

# Public Protection Partnership Service Update and Q1 Report for 2024/25

Committee considering report:	Joint Public Protection Committee
Date of Committee:	7 October 2024
Chair of Committee:	Councillor Iskandar Jefferies
Date JMB agreed report:	23 September 2024
Report Author:	Sean Murphy
Forward Plan Ref:	JPPC4618

## 1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To inform the Committee of the performance of the Public Protection Partnership in line with the operating model and business plan and provide an update setting out performance during the first quarter of 2024/25.

## 2. Recommendations

The Committee:

- 2.1 **NOTES** the 2024/25 Q1 data for the Public Protection Service set out in Appendix A.
- 2.1 **NOTES** the update on service delivery.

## 3. Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
<b>Financial:</b>	<p>Since the last meeting that service revenue budget has been reprofiled. There is an income shortfall of £196K. Of this £144K is shortfall in licensing income from profile.</p> <p>In year this has been reduced through holding vacancies and by the carry forward of £60K from last year.</p> <p>We are however facing a further pressure of £39.25K if the proposed salary settlement is implemented leaving a total pressure of £55K.</p> <p>Managing the income deficit and pressures created by use of agency staff, casual staff etc. has been achieved by holding open key vacancies.</p>
<b>Human Resource:</b>	<p>The combination of vacancies and deletions of posts (6.7 fte) to balance the budget has the risk of increasing pressure on existing staff and there is no doubt in some areas the staff and the service are under significant pressure.</p> <p>In addition, some posts have been held to cover income shortfall and agency / casual staff costs and a further four staff are in</p>

	<p>maternity leave. We are seeking maternity cover and have moved staff within service to cover gaps and backfill.</p> <p>We are constantly reviewing the service to ensure that resource is targeted in high priority areas and areas where there is greater risk of detriment to residents. The Strategic Assessment brought to the June 2024 meeting will be used to assist Members with priority setting for the team.</p> <p>There is some very limited engagement of agency staff, but this is linked primarily to grant funded areas where there is not the resource to conduct the work.</p> <p>A great deal of effort has gone into re-balancing the service through the delivery of a <a href="#">Workforce Strategy</a> focussed on a 'grow our own' ethos by investing in apprenticeships, post graduate professional qualifications and post-entry training for both new and existing officers. The is starting to bear fruit, with all Level 4 apprentices completing their regulatory compliance officer training, but there is still some way to go until the service can rely on 5 upskilled L6 professional officers (3 EHO and 2 TSO) as a resource as training is midway for those involved. This workforce strategy is underpinned by the <a href="#">Training and Development Plan</a>.</p>
<b>Legal:</b>	<p>There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. The Inter-Authority Agreement (IAA) charges the Joint Public Protection Committee with the responsibility to oversee service delivery and performance including financial performance. This report discharges this responsibility.</p> <p>The governance arrangements with Wokingham are managed through Joint Management Board as per the current agreement.</p>
<b>Risk Management:</b>	<p>JMB and the management team meet regularly to consider the risks for the delivery of the service. The current key risks relate to operational and management capacity due to the number of vacancies across the service and the financial pressure which affects the ability to cover off those resource gaps. To mitigate the risk, the service has taken several steps. It is currently advertising for 2 environmental control officers and moving work across teams where capacity impact is less severe. However, finances and the market availability are such that it is not yet able to recruit additional professional officers or agency resource. Attempted recruitment to one of the vacant management posts has not been successful due to the lack of applicants.</p> <p>Due to the finite resource service management are taking a risk-based approach in all its activity's ranging from routine interventions and criminal investigations to how formal investigations are dealt with. The service is also maintaining its approach as being intelligence led in dealing with reactive</p>

	<p>requests that are not a risk to life or limb. This does create additional risk around perceptions of levels of response which require the management of those expectations.</p> <p>There is an item elsewhere on this agenda that explains this in more detail.</p>			
<b>Property:</b>	<p>There are no direct property implications arising from this report although it is to be noted that the 'Transformation Programme' at West Berkshire is looking at rationalising the use of the estate. This may have an impact on the PPP use of Theale Gateway with some sharing of the building proposed.</p>			
<b>Policy:</b>	<p>There are no direct policy implications arising from this paper. It should be noted that the Inter-Authority Agreement (IAA) places a responsibility on the Joint Public Protection Committee (JPPC) to determine service policies and priorities and to maintain oversight of performance. This report addresses that requirement.</p> <p>The revised service priorities were agreed at the <a href="#">March 2023</a> JPPC meeting. The Strategic Assessment was adopted at the <a href="#">June 2024</a> meeting and will assist with setting new priorities and monitoring progress against them. The revised priorities will be agreed at this meeting as a separate agenda item.</p>			
	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
<b>Equalities Impact:</b>				
<b>A</b> Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		✓		No implications
<b>B</b> Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		✓		No implications

<b>Environmental Impact:</b>		✓		
<b>Health Impact:</b>		✓		
<b>ICT or Digital Services Impact:</b>		✓		
<b>PPP Priorities:</b>				The report will impact on the following PPP Priorities (delete those that are not appropriate) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Building Safer Communities</li> <li>2. Improved Living Environment</li> <li>3. Protecting Consumers from Fraud</li> <li>4. Reducing Harm in Young People</li> <li>5. Protecting and Informing Consumers</li> <li>6. Protection of the Environment</li> <li>7. Promoting Animal Welfare</li> <li>8. Safety in the Workplace</li> <li>9. Safe and Healthy Food Chain</li> </ul> Business as Usual Activity is supported too.
<b>Data Impact:</b>		✓		None
<b>Consultation and Engagement:</b>	There is regular engagement with staff as well as senior officer and Member briefings in each of the authorities that form the PPP.			
<b>Other Options Considered:</b>	None. It is a requirement of the IAA to report on the performance of the service.			

## 4. Executive Summary

- 4.1 The Joint Public Protection Committee is mandated by the Inter-Authority Agreement (IAA) to keep under review the performance and activity of the Public Protection Service including the financial performance and outputs of the service. Throughout the year the Committee receives updates on aspects of performance and any emerging issues, achievements, and priorities. This report also sets out progress and risks in key strategic areas of the business i.e., Finance, HR, ICT, Property and Legal.
- 4.2 The key outturn measures of volume and data for Quarter 1 (April to June) is set out in Appendix A to the report.
- 4.3 The narrative in this report sets out the steps and interventions that the service performs across all partner authority areas to protect both residents and businesses. As was agreed when the Strategic Assessment was agreed in June 2024, we have adjusted the layout of this report to reflect the targeted priority outcomes set out in that document.

## 5. Finances and Resources

- 5.1 Since the last meeting that service revenue budget has been reprofiled. As a result, an income shortfall of £196K. Of this £144K is shortfall in licensing income from profile. Some of this shortfall is historic but it has been exacerbated by Covid and income is still below pre-pandemic levels. It is proposed that we raise the issue again with Government of statutory licensing fees that have now fallen 72% behind inflation since 2005 when they came into effect.

- 5.2 In year this has been reduced through holding vacancies and by the carry forward of £60K from last year. The posts being held are over and above the 6.7FTE deleted to manage the deficit created by Wokingham leaving the PPP.
- 5.3 We are however facing a further pressure of £39.25K if the proposed salary settlement is implemented leaving a total pressure of £55K. The service management will work to reduce this pressure in year and is currently exploring options, but it is likely holding vacancies will be the main response and service levels will reduce further as a result.
- 5.4 Away from staffing budgets there is likely to be a pressure on fees for external Counsel as we are seeing a significant increase in cases being referred to Crown Court because of their seriousness or defendants electing this mode of trial.
- 5.5 The service has been successful in attracting over £250K in grants covering public health, investigations, fly tipping and legal fees.

## 6. Human Resources

### Recruitment

- 6.1 The Service has, since the June JPPC meeting, been successful in recruiting to the Lead Licensing Officer role. The licensing team is now fully staffed. The following posts are currently out to advert or by the time of the meeting recruited too:
- Enforcement Officer – Age Restricted Products (1 year fixed term – grant funded)
  - Environmental Control Officer – (1 year fixed term – maternity cover)
  - Senior / Environmental Control Officer – (Full Time / Permanent)
  - Programme Manager – Health and Community (100% grant funded)
- 6.2 During Q1 the following officers have left the Service:
- Principle Officer: Housing
  - Strategic Manager: Case Management Unit
- 6.3 Both these posts are currently vacant despite attempts to fill the case management post.
- 6.4 In addition, we have the following vacancies:
- 1 Environmental Health Officer
  - 1 Trading Standards Officer
  - 1 Trading Standards Investigator
  - 1 Case Manager
- 6.5 Finally, three trading standards staff have indicated that they wish to retire or reduce hours in 2024. The impact of this will be a further 2FTE vacancies before the end of the current financial year.

### Training and Development

- 6.6 All four of our Level 4 Apprentices have now completed their apprenticeship. The three Level 6 apprentices have all completed the first year of either their Trading Standards

or Environment Health courses. Our two team members undertaking their MSC's in Environmental Health are progressing well (entering their final year) and our environmental health graduate trainee is continuing to progress well with the practical element of his course.

- 6.7 Once the budget is confirmed we will start to look at phase two of the apprenticeship programme in line with our Workforce Strategy and Training and Development Plan.
- 6.8 One officer passed the accreditation assessment and two passed the initial training course to carry out the statutory private water supplies sampling.
- 6.9 Six officers carried out the Institute of Licensing Responsible Authority training course.
- 6.10 One officer has just been awarded her ILM level 3 award in management.
- 6.11 There is a whole team away day scheduled for the 22 October 2024 which will focus on the customer journey and improving customer experience.
- 6.12 Five officers have undertaken the necessary training and have passed a CILEX criminal disclosure course, and two officers are attending age restricted product enforcement training in September.
- 6.13 Five officers have completed the Institute of Licensing Professional Licensing Practitioners Qualification.

## 7. ICT Update

- 7.1 JMB continue to meet with the supplier of the PPP single system database on a monthly basis.
- 7.2 We are now in the final stages of implementation as the on-line portal is rolled out to the licensing trade in stages.

## 8. Governance

- 8.1 The [Feed and Food Standards Controls Service Plan 2024- 2025](#) was signed off at the Joint Management Board meeting on the 12 August 2024.
- 8.2 Two consultations have been undertaken by the Service since the June meeting. The consultation on the Nuisance Policy ran from the 08 July to 26 August 2024 and the West Berkshire Council Statement of Gambling Policy consultation was undertaken between the 18 July and the 12 September 2024. Over fifty responses have been received on the Nuisance Policy and there are likely to be changes to the draft presented to Committee in June 2024.
- 8.3 The Peer Review of the shared service arrangements will commence in September and report before the end of the year. The focus will be on the effectiveness of governance arrangements, management, inputs and resourcing, outputs and the future. All documents required by the review team have been compiled.
- 8.4 During Q1 the team dealt with a total of 102 Freedom of Information requests which took around 72 hours to process. The number of requests increased by 14.5% when compared to the same period in 2023/24 where 89 Fols were processed. The Fols also took significantly more time to process (around 61 hours in Q1 of 2023/24). This is

in part due to the complexity of the requests and the new processes introduced in Bracknell Forest

8.5 The team also processed 60 enquiries from Councillors and the local MPs, 29 of those were in West Berkshire and 31 in Bracknell Forest. This represented a significant increase when compared to the 38 (58% increase) that were dealt with in Quarter 1 of the previous year.

8.6 In terms of complaints, the service received 11 complaints which equates to 0.37% of the service requests that the team has dealt with. Of the 11 complaints (2 in BFC and 9 in WBC) received three were upheld and the matters were rectified and apologies were issued. One of the stage 1 complaints, which was not upheld, was the subject of a stage 2 complaint which was also not upheld. Three complaints related to response times, three about the service received, four about the decision made and one was dealt with as a service request.

## 9. Building Safer Communities

9.1 With the onset of the event season Noise Management Plans have been checked and noise monitoring carried out. The Service has considered 108 event management plans (42 in Bracknell and 66 in West Berkshire) as part of the [Safety Advisory Group](#) process.

9.2 The following licensing panel/subcommittee meetings have taken place in Q1:

Type of Application	Applicant	Outcome
<b>Bracknell Forest</b>		
None		
<b>West Berkshire</b>		
New Premise Licence	Hungerford Park Estate, Hungerford Park, Hungerford, West Berkshire, RG17 0UU	grant the licence, with conditions

9.3 During Q2 of 2024/25 to date the following applications have been heard:

Type of Application	Applicant	Outcome
<b>Bracknell Forest</b>		
Street Trading Consent	Mr Mustafa Karaduman at Priory Lane Field Car Park, Warfield, Bracknell.	grant consent with the standard conditions for one month initially
New Premise Licence	The Vault, 19 High Street, Crowthorne, Bracknell, RG45 7AD	grant the licence, with conditions
<b>West Berkshire</b>		
None		

Licensing Hearings Data for last three years.			
Authority	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25 To Date
<b>Bracknell Forest</b>	1	3	2
<b>West Berkshire</b>	0 (2 cancelled after agenda publication)	8 (with a further five cancelled or adjourned after agenda publication)	1

- 9.4 Operation Albion is underway which deals with corrosive substances that are caught under the Offensive Weapons Act 2019. The project will encompass both enforcement and education directed at the trade. The team has consulted with colleagues within youth offending teams and other interested partners. Premises will be targeted based on intelligence. The project is expected to be completed by end of Q3.
- 9.5 Operation Joseph - Following on from initial testing, a 3<sup>rd</sup> phase of testing is underway, and on-line test purchasing is taking place. We will be submitting seven test purchases to our test house shortly and will await results.
- 9.6 Licensing officers continue to work with Thames Valley Police in the project to reduce violence against women and girls and have undertaken joint visits to premises as part of this initiative.
- 9.7 Licensing officers have sought compliance from illegal scrap metal sites and dealers and have served a closure notice in respect of one premise.
- 9.8 During Q1, officers issued three seizure of dog notices (alongside a number of collected strays) and two Prevention of Damage by Pest Act Notices following inaction by the owner or occupiers of land that presented with rat infestations.
- 9.9 All funeral directors in West Berkshire and Bracknell have now received confirmation / advice visits by Environmental Health as requested by the government following the incidents in East Riding of Yorkshire. Compliance was found to be high.

## 10. Improved Living Environment

- 10.1 Officers are continuing to receive high numbers of service requests regarding disrepair in tenants' homes and on caravan sites. These are dealt with by Housing Officers who triage, and risk assess the information coming in as part of the Duty Officer role. These are then assigned to Officers for action. This can involve full HHSRS Inspections (Housing Health and Safety Rating Scheme), ensuring landlords are fulfilling their duties and ensuring defects are corrected or assistance being given to the tenant.
- 10.2 HMO (House of Multiple Occupation) renewals are ongoing. It is over five years since new legislation came into effect which changed the definition of an HMO, and this meant that many more HMOs were licenced by the team. Each licence is renewed every five years and so the team are now working on these renewals. This involves ensuring that all documentation is up to date (e.g. Electrical and gas safety certificates)



and an inspection to ensure that the property is operating within the conditions of the licence and are in good repair.

10.3 Alongside this we continue to monitor the areas for unlicensed HMOs and monitor where landlords have not renewed their licences to ensure it is now under the occupancy required to be adjudged an HMO.

10.4 Work is ongoing on the Quality Management System to ensure consistency and efficiency of approach.

10.5 In terms of service requests around housing:

	Total request for service housing	Of these number of complaints regarding house condition	Of these number that were Registered Social Landlords
WB October to December 2023	82	60	34 (57%)
WB January to March 2024	104	80	49 (61%)
WB April to June 2024	90	71	32 (45%)
BF October to December 2023	92	62	31 (50%)
BF January to March 2024	74	63	30 (48%)
BF April to June 2024	78	49	20 (41%)

10.6 The team dealt with 140 service requests in respect of pest control and 99 service requests which related to domestic nuisance. This in addition to the significant number of phone calls from worried residents wanting information and help with pest control measures and types of treatment.

10.7 Three Abatement Notices were issued following failures to ensure compliance through informal measures. There were also four littering notices, and one abatement notice issued for rubbish accumulation.

10.8 Energy Efficiency and Non-compliance, tenants' rights and letting Agents, housing condition survey (WB) - Operation Sapphire has been set up to assess properties being let that are not compliant with the Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating. This project will involve a large amount of research time to create a database of non-compliant premises, which are then followed up for the purposes of assessing compliance.

10.9 This is work being carried out as part of a joint Environment Health and Trading Standards initiative to improve standards of living. According to a recent housing condition survey carried out in West Berkshire, the proportion of properties within the non-compliant (F-G) category was 11.8% of all privately rented stock, compared to 5% nationally. The housing condition survey has not been carried out in Bracknell, so the initial pilot will be carried out within West Berkshire.

10.10 We are reviewing our nuisance protocol with respect to sewage discharges and will be working with respective highways teams.

## **11. Protecting Consumers from Fraud**

### **Fraud Victim Support**

11.1 During Q1 the scams team have achieved the following across Bracknell Forest, West Berkshire and Wokingham:

- Received and dealt with 21 fraud complaints
- Fitted seven call blockers saving each resident an estimated £1000 per year
- Delivered six scam / fraud presentations
- Commenced three bank challenges
- Set up one No Cold Calling Zone
- Undertaken campaigns on Holiday Scams and Used Cars
- Returned nearly £15,000 of money lost through scams back to residents

11.2 The scams team have been in regular communication with colleagues in Bracknell Forest to improve referral pathways into PPP for Bracknell Forest residents who are suspected victims of scams.

### **Illegal Money Lending**

11.3 The PPP received training from the Illegal Money Lending Team (IMLT) in respect of illegal money lenders and Loan Sharks during the Team Away morning in April. The training has subsequently been offered and delivered to colleagues in Bracknell Forest and West Berkshire Housing Teams, Adult and Children's Services, Public Health and Libraries.

11.4 The PPP supported the IMLT in the promotion of their Stop Loan Sharks week in May through the sharing of communications over our social media platforms.

11.5 The PPP were successful in bidding for £3,000 funding from the IMLT to deliver awareness raising session to residents within Bracknell Forest, West Berkshire and Wokingham. These sessions are planned to take place during November in conjunction with Boom Community Bank and the Southeast Regional Organised Crime Unit (SEROUCU).

11.6 In June, the PPP applied for and were awarded partnership status with the IMLT and a referral protocol is now in place. The service will continue working to raise awareness and education amongst the community.

### **Unfair Trading and Fraud**

11.7 Officers continue to inspect weights and measures equipment (e.g. Optics, scales, beer measures). During Q1, 156 pieces of equipment have been examined or tested with seven being found to be incorrect and removed.

11.8 Enquiries are on-going following reports of counterfeit gas safety valves being sold on-line. Further test purchases of gas safety valves have been conducted for on-line sales to obtain evidence under the Trademarks Act (and Product Safety).

- 11.9 Illicit products and excise breaches - The team continue to work to progress the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding with the HMRC in order to gain access to the application that can be used to identify illicit tobacco products.
- 11.10 The service has been receiving a high number of complaints about car traders in the area, relating to consumer statutory rights. In response to this, Operation Tabitha was set up and has been underway since March in a bid to drive down the number of complaints through trader advice. Continuing breaches and complaints against these traders will escalate to action under the Enterprise Act. To date 34 advice letters have been sent, and 12 business have been visited as part of the follow up and further matters relating to undertakings being considered.
- 11.11 The investigation team have taken on all Doorstep Crime incidents reported via Consumer Advice and Thames Valley Police. The Service have seen a sudden rise in incidents in the last three months. This is due to a couple of factors, firstly the spring and summer period is the busiest time of the year for home repairs and as a result there is usually an increase in activity from those seeking to take advantage of vulnerable older people. Secondly the team are carrying out unannounced days out with the police to catch offenders whilst they are working. A number of suspects have been identified by officers who would not have been reported by the victim. Between the 1<sup>st</sup> of April and 30<sup>th</sup> June 2024 there has been a total of 38 rapid response live incidents.
- 11.12 The total reported money lost by victims totals £250,999. (Bracknell residents £98,929, Wokingham residents £65,366 and West Berkshire residents £86,704.) The money saved by early intervention by the service totalled £23,050. The
- 11.13 The team have 15 ongoing investigations across Bracknell, Wokingham and West Berkshire.
- 11.14 A planned two days of action was undertaken which involved officers patrolling areas where intelligence pointed to 'hot spots for rogue trader activity'. This resulted in six interventions where three written warnings were issued and signed by the trader instantly. The remaining incidents are still under investigation.

## **12. Reducing Harm in Young People**

### **Schools Work**

- 12.1 During Q1 ten presentations have taken place within three schools within West Berkshire and Newbury College. Four presentations were in respect of alcohol, five informed on vapes and one discussed scams.
- 12.2 The PPP's Senior Officer, Community Protection and Health has supported Bracknell Forest's Public Health Team in drafting their young people's vaping action plan.

### **Attitudinal Survey**

- 12.3 The annual schools attitudinal survey launched across West Berkshire Secondary Schools on 15<sup>th</sup> April and closed on 26<sup>th</sup> June. The survey seeks to identify the smoking, vaping and alcohol use habits of secondary school pupils across the Local Authority. 4406 pupils completed the survey. This is the highest completion figure in the nearly 20 years the survey has been running and is testament to the positive relationships the PPP have built with our Public Health and Secondary School

colleagues within West Berkshire. The survey data will be anonymised and analysed over the summer. A report detailing the findings and action plan based on these will be ready to be sent to schools and other relevant professionals and forums for the beginning of the new academic year in September.

### **Tobacco Control Alliance**

- 12.4 The PPP's Senior Officer, Community Protection and Health represents both the PPP and West Berkshire Public Health at the Tobacco Control Alliance and owing to sickness absence within Public Health, is also managing West Berkshire Council's Local Stop Smoking Service (LSSS) contract and the spending of the Local Authority's allocated Local Stop Smoking Service and Support Grant funding.
- 12.5 During Q1, PPP's Senior Officer, Community Protection and Health, on behalf of West Berkshire Public Health applied for and secured funding from the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) for up to 150 vape started kits to be given out by the LSSS to clients within West Berkshire wishing to quit smoking. In addition, she has supported the contract variation to allow the LSSS to provide vapes and attended contract management and extension meetings for the LSSS.
- 12.6 Public Health received their first payment on the Local Stop Smoking Service and Support Grant in April. The PPP's Senior Officer, Community Protection and Health has started to seek to procure additional stop smoking services, insights and evaluation work and recruit a Project Officer to support with work to be funded through the grant.

### **Community Alcohol Partnership**

- 12.7 As part of the ongoing work of the Community Alcohol Partnership, a Challenge 25 test purchasing operation commenced during Q1 and will continue into Q2. The focus of the project is testing rurally located and independent retail premises across West Berkshire. A twenty-year-old volunteer has been recruited and two test purchasing days haven taken place. The retail premises visited have all received letters advising of their involvement in the operation, whether they passed or failed and providing information on Challenge 25 and responsible retailer training.

### **Underage Sales**

- 12.8 The team conducted 15 vape test purchases, and two alcohol test purchase. There were no sales. The team are currently reviewing its approach to carrying out increased work in this area and are seeking to employ a dedicated officer solely for test purchasing and under-age sale activity.
- 12.9 A recruitment campaign is also underway to recruit more volunteers for under age sale test purchasing.

## **13. Protection of the Environment**

- 13.1 An eight day proactive odour and noise monitoring exercise was carried out to determine if a statutory nuisance exists at a commercial property.
- 13.2 The Nuisance Policy was subject to consultation from the 08 July to 26 August 2024 and the outcome is included as a separate item on this agenda.

- 13.3 The Team have been providing support to Wokingham Borough Council for the new Air Quality Action Plan for Wokingham Town Centre.
- 13.4 Officers have continued to provide support to Planning Committees including attending a meeting where a high profile housing development was discussed to provide advice in relation to air quality. Officers also attended a number of sessions to provide evidence at the West Berkshire Local Plan Inquiry.
- 13.5 During Q1 the Team dealt with 245 reports relating to abandoned vehicles and 52 fly tipping service requests. Officers have been highlighting the issues with littering around the 39 community recycling centres in Bracknell Forest on social media and via press releases. A number of fixed penalty notices have been issued to residents and a number of larger scale investigations are ongoing.
- 13.6 During Q1 63 checks were made in relation to potential breaches of weight restrictions and overloaded vehicles.
- 13.7 Case management will now be considering a number of cases arising from unpaid fixed penalties where prosecution could follow.

## **14. Protecting and Informing Consumers**

- 14.1 During Q1 Officers have dealt with seven press enquiries, issued seven press releases and published eight articles on the website. The Principal Officer - Policy and Governance continues to work closely with West Berkshire, Bracknell Forest and Wokingham Borough's communication teams and liaises with them on a regular basis regarding our campaigns. We also share our press releases for their distribution, as well as both continuing to share relevant posts on each other's social media platforms.
- 14.2 In addition a series starring Billy Bingham (ex- SAS Officer) recently aired which showed our Trading Standards Officers in action: [SAS: Catching the Criminals - Series 1: Episode 12 - BBC iPlayer](#).
- 14.3 In terms of social media activity Officers have supported a number of relevant national public campaigns including deadlines for getting cats microchipped, ant-idling and clean air day, buying a used car, water safety messaging including the Royal Life Saving Society's drowning prevention week, bird flu and blue tongue virus messaging, quitting smoking and stop loan sharks week.
- 14.4 Officers have also attended the following community events over the summer:
- Victoria Park Fun Day (19<sup>th</sup> May 2024)
  - Pangbourne Fete (08 June 2024)
  - Thatcham Fun Day (30 June 2024)
  - Sandhurst Summer of Fun (02 August 2024)
  - Great Hollands Summer of Fun (07 August 2024)
  - Binfield Summer of Fun (21 August 2024)
  - Bracknell Summer of Fun (28 August 2024)
  - Thames Valley Police Open Day (07 September 2024)

## **Assured Care and Support**

- 14.5 During Q1 a workshop was held with scheme funders and potential funders. During this meeting it was agreed that the Assured Care and Support (ACS) scheme would only support micro providers who are ineligible to register with Care Quality Commission (CQC). At the end of Q1 the scheme had 59 members. Four new applications are being processed.
- 14.6 The PPP has sought external legal advice regarding the following the publishing of a report, questioning the employment status of personal assistants in the care sector. That advice has cleared our own scheme to proceed in its current format.

## **Community Larder**

- 14.7 The Thatcham Community Larder has over 100 members and a dedicated team of volunteers supporting the setting up and running of the larder. There is a weekly craft table, 'knit and natter', chair exercises and information and support available regarding various other PPP functions. A funding bid has been made to West Berkshire's Public Health Team. A decision is anticipated to be made at the next Health and Wellbeing Board meeting in September.

## **15. Promoting Animal Welfare**

- 15.1 During Q1 Officers undertook 77 animal health visits.
- 15.2 The service have been promoting the new requirements relating to the registration of captive bird flocks which have now been extended to cover all outdoor birds whether kept commercially or residentially.
- 15.3 Licensing visits to premises involved in boarding, breeding, performing animals, riding schools, pet shops and zoos are regularly undertaken and investigations are ongoing to identify illegal businesses and seek compliance.

## **16. Safety in the Workplace**

- 16.1 The Team has dealt with 66 Health and safety at work service requests during quarter 1 and 24 workplace accidents were reported.
- 16.2 We have an ongoing investigation into a workplace accident that occurred in West Berkshire.
- 16.3 Legal proceedings have been instituted following an serious incident in 2022 involving the storage and discharge of explosives.

## **17. Safe and Healthy Food Chain**

- 17.1 Inspections relating to Risk Assessments and sampling of Private Water Supplies continue, with four supplies served with Notices for nitrate and or E Coli failures. In addition to the new requirements for dealing with Private Distribution Systems, some of which is being highlighted through events.
- 17.2 During Q1 131 food standards inspections were carried out and five animal feed inspections were undertaken.

17.3 Officers completed the the foodsampling programme for Q1. Two service requests in respect of allergens were received. The Service also received 29 service requests relating to food labelling and claims.

17.4 Officers have completed 205 Food hygiene inspections during Quarter 1 and have dealt with 144 Food hygiene service requests.

17.5 The table below sets out the premises overdue and due in 2024/25:

	Premises Rating	PROVISIONAL EST Food inspections due 24 /25 and overdue	CORRECTED BF DUE 24 25	CORRECTED WB due 24 25	Corrected TOTAL due and OD BF	Corrected TOTAL due and OD WB
BF and WB	A	2	1 (2)	3 (6)	1 (2)	3 (6)
	B	41	23	20	23	20
	C	160	53	103	53	103
	D	525	66	111	168	355
	E	782	77	185	348	433
	Unrated				74 OD and 120 est = 200	196 OD and 200 est = 200

17.6 One notice was served to seize and detain illegally imported food stored at a warehouse in West Berkshire in accordance with Regulation 19 of the Trade in Animals and Related Products (TARP) Regulations 2011. This was because the food had arrived in the UK without the correct food safety documentation. The owner of the food was required to export or destroy the food.

17.7 Two premises, both in West Berkshire, undertook voluntary closures following inspections as a result of pest activity and a complaint about poor hygiene practices.

17.8 The Service received 126 infectious disease notifications during Q1.

## 18. Investigations and Case Management

18.1 The Joint Case Management Unit continues to be busy working with new investigations commencing all the time across PPP. The loss of the Stategic Manager has reduced staff capacity with some cases taking longer to progress.

18.2 The service has part funded a shared trainee post with West Berkshire legal team.

18.3 With 37 live PPP matters under investigation and/or in the court system (excluding a significant volume of road traffic matters as well as a number enviro crime cases). Many of these are complex and involve multiple defendents and victims. Currently over half of PPP cases end up being dealt with in the Crown Court due the seriousness of the alleged offending.

18.4 The two National Crime Agency Accredited Financial Investigation Officers are fully occupied with ten investigations relating to money laundering or confiscation under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. Whilst the majority of these are for the PPP there are two investigations being conducted in conjunction with Reading Borough Council under an agreed protocol. The Service Lead is also qualified to have oversight financial investigations but following the loss of the Strategic Manager – Case Management we will need to seek accreditation for another senior manager.

18.5 Examples of some cases that had concluded in the last quarter are:

- (a) **Two Builders Sentenced for Unfair Trading.** These builders started work in 2019 for a Bracknell family to convert a loft, but the relationship deteriorated, and the work was not completed. The investigation found workmanship was unacceptably poor with the cost of repair exceeding the cost of the original works. The first defendant was sentenced to a 12-month Community Order, with a requirement to undertake 220 hours of Unpaid Work and ordered to pay compensation in the sum of £15,000. The second defendant was sentenced to a 12-month Community Order, with a requirement to undertake 150 hours of Unpaid Work, and to pay compensation in the sum of £5,000.
- (b) **Restaurant Owner Sentenced for Food Law Breaches.** In 2022, a customer suffered a serious allergic reaction after buying a curry which contained peanuts despite requesting that their meal be free from nuts. The defendant was sentenced to pay total fines and costs amounting to £4,272 which included a victim surcharge of £506 and a £2,500 contribution towards the prosecution costs.
- (c) **Company Sentenced for Unfair Trading together with two of its former sales representatives.** The company offered a range of services relating to solar panel installation but misled consumers with false testimonies and misleading various claims. The defendant company was fined £464,000 together with two of its representatives. One representative was sentenced to 2 years' imprisonment suspended for 18 months with 8 sessions of rehabilitation activity and a fine of £2500. The other representative was sentenced to 4 months' imprisonment suspended for 18 months with 10 sessions of rehabilitation activity and a victim surcharge.
- (d) **Unlicensed Dog Breeder convicted of fraud.** After discovering an online puppy seller was selling litters without a license, further investigation found different aliases for the same seller. He was handed a fifteen-month custodial sentence for fraud, two months custodial sentence for unfair trading and one month for trading without a licence. All sentences were to run concurrently and were suspended for eighteen months. He was also ordered to complete 20 days rehabilitation activity requirement, pay £1000 compensation and £1000 towards prosecution costs.

## 19. Concluding Observations

19.1 The service started this year with some significant challenges following the loss of 6.7FTE of operational resource. This has been compounded by the loss of two key



managers and the need to hold posts open to cover income deficit. The demands on the service continue to grow and the gap between demand and resource widens.

19.2 Elsewhere on this agenda Members are asked to review the priorities for the service. This will be critical going forward if no funding is available to reduce pressures.

19.3 On the positive the service remains risk-based, focussed and innovative in delivery and the results continue to show this. The workforce strategy has been an undoubtable success and we will now move to the next stage by bringing in new entry level trainees whilst investing in our existing officers.

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## 20. Appendices

20.1 Appendix A – Q1 Performance Data

20.2 Appendix B – Compliments

20.3 Appendix C – Activity by Authority

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## 21. Background Papers:

21.1 None

### Subject to Call-In:

Yes:  No:

The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval

Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council

Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position

Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or associated Task Groups within preceding six months

Item is Urgent Key Decision

Report is to note only

**Wards affected:** All Wards

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