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# Water Safety Partnership Annual Report 2023/24

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<b>Committee considering report:</b>	Joint Public Protection Committee
<b>Date of Committee:</b>	11 March 2024
<b>Chair of Committee:</b>	Councillor Lee Dillon
<b>Date JMB agreed report:</b>	26 February 2024
<b>Report Author:</b>	Jon Winstanley
<b>Forward Plan Ref:</b>	JPPC4335

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## 1. Purpose of the Briefing

- 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 Bracknell and 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 was the establishment of a Water Safety Partnership for West Berkshire. Following the initial annual report to the Joint Public Protection Committee in 2022 it was agreed that the Water Safety Partnership would cover both West Berkshire and Bracknell to align with the Public Protection Partnership.
- 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.
- 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).
- Bracknell Forest Council Officers.
- 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

## 4. Current Status

- 4.1 There has been one reported water related fatality in West Berkshire over the last 12-month period and none in Bracknell Forest. The incident in West Berkshire involved a male returning home from the Town Centre at night and falling into the canal in the Mill Lane area of Newbury. Representatives from the Water Safety Partnership visited the site of the incident and did not find any physical measures that could reasonably be introduced that would have prevented the incident. Contact has been made with the Street Pastors in Newbury for their assistance in spreading the word about the dangers of water when walking home from a night out. RBFRS are looking at other promotional activity around the night time trade in Newbury.
- 4.2 In addition to the above, two vulnerable users of the salvation army building in Newbury town centre fell into the river Kennet opposite the building. Both had to be rescued by RBFRS and it was classed as a 'near miss'. The incident occurred on private land with the two men falling over a low barrier. Discussion is ongoing with the landowner to make this area more secure and to prevent access to the water at this point.
- 4.3 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. One such unfortunate incident has involved the death of a 10-year-old boy in the River Kennet in the Elgar Rd area of Reading. Representatives of the Water Safety Partnership have been liaising with Reading Borough Council about the establishment of a Reading Water Safety Partnership.
- 4.4 4 meetings of the Water Safety Partnership took place in 2023 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 completed to remove trees and tree roots that could impact of water safety.
  - RBFRS hosted a Water Safety Day in Newbury on the 15th of April at 10.00 in Victoria Park with throw line demonstration and training.
  - Open water swim coaching – Bracknell Forest have an open space Horseshoe Lake where they have a water sports operator who do open water swimming lessons if a venue is needed.
  - Water Safety Messaging has been incorporated into Emergency Planning's Heatwave Health Alerts as this tends to represent a peak in water activity.
  - Further development of the PPP website as a resource for sharing information etc. [Water Safety Messages - Key Resources - PPP \(publicprotectionpartnership.org.uk\)](https://www.publicprotectionpartnership.org.uk)
  - Analysis of water incidents have resulted in a Water Safety cabinet being installed in Northcroft Park, Newbury in addition to those previously installed in Victoria Park, Newbury and at Pangbourne Meadows.



*Northcroft Newbury*

- Cabinet features rescue buoy with rope, solar powered beacon, and keypad entry to prevent vandalism.
- Joint promotional activities around water safety week in May, drowning prevention week in June, summer water activities and promotional material around cold-water shock along with winter preparedness late Autumn.

4.5 The Water Safety Partnership is also working with Pangbourne Parish Council to look at ways to discourage jumping (tombstoning) from Whitchurch Bridge. A Water Safety Partnership roadshow was held during the summer in Pangbourne Meadows adjacent to the Bridge and we are soon to trial the placing of signs with QR codes that will link to educational and safety messaging around the dangers of this activity.

## 5. Next Steps

5.1 Currently planned activities for 2024 include the following:

- [Toddler Safety Week](#) being organised by the Canal and River Trust, date TBC.

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.
- Monitoring the use of QR codes at key locations linking to water safety educational and safety messaging.

## **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 Comms Plan