

# Central Bedfordshire Council

06 January 2026

## Executive

### Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) – Vehicle Nuisance

#### Report of:

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This report relates to a decision that is: **Key**

#### Purpose of this report

To inform the Committee of the proposal for a new Public Space Protection Order for vehicle nuisance.

#### RECOMMENDATION(S)

The Executive is asked to:

1. Agree that the proposal for a new Public Space Protection Order for vehicle nuisance goes out to a public consultation.

#### Executive Summary

1. Vehicle-related anti-social behaviour (ASB) in Central Bedfordshire is persistent, escalating and significantly impacts residents' quality of life. Bedfordshire Police data shows Central Bedfordshire accounts for nearly half of all vehicle-related ASB incidents in the county, with hotspots in Houghton Regis and Dunstable. Behaviours include car meets, cruising, street racing, and associated nuisance obstruction of highways.
2. To address this a Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) is proposed to restrict harmful vehicle-related behaviours across Central Bedfordshire.
3. Bedfordshire Police have formally committed to enforcement under the terms of a Memorandum of Understanding.
4. Legislation requires a public consultation before implementation.

## Background

5. The Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 introduced a range of tools to help councils and their partners tackle anti-social behaviour (ASB), with a strong emphasis on protecting victims and vulnerable individuals. Among these tools is the Public Space Protection Order (PSPO).
6. PSPOs enable councils to restrict specific behaviors or require certain actions with a defined public area. Unlike other powers under the Act, PSPOs are council-led and apply to all individuals in the designated area, rather than targeting specific people or properties. Breaching a PSPO without reasonable excuse is a criminal offence.
7. A PSPO can be implemented where the council is satisfied that the behaviour in question has, or is likely to have, a persistent and detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the locality. Orders can last for up to three years and must be reviewed on expiry. If ASB has reduced or ceased, it is appropriate to assess the likelihood of recurrence before deciding whether to extend the order.
8. A PSPO runs for three years, after which a formal review is required. When anti-social behaviour has been mitigated or eliminated, it is both proportionate and appropriate to evaluate the potential risk of recurrence should the order not be extended.

## Vehicle Nuisance

9. In October 2023, Bedfordshire Police published a problem profile titled *Car Meets & Car Cruising – Central Bedfordshire 2023*, highlighting the scale and impact of vehicle-related ASB across the area. An updated report has been requested to include data from 2024 and 2025, but findings demonstrate a persistent issue:
  - Central Bedfordshire accounts for nearly half of all vehicle ASB incidents reported in Bedfordshire.
  - Incidents have increased year-on-year.
  - Peak times are late evenings on weekends.
  - In Houghton Regis, nearly 50% of vehicle-related ASB relates directly to car meets and car cruising.
  - In Dunstable, nearly one-third of vehicle-related ASB is link to similar behaviours
  - Reports of car meets, and cruising have continued into 2024 and 2025, indicating an ongoing and escalating issue.
10. The problem profile evidenced that vehicle nuisance is persistent, unreasonable and having a detrimental effect on the quality of life for Central Bedfordshire residents and businesses. The introduction of a PSPO is believed to be a proportionate and enforceable response to reduce harm, improve public safety, and support community wellbeing.

11. Concerns about vehicle nuisance in Houghton Regis have been raised at Council committee meetings and Ward Members have worked directly with the police about implementing a PSPO to tackle vehicle nuisance incidents.
12. The Council engaged with local policing colleagues regarding the need for a PSPO and agreed to progress this work. However, it was required that this PSPO would only proceed if the police confirmed their commitment to respond to and enforce incidents arising from the order. This is essential, as the Council does not have enforcement powers; without police action; reported offences would create additional demand and undermine the effectiveness of the PSPO.
13. Bedfordshire police confirmed they would enforce the PSPO, but to ensure there was formal agreement about responsibilities, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was developed involving Pathfinder Legal Services and police legal services. To ensure the police response was not agreed at a local policing level the police were advised the MOU must be approved by a member of the Force Executive and it has been signed by the Assistant Chief Constable.
14. The MOU outlines respective responsibilities. Bedfordshire Police will lead enforcement including incident response, evidence gathering, use of PSPO powers, and prosecution and the Council will support enforcement through CCTV deployment, issuing of Fixed Penalty Notices, and support prosecutions.

## Scope of the PSPO

15. The proposed PSPO will cover the whole of Central Bedfordshire and will restrict vehicle-related anti-social behaviour.
16. The order will cover the whole of Central Bedfordshire and restrict certain activities and behaviours involving a vehicle that may impact the quality of life for residents.
17. Non-compliance may result in a fixed penalty notice of £100 or a court summons. Police will be able to issue an FPN to people who do not adhere to the new restrictions

Restrictions considered include:

- Excessive engine revving and loud exhaust noise
- Rapid acceleration, harsh braking, and drifting
- Street racing or convoy driving
- Performing stunts such as doughnuts or wheel spins
- Unnecessary sounding of horns
- Playing amplified music in or near or powered from a vehicle at an excessive volume
- Obstructing public highways or car parks
- Intimidating behaviour
- Setting light to petrol/other flammable liquids
- Depositing litter from a vehicle

18. The Council can implement the PSPO but enforcement rests with the police.

## Propose Timescales

19. The proposed timescales are:

Action	Timeframe (Estimated)
Paper to Executive to request a public consultation	January 2026
Public consultation	February 2026 – April 2026
Consultation Analysis	June 2026
Paper to OSC	July 2026
Paper to Executive	August 2026
Paper to Full Council	September 2026
Communications to residents	September 2026
Installation of signs	September 2026
Enforcement	October 2026 onwards

## Options for consideration

20. That the proposal for a new Public Space Protection Order for vehicle nuisance goes out to a public consultation.

## Reason/s for decision

21. Vehicle-related ASB is persistent and escalating across Central Bedfordshire.

22. A PSPO is a proportionate and enforceable tool under the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 to address this issue.

23. Legislation requires a public consultation before implementing a PSPO; approval is needed to commence this process.

## Council priorities

24. The proposed PSPO directly supports the Council's strategic priorities. By tackling vehicle-related ASB, the PSPO will help improve and maintain roads and the travel network, reducing obstruction and enhancing road safety for all users.

25. It will enable people to live active, healthy and independent lives by creating safer public spaces and reducing intimidation and noise, which negatively impact wellbeing.
26. By improving community safety and confidence, the PSPO helps support economic prosperity, encouraging businesses and visitors to use local spaces without fear of disruption.

## Legal Implications

27. Public Space Protection Orders are a tool under the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014. This legislation sets out several requirements for consultation and communication before a new Order is introduced, once it is implemented and where it is extended, varied or discharged. PSPOs can be legally challenged under section 66 of the Act on certain grounds.
28. Section 72 of the Act concerns the consultation requirements. A local authority must carry out the necessary consultation and the necessary publicity, and the necessary notification (if any), before - (a) making a public space protection order, (b) extending the period for which a public space protection order has effect, or (c) varying or discharging a public space protection order. “the necessary consultation” means consulting with—(a) the chief officer of police, and the local policing body, for the police area that includes the restricted area; (b) whatever community representatives the local authority thinks it appropriate to consult; (c) the owner or occupier of land within the restricted area; “the necessary publicity” means— (a) in the case of a proposed order or variation, publishing the text of it; (b) in the case of a proposed extension or discharge, publicising the proposal; “the necessary notification” means notifying the following authorities of the proposed order, extension, variation or discharge—(a) the parish council or community council (if any) for the area that includes the restricted area. The requirement to consult with the owner or occupier of land within the restricted area(a) does not apply to land that is owned and occupied by the local authority; (b) applies only if, or to the extent that, it is reasonably practicable to consult the owner or occupier of the land.
29. PSPOs can be used to restrict a broad range of activities. Under section 59 of the Act, local authorities must be satisfied on reasonable grounds that the activity is subject to an order:
  - Has a detrimental effect on the quality of life of those in the locality
  - Is persistent or continuing in nature
  - Is unreasonable
  - Justifies the restrictions being imposed
30. There are some limitations set out in the legislation regarding behaviours that can be restricted by PSPOs. Under the Act, local authorities must have regard to the freedom permitted under articles 10 and 11 of the Human Rights Act.

## Financial and Risk Implications

31. If approved, signage must be installed in hotspot areas to ensure the order is clear and enforceable. Estimated signage cost is £10,000. No separate budgetary provision has been made and so whilst efforts will be made to seek a contribution from the Police, any spend will have to be contained within the overall Directorate budget envelop.
32. The enforcement of the PSPO will rest solely with Bedfordshire Police. If enforcement is not actively carried out, the Council may have a PSPO in place that cannot be effectively enforced, limiting its impact and undermining public confidence.
33. To mitigate this risk, the PSPO should be reviewed annually to ensure it remains relevant, enforceable and aligned with priorities. Reviews will assess enforcement and community impact, allowing adjustments. If no enforcement occurs, the PSPO will be revoked.
34. There is a risk that some members of the public, particularly car enthusiasts, may perceive the PSPO as targeting legitimate gatherings or recreational activity. This could lead to negative feedback.
35. Clear communication is essential to mitigate this and engagement with affected groups will be essential, alongside promoting the PSPO as a tool to address harmful and disruptive behaviour, not lawful activity.
36. While signage costs are estimated, there may be additional resource implications for monitoring, and responding to public enquiries or complaints. Our existing PSPO generates queries, member queries and FOIs, which should be factored into ongoing service planning and partnership working

## Equalities and Fairness Implications

37. Central Bedfordshire Council has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
38. It is anticipated that the PSPO will benefit all people with protected characteristics and there is no adverse equality impact identified at this time.
39. Feedback received from any public consultation will be considered if equality implications are identified.

## Biodiversity and Sustainability Implications

40. The PSPO supports elements of the Central Bedfordshire Sustainability Plan (2020-2030). The PSPO, alongside reducing ASB, promotes keeping Central Bedfordshire's public spaces safe.
41. The PSPO aligns with the Council's commitment to environmental sustainability and climate resilience, as preventing nuisance and littering contributes to cleaner, safer environments.

## **Conclusion and next steps**

42. Vehicle-related ASB is a growing issue in Central Bedfordshire and a PSPO would provide the police with additional enforcement tools to tackle. To implement a PSPO legislation requires a public consultation to be carried out, therefore The Executive is asked to approve the recommendation for a public consultation.

## **Report author(s):**

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