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# Public Protection Partnership Service Update and Q4 and Year End Report for 2024/25

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Committee considering report:	Joint Public Protection Committee
Date of Committee:	09 June 2025
Chair of Committee:	TBC
Date JMB agreed report:	19 May 2025
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 final quarter of 2024/25 and the year-end outturn.
- 1.2 To consider a set of revised Key Performance Indicators for the Service.

## 2. Recommendations

That the Committee:

- 2.1 Be **INFORMED** about the 2024/25 Q4 data for the Public Protection Service set out in **Appendix A**.
- 2.2 Be **INFORMED** about the update on service delivery.
- 2.3 **CONSIDER** and **AGREE** revised Key Performance Indicators for the Service as set out in Appendix D.

## 3. Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
<b>Financial:</b>	<p>The year end position for the PPP Revenue Budget was an underspend of £124.</p> <p>To achieve this outturn the Service has had to hold key vacancies.</p> <p>Further detail can be found at Section 5 below.</p>
<b>Human Resource:</b>	<p>No new staff have started since the last report to the Committee. The current vacancy information and recruitment activity is set out within the body of the report. See Section 6.</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. The only agency resource outside of grant funded work has been in the areas of case management</p>

	(vacancy / long term absence cover) and food safety inspections.
<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 that responsibility.</p> <p>The governance arrangements with Wokingham Borough Council are managed through the Joint Management Board in accordance with the current agreement. The future of the governance arrangements is set out elsewhere on this agenda.</p>
<b>Risk Management:</b>	<p>JMB and the management team meet regularly to consider the risks for the delivery of the service.</p> <p>The current key risks relate to operational and management capacity due to the number of vacancies across the service and the inability to recruit to critical posts. Most notably, a strategic manager leading the case management unit has not been recruited to for some months but is continually advertised. The same can be said for Trading Standards posts.</p> <p>To mitigate this, the service is continuing the 'grow your own' approach and has been successful in securing funding externally for two L6 TSO apprentices, which will be advertised in Quarter 1 25/26 as will a Senior TSO post. (see section 6)</p> <p>The Strategic Manager (Case Management Unit) post is being reviewed. Posts that were held are now being released for advertisement. Additional grant funding has been secured for additional enforcement positions.</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 requests and prioritising of risk. This does create additional risk around the perceptions of the level of response which require management of those expectations.</p>
<b>Property:</b>	None
<b>Policy:</b>	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.

	The revised service priorities were approved 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.			
	<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> <li>7. Promoting Animal Welfare</li> <li>8. Safety in the Workplace</li> <li>9. Safe and Healthy Food Chain</li> </ol> <p>Business as Usual Activity is supported too.</p>
<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. A whole team away day took place on the 05 March 2025 and a further team briefing on the year end outturn and implications of local government re-organisation announcement in West Berkshire took place on the 26 March 2025.
<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.
- 4.2 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. HR, ICT, Property and Legal. The report also provides the Committee with the year-end budget outturn.
- 4.3 The key outturn measures of volume and data for Quarter 4 (January to March) is set out in Appendix A to the report. 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.
- 4.4 As part of the Member Survey that was undertaken to inform the recently completed Peer Review it was noted that “A wide range of quite detailed KPIs are used but they primarily focus on activity and demand levels. Some Members expressed the view that the KPIs were helpful and comprehensive whilst others felt the way they were used could be improved to help the JPPC get a better understanding of performance.” “It was also suggested that it would be useful to enhance the profile of the Service by ensuring that service priorities were measured against some of the corporate priorities across the partner authorities.”
- 4.5 The Peer Review Team Recommended that the Service:
- Review and update the KPIs used to manage the performance of the service ensuring that the KPIs used for the JMB and JPPC meet the needs of Members. Consideration should be given to the use of a KPI scorecard with clarity over what performance is good or not, on or off target, with comparisons to previous reporting periods and highlighting any trends. For key targets, a traffic light approach should be considered.
  - Ensure there is a clearer more explicit link between service and corporate priorities for the three partner authorities, highlighted in presentation of KPIs Future iterations of the service plan and future Strategic Assessment should indicate which corporate priorities they help support.
- 4.6 Officers have therefore been reviewing the current KPIs that are presented to this Committee and proposals for the Committee to discuss and agree are set out in Appendix D to the report.

## 5. Finance

- 5.1 The end of year position was a £124 underspend. Therefore, well within the KPI of management to within 1% of budget. This was challenging with a significant in year income shortfall (over £179K). To achieve this the Service has had to hold several vacancies open for significant lengths of time. This has had an impact on the ability to deliver certain aspects of the Service. The impact on staff who have been covering additional responsibilities also needs to be recognised.
- 5.2 The budget has been rebuilt / re-balanced with the previous post deletions offsetting the income losses and a permanent increase in the BFC contribution.
- 5.3 The updated fees and charges proposals, based on an hourly rate of £69p/h agreed by JPPC in October 2024, and agreed at the partner authority budget setting meetings came into effect on the 01 April 2025.

## 6. Human Resources

### Recruitment

- 6.1 In terms of recruitment:
- The Licensing Enforcement Officer post was advertised during Q4 and there were a significant number of applicants. Shortlisting and the interview process is currently underway.
  - The grant funded Public Protection Community Officer (two year contract) post closed at the end of May and there are a significant number of applicants. Shortlisting and the interview process will soon be underway.
- 6.2 The following posts are currently out to advert:
- Strategic Manager: Case Management Unit – This post having been advertised five times is now under review and both job title and grading are being reviewed. This is a business-critical post as without it the Service Lead has had to pick up management of the team directly.
  - Senior Trading Standards Officer – this post is being re-advertised (following the retirement of the previous postholder).
  - Senior Environment Health Officer in the Environmental Quality Team is currently out to internal advert.
  - Trading Standards Investigator
  - Case Management Officer (previous postholder has recently retired)
- 6.3 The following posts are now vacant:
- 0.4 FTE Enforcement Officer – Trading Standards
  - 1.0 FTE Customer Delivery Lead Officer
  - 2.0 FTE Level 6 Trading Standards Apprentice (new posts)
  - 1.0 FTE Fraud Victim Support Officer
- 6.4 There are currently two officers on maternity leave.

## **Training and Development**

- 6.5 The two team members undertaking their MSc's in Environmental Health are progressing well and are in the completion stage of the final term of their course. A further member of staff has been approved to enter the MSc programme.
- 6.6 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. One of our Level 6 Trading Standards Apprentices is in her final year.
- 6.7 The PPP has been successful in securing four years' worth of funding to employ two apprentice trading standards professionals (Level 6). The funding, which will be distributed through Trading Standards South-East will amount to some £90K per annum for the PPP for each of the four years.
- 6.8 In-house training sessions on evidence gathering and disclosure requirements took place in January and March. A whole team away day also took place in March.
- 6.9 One of our Officers in the Investigations Team has completed his Introduction to Digital Markets, Competition and Consumers Act 2024 training. The Duty team have all undertaken this course previously
- 6.10 One of the Intelligence Officers is training as a Financial Intelligence Officer with a view to authorisation by the National Crime Agency.
- 6.11 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.
- 6.12 Safeguarding training for Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Drivers as well as Private Hire Operators is now being delivered in house. We are exploring if Disability Awareness training could be delivered as a new income stream.
- 6.13 One of our Regulatory Services Officers (who joined us as a Level 4 Apprentice) is about to conclude the Higher Certificate Qualification in Food Premises Inspection at NESOT College after taking his exams in May. He has been attending college one day each week and shadowing colleagues, dealing with complaints and working on important food safety projects including planning and delivery interventions for lower risk food businesses. On successful completion of the course, he will be authorised to carry out investigations, inspect food businesses for food hygiene compliance and take any necessary legal action.

## **7. ICT Update**

- 7.1 The Service is currently reviewing its procurement options for the main service premise based software system. The current contract ends in the summer. There is a service specification and procurement plan in place to cover all eventualities.
- 7.2 The PPP have commissioned a new website which was launched on the 31 March 2025. It was designed and built by the digital team at West Berkshire Council. There are still a small number of documents which need to be uploaded but these are likely to be completed by the time of the June JPPC Meeting. Where this is the case there

is a note on the website directing viewers to request them directly from the Service. The new website is designed to meet updated accessibility standards and allows more flexibility in terms of layout to promote more 'self help' for our users.

## **8. Governance, Information Management and Communications**

- 8.1 During Q4 Officers have dealt with four press enquiries, issued five press releases and published one article on the website. The Portfolio Holder for Public Protection in West Berkshire was interviewed on BBC Radio Berkshire about nicotine pouches in early February and undertook an interview about underage sales in April too. An article about one of the operations the Trading Standards Team was involved in (Operation Joseph) also appeared in the Sun newspaper.
- 8.2 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. PPP press releases are shared for their distribution, as well as both continuing to share relevant posts on each other's social media platforms. The PPP also provides a weekly contribution to the West Berkshire Council Newsletter which is produced by the internal Communications Team and they provide regular contributions to Wokingham Borough Connect (Community Safety and Enforcement) and Out and About in Bracknell Forest too.
- 8.3 In terms of social media activity Officers have supported a number of relevant national public campaigns including E-Scooter and Electric Bike Buy Charge and Store Safe, White Goods Safety, Romance Scams and Dry January. The Service has posted 223 posts on social media this quarter and over the year has attracted another 150 new followers.
- 8.4 During Q4 the team dealt with a total of 122 Freedom of Information requests which took around 139 hours to process (which equates to almost four weeks of officer time). The number of requests increased when compared to the same period in 2023/24 where 104 Fols were processed. Although in total in 2024/25 the Service only dealt with 28 more Fols (399 vs 371) than the previous year it should be noted that this year it has taken around 185 hours (5 weeks of officer time) longer to process them (426 hrs vs 241).
- 8.5 The team also processed 43 enquiries from Councillors and the local MPs, 28 of those were in West Berkshire, 14 in Bracknell Forest and one from a Wokingham Councillor during Quarter 4. This represented an increase when compared to the 33 that were dealt with in the same period of the previous year. In total the Service dealt with 159 of these types of request this year, a slight increase (15%) on the 138 that were responded to in 2023/24.
- 8.6 In terms of complaints, the service received ten complaints which equates to 0.35% of the 2,821 service requests that the team has dealt with in Q4. Of these eight were stage 1 complaints, one was a stage 2 complaint and the one was a complaint submitted to the Local Government Ombudsman. Of the ten complaints received (3 in BFC and 7 in WBC) four were upheld in full, four were not upheld, one was upheld in part and the Local Government Ombudsman found no fault on the part of the PPP in relation to the complaint submitted to them. A total of 34 complaints were dealt with in 2024/25 compared to 17 in 2023/24. Both West Berkshire and Bracknell Forest have now introduced new online portals for complaint handling.



- 8.7 The PPP have had 38,035 visits to the PPP website from a total of 16,086 users during Quarter 4. There were a record number of engagements with the PPP Website in 2024/25 with some 152K views up from 87K the previous year. This is proving a significant resource for residents and businesses.
- 8.8 During Q4 we started consulting on the West Berkshire Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Policy. The Team also supported three events across Bracknell Forest, West Berkshire and Wokingham ILMT and Loan Shark events.

## **9. Building Safer Communities**

- 9.1 Of the numerous noise nuisance services requests the team have received, a particular issue involving over 10 dogs barking has resulted in both the service and breach of an abatement notice, which will be investigated.
- 9.2 A large amount of waste, including asbestos was reported at a private property, and officers used their powers and negotiating skills to remove all the waste safely, without the need for enforcement action.
- 9.3 Team members have worked with Southern Housing after complaints from neighbours about waste being piled up in the rear of the property and the possibility of rats. There were also concerns for a child's welfare - Having liaised with MASH the source was referred to the multi-agency group, and Southern Housing have cleared the waste from the rear garden. To prevent further episodes, officers have arranged for assisted bin collections for the resident and have arranged for a visit by the Council's waste team to educate the resident on what waste can go into which bin.
- 9.4 Licensing Officers have been continuing to support the the 'ask Angela' and the stop 'Violence Against Women and Girls' (VAWG) campaigns and are planning more joint activities later in the year. Licensing Officers also engage in regular meetings with Pub Watch.
- 9.5 The Licensing Team have undertaken 35 inspections of premises licensed under the Licensing and Gambling regime during Quarter 4, they have attended two joint operations with Immigration and accompanied colleagues from Trading Standards on several underage sales inspections.
- 9.6 A number of joint operations with Thames Valley Police (TVP) have been undertaken following receipt of complaints and intelligence about premises. Follow up work is continuing with one of these premises.
- 9.7 Licensing officers carried out a film classification for the showing of a local film following the adoption of the new policy in Bracknell Forest. This was a high profile event locally.

## **10. Improved Living Environment**

- 10.1 The team have engaged with a hoarder that has been ongoing for a few years. Working with Social Services colleagues, and following professional meetings, the property is now being cleared and risks of fire-spread, pest infestations, and ill health has been significantly reduced.



- 10.2 A High Hedge Notice issued in August 2024 has been complied with during Quarter 4. The works were originally done, but compliance with the notice was not deemed to be satisfactory as the height reduction was inadequate. Officers were required to manage expectations and complaints being made from both parties, and the result was that the property management company revisited to reduce height.
- 10.3 After a report from a police officer some time ago, officers have worked with parks and countryside to have the area around Jubilee Gardens in Bracknell baited. The next stage was to have the felled Ash trees removed as they were providing harbourage for pests and to contact neighbouring businesses to advise on necessary treatment to protect their own properties and welfare. This work has begun.
- 10.4 Working in collaboration with EQ colleagues, officers attempted to find a source of vibration and low frequency noise in a complainant's home. Despite sitting with the complainant for two hours, they were unable to substantiate their concerns. This is an example of officers managing expectations and giving clear guidance as to nuisance, especially where the complainant is convinced of both an issue and a source. It also highlights how family units can think alike. Despite not being able to assist further, the complainant was very thankful to the officers for taking the time to investigate and taking the complaint seriously.
- 10.5 In terms of service requests (SRs) relating to housing:

	Total request for service housing	Of these number of complaints regarding house condition	Of these number that were Registered Social Landlords
WB April to June 2024	90	71	32 (45%)
WB July to Sept 2024	68	59	21 (36%)
WB Oct to December 2024	92	62	31 (50%)
WB January to March 2025	84	56	29 (52%)
BF April to June 2024	78	49	20 (41%)
BF July to Sept 2024	87	55	25 (27%)
BF Oct to December 2024	95	69	35 (50%)
BF January to March 2025	86	51	29 (57%)

- 10.6 The majority of the housing condition SRs are related to damp and mould, either entirely or in part with other disrepair in the home. This is normally expected in the winter months. There were no cases of significant concern that required urgent formal intervention.
- 10.7 In the final quarter of the year the annual caravan site inspection visits are carried out. This is where officers inspect, by appointment, and ensure that the caravan sites are complying with their site licences. There are 24 sites that require an annual inspection visit (these are the 'Relevant Protected Sites') and all received their inspections. The next stage is to draft reports where there is non compliance and ensure that any works required are highlighted to the site owners and, where necessary due to risk, are followed up by officers before the next annual visit.
- 10.8 Our work on identifying and ensuring compliance of unlicensed HMOs (Houses in Multiple Occupation) continued in this quarter. A number of properties were inspected and actions taken to progress cases that have been previously identified.

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

### **Scams and Fraud Victim Support**

- 11.1 During Q4 the scams team have achieved the following across Bracknell Forest, West Berkshire and Wokingham:
- Dealt with 47 Service Requests in respect of fraud and scams.
  - Undertaken five presentations.
  - Supported the set-up of one new No Cold Calling Zone and fitted one new call blocker.
  - Delivered two seasonal campaigns, the first detailing romance scams and the second raising awareness to students of scams aimed at this cohort.
  - Successfully challenged a bank via the Banking Protocol, resulting in the return of £6,500 to the client.
- 11.2 This work is part of the Service's commitment to support and protect victims from fraud and being scammed. Funding for this work is provided by the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner's three year Community Safety Fund. The current funding cycle ceased on 31st March 2025. It is anticipated that further funding can be applied for in 2025 as part of another three year cycle. Applications will be made when possible, in hope that further funding for this work will be awarded to the PPP. In addition, funding will be sought through this grant to recruit an officer who can work directly with residents across the PPP who do not meet Adult Social Care intervention thresholds, however require additional support and signposting to prevent their circumstances deteriorating.

### **Unfair Trading and Fraud**

- 11.3 In terms of losses across the PPP area arising from unfair trading and fraud in 2024/25:
- The total detriment identified from victims in the PPP area is £1,371,743 (Bracknell Forest £274,581, Wokingham £684,357 and West Berkshire £412,805)
  - The total money saved or recovered (in addition to the above) is £227,627 (Bracknell Forest £32,200, Wokingham £83,250 and West Berkshire £112,177)
  - The total number of alleged incidents is 191 (32 Bracknell Forest, 77 Wokingham and 82 West Berkshire).
  - The average loss is £7,581 per victim. The average loss in Wokingham is £8,887, in Bracknell Forest £8,580 and in West Berkshire £5,034.

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

### **Schools Work**

- 12.1 Schools work continues to be limited owing to a lack of resources. During quarter 4 a vaping session took place for year 6 pupils at a West Berkshire Primary School and two further sessions are being arranged for the new financial year. Moreover, ten Drink Spiking awareness raising sessions took place to all year 11 pupils within a West Berkshire Secondary School. Vaping sessions have been requested by two Secondary Schools to take place during the summer term.

- 12.2 The process of recruiting to a full time Engagement Officer who will be responsible for delivering the work within schools has commenced. It is anticipated that the post will be filled by quarter 2 of 2025/26.

### **Tobacco Control Alliance**

- 12.3 The Berkshire West Tobacco Control Alliance continues to meet on a six-weekly basis with representatives from West Berkshire, Reading and Wokingham Public Health, Trading Standards, NHS, Buckinghamshire Oxfordshire & West Berkshire (BOB) Integrated Care Board (ICB), pharmacies and the local stop smoking service provider. The alliance's Tobacco Control Plan is a 'live' document that is routinely reviewed and amended.
- 12.4 The PPP's Senior Programme and Community Officer has ensured the effective spending of the 2024/25 Local Stop Smoking Service and Support grant funding on behalf of West Berkshire's Public Health and will continue to have responsibility for the spending of 2025/26's allocation of the grant. Moreover, the officer has line management responsibility for the Project Officer who commenced in role at the end of January, funded through the grant to support with the delivery of the required conditions.
- 12.5 The Senior Programme and Community Officer is currently seeking to direct award via the Provider Service Regime some of the grant funding to deliver a targeted outreach stop smoking service to persons employed within routine and manual professions. A report detailing this request has been prepared to go to West Berkshire's Procurement Board in April. In addition, the officer, alongside colleagues from Reading and Wokingham Public Health has commenced the procurement process for the re-commissioning of a new local stop smoking service provider by October 2026.

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

- 12.6 During the academic year 2023/24, West Berkshire CAP supported Newbury College to create the West Berkshire and Newbury College CAP. During the academic year the following aspects were delivered:
- **16+ programme development:** A new programme was created in collaboration with Newbury College to engage students about risky behaviours in respect of alcohol and associated behaviours including smoking, vaping and substance use. Sessions took place with students to raise awareness in relation to these topics, in addition Via, West Berkshire's local drug and alcohol behaviour change service and Smokefree Life Berkshire, local stop smoking provider now hold regular clinics at the college for students and staff to attend.
  - **Resource distribution:** CAP resources, including posters and online materials, were made available across the college intranet, providing students with easy access to local support services.
  - **Young Health Champions Programme:** The young health champions programme teaches young people between 14-24 about managing their health and wellbeing and how to promote health messages to their peers. The CAP supported 23 learners in completing their Level 2 qualification.

- **Inaugural Freshers' Fair:** The fair took place at the beginning of the 2024/25 academic year and attracted over 300 new students, providing them with access to information on volunteering, career opportunities, cybercrime, alcohol, mental health, and gender-based violence.

- 12.7 In November 2024 the PPP's Senior Programme and Community Officer who Co-ordinates the CAP on behalf of West Berkshire Public Health was made aware that the West Berkshire and Newbury College CAP had been nominated for a CAP award. In February 2025, the officer was informed that the West Berkshire and Newbury College CAP had won the CAP's Spotlight Award. On 2nd April 2025, the officer attended the Houses of Parliament to attend the award ceremony and accept the award.
- 12.8 As aforementioned, during Quarter 4 the Senior Programme and Community Officer has undertaken 10 Drink Spiking sessions within a West Berkshire Secondary. Furthermore, in conjunction with Newbury College, health harm campaigns are being created by Health and Social Care students using a localised approach that it is anticipated will resonate with secondary school pupils.
- 12.9 Moving forward into the next financial year the PPP are keen to scope and create a Responsible Retailer Scheme for independent retailers of all age restricted goods to have the opportunity to sign up to.

### Age Restricted Products

- 12.10 The Underage Sales Officer has now recruited a pool of 18 UAS volunteers aged between 14yrs and 17yrs and has ten PPP officers available on a rota basis to be the second officer on the UAS test purchase operations with other members of the team on 'back-up' if required.
- 12.11 During Q4 the following underage sales activity took place:

Vapes		Lottery		Alcohol		Knives		Tobacco	
Attempts	Sales	Attempts	Sales	Attempts	Sales	Attempts	Sales	Attempts	Sales
58	6	5	1	34	6	18	1	1	1

- 12.12 An age restricted products guidance leaflet has been drafted to provide to traders as a reminder of good practice. A 'Responsible Retailer Scheme' is being considered (see paragraph 12.9).

## 13. Protection of the Environment

- 13.1 **Air Quality** - The DEFRA Air Quality Grant 20/21 return was finalised during Q4 with the final report being accepted by DEFRA. The 2025 calendar year monitoring programme commenced across the three local authority areas albeit that continuous monitoring is no longer undertaken. This is mainly due to a decrease in pollution levels but also due to rising costs and our long-term contractor, TRL, no longer providing this service.
- 13.2 **Environmental Permitting** - All inspections for 2024/25 have been carried out. One premise has decreased its risk from two inspections per year to one a year going forward following successful compliance with an Enforcement Notice. Where

possible some of the Petrol Vapour Recovery inspections have been carried out jointly with the Petroleum licensing inspections.

- 13.3 **Energy Efficiency (EPC)** – A minimum energy efficiency standards (MEES) project will be started in Q1 of the current financial year looking at private rented sector housing to ensure no properties are being let with an EPC rating below E (F or G) unless they have a valid registered exemption.
- 13.4 **Single-use Plastics** - Officers have been carrying out checks on single use plastics during routine food standards inspections. During Quarter 4, 12 premises were checked, and all were satisfactory. The Duty Officers have also been providing business advice to local businesses upon request.
- 13.5 **Private Water Supplies** – The Drinking Water Inspectorate (DWI) 2024 returns for Bracknell Forest and West Berkshire were submitted by the Team within the deadlines and have been accepted. One member of the team has successfully been re-accredited for PWS sampling. One supply, connected to two properties, was successfully connected to mains which removes the risk as it has been sourced from a properly maintained supply.
- 13.6 Through the sampling programme officers have dealt with failures arising from the presences of nitrate, iron and manganese. One supply serving thirteen properties with iron failures is being dealt with. Following UK Health Security Agency advice, it requires extensive works involving the replacement of pipework. A Memorandum of Understanding with two large suppliers has been produced as they carry out their own Risk Assessments and sampling.
- 13.7 **Planning Consultations** – Officers continue to attend planning meetings at both Bracknell Forest and West Berkshire Councils to provide advice about noise and environmental protection matters. A Noise Guidance for Developers has been produced for Bracknell Forest, with links to the Local Plan. A similar document for West Berkshire will now be produced. Involvement in the production of a Supplementary Planning Document for the North-East Thatcham development site in West Berkshire has commenced.
- 13.8 **Contaminated Land** - The data transfer of the two Uniform databases to Idox is now progressing. The work was not carried out as part of the original data migration to the new Idox system but will now assist in supporting future updates of the Contaminated Land Strategies.

## 14. Protecting and Informing Consumers

- 14.1 Officers working collaboratively conducted 213 premises visits to our known/licensed Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs) in March. The purpose was to provide information to residents and managers of HMO's of the dangers of e-bike and e-scooter charging – a guide pack was produced, and internal training provided for all officers involved in the residential property visits. A full report is being drafted, and the findings will be sent to the Office for Product Safety and Standards (OPSS) and it is hoped that further funding will be provided to support further similar initiatives.
- 14.2 **Weights and Measure Inspections** - During Quarter 4, officers have examined 1205 pieces of measuring equipment. This is in addition to usual weights and measures signage held in licensed premises. Of things examined, 43 items were

found to be incorrect. For example, no 'CE' or 'Crown' mark on a glass or measure. In addition, 44 pieces of equipment have been tested, (pub optics and weighing machines in shops). Failures were recorded and notices were given requiring correct measures before continuing to be used.

## **15. Promoting Animal Welfare**

- 15.1 Officers have conducted a full programme of animal welfare visits. This year 263 animal welfare visits have been completed and in addition, 35 animal feed visits have also been completed.
- 15.2 Bluetongue and Avian Influenza are both notifiable diseases and are currently circulating throughout the UK. This remains the case for Quarter 4, and officers are continuing to ensure livestock keepers are aware of restrictions and advising on the best biosecurity on routine visits and responding to any individual concerns whilst continuing to promote Animal and Plant Health Agency guidance.

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

- 16.1 The Team has dealt with 69 health and safety at work service requests during Q4 and 31 workplace accidents were reported. During quarter four, the team visited a total of 117 barber and hairdressers following concerns of possible lapses in hygiene practises, leading to ringworm as well as unregistered businesses. 86 premises were visited in West Berks and 31 in Bracknell Forest. Most were found to be compliant with health and safety rules, but some were found not to be registered. Licensing colleagues will follow up any premises not registered. No significant health and safety issues were reported.
- 16.2 The Safety Advisory Group have been notified about and considered the documentation provided in respect of 27 events in Bracknell Forest and 73 in West Berkshire. SAG reviewed a total of 129 sets of event documentation for Bracknell Forest and 318 sets of documentation in West Berkshire in 2024/25. This is a significant increase when compared to the 90 (BFC) and 195 (WBC) outturn in 2023/24.
- 16.3 Officers have held preliminary discussions with the operator of a food and safety consultancy wishing to enter into a Co-ordinated Primary Authority Partnership with West Berkshire Council for food safety and health and safety at work.

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

- 17.1 The Team have dealt with 158 food hygiene service requests during quarter 4. They have completed 413 food hygiene inspections. This includes both scheduled and reactive visits. A total of 1137 food safety inspections / visits have been conducted this year.
- 17.2 During Quarter 4 six food hygiene notices have been served:
- two notices to seize and detain illegally imported foods (consignment of food with dairy and nut content and required import documents not provided at point of entry).
  - four notices requiring implementation of adequate food safety management controls at a food manufacturer, a food retail premises, a food takeaway and a hospitality establishment.



- 17.3 During this quarter three voluntary food hygiene closures have been secured at:
- two pub/restaurant premises which were found to have rodent activity and absence of a hot water supply.
  - one day nursery found to have rodent activity in the cellar (this led to part closure of the cellar only)
- 17.4 Food hygiene cases of interest included approval of a new cold store under Assimilated EC Reg no 853/2004 to supply imported chilled meat products to food retailers.
- 17.5 The new food standards model has come into being in line with the Food Standards Agency (FSA) requirements, with IDOX data transfer and procedural updates to ensure the new model is complied with. Data transfer has presented some data anomalies and inconsistencies across the recording system. This requires further work to investigate and clean data sets to ensure that statutory returns can be completed with accurate data, and that inspection programmes for 2025/26 onward continue to be reliable.
- 17.6 To have conducted 1324 food standards inspections along with a full sampling programme over the previous twelve months by the team has been an extraordinary effort given the resources available. This is in addition for the need to familiarise themselves with both new models of service delivery in food standards and the use of a changed database in scoring visits.
- 17.7 The team have also dealt with reactive and advisory work as standard business as usual and have had some interesting requests during Quarter 4. For example, a premises had already created a high volume of food labels for its products, which have been found to be wrong, and officers are working with the business to ensure proper compliance with labelling laws.
- 17.8 The Service received 127 infectious disease notifications during Q4. The majority of these related to campylobacter which is commonly associated with contamination from handling poultry. In reviewing notifications Officers are looking for unusual trends, common sources or people working in high risk settings such as food premises or care settings.

## **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 the PPP. One of the lawyers has retired early on ill health grounds and the vacant Strategic Manager post both has reduced staff capacity with some cases taking longer to progress. This is a challenge with many cases on legal limitations. The investigations team are currently working on 22 ongoing investigations relating to unfair trading, fraud, confiscations under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 and counterfeiting.
- 18.2 Of these 22 are already in the case management / court system and all mostly expected to be crown court disposals. A number are set for trial in late 2025 as well as in 2026. It is anticipated that there will be an increase in the number of e-cigarette, alcohol, offensive weapons and investigation prosecutions with the new officer dedicated to underage sales.

- 18.3 The Accredited Financial Investigators have 19 active cases, 4 pertaining to confiscations, 14 money laundering/fraud cases and one money laundering/counterfeit goods case. Of those cases 15 are in West Berkshire, three in Reading and one in Oxford.
- 18.4 There is a six week Fraud trial scheduled for June at Reading Crown Court.

## 19. Concluding Observations

- 19.1 The report sets out a significant focus with respect to the priority areas. This is in addition to the large volume of other work undertaken on a day-to-day basis. There will inevitably need to be some re-prioritisation of other workstreams if we are going to continue to focus on the areas of highest risk and demand.
- 19.2 This continues to be an extremely busy period for the service. The work has covered a vast range of priority areas, and the balancing of priorities and risk has been a key focus whilst delivering savings to mitigate pressures. The Service would like to place on record our gratitude for the support of the partner authorities and for constructive oversight of this Committee.

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## 20. Appendices

- 20.1 Appendix A – Q4 Performance Data
- 20.2 Appendix B – Compliments
- 20.3 Appendix C - Activity by Authority
- 20.4 Appendix D – Proposals Around KPIs

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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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