

Bulletin for Town and Parish Councils #1

Public Protection Partnership

Bracknell Forest
West Berkshire
Wokingham

Public Protection Partnership

Our role is to preserve the health, wellbeing and safety of the communities we serve. Our aim is to provide information to residents and businesses to encourage self-service, to enable them to make informed decisions and to understand their rights and responsibilities and update them on any changes to our processes, service provision and service status.

Through this bulletin we aim to provide information that will help you deal with a variety of queries from your residents, in relation to life during the Coronavirus pandemic.

The New Health Protection Regulations and how PPP are enforcing them

The Health Protection (Coronavirus, Business Closure) (England) Regulations 2020 were brought in on 23rd March 2020 to increase measures for limiting the spread of Covid-19. The trading bans that came in were designated to PPP for enforcement across Bracknell Forest, West Berkshire and Wokingham. We have developed an enforcement process for the new business closure controls and our Environmental Health and Trading Standards Officers are monitoring compliance with these Regulations, with Police support provided if appropriate. Businesses and premises that breach the controls will be subject to prohibition notices, and potentially unlimited fines.

Bonfires

Since the start of the Covid 19 pandemic the Public Protection Partnership has seen a 622% increase in bonfire complaints over the same period last year (from 32 complaints to 231). We are aware that Town and Parish Councils are also receiving a higher level of complaints and our advice is as follows:

At the moment we are asking residents to think of others and not light bonfires during the ongoing Coronavirus pandemic lockdown because many people at home are vulnerable and may have respiratory issues, or even be fighting the Coronavirus itself. During this difficult time we are asking that their needs are put first.

We are also urging people to consider alternative means of disposal of waste as burning in close proximity to other properties is always a potential source of nuisance. For instance, if the job can't wait until the civic amenity sites re-open, green waste can be composted or stockpiled at home.

Bonfires can also get out of control or cause accidents, creating extra pressure on the already busy emergency services.

This advice could also apply to fires on allotments should you deem it necessary.

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Bonfire Legislation

While there are no laws against having a domestic bonfire there are laws about causing a nuisance. The smoke or the smell of smoke from bonfires can cause a statutory nuisance under the Environmental Protection Act 1990.

PPP would consider taking formal action under the above legislation if a number of justified complaints were received about the burning. If sufficient evidence is gathered and the Council is satisfied that a Statutory Nuisance exists then an enforcement notice may be served to prohibit the recurrence of the nuisance. A breach of this notice may result in a fine.

Encourage residents to report nuisance Bonfires to PPP using our online reporting form [here](#).

Fly Tipping

Fly tipping is the illegal dumping of any waste or rubbish on public land, or sites which are unauthorised to accept waste. If the rubbish is dumped on private land, the landowner is responsible for removing it.

If you receive notification of fly tipped material on private land you will need to inform the landowner who will unfortunately have to bear disposal costs. You can encourage residents to report fly tipping via links on the PPP website [here](#).



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SCAMS

Several Coronavirus related scams, frauds and trading malpractices have been identified both locally and nationwide so PPP aim raise awareness of and tackle those who are perpetrating the crimes. The nature of scams is that they change on a regular basis and we continue to monitor these and put out information as and when we have it.

Locally, the following have occurred:

1. **Profiteering** - everyday goods being sold at extortionate prices.

Incidents can be reported direct to The Competition and Marketing Authority via covid.monitoring@cma.gov.uk

2. **Premises continuing to trade despite the Government ban**. Police and PPP move fast to close such premises and residents can report issues via the form [here](#).

3. **The sale of unsafe PPE (Personal Protective Equipment)**-Such as face masks and hand sanitiser. Trading Standards and the Office for Product Safety work together to ensure all products placed on the market are fit for purpose. Suspected sales of unsuitable equipment can be reported via the form [here](#).

Nationally, Trading Standards teams are experiencing an increase in the number of complaints about scams designed to prey on people's vulnerabilities:

1. Financial

Text and email messages are received which appear to be from banks, government departments or other trusted organisations aiming to trick people into

providing their bank details. Do not click on the links or respond to such messages as banks in particular would never ask for financial information in this way. Residents must contact their bank immediately and report to PPP.

2. Miracle cures and vaccines for Covid-19

3. Fake and dangerous PPE and Coronavirus testing kits and vaccines.

4. Shopping and medication collection services demanding money up front, with no service delivered.

5. Home cleaning and health and safety checks.

6. Bogus mobile phone apps promising to provide updates, instead the phone is locked completely until a release fee is paid.

7. Emails purporting to be from HMRC offering tax rebates or grants. These are another way of tricking residents into providing their bank details. Remember, if the link does not end in "gov.uk" or "nhs.net", it is not legitimate.

The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) take down these malicious websites as soon as they become aware of them. If a resident receives a suspicious email or text, they should report it via the Netcraft website [here](#).

8. Messages via email and SMS to parents relating to free school meals. "As schools are closed you are entitled to free school meals... please send your bank details to claim your money/vouchers".

All incidents relating to the above should be reported to PPP via the form [here](#).

In addition, our Fraud Victim Support Officer has produced some user friendly videos with advice relating to specific Covid-19 scams, they are available to view on the PPP website and social media.



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WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

Non Covid-19 Scams

Unfortunately, Non Covid 19 related Scams continue.

With more of us being at home, everyone needs to be aware of the various Door Step scams. See below:

Rogue traders:

A cold-caller may offer a service that's not needed. For instance, they may claim to have noticed a defect on the roof or a damaged tree then offer to sort it for cash, or at an inflated price.

Bogus officials:

These people claim to be from utility companies in order to gain access to home. A genuine official will be happy to have their ID checked and verified.

Fake charity collections:

A fraudster may pretend to be from a charity and ask for donations of money, clothes or household goods. Legitimate charities will all have a charity number that can be checked on the Charity Commission website.

Made-up consumer surveys:

Some scammers might ask a resident to complete a survey, this enables them to obtain personal details, or they use the survey as a cover for persuading a person to buy goods they don't want or need.

Hard luck stories:

A person might knock at the door and ask for help with cash, ask to use the house phone or claim to be feeling ill. The story is made up and intended to con residents out of money and/or gain access to their home.

Encouraging residents to report issues via the PPP website is vital so that we can all avoid being scammed.

You can report a scam [here](#).

Residents can help protect themselves from door-to-door scams as follows:

Put up a deterrent sign

Place a 'no cold callers' sign up on the front door or window, it should deter cold callers from 'wasting their time'.

Set up passwords for utilities

Utility companies are happy to set up passwords for use by officials/engineers sent out to visit a customer. This can be arranged over the phone in advance.

Nominate a neighbour

Create a Nominated Neighbour Scheme where neighbours can help ensure callers are genuine.

For advice contact the local Neighbourhood Watch or the local Police Safer Neighbourhood team.

Door step check list for residents – this could be made into a leaflet or poster.

- Don't donate to charities or buy products directly from someone selling door to door.
- Don't give personal information to someone who has just knocked on your door.
- Don't feel embarrassed about turning someone away. Only let someone in if you're expecting them, they're a trusted friend, family member or a professional.
- Always ask for identification before letting a stranger into your house. Don't phone the number on their ID card, independently source a number for the company they claim to be from and make sure the door is locked while you do this.
- Always check credentials from an independent source, including a permanent business address and landline telephone number. The mobile phone number given on a scammer's business card is often a pay-as-you-go number which is virtually impossible to trace.
- Don't feel pressured and don't agree to sign a contract or hand over money at the door. Think about it first and talk to someone you trust.
- Don't share your PIN. Never disclose your PIN number or let anyone persuade you to hand over your bank card or withdraw cash for you.
- Do take control by asking the questions. Seek references from previous customers or ask to see examples of their work.
- Don't sign on the spot – shop around. Get at least three written quotes to make sure you're not being ripped off.

- If you're suspicious, why not ask the salesman whether you can use your mobile phone to take their photo. If the person is legitimate, they probably won't mind.

- Take time to think about any offer, even if it's genuine. Don't be embarrassed to say 'No'.

If you're ever in doubt, ask the person to leave, then maybe phone Consumer Direct on 03454 04 05 06 to make a report or call the Police. If you're not in immediate danger but want to report an incident call the Police non-emergency number 101 but if you feel threatened or in danger call 999.

You can also contact Public Protection Partnership (PPP) Trading Standards team directly on 01635 519930 or email TSadvice@westberks.gov.uk

Animal Warden Update

We are still running a normal stray dog collection service. Whilst stray dog numbers may not have risen we are finding that our usual rescue centres are limited in the number of strays that can be accommodated because of the lockdown, so we are working on finding alternative rescue centres to help us out.

You may receive enquiries about whether dog walking services are permitted.

The advice from DEFRA at present is that yes, subject to public health rules being maintained (including social distancing), dog walking services may still be provided.

For further guidance visit [here](#).

Please note: At the moment we are unable to deal with dog fouling complaints or carry out our usual range of patrols.

Advice to Businesses

Please direct business queries to our website where we continue to provide relevant advice and useful links including a distancing poster which can be downloaded/printed off for use in shops that remain open.

Advice to Community Hubs

PPP has asked Community Hubs to request that any group or individual, undertaking particular activities initially seek our advice to ensure those activities are carried out safely. Those activities include: collecting and storing food in order to package and re-distribute to residents, breaking down and re-packing bulk packages or catering packages for re-distribution to residents, producing meals for distribution to residents and providing a collection and delivery service for hot meals to residents.

Support with Confidence

Support with Confidence is a service PPP runs for West Berkshire and Wokingham and is dedicated to businesses and individuals who provide care and support services. Providers who are registered with the scheme have been approved by us by showing they have had the correct training, a valid DBS certificate, insurance and background checks.

Visit [here](#) for a list of registered carers who are available for emergency cover as well as routine care.

For any queries, email supportwithconfidence@westberks.gov.uk or call 01635 519171

Last but not least...

The PPP website has been amended to provide one location for all Covid-19 related information.

We regularly update the site to provide timely guidance and links to relevant government websites. See Covid-19 website page [here](#).

Facebook and Twitter are being used to pass on important messages and share information from relevant partner agencies. Please encourage residents and businesses to follow us so we can broaden our advice, send community messages and ensure everyone is kept informed.

[Facebook](#)

[Twitter](#)

How to report a Covid-19 related complaint

On the front page of the PPP website there is an Enforcement Form to fill in [here](#). For now, we would prefer contact via email rather than by phone as all officers are working from home.

For Coronavirus related Scams concerned residents or anyone with information to share should contact Trading Standards directly via:
TSadvice@westberks.gov.uk or by telephone on 01635 519930

For Environmental Health matters contact us by emailing ehadvice@westberks.gov.uk or by telephone on 01635 503242

For Bracknell Forest Licensing matters contact us by emailing:

Licensing.All@bracknell-forest.gov.uk

For West Berkshire Licensing matters contact us by emailing:

Licensing@westberks.gov.uk

For Wokingham Licensing matters are to contact us by emailing:

Licensing@wokingham.gov.uk

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF FROM CORONAVIRUS SCAMS

I'm not sure about this...?

NEVER FEEL PRESSURED

Never feel pressured into making any decision or contract. Genuine offers of help/support will not pressure you to do this.

ONLY BUY GOODS FROM TRUSTED RETAILERS

Only buy goods from trusted retailers and sources. Do not buy from unsolicited emails or texts even if the sender is a large 'brand'. These messages can be fake. Always search independently to find genuine online stores.



DO NOT PAY ANY MONEY UP FRONT

Do not pay any money up front. Be very suspicious of anyone demanding money up front and question their motives. See point above, only buy from trusted sources.

NEVER GIVE OUT FINANCIAL INFORMATION

Never give out any financial information. Your bank, HMRC, the police or local authority (or other organisations) will not ask for this. Never share your pin with anyone.



DO NOT ENGAGE WITH STRANGERS FOR HELP...

... unless you have accessed support through a recognised community support group. If you do not know the person who has contacted you, then do not engage with them for help. See link at bottom for details of community support groups.

NEVER CLICK ON SUSPICIOUS LINKS IN EMAILS OR TEXTS

Never click on suspicious text or email links and do not engage with these messages. If you have any queries with your bank, HMRC, NHS, the Local Authority or any other business, then call them directly. Do not click on any links or use any contacts given in these messages. Think before you click.



For more information on Coronavirus Scams and where to access support or report a scam see website link below:

<https://publicprotectionpartnership.org.uk/news-articles/press-release-coronavirus-covid-19-update-from-public-protection-partnership-trading-standards-team/>