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

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Committee considering report:	Joint Public Protection Committee
Date of Committee:	16 December 2024
Chair of Committee:	Councillor Iskandar Jefferies
Date JMB agreed report:	4 November 2024
Report Author:	Sean Murphy
Forward Plan Ref:	N/a

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## 1. Purpose of the Report

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

## 2. Recommendations

The Committee:

- 2.1 Be **INFORMED** about the 2024/25 Q2 data for the Public Protection Service set out in **Appendix A**.
- 2.2 Be **INFORMED** about the update on service delivery.

## 3. Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
<b>Financial:</b>	<p>Since the last meeting the service revenue budget has been reprofiled. The outturn is expected to be zero taking account that there is a £90K pressure at Bracknell Forest.</p> <p>Managing the income deficit of £180K has been achieved by holding vacant key vacancies. This is on top of the 6.7FTE reduction to balance the budget post the departure of Wokingham.</p> <p>Further detail can be found at Section 5 below.</p>
<b>Human Resource:</b>	<p>The combination of vacancies and deletions of posts 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, a number of posts have been held for various periods to cover income shortfall and agency / casual staff costs and a further four staff are on maternity leave. We have sought maternity cover unsuccessfully 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 and Member Priority setting exercise has been used to inform decision making.</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>
<p><b>Legal:</b></p>	<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>
<p><b>Risk Management:</b></p>	<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 moving work between 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 in certain areas. Attempted recruitment to two of the vacant management posts has not been successful due to the lack of applicants.</p> <p>Due to the finite resource, management are taking a risk-based approach in all its activities ranging from routine interventions to criminal investigations. The service is also maintaining its approach as being intelligence led in dealing with reactive request and prioritising on risk. This does create additional risk around perceptions of levels of response which require the management of those expectations.</p>

<b>Property:</b>	None			
<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 discussed at the <a href="#">October 2024</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.</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>				<p>The report will impact on the following PPP Priorities</p> <ol 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> </ol>

				7. Promoting Animal Welfare 8. Safety in the Workplace 9. Safe and Healthy Food Chain 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.
- 4.1 The key outturn measures of volume and data for Quarter 2 (July to September) is set out in Appendix A to the report.
- 4.2 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.

## 5. Finances

- 5.1 Since the last meeting the service work has been undertaken to rebuild the budget in line with updated income projections. This has reduced the income targets by around £180K per year. In reality the Service has been managing some deficit for many years, but it was exacerbated by Covid where licensing income still has not recovered to pre-pandemic levels in real terms despite several increases in discretionary charges.
- 5.2 See pre and post pandemic data set out below:

Licence Type	BFC 2020	BFC 2024	WBC 2020	WBC 2024	Total 2020	Total 2024
Betting Premises	10	9	14	11	24	20
PH Operators	50	39	61	59	111	98
PH Vehicles	189	107	163	181	352	288

- 5.3 We are expected to have zero outturn at the end of the financial year although this includes a legacy £90K pressure for Bracknell Forest. We have had to hold a number of vacancies open for significant lengths of time to achieve this. There are still risks associated with the budget and these largely relate to vacancies / absence in case management and the need to engage locum legal staff.
- 5.4 The budget and fees and charges proposals agreed by JPPC in October have been submitted to the Councils and statutory consultation is underway for those fees and charges that need to be consulted on by law. All other fees will be subject to each council's budget consultation processes. We will advise the Committee at the next meeting whether the proposed budget contributions were acceptable / deliverable by the partner Councils.

## **6. Human Resources**

### **Recruitment**

- 6.1 The Service has, since the October JPPC meeting, been successful in recruiting to:
- Enforcement Officer – Age Restricted Products (1 year fixed term – grant funded) started on the 02 December 2024.
  - 2 x Senior / Environmental Control Officers – (Full Time / Permanent) starting in January 2025.
  - Programme Manager – Health and Community (100% grant funded)
  - Disclosure Officer (fixed term contract – substantially grant funded)
  - Principal Officer – Private Sector Housing – start February 2025
  - A part time Environment Health Officers has been appointed on a fixed term casual contract to undertake food hygiene visits to help clear the current backlog.
  - We have also appointed a solicitor and a barrister on fixed term contracts (12 weeks) who together will make up 1fte to provide resilience in the CMU while the recruitment to the Strategic Manager role continues.
- 6.2 The following posts are currently out to advert:
- Strategic Manager: Case Management Unit (out to advert) – This post has been advertised four times without success. This is now advertised again.
- 6.3 Since the last meeting the following officers have left the Service:
- 0.8FTE Acting Senior Environment Health Officer in the Environmental Quality team
  - 0.6FTE Community Support Officer
  - 1.0FTE Senior Trading Standards Officer (retired)
  - 1.0FTE Licensing Officer
- 6.4 In addition, we have the following vacancies:
- 1 Trading Standards Officers / Financial Investigator

- 6.5 Finally, two trading standards staff have indicated that they wish to reduce hours in Q4. The impact of this will be a further 1fte vacancies by the beginning of the next financial year. There are currently four officers on maternity leave. Unfortunately, despite attempting to do so, we have been unable to recruit maternity cover for environmental health.
- 6.6 The situation with respect to case management is challenging due to being unable to recruit to the vacant manager post.

### **Training and Development**

- 6.7 One officer has completed the CTSI Advanced Practitioner Age Restricted Sales course. We will be looking to bring this knowledge to the fore with the appointment of an age restricted product lead.
- 6.8 A whole team half day took place on the 22 October 2024 which focussed on the the peer review and the role of public protection in 'place making'.
- 6.9 The two team members undertaking their MSC's in Environmental Health are progressing well and have started the final year of their course. The Environmental Health Graduate trainee is continuing to progress well with the practical element of his course and the Level 6 Environment Health Apprentice is making very good progress with her course. The two Level 6 Trading Standards Apprentices are in their final year.
- 6.10 One of the trainee officers has enrolled and started on his one-year Food Premises Inspection Higher Certificate in September, following qualification he will be able to undertake food hygiene inspections of premises.
- 6.11 In-house training sessions on evidence gathering and disclosure requirements are going to be delivered through two sessions early in the new year.
- 6.12 Further safeguarding training is being provided for new staff into the service. This is a mandatory requirement for PPP staff as set out in the Training and Development Plan.

## **7. ICT Update**

- 7.1 The primary focus in this period has been securing access to legacy data as West Berkshire have moved to a new system and Bracknell are in the process of doing so. This is now largely complete.
- 7.2 We have commissioned a new website to be in place by April 2025. It is being designed and built by the digital team at West Berkshire Council.

## **8. Governance**

- 8.1 During Q2 Officers have dealt with four press enquiries, issued 12 press releases and published six 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 the PPP's campaigns. We also share PPP press releases for their distribution, as well as both continuing to share relevant posts on each other's social media platforms.

- 8.2 In terms of social media activity Officers have supported a number of relevant national public campaigns including Fire Door Safety Week, promoting messaging from the Animal and Plant Health Agency around the Bluetongue Virus, the Food Standards Agency campaign for students around food hygiene, domestic bird flock registration by 01 October, rental scams and the 'shopashark' campaign.
- 8.3 Officers have also attended the following community events during Q2:
- 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)
  - Newbury Show – animal welfare checks and advising livestock exhibitors (21 and 22 September 2024)
- 8.4 During Q2 the team dealt with a total of 98 Freedom of Information requests which took around 92 hours to process. The number of requests increased by 10% when compared to the same period in 2023/24 where 89 Fols were processed. The Fols also took significantly more time to process (around 66 hours in Q2 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 29 enquiries from Councillors and the local MPs, 20 of those were in West Berkshire and 9 in Bracknell Forest. This represented a small decrease when compared to the 35 that were dealt with in Quarter 2 of the previous year.
- 8.6 In terms of complaints, the service received seven complaints which equates to 0.3% of the 2729 service requests that the team has dealt with. Of the seven complaints received (five in BFC and two in WBC) one was upheld in full, two were upheld in part and the matters were rectified and apologies were issued. Four were not upheld.
- 8.7 We have had 38,261 visits to the PPP website from a total of 17,336 users. The most visited pages during Q2 were: What Are My Rights, Loft Insulation Scams and Taxi Licence pages.
- 8.8 During Q2 we consulted on minor revisions to the Draft West Berkshire Statement of Gambling Policy. The consultation ran between the 18 July 2024 and the 12 September 2024 and we received six responses. A small number of further adjustments were made to the document as a result of the consultation. The revised policy was adopted at the November Council meeting. [November Council meeting](#).
- 8.9 A consultation on the [Nuisance Policy](#) was also undertaken between the 08 July to 26 August 2024 and it received 69 responses. The outcome of the consultation and the revised policy was adopted at the October 2024 JPPC meeting.
- 8.10 The Peer Review of the Service started in early October. It will include three phases: Discovery, Scoping and Planning in October, Delivery in November and December and Reporting in January 2025. The process will be overseen by a Member Reference Group comprising of the cabinet/ executive members from each of the three authorities. The collaborative process will focus on four main areas:

Governance Arrangements, Inputs and Support, Outputs, Outcomes and Value for Money and Options for the Future. The lead has already met with JMB, the Executive Members from all three partner authorities and the PPP management team.

- 8.11 West Berkshire Council's Internal Audit Team is conducting an audit to ensure arrangements for budget setting and oversight, are applied and operated in accordance with the terms of the partnership agreements and budget performance and risks are effectively managed.

## 9. Building Safer Communities

- 9.1 **Event safety and noise monitoring** - There are numerous large scale high profile events that occur across the PPP area. In addition to co-ordinating and Chairing the SAG (Safety Advisory Group), officers in PPP are also involved with events from different enforcement roles such as health and safety, food safety and control of nuisance.
- 9.2 Each event presents unique challenges that required coordination and oversight, this entails close collaboration with event organisers and members of the Safety Advisory Group to uphold standards, address safety concerns, and maintain public health across a series of large-scale gatherings. Events in this quarter that had during performance inspections for health and safety and food safety included Dizze Rascal at Newbury Racecourse, Medicine Festival, the Newbury Agricultural Show and the Retro Festival.
- 9.3 Extensive noise monitoring has also been carried out at a number of events to ensure that the organisers are complying with their controls which are detailed in the Noise Assessment Plans that are required to be submitted in advance of an event. These plans evaluate the event in terms of noise nuisance and detail the controls and monitoring that the event organisers will have in place.
- 9.4 During quarter 2, the service handled 25 stray dogs matters, eight of which were reunited with their owner. Sadly one was put to sleep, and the remaining dogs were successfully rehomed.
- 9.5 The team dealt with 107 pest control enforcement enquiries. In the majority of cases the enquiries were dealt with informally and advice and support was offered to the requesters. However, 11 cases required the issuance of an enforcement notice requiring the land owner to put in place measures to remove and/or prevent pest infestation.
- 9.6 Eleven public health cremation enquiries were received by the team. Two were undertaken by the PPP. Officers were able to locate the next of kin for the other nine, and supported them in funeral arrangements.
- 9.7 In addition, two notices were issued and works in default were carried out on two properties considered to be a public health nuisance due to being filthy and verminous.
- 9.8 The following licensing panel/subcommittee meetings have taken place in Q2:



Type of Application	Applicant	Outcome
<b>Bracknell Forest</b>		
Application to Grant Street Trading Consent	Mr Mustafa Karaduman T/A Bracknell Kebab - Priory Lane Field Car Park	grant the applicant a new Street Trading Consent for an initial period of 1 month
New Premises Licence	The Vault, 19 High Street, Crowthorne, Bracknell, RG45 7AD	grant the application with conditions
<b>West Berkshire</b>		
None		

9.9 Trend data for hearings:

<b>Licensing Hearings Data for last three years.</b>			
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

9.10 **Operation Albion** – Offensive Weapons Act (OWA) 2019 – business guidance is being drawn up for retailers of corrosive substances and will be issued during face to face visits. Following that plans are underway to conduct some test purchases using underage persons to check compliance, the focus being on garden centres, hardware shops, and pharmacies etc where awareness and compliance may be lower.

9.11 Underage test purchasing of knives will take place this Autumn across all three local authorities.

9.12 **Operation Joseph** – The final part (3) of Operation Joseph is close to completion. National Trading Standards asked PPP to conduct further test purchasing (online) of zero % nicotine disposable vapes. Ten samples are currently with the external test house for testing for the presence of nicotine.

## 10. Improved Living Environment

10.1 **High Rise Residential Building Project** - Housing Officers have regular meetings with Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service (RBFRS) to co-ordinate the approach and exchange intelligence on high rise residential properties. We have also recently met with RBFRS and Building Control to ensure we are aware of each other's roles in this area. The work we have carried out to date on the Commercial to Residential conversion project feeds into this.

10.2 **Unlicensed Houses in Multiple Occupancy (HMOs)** - The Environmental Health Housing Team continue their work on unlicensed HMOs), to survey the districts and

use intelligence sources to identify possible HMOs. A house, flat, or building converted into self-contained flats is a house in multiple occupation (HMO) if:

- It is occupied by five or more people: Adults and children are counted as people.
- They form two or more households. A household may be either a single person, or several members of the same family all related by blood (up to first cousin distance), or marriage (or equivalent co-habiting arrangement)
- They share basic amenities such as a toilet, bathroom and/or kitchen.
- It is their only or main residence.
- Rent is payable or other consideration e.g. accommodation provided instead of wages.

10.3 The PPP currently licence approximately 240 HMOs. As part of the investigations work Officers ensure, using emergency powers where necessary, that it is safe for the tenants, and then work on getting the property compliant. This can involve an investigation to determine if formal action is required against the landlord or owner. It is very often the most vulnerable people in society that live in these properties.

10.4 There have been two such examples in recent months. Officers visited a suspected HMO that was found on inspection to be structurally and electrically unsafe resulting in imminent risk and they had to prohibit its use. A family who have English as a second language (including a woman over 75 and two children under five years of age) were living in unsatisfactory conditions. Working with the Housing Options Team, Officers were able to get them to safe accommodation whilst ensuring the landlord is resolving the issues with the property.

10.5 In another case a suspected HMO on investigation was an unlicensed HMO. In this case the property was overcrowded, and had extreme mould growth in a bedroom used by a mother and her baby, this room was also minimum size. The property had no fire detection or smoke alarm. Emergency Prohibition notices were prepared due to the imminent risk however the landlord installed smoke detectors immediately. Formal notices have been served regarding the other hazards including prohibiting the mouldy bedroom from being used.

10.6 **Licensed HMOs** - Many of the 240 licensed HMOs are in the process of renewal in this year as the licences are for five years and it was just over five years ago that new legislation came into effect that meant many more properties were included in mandatory licences. Officers are working through these renewals.

10.7 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%)

WB July to Sept 2024	68	59	21 (36%)
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%)
WB July to Sept 2024	87	55	25 (27%)

- 10.8 **Caravan Sites** - There have been a number of activities in terms of caravan site licensing. Officers are ensuring that where complaints are made by residents, Officers follow up to see if the conditions on the licences are being adhered to. There is also the normal flow of work relating to enforcement of the licence where there are changes of ownership. Unlicensed caravan sites are being investigated and Officers work with planning on these sites as a site cannot be licenced by the PPP if it does not have planning permission.
- 10.9 **Commercial Noise** - An abatement notice was served for the transfer of vibration from an air conditioning unit through the structure of a building into a residential property. The resident kept a detailed noise log and provided recordings using the Trojan meter. Although the noise was not audible on the recordings, it was witnessed by an Authorised Officer in person who was also able to compare the measurements against the Defra low frequency noise criteria to assist with the determination of statutory nuisance.
- 10.10 The team have intervened in 227 domestic nuisance service requests ranging from noise from music, DIY, alarms, human behaviour, dog barking and other animal noise. The overwhelming majority were dealt with through negotiation and communications with all relevant parties. However, one abatement notice was served to abate noise from a cockerel, and another from a barking dog.
- 10.11 We are dealing with a number of ongoing cases relating to potential damage by pests and in particular rats. Examples include a large scale infestation relating to a flat where the previous resident had passed away. The infestation was affecting neighbouring properties and were found to be linked to the loft of the empty property. In another example notice has been served on a management company regarding an infestation of rats in a bin store where it was alleged that one rat had jumped on a resident. There are a significant number of other ongoing cases.
- 10.12 Of other nuisances, such as bonfires, fumes, odours and light pollution, 63 enquires were handled and dealt with in the same manner.
- 10.13 Other community issues such as high hedges, accumulations and boarding up unsafe premises accounted for 38 service requests.

## 11. Protecting Consumers from Fraud

### Fraud Victim Support

- 11.1 During Q2 the scams team have achieved the following across Bracknell Forest, West Berkshire and Wokingham:

- Through the scams work intervention Officers have managed to recoup £288,600 for residents.
- Officers have delivered six training sessions to local groups and fitted two further call blockers for vulnerable residents.
- Officers delivered three campaigns sessions relating to holiday fraud, the digital switchover and car related scams.

### **Unfair Trading and Fraud**

- 11.2 Successful outcome in court against a supplier of counterfeit clothing. On 11th February 2021, the Public Protection Partnership was informed that multiple pallet loads of potentially counterfeit clothing were at a storage facility in Hampshire. The items were branded with trademarks such as Tommy Hilfiger, G-Star, Ralph Lauren, Diesel and Levi and included T shirts, polo shirts, jeans, trousers, and dresses.
- 11.3 The company director received confiscation orders totalling £267,544.85 at a Crown Court hearing in Reading on 2nd October 2024. The orders were made under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. R'Elite Raiments Ltd was fined £28,000 separately and the two defendants were also ordered to pay £28,000 towards prosecution costs.
- 11.4 The PPP have dealt with 87 complaints relating to: rogue trading, scams, misleading pricing, counterfeiting and restricting consumer rights during Q2,

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

### **Schools Work**

- 12.1 Prior to the school summer holidays, five presentations were undertaken within secondary schools across West Berkshire, three regarding alcohol and two regarding vaping. Since the beginning of the school's autumn term, one West Berkshire secondary school has made contact regarding the delivery of vaping presentations. Unfortunately, with the departure at the beginning of September of the of the PPP's Community Support Officer who leads on this piece of work, capacity to deliver this piece of work is currently limited.
- 12.2 Four primary schools within West Berkshire have contacted and requested vaping presentations. Dates have been set to deliver these during Q4.
- 12.3 At the beginning of the Autumn term the PPP's Senior Programme and Community Officer attended the West Berkshire's Secondary School's Senior Pastoral Leads meeting and PSHE/RSHE network meeting to deliver presentations on Nicotine Pouches.

### **Attitudinal Survey**

- 12.4 The school's attitudinal survey took place across West Berkshire secondary schools between April and June 2024. The results were subsequently collated and anonymised, and an outcomes report produced for the beginning of the school terms in September. 4406 pupils took part in the survey across all West Berkshire secondary schools. This is the most responses to the survey received since it commenced. The survey outcomes were delivered at West Berkshire's Health and

Wellbeing Board Steering Group in August and to the Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire Integrated Care Service (BOB ICS's) Tobacco Dependency Steering Group at the beginning of October.

### **Tobacco Control Alliance**

- 12.5 The focus of the Berkshire West Tobacco Control Alliance has been the in-year spending of the Local Stop Smoking and Service Support Grant funding. Within West Berkshire, the PPP's Senior Programme and Community Officer has responsibility for the grant and has been working with West Berkshire's Public Health, Category Management and Legal to vary the Community Wellness Outreach provision contract to include targeted Tobacco Dependency Services. Furthermore, service specifications and requests for quotes are being drawn up and circulated for the procurement of insights and evaluation work.
- 12.6 The Public Health Project Officer role to support the effective spending of the grant went out to advert and closed after one week owing to receiving 40 applicants. Following a successful interview process the role has been offered to one of the shortlisted candidates. This role will be line managed by the Senior Programme and Community Officer.
- 12.7 Q2 spending return was submitted to the Office of Health Improvement and Disparities (OHID) on time.

### **Community Alcohol Partnership (CAP)**

- 12.8 The CAP's Challenge 25 Test Purchasing Operation was completed to July. The purchasing focused on rural and independent retailers across West Berkshire. Of the 28 retailers visited, 20 (71%) sold to the volunteer test purchaser without requesting identification. All retailers were written to advising whether they had passed or failed and providing information, advice and guidance regarding adopting a Challenge 25 policy.
- 12.9 At the beginning of September, the West Berkshire CAP coordinator attended Newbury college's 'fresher's week' to staff a stall dedicated to highlighting the health harms associated with alcohol, tobacco and vapes.
- 12.10 The school's attitudinal survey highlighted parental supply of alcohol to their children as being the main way school pupils are procuring alcohol. One of CAP's regional priorities is parental supply, therefore West Berkshire will work alongside CAP to deliver a campaign addressing this issue.

### **Underage Sales**

- 12.11 Officers have carried out 12 further visits to retailers with underage volunteers to attempt to buy alcohol and vapes resulting in two sales which are now being investigated.
- 12.12 As above Operation ALBION will be focussing on the sale of knives and corrosive substances in the coming months.
- 12.13 A dedicated Enforcement Officer focusing on the sale of age restricted products has been recruited on a fixed term contract. This will provide additional capacity to focus on this important area of work.

## 13. Protection of the Environment

- 13.1 **Mosquito traps** - PPP have been working with the UK Health Security Agency to look for evidence of an invasive species, the Asian Tiger Mosquito, entering the UK. This dengue fever carrying species has gradually been moving north through Europe, but has yet to become established in the UK. It is thought that one means of the mosquito entering the UK is in the cabs and loads of trucks arriving from Europe. Officers have placed traps in several motorway truck stops in Berkshire and have been collecting/replacing the equipment every two weeks and sending it to the UKHSA for analysis. No evidence of the Asian Tiger mosquito has been found in Berkshire.
- 13.2 **Air Quality** - Air Quality Officers are working on the Strategy for West Berkshire Council. This is a requirement following the revocation of the two Air Quality Management Areas to replace the Air Quality Action Plan. The annual returns have been submitted and evaluated by DEFRA and the outcomes appear elsewhere on this agenda. The Air Quality DEFRA grant funded projects are now complete and a final report is required to be sent to DEFRA by the end of March 2025.
- 13.3 **Single-use Plastics**. - Officers continue to look at take-away premises for single use plastic compliance as part of the routine food standards inspections where relevant. Five premises were assessed for single use plastic during the quarter, and all were found to be satisfactory. Officers have also responded to complaints relating to the use of banned single use plastics in the food sector.

## 14. Protecting and Informing Consumers

- 14.1 Operation TOPAZ, which is an OPSS (Office for Product and Safety Standards) initiated project, is near completion. Officers have visited 15 retailers of E-bikes and scooters to assess compliance. No major issues were found and it is thought that the majority of the issues being reported nationally may be found in products purchased on the online platforms.
- 14.2 A new safety project is planned focussed on home produced candles, childrens clothing and toys to establish compliance with safety legislation. The service provides advice to businesses on safety requirements.
- 14.3 Operation Sapphire – is looking into a large number of complaints about vehicle sellers based within PPP. Using the Enterprise Act we are tackling the growing trend of traders attempting to restrict consumer rights in the secondhand car market.
- 14.4 Weights and Measure Inspections. - Officers continue to check equipment in use for trade during routine food inspections. During the quarter, 595 pieces of equipment were found to be correct. 17 pieces of equipment were examined and found to be incorrect. For example, shot measures without the 'inspectors' stamp. These were dealt with by removal at the time of inspection

## 15. Promoting Animal Welfare

- 15.1 During Q2 Trading Standards undertook 33 on farm animal health and welfare checks as well as attending Newbury Show for the entire weekend. In addition four visits were conducted with respect to animal feedingstuffs.

15.2 A total of 39 visits were carried out to licensed animal establishments of these 12 were in Bracknell Forest and 27 in West Berkshire..

15.3 The Bluetongue control area was recently extended to include Bracknell Forest and Wokingham Borough. The PPP was also notified of one suspect case that tested negative. More on Bluetongue can be found here: [Bluetongue: news, information and guidance for livestock keepers - GOV.UK](#)

## 16. Safety in the Workplace

16.1 The Team has dealt with 54 health and safety at work service requests during Q2 and 33 workplace accidents were reported.

16.2 Four prohibition notices have been served under Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974:

- Prohibition of the use of a hydraulic pallet truck at a warehouse in Thatcham that had not been inspected for safety by a competent person.
- Inadequate procedures for disinfection of equipment at a barber in Sandhurst.
- Prohibition of inadequately maintained sterilisation equipment at a tattooist in Bracknell.
- Inadequate ventilation for gas cooking equipment at a café in Newbury.

16.3 The issues relating to disinfection and barbers has highlighted an area for further investigation. Barbers and Hairdressers are required to be registered with councils in West Berkshire and Bracknell and to comply with any local bye-laws. There has been a rapid increase in the number of outlets and it is suspected that a number are not registered. The Service intends to focus on this area in Q3 and in particular look at hygiene and sterilisation standards.

## 17. Safe and Healthy Food Chain

17.1 Food Hygiene - A number of food hygiene re-rating visits were requested and paid for by the respective businesses following earlier programmed food hygiene inspections. Authorised Officers carry out a rescore visit to these premises after which the Food Hygiene Rating Scores may go up, or down or remain the same dependant on the outcome of the visit. Although the Food Hygiene Rating can change – which is the visible score on the Food Standards Agency site – the risk rating that determines how often the business gets inspected does not change on a rating rescore visit, which means that Officers go back at the original next inspection date and so ensure that any improvements are sustained.

17.2 Officers have completed 163 food hygiene inspections during Quarter 2 and have dealt with 205 food hygiene service requests.

17.3 Food Hygiene cases of interest include:

- An appeal has been lodged against a notice served under The Trade in Animals and Related Products Regulations 2011 which seized a consignment of illegally imported caviar.
- Voluntary closure of a garage with evidence of rat activity being used in connection with a food business.

17.4 The Service received 187 infectious disease notifications during Q2.

- 17.5 **Food Standards** (quality, composition, labelling, claims, allergens etc.): A total of 325 food standards visits have been conducted by trading standards and a total of 37 food samples have been taken in Q2.

## 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 Strategic Manager has reduced staff capacity with some cases taking longer to progress. This is a challenge with many cases on legal limitations.
- 18.2 The investigations team are currently working on twenty ongoing investigations relating to unfair trading, fraud and counterfeiting. Of these eight are already in the case management / court system and all are expected to be crown court disposals. A number are set for trial in 2024 and 2025. However new trials are now being listed for late 2026.
- 18.3 There has also been a significant increase in doorstep crime / property maintenance and repair fraud and unfair trading. In addition to the ones under investigation a number of the less serious matters have been dealt with through early intervention including face to face meetings, witnessed written warnings and recovery of losses.
- 18.4 The Accredited Financial Investigators have ten active money laundering / confiscation investigations along with six pended cases. Two more are waiting to be allocated. Officers are currently looking at how critical mass can be expanded in this very specialist area of work by working in partnership with a neighbouring authority to fund an additional officer. The team recently recovered over £267K following a contested hearing at Reading Crown Court as per 11.3 above.

## 19. Concluding Observations

- 19.1 As can be seen from the report there has been significant work undertaken with respect to the priority areas. This is addition to the large volume of other work undertaken on a day-to-day basis. It is clear that resource will need to be transferred into priority areas if some targets are not going to be missed. This will inevitably mean some re-prioritisation of other workstreams.
- 19.2 It is also clear that the focus of resource into some areas appears to be increasing demand. This is especially so in the area of property related fraud and unfair trading. The Service will keep this under review and update the Committee at its next scheduled meeting.

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## 20. Appendices

- 20.1 Appendix A – Q2 Performance Data
- 20.2 Appendix B – Compliments
- 20.3 Appendix C – Activity by Authority

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## 21. Background Papers:

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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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