools during lockdown;
- PR and promotional material around cold water shock and winter preparedness late Autumn;
- Working with RBFPS and Education colleagues have brought water safety awareness to schools KS3 and above [KS3+ Water Safety \(rbfrs.co.uk\)](https://rbfrs.co.uk/ks3-water-safety/)

5. Next Steps

5.1 Currently planned activities for 2022 include the following:

- Developing the water incident database to inform future campaigns. Considering if there is a particular risk geographically or amongst particular age groups that we should be targeting.
- Programme of assessing hotspots to establish where we should be focussing intervention measures including the roll-out of further water safety cabinets;
- Continuous monitoring and assessment of water related incidents;
- Comms plan for the year currently being developed a draft of which can be seen in Appendix B;
- Continued schools training programme;
- Liaison with suicide prevention group to look at Samaritans signs on appropriate bridges;
- Contact with Wild Swimming groups to see about rolling out coaching opportunities and targeting known areas in West Berkshire;
- Targeting marinas to ensure boat owners have correct accreditations and safety equipment. Potentially to be combined with boat safety week.

6. Conclusion

- 6.1 Although instigated as a result of a tragic event, there is a clear need for a multi-agency group to focus on water safety and reducing the risk of accidental drowning.
- 6.2 This group has been effective in the initial response to the incident in March, but also provides the longer term opportunity for individual members to present ideas, initiatives, research and updates on their individual work on water safety.

7. Appendices

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

7.2 Appendix B – Draft 2022 Comms Plan