

# DRAFT

Note: These Minutes will remain DRAFT until approved at the next meeting of the Committee

## JOINT PUBLIC PROTECTION COMMITTEE

### Minutes of the meeting held on MONDAY 9 MARCH 2026

### COUNCIL CHAMBER COUNCIL OFFICES MARKET STREET NEWBURY

**Present:** Tom McCann (Chairman), Nick Allen, Jeremy Cottam, Pauline Jorgensen, Stephen Newton, Lou Timlin, Patrick Clark (Substitute) (In place of Howard Woollaston) and Guy Gillbe (Substitute) (In place of Iskandar Jefferies)

**Also Present:** Rosalynd Gater (Team Manager - Commercial), Sean Murphy (Service Lead - Public Protection), April Peberdy (Service Director - Community Services), Deborah Vincent (Principal Officer), Moira Fraser (Public Protection Partnership), Damian James (Bracknell Forest Council), Stephen Chard (Democratic Services Manager) and Gordon Oliver (Principal Policy Officer (Scrutiny & Dem Services))

**Apologies for absence:** Councillor Iskandar Jefferies (Bracknell Forest Council) and Councillor Howard Woollaston

#### PART I

##### 1 Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on the 8 December 2025 were approved as a true and accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

##### 2 Outstanding actions from previous meetings

Members noted the update on the actions arising from previous meetings.

##### 3 Declarations of Interest

Councillor Patrick Clark declared an interest in Agenda Item 7 by virtue of the fact that the report referenced the Gun public house which was located within his ward. He reported that, as his interest was a personal or an other registrable interest, but not a disclosable pecuniary interest, he determined to remain to take part in the debate.

##### 4 Notice of Public Speaking and Questions

No public questions were received.

##### 5 Forward Plan

The Chairman reminded Members that items could be added or additional information requested between meetings, as the Committee only met on a quarterly basis.

**RESOLVED** that the Forward Plan be noted.

##### 6 Public Protection Partnership Service Update and Q3 Report for 2025/26

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The Committee considered the report (Agenda Item 7) which provided an update on the performance of the Public Protection Partnership (PPP) in line with the operating model and business plan.

Sean Murphy (Service Lead – Public Protection) introduced the Q3 report for 2025/26. The following key points were raised:

- The PPP was projected to end the year with a balanced budget or a small underspend, despite challenges such as the national insurance rise and higher than expected salary increases.
- Additional grant funding for investigation work had been generated totalling over £200,000 which had helped to balance the budget. In addition, a number of posts had deliberately been held vacant to ensure that the budget was balanced.
- Recruitment: A trainee post had been temporarily converted to a paralegal role in the case management unit to address capacity issues. Other recruitment successes included filling long-term vacancies and appointing a new animal health warden officer, whose remit would eventually be extended to include animal inspection work for the licensing team. Recruitment for qualified officers, especially the senior trading standards officer post, remained challenging.
- Training: Achievements included a second senior trading standards officer passing a management course, the first fully qualified officer at level six in trading standards, and a food safety officer qualifying with distinction at level five.
- Peer review recommendations had largely been enacted.
- Governance: 19 press releases had been issued, significant media coverage achieved, 134 Freedom of Information requests processed in Q3, and 50 enquiries from Councillors and local MPs had been responded to.
- The number of service complaints remained low, with only four received in the quarter.
- Fraud and consumer protection: Campaigns around Black Friday, Cyber Monday, Christmas, and National Adult Safeguarding Week had been delivered, including installation of call blockers and public presentations. Over £1 million in resident losses to fraud had been reported for the year to date.
- Enforcement: Intelligence-based visits as part of a national operation (Operation CeCe) on illegal tobacco resulted in the seizure of over 7,000 cigarettes.
- A (grant funded) officer had been recruited to focus on reducing harm in young people, which included work on age restricted products. Overall, reasonable levels of compliance were in place amongst retailers, but there were a small number of exceptions to that as noted in the report.
- Case management: 79 cases were in the court system, many in the Crown Court, with a significant trial scheduled for June and multiple trials planned for later in the year.
- Housing: Ongoing work on HMO licensing and proactive identification of unlicensed HMOs continued. The environmental quality team had seen an increase in commercial noise complaints. Food hygiene inspections continued at a rate of approximately 1,000 per year, with 98-99% of premises in Bracknell and West Berkshire rated three or above.
- Notable prosecutions: Sale of dangerous vodka in Wokingham (£9,000 penalty) and an advanced fee fraud related to property letting (four-and-a-half-year custodial sentence).

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- Members discussed the Gun Pub licensing review in West Berkshire, which resulted in a new condition requiring monthly document inspections by the landlord and record-keeping. The process for the publication of the outcome of such reviews was clarified.
- Members queried the process for accessing trading standards support, and it was confirmed that Members should contact Sean Murphy or Moira Fraser directly.
- Food Standards Agency (FSA) action plan: Staffing and prioritisation of high-risk premises were explained, with ongoing challenges arising from new food businesses opening.
- Vape shop safety and lithium battery awareness: The PPP had conducted significant work on compliance and safety, including awareness-raising in HMOs and private sector lets.

**RESOLVED** that the Committee had been informed about:

- The 2025/26 Q3 data for the Public Protection Service.
- The update on service delivery.

### **7 PPP AI and Digital Strategy 2026 - 2029**

The Committee considered the report (Agenda Item 8) which set out the proposed Strategy that the Shared Service would implement to harness emerging technologies to drive innovation, improve service delivery and enhance operational efficiency across the Service where appropriate to do so.

Moira Fraser (Principal Officer – Policy and Governance) introduced the Artificial Intelligence and Digital Strategy 2026-2029. The following key points were raised:

- The Strategy set out how the service would use emerging technology, including AI and wider digitisation, to drive innovation, improve service delivery, and enhance operational efficiency.
- The Strategy was a living document, based on the Bracknell Forest AI Strategy and guidance from organisations such as Unison.
- The Strategy covered not only AI but also broader digital technologies, such as the introduction of body-worn cameras for officer safety and evidential purposes.
- The Strategy was intended to support staff, not replace them, and human interaction remained central to the service.
- Ongoing staff training and professional oversight were essential, particularly when using tools such as Copilot, to ensure accuracy and appropriateness of outputs.
- Members welcomed the report and commended its comprehensive approach, highlighting the importance of risk considerations, the evolving nature of the Strategy, and the need for human oversight.
- Officers acknowledged the importance of understanding the boundaries between AI use and surveillance, and the need for officers to have sufficient knowledge to interpret AI outputs critically.

**RESOLVED** that the PPP Artificial Intelligence and Digital Strategy 2026-2029 be approved.

### **8 Air Quality Update 2026**

The Committee considered the report (Agenda Item 9) which informed Members of the submission and results of the air quality report for Bracknell Forest Council.

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Rosalynd Gater (Team Manager – Commercial) introduced the Air Quality Update 2026. The following key points were raised:

- DEFRA had approved the actions taken and noted progress in reducing pollutant levels in the area.
- Public consultation on the proposed revocation of the Crowthorne Air Quality Management Area (AQMA) had commenced, with a report on the revocation to be brought to the June JPPC.
- DEFRA's commentary requested more evidence for the revocation, and officers were liaising with DEFRA to clarify requirements.
- Members welcomed the proposed revocation of the AQMA in Crowthorne, noting significant reductions in pollutant levels.
- Similar improvements in air quality were reported in Thatcham, some of which could be attributed to the use of AdBlue in diesel vehicles and the increasing prevalence of electric vehicles.
- Only one AQMA remained, in Wokingham Town Centre, with Twyford's AQMA having previously been revoked. Officers explained DEFRA's criteria for revocation and undertook to provide technical details of the Twyford AQMA to Wokingham Members.
- New legislation regarding wood burners was expected.

### **RESOLVED to note:**

- The contents of the Air Quality Status Report for Bracknell Forest.
- The feedback from the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) on the reports for Bracknell Forest Council.

## **9 Renters' Rights Act**

The Committee considered the report (Agenda Item 10) which set out the basis of the new legislation (the Renters' Rights Act), its potential resource impact and a range of recommendations for policy approval to implement the various aspects of the legislation specifically with reference to enforcement and debt recovery where penalties were not paid.

Rosalynd Gater (Team Manager – Commercial) and Deborah Vincent (Principal Residential Officer) gave an update on the Act (which came into force in October 2025) and associated policy updates. The following key points were raised:

- The Renters' Rights Act had received Royal Assent in October 2025, with the first stage of tenancy reforms due to commence on 1 May 2026.
- Main changes included the ending of Section 21 'no-fault' evictions, making unlawful eviction or harassment of tenants an offence, and placing a duty on councils to enforce these provisions.
- The Act required updates to the Council's Housing Enforcement Policy, with a new policy being developed nationally by the Association of Chief Environmental Health Officers.
- Introduction of a model civil penalty policy procedure, developed with input from Justice for Tenants, to be implemented via a cloud-based system.
- A national debt recovery policy was being developed and would be adopted once available.

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- The Environmental Health Housing Policy required minor amendments for consistency.
- A landlord database would be introduced, requiring all landlords to register their properties and upload compliance documentation, with phased implementation expected towards the end of the year or early the following year. Landlords who were not on the database would be contacted.
- Members raised questions regarding data accuracy (a point would be clarified in relation to the number of landlords in Bracknell Forest), division of enforcement responsibilities between trading standards and environmental health, and the need for clear signposting for tenants and councillors.
- Officers confirmed ongoing discussions with the Wokingham housing team (including private sector officers) to clarify roles and referral processes, and work was underway to develop a user-friendly front end to the website for reporting and information.
- Officers confirmed that systems were in place nationally in order to share data and intelligence across local authorities.
- Members queried the steps that tenants could take should they wish to raise a concern. Sean Murphy (Service Lead – Public Protection) stated that this would be made clear for residents across the PPP area. This would include making people aware of their rights, to help them feel empowered to seek help.

### Action:

- The Chairman requested regular reports on implementation and effectiveness, which officers confirmed would be provided.

### RESOLVED that the JPPC:

- **NOTED** the principles of the Housing Enforcement Policy for the Renters' Rights Act.
- **NOTED** that the model Civil Penalty Policy Procedure that has been drafted for use across England in connection with the Renters' Rights Act 2025 will be used by the Public Protection Partnership (NB the use of Civil Penalties in relation to Housing Legislation has already been agreed at JPPC in October 2022).
- **APPROVED** the use of the model Civil Penalty Policy Procedure.
- **DELEGATED** to the Service Lead – Public Protection Manager, in consultation with the Portfolio Holders/Cabinet Members from all three partner authorities of the Committee, the authority to update the service enforcement policy to give effect to the enforcement elements of the Renters' Rights Act 2025.
- **APPROVED** the proposed changes to the Environmental Health Housing Policy 2025 – 2028 regarding the precedence of the model Housing Enforcement Policy over the approach described in the EH Housing Policy 2025 – 2028.
- **APPROVED** that authority be delegated to the Joint Management Board to adopt the national Debt Recovery Policy for use by the Public Protection Partnership.

*(Post meeting note: [The Public Protection Partnership Housing Enforcement Policy 2026 – 2029](#) was signed off under delegated authority on the 5 May 2026).*

## 10 Water Safety Partnership Annual Report (Review of 2025)

The Committee considered the Water Safety Partnership Annual Report (Review of 2025) - (Agenda Item 11).

The following key points were raised:

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- The partnership worked closely with Thames Valley Police, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service, the Environment Agency, South Central Ambulance, the NHS, the Canal & River Trust, and the Berkshire Lowlands Search and Rescue team.
- The Public Protection Partnership would coordinate and attend a range of events over the summer.
- Wokingham was not currently included in the Partnership, but there was no barrier to joining in the future. This would be explored.
- Communications and good practice were shared with parish councils, and officers attended local events to promote water safety.
- Members highlighted the importance of involving parishes and towns as key partners in water safety.

**RESOLVED that** the JPPC note the report.

*(The meeting commenced at 7.00pm and closed at 8.33pm)*

**CHAIRMAN** .....

**Date of Signature** .....