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# Water Safety Partnership Annual Report 2021/22

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<b>Committee considering report:</b>	Joint Public Protection Committee
<b>Date of Committee:</b>	13 March 2023
<b>Chair of Committee:</b>	Councillor Tom Marino
<b>Report Author:</b>	Jon Winstanley
<b>Forward Plan Ref:</b>	JPPC4193

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## 1. Purpose of the Report and Recommendations

- 1.1 As agreed by West Berkshire Council's Executive on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2021, an annual report would be presented to the JPPC detailing the activities of the West Berkshire Water Safety Partnership.
- 1.2 The JPPC agreed to extend the role of the partnership to include Bracknell Forest.
- 1.3 The Committee is asked to **NOTE** the report.
- 1.4 The Committee **RESOLVE** that the Terms of Reference are updated to include Bracknell Forest Council and Officer.

## 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;
- 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 and Bracknell;
- Work with partner organisations to gather and improve data involving water incidents in West Berkshire and Bracknell in order to inform a targeted approach to water safety.

2.6 Partnership member organisations include:

- WBC Service Director Environment (Chair);
- WBC and PPP 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
<b>Financial:</b>	None
<b>Human Resource:</b>	None
<b>Legal:</b>	None
<b>Risk Management:</b>	An objective of the partnership is to reduce the risk of accidental deaths from water related incidents.
<b>Property:</b>	None
<b>Policy:</b>	None

<b>Consultation and Engagement</b>	None
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## 4. Current Status

- 4.1 I am pleased to report that there has been no reported fatalities or serious water safety incidents in West Berkshire over the last 12 month period. The Water Safety Partnership also keeps abreast of incidents county-wide to ensure we are aware of current issues and take any learning from those incidents.
- 4.2 4 meetings of the Water Safety Partnership took place in 2022 and the following actions have been completed during that period:
- Terms of reference for the partnership have been updated;
  - Further safety review of the River and Canal through Newbury initial and significant work planned to remove trees and tree roots that could impact of water safety. Habitat surveys have been undertaken and the work is planned for late summer 2023;
  - Discussion with open water swimming experts with a view to holding an open water swimming coaching event with children and adults in the summer holidays 2023.
  - RBFRS has established a Water safety Incident database for West Berkshire District. Database will be reviewed to identify hotspots for further intervention measures;
  - Analysis of water incidents have resulted in Water Safety cabinets has being installed in Victoria Park, Newbury and at Pangbourne Meadows in partnership with Pangbourne Parish Council. A further cabinet is on order for Northcroft Park in Newbury with the implementation imminent;



*Pangbourne Meadows*

- Cabinet features rescue buoy with rope, solar powered beacon, and keypad entry to prevent vandalism;
- Structural repairs have been carried out to fishing platforms in the Northcroft area of Newbury;
- Joint promotional activities around water safety week in May, drowning prevention week in June, summer water activities linked to closure of swimming pools during lockdown and promotional material around cold water shock and winter preparedness late Autumn

4.3 The Council's Countryside Team and Water Safety Partnership has also been assisting Suttons Estates on public access and water safety concerns in Speen Moors. We have encouraged the Estate to continue to keep the permitted path through Speen Moors open and supported them with advice on measures to safety discourage swimming in the pools near weirs and bridges. Advice was given in terms of shared experiences on dealing with youths, some potential under the influence of alcohol, near water and these concerns were relayed to the community outreach teams. Were now looking at ways of working with the estate to ensure the path remains open and managing access rather than seeing it closed and having kids trespass on the site to get access to the water which is a less safe option.

## 5. Next Steps

5.1 Currently planned activities for 2023 include the following:

- [Toddler Safety Weeks](#) took place in February organised by the Canal and River Trust.

Further engagement with youth groups to promote water safety especially during the summer months. Groups such as <https://togetherasone.org.uk/> [Don't die of cold water shock! Mellesa explains what you should do if ... | TikTok](#)

- Continuous monitoring and assessment of water related incidents;
- Comms/Events 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;
- Wild/Open Water Swimming coaching and instruction event for adults and children targeting popular areas in West Berkshire;
- Targeted campaign around the dangers of falling through ice following the tragic death of four young boys in Solihull.

5.2 Activities in Bracknell are still being organised and the plan will be updated. A number of events too place in Bracknell in 2022/23.

## 6. Supporting Information (if required)

6.1 N/A

## 7. Conclusion

7.1 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.

7.2 This group was effective in the initial response to the incident in March 2021, but also provides the longer term opportunity for individual members to present ideas, initiatives, research and updates on their individual work on water safety.

## 8. Appendices

8.1 Appendix A – Water Safety Partnership Terms of Reference.

8.2 Appendix B – Draft 2023 Communications and Community Engagement Plan