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# Water Safety Partnership Annual Report (Review of 2025)

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| <b>Committee considering report:</b> | Joint Public Protection Committee |
| <b>Date of Committee:</b>            | 9 March 2026                      |
| <b>Chair of Committee:</b>           | Councillor Tom McCann             |
| <b>Date JMB agreed report:</b>       | N/a                               |
| <b>Report Author:</b>                | Jon Winstanley                    |
| <b>Forward Plan Ref:</b>             | JPPC                              |

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## 1. Purpose of the Briefing

As agreed by West Berkshire Council's Executive on 15<sup>th</sup> July 2021, an annual report would be presented to the JPPC detailing the activities of the Bracknell and West Berkshire Water Safety Partnership.

## 2. Background

- 2.1 Following a tragic incident in March 2021, involving the loss of life of a young child in the Kennet and Avon Canal adjacent to Victoria Park in Newbury, West Berkshire Council Officers and representatives from the Canal and River Trust and emergency services came together to look at measures that could be implemented to prevent future loss of life from accidental drowning. A proposal from this group was the establishment of a Water Safety Partnership for West Berkshire. Following the initial annual report to the Joint Public Protection Committee in 2022 it was agreed that the Water Safety Partnership would cover both West Berkshire and Bracknell to align with the Public Protection Partnership.
- 2.2 On average, around 250 people lose their lives in accidental drownings in the UK every year, with hundreds more having near drowning experiences, sometimes suffering life-changing injuries. Children can be particularly at risk.
- 2.3 One of the striking characteristics of the data on accidental drownings is that a large proportion of victims did not leave home on the day they died intending to go into water of significant depth. Roughly 40% of deaths happen whilst people were out walking or running, in comparison to approx. 20% who lose their life whilst swimming. It shows the importance of everyone being aware of the risks posed by water. West Berkshire is home to a number of significant water courses and bodies, some of which extend through our urban areas, which can significantly increase the risk of accidental drowning.
- 2.4 The incident in March 2021 has emphasised the devastating impact water related tragedies can have on our communities. Through the Partnership key stakeholders have an opportunity to play a leading role in helping prevent future incidents of accidental drowning
- 2.5 The objectives of the partnership being to:

- Promote and develop water-safety education and initiatives within West Berkshire and Bracknell with particular emphasis on the most at-risk groups identified through incident data and local knowledge.
- Proactively promote public awareness of water-related risks and ensure a consistent message through campaigns and communications.
- Share best practice and resources across the district (and beyond) highlighting a multi-agency approach to water safety.
- To be the focus group in responding to water related incidents in West Berkshire.
- Work with partner organisations to gather and improve data involving water incidents in West Berkshire in order to inform a targeted approach to water safety.

2.6 Partnership member organisations include:

- WBC Service Director Environment (Chair).
- WBC Officers (Public Protection, Environment and Communities & Wellbeing).
- Bracknell Forest Council Officers.
- Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service.
- Canal and River Trust.
- Thames Valley Police.
- South Central Ambulance Service.
- National Health Service.
- Environment Agency.

2.7 The meeting has also been attended by representatives from Laura Farris' (MP) office and there are plans to invite representatives from other local unitary authorities as part of a knowledge sharing exercise.

### 3. Implications and Impact

| Implication             | Commentary   |
|-------------------------|--|
| <b>Financial:</b>       | None   |
| <b>Human Resource:</b>  | None   |
| <b>Legal:</b>           | None   |
| <b>Risk Management:</b> | An objective of the partnership is to reduce the risk of accidental deaths from water related incidents. |
| <b>Property:</b>        | None   |
| <b>Policy:</b>          | None   |

|                                    |      |
|------------------------------------|------|
| <b>Consultation and Engagement</b> | None |
|------------------------------------|------|

## 4. Current Status

4.8 There has been no reported water related fatalities in West Berkshire and Bracknell Forest over the last 12-month period.

4.9 Points of note from throughout the year include:

- (a) A review into the case following the drowning of the young boy in Waterloo Meadows, Reading took place in February. Whilst outside of the area, learning and actions from the review was shared at the WSP meetings.
- (b) Pangbourne Meadows Public Spaces Protection Order came into operation during 2025 and this has resulted in a significant reduction in anti-social behaviour and associated water related incidents. RBFRS has however noted that there has been an increase in reports of antisocial behaviours and swimming at Purley Lock and the WSP will look at educational/promotion in this location.

4.10 Given the issues at Pangbourne Meadows and Purley Lock, water safety and awareness roadshows now include messaging around the Royal Life Saving Society UK's national campaign that encourages smart decision making whilst intoxicated around water (Don't Drink and Drown).

4.11 4 meetings of the Water Safety Partnership took place in 2025 and the following actions have been completed during that period:

- Terms of reference for the partnership have been updated.
- Further clearance work along the river corridor to the west of Newbury has been undertaken to remove willow branches.
- RBFRS hosted a Water Safety Day in Newbury in July in Victoria Park with throw line demonstration and training. This was attended by West Berkshire Council Countryside Officers who took part in the training.
- Water Safety Messaging has been incorporated into Emergency Planning's Heatwave Health Alerts and flood risk and preparedness comms.
- Further development of the PPP website as a resource for sharing information etc. [Water Safety Messages - Key Resources - PPP \(publicprotectionpartnership.org.uk\)](https://publicprotectionpartnership.org.uk)
- Annual inspection and maintenance of water safety cabinets at Pangbourne Meadows, Victoria Park Newbury and Northcroft Newbury.



*Northcroft Newbury*

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

## 5. Next Steps

5.1 Currently planned activities for 2026 include the following:

- [Little Explorers](#) being organised by the Canal and River Trust, date TBC.

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

- Continuous monitoring and assessment of water related incidents.
- Comms/Events plan for the year currently being developed a draft of which can be seen in Appendix B.
- Liaison with suicide prevention group to look at Samaritans signs on appropriate bridges.
- Wild/Open Water Swimming coaching and instruction event for adults and children targeting popular areas.
- Monitoring the use of QR codes at key locations linking to water safety educational and safety messaging.

## **6. Conclusion**

- 6.1 Although instigated as a result of a tragic event, there is a clear need for a multi-agency group to focus on water safety and reducing the risk of accidental drowning.
- 6.2 This group was effective in the initial response to the incident in March 2021, but also provides the longer-term opportunity for individual members to present ideas, initiatives, research and updates on their individual work on water safety.

## **7. Appendices**

- 7.1 Appendix A – Water Safety Partnership Terms of Reference.
- 7.2 Appendix B – Draft 2025 Comms Plan