



Report of:

Paul Darby, Corporate Director of Resources (Interim)

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To provide members of the committee with information regarding the actions taken by Durham County Council (The Council) and its partners in relation to Open Water Safety.

Executive Summary

- 2 The city safety group and county wide open water safety group convened during the reporting period to review open water safety interventions.
- 3 A new city centre action plan was developed and agreed by city safety group members, with assessments and inspections of county wide open water locations continuing to be undertaken.
- 4 A continuation of a proactive approach to open water safety education and awareness remains a crucial intervention and is being applied by both safety groups.
- 5 Statistically there has continued to be a positive trend in relation to the number of open water related incidents across the county.
- 6 There remains a good approach to partnership working and collaboration amongst the safety groups, with new partners being identified.

Recommendation

- 7 Safer and Stronger Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:
 - a. Note the reported progress made to date by CSG and OWSG

Background

- 8 There are currently two multiagency water safety groups within County Durham. In terms of governance, both water safety groups report into the Safe Durham Partnership (SDP).
- 9 The City Safety Group (CSG) was formed in January 2015 and comprises of Durham County Council, Durham Constabulary, Durham University, Durham Students Union, Durham Cathedral and County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service. The CSG is now chaired by Alan Patrickson, Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change. The CSG continues to meet on a quarterly basis.
- 10 From a County wide perspective, the open water safety group (OWSG) is chaired by the Council Occupational Health & Safety Manager. It was established in February 2015, with a remit of reviewing the Councils internal open water safety policy and focusing on safety relating to areas of open water (e.g., lakes, rivers, reservoirs) other than in Durham city centre. The OWSG also meets on a quarterly basis.
- 11 Table 1 below indicates the number of non-fatal and fatal water related incidents in County Durham since 2013. This data has been validated using the national water accident & incident database (WAID), regional emergency service and Council incident reporting data.

Table 1- Open Water Incident Statistics 2013/14- 2020/21

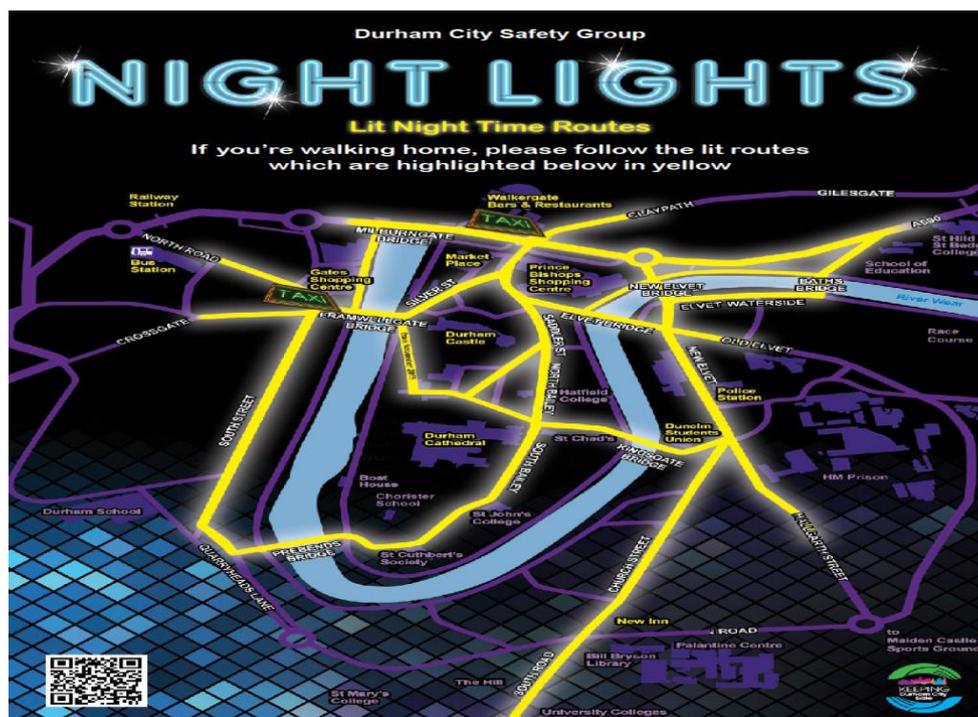
Year	Durham City Centre			County Durham (Exc. Durham City centre)		
	Near miss	Injury	Fatality	Near miss	Injury	Fatality
2013/14	13	1	1	3	1	2
2014/15	5	1	4	5	2	3
2015/16	3	1	0	8	5	2
2016/17	2	1	0	1	2	1
2017/18	2	3	0	3	5	0
2018/19	3	6	1	1	1	2
2019/20	2	4	0	6	3	1
2020/21	2	0	0	8	3	2

- 12 Fatal incidents have been subject to scrutiny by HM Coroner for Durham and Darlington in terms of prevention of future deaths. Updates have been provided by CSG and OWSG on an ongoing basis to keep HM Coroner up to date with progress being made in relation to water safety within the County.
- 13 It is apparent from analysis of incident statistics that mental health and self-harm are an emerging cause of water related incidents within the city centre and county wide. Work with public health mental health and suicide prevention colleagues has been undertaken to ensure that multiagency support and interventions are in place and continue to be reviewed for any specific locations or cohorts in the county.

City Safety Group

- 14 Throughout 2020/21 the CSG has been continuing to monitor the riverside development projects to ensure that any public safety issues and impacts were identified with the developers. Further work is scheduled in relation to engaging ROSPA independent consultants to review the riverside developments when they are nearing completion and are accessible to the public.
- 15 A review of the City Safety group action plan was undertaken and agreed by group partners. This action plan will incorporate several proactive interventions aimed at reducing open water related risks amongst other city centre risks and will be monitored via the multiagency group. All previous control measures including lighting, physical barriers, safety signage, public rescue equipment and licensed premises training, awareness initiatives and public safety campaigns will be reviewed and/or redelivered as part of the new action plan.
- 16 A monthly cycle of inspection and monitoring continues in relation to the completion of all physical safety infrastructure works in the city centre. This provides the CSG with assurance that the control measures identified in 2016/17 remain effectively in situ and proactively identifies any further actions required.
- 17 The CSG has once again reviewed arrangements for student induction weeks to ensure that appropriate arrangements had been put in place and partners were working in collaboration. A specific student induction task and finish group was established and work was undertaken in quarter two of 2020/21 to ensure that safety related controls were in place for Sep 2021 induction week.

- 18 Student induction week planning involves collaborative work with the police, university, business and licensed premises. The work particularly focused on the high footfall night-time economy areas within the City and it was positive that the activities went safely and without incident. COVID related restrictions were in place during the freshers week period and this impacted on footfall levels and license premise activity.
- 19 The university continues to embed the student alcohol awareness and personal safety as part of induction and use the alcohol awareness and use policies which focus on making students aware of the potential effects of alcohol, particularly as they can relate to health, behaviour, safety and academic performance and to establish guidelines for its proper use. The nightlights safety map (below) has also been cascaded throughout the university colleges and used as part of induction. It is downloadable via a QR code on all marketing materials and published on a variety of web sites. This information is also available through a 'student app' which has recently been developed. This is also displayed in licensed premises and student bars.



- 20 It is positive to report that since the formation of the CSG, there have been a continued reduction in water related incidents within the city centre and zero in 5 of the 6 reporting periods. Whilst the introduction of physical safety improvements cannot be attributed in isolation to the reduction in incidents, these have had a significant impact in conjunction with the broader range of educational and awareness initiatives.

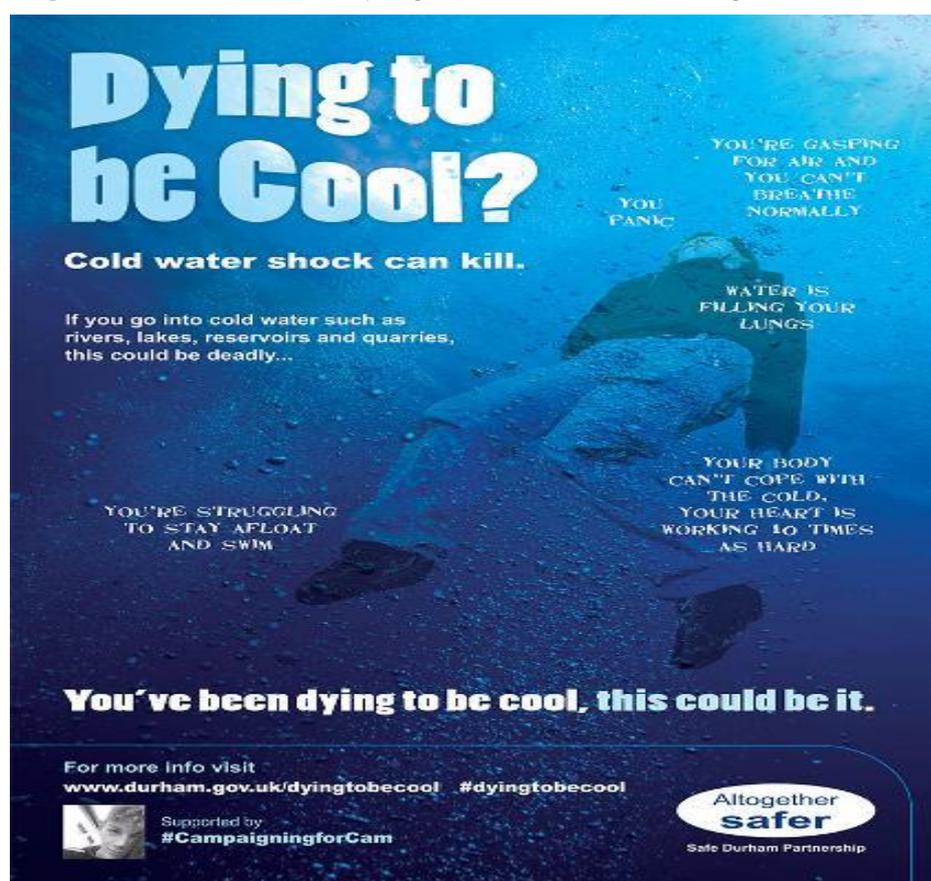
- 21 The CSG are looking to reinstate the best bar none scheme, which will support all Durham city licensees to improve guardianship arrangements in the city. The aim of this is to prevent people who are vulnerable due to alcohol consumption from being left to walk home alone. Plans are also being made to undertake further alcohol retail training to all new staff working in student union bars.
- 22 The Durham university night bus has been replaced with shuttle vehicles which support the 'get home stay safe scheme' and support vulnerable students in an emergency situation by helping them get home safely if they have no funds to pay for their fare. Students can also use a taxi firm, which is a member of the scheme as an alternative means of safe transport.
- 23 Licensed premises in close proximity of the River corridor adjacent to Old Elvet Bridge are also going to be approached as part of the revised action plan to review risk assessments of their public realm spaces in relation to water safety. Previous risk assessments have resulted in physical safety improvements to four licensed premises in a higher risk location of the river corridor within the city centre. Safety improvements introduced by licensed premises include introduction of physical barriers, improved lighting, public rescue equipment and water safety signage.

Open Water Safety Group

- 24 The OWSG continues to manage and monitor County wide open water safety risks. A schedule of monitoring and reassessment of priority risk locations identified in the initial county wide assessment process continues to be applied in order to provide assurance. The OWSG has incorporated new partners to the group from Northumbrian water in order to enhance and provide consistent water safety campaigns and messaging across the county.
- 25 Following an initial risk identification and analysis exercise, risk assessments, using RoSPA assessment methodology, were completed for 256 priority locations across the county. Despite COVID restrictions, reassessments of priority locations prior to the summer holiday periods are routinely completed to ensure that safety controls remain in situ.
- 26 The assessments of priority locations completed to date have resulted in physical safety improvements to fencing and barriers at high footfall foreseeable risk locations, installation of improved public rescue equipment, hazard warning signage and footpath resurfacing.

- 27 The OWSG were responsible for planning and implementation of water safety educational campaigns throughout 2020/21. Whilst these were significantly impacted during the reporting period in terms of not being able to deliver assemblies and undertake some promotional activities, there remained a range of awareness activities delivered.
- 28 Education campaigns included promotions of national drowning prevention weeks and once again the annual 'dying to be cool' cold water shock safety campaign through a variation of social media, posters and alerts at high footfall open water sites across the county.
- 29 Campaign materials include are provided via a water safety webpage, <http://www.durham.gov.uk/watersafety>, water safety video, poster, campaign video and social media supporting information. The campaign was again endorsed and supported by Fiona Gosling, mother of Cameron Gosling who tragically died from cold water immersion shock in July 2015 at Witton-le-Wear.
- 30 Work is ongoing to further promote water safety messages to primary age children via the youth groups of the police (mini police) and rescue services (young fire officers). Options to fund further water safety initiatives are also currently being explored. Promotion of water safety messages to local communities through the Durham County News, Area Action Partnerships and Town and Parish Councils has also taken place.

Image 2 – example of 'Dying to be Cool' campaign material



Conclusions

- 31 Recent national statistics in June and July 2021 have indicated that open water safety related risks very much remain and there is a requirement on responsible organisations to impart risk based educations and awareness into their communities and settings.
- 32 Statistics indicate that the formation of CSG and OWSG has had a positive impact in terms of a reduction in non-fatal and fatal incidents involving open water. However, it remains the view of both groups that even one fatality is always one too many in terms of the devastating impact on families, friends and the community. It places a significant burden on society both in terms of direct costs and the years of life that are lost.
- 33 The characteristics and factors regarding drowning risks remain complex and multi-factorial. It is unequivocal that drowning prevention cannot be achieved by the introduction of physical safety controls in isolation. Focus must remain on a long term strategy of education and awareness, particularly at high risk groups, to ensure that fatalities and life changing injuries are minimised as much as possible.
- 34 The CSG and OWSG will continue to meet on a quarterly basis and monitor and review the physical and cultural safety improvements introduced. In terms of the OWSG, collaborative working with partner organisations will continue in 2021/22 and beyond, with particular emphasis being placed on preventative and educational initiatives for local schools and to ensure key water risk are appropriately managed and communicated to stakeholders. The development of a calendar of water safety initiatives and events for 2021/22 will be effective in coordinating approaches and avoidance of duplication of campaigns and activities.

Background Papers

- None

Other useful documents

- None

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

Compliance with statutory legislative requirements reduce risks of enforcement action and/or prosecution against the council or individuals. It will also assist in defending civil claims against the council from employees and members of the public, including service users.

Finance

Compliance with legislative requirements will reduce increased service delivery costs, financial penalties associated with H&S sentencing guidelines 2016 and successful civil claims against the council. Financial costs may be insured to some degree and uninsured in some cases, with poor outcomes possibly leading to increased insurance premiums. Financial implications also include staff absence associated with physical and mental ill health, staff training, retention, recruitment and productivity.

Consultation

None

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

None

Climate Change

None

Human Rights

None

Crime and Disorder

None

Staffing

None

Accommodation

None

Risk

This report considers physical and psychological risks to member of the public, employees and service users. Risks also relate to the failure to comply with statutory legislative requirements, which may result in civil action being brought against the Council and enforcement action, including prosecution against the Council or individuals. These enforcement actions may result in financial penalties, loss of reputation and reduction in business continuity.

Procurement

Minimal procurement and supplier related issues which are associated with purchase and maintenance of safety related infrastructure in city centre and county wide locations.