



**Report of Geoff Paul, Interim Corporate Director of Regeneration,
Economy and Growth**

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide.

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 on a quarterly basis during the reporting period to review open water safety interventions.
- 3 A revised city centre action plan was progressed by the city safety group members and supplemented further following an independent assessment of the river corridor within the city centre by RoSPA. Assessments and inspections of county wide open water locations also continued 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 positive approach to partnership working and collaboration amongst the safety groups, with new partners being identified and incorporated into activities.

Recommendation(s)

- 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

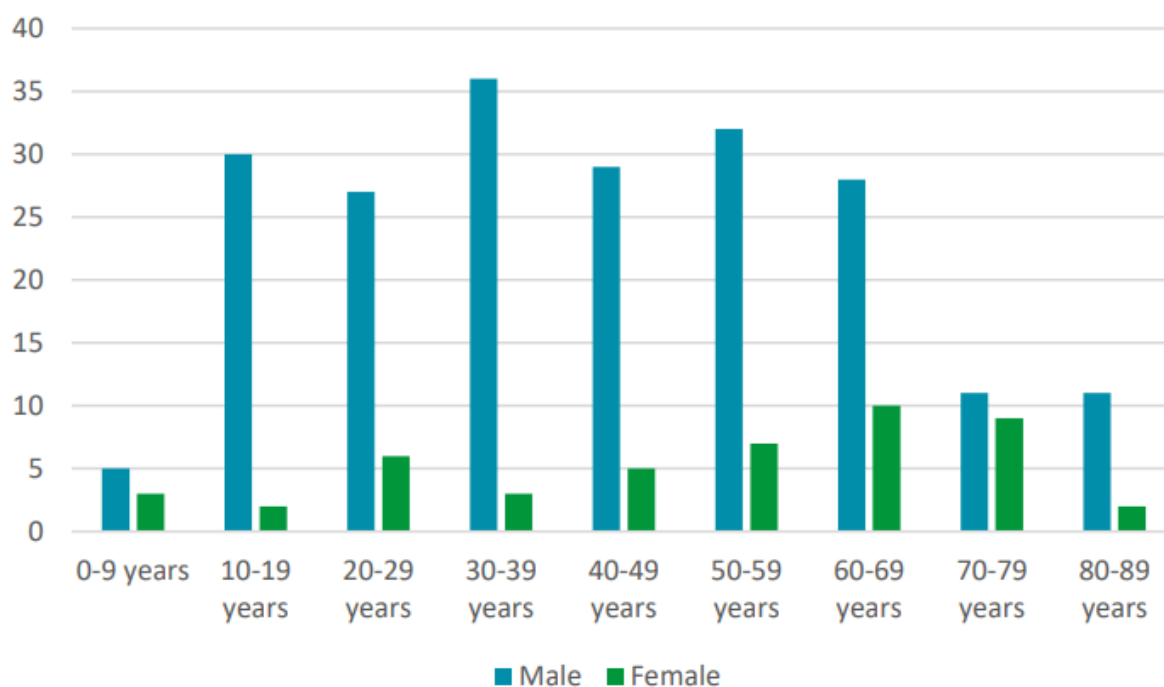
- 8 There are currently two multiagency water safety groups within County Durham. In terms of governance, both water safety groups report into the Safe Durham Partnership (SDP) as required.
- 9 The City Safety Group (CSG) was formed in January 2015 and comprises of Durham County Council, Durham Constabulary, 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's Corporate Health & Safety Manager. It was established in February 2015, with a remit of reviewing the Council's 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 National guidance such as [Managing Safety at Inland Waters](#) and best practice has been used to form open water safety policy and risk assessment methodology across the County. Visits to other areas which have high risk profiles such as York, Manchester and Bath have been undertaken to benchmark safety control measures, learn from incident causation and use best practice approaches within the County. Engagement with independent bodies such as RoSPA, RLSS and National Water Safety Forum remains a key element of the approach to open water safety related risks.
- 12 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- 2021/22

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
2021/22	9	4	0	7	1	1

13 UK statistics indicate that there are on average 650 water related fatalities per year, of which an average of 200 are suicide related incidents. Other key national headlines are:

- 83% of accidental fatalities were male;
- Males 30 -39 were the highest group for accidental fatalities;
- 62% of accidental fatalities happened at inland waters;
- Change from previous years which has seen most accidental fatalities at the coast;
- Recreational activities accounted for 55% of accidental fatalities;
- 68 accidental fatality reports noted the presence of drugs or alcohol;
- The rate of accidental drowning has increased slightly since 2017 (0.38 per 100,000) to 0.41 per 100,000;
- When considering rates, those aged 60-69 were the highest at-risk group



- 14 Compared to national statistics, County Durham has a significantly lower fatality rate of 0.19 per 100,000 compared to 0.41 per 100,000 at a UK level in 2021. County Durham has an average 3-year accidental drowning fatality rate of 1 per year compared to 6 in the North east as a region and 244 overall in the UK.
- 15 Whilst walking and running close to open water remain the highest cause of accidental drowning in the UK, swimming (which includes open water swimming) accounts for 61 in the latest year compared to 44 in the previous 3-year average in the UK. Given the widespread media and leisure industry reports regarding the psychological and physical benefits of open water swimming as a recreational activity, this is an area that requires monitoring in County Durham going forward.
- 16 Fatal incidents are, where appropriate, 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, where required, to keep HM Coroner up to date with progress being made in relation to water safety within the County.
- 17 It is apparent from analysis of incident statistics that mental health and self-harm continue to be a lead 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. There is a

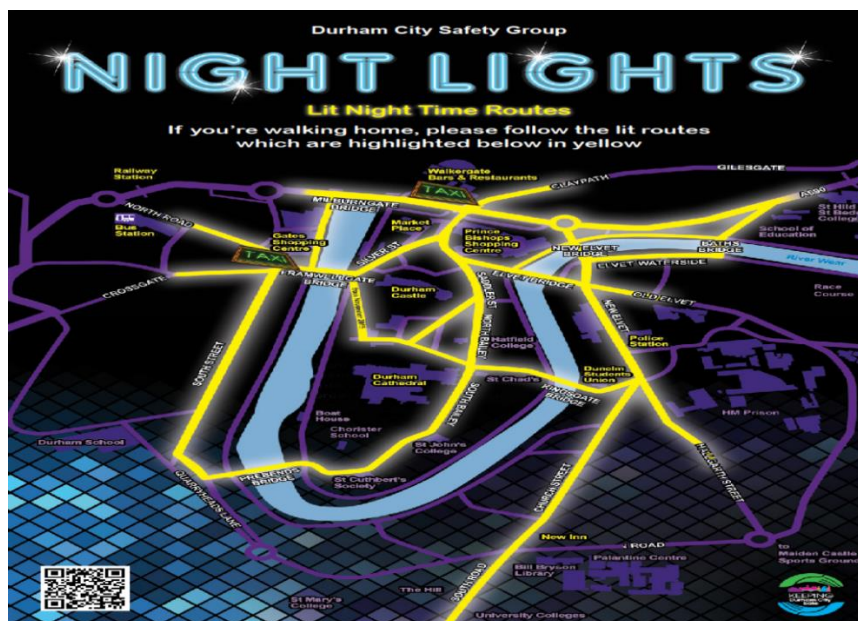
known number of hotspots across the County where suicides tragically occur and work continues with public health and other partners regarding these locations within the County.

City Safety Group

- 18 The CSG was chaired throughout 2021/22 by the Council's Director of Neighbourhoods and Climate Change and continues to have representation from the Council, emergency services and riparian landowners such as Durham University and Cathedral. Durham University student union is also a key member of the CSG.
- 19 Throughout 2021/22, 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. 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.
- 20 Additional works have been undertaken in relation to the independent assessment of the river corridor and new developments within the city that may have an impact on river related safety. The CSG commissioned the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (ROSPA) in 2021/2022 to undertake a further assessment of river corridor related risks. The scope of the assessments included safety reviews of the new Milburngate development, wider city centre and the river corridor following previous assessments in 2015 and 2018. These assessments were completed in December 2021 and subsequent reports were provided to the DCSG members in early 2022 for consideration and an action plan has been derived from the inspections undertaken.
- 21 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 to ensure that safety related controls were in place for freshers week. This involved 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.
- 22 A review of the CSG 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.

- 23 The university continues to embed the student alcohol awareness and personal safety elements as part of student induction. It also uses 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 continued to be 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.



- 24 It is positive to report that since the formation of the CSG, there has been a continued reduction in water related incidents within the city centre and zero in six of the seven previous years. 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.

- 25 The CSG is looking to reinstate the best bar none scheme, which will support all Durham city licensees to improve guardianship arrangements in the city. The actions regarding reinstatement will be progressed through the city safety group action delivery plan. 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.
- 26 Licensed premises in close proximity of the river corridor 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

- 27 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 further partnership work with Northumbrian water in order to enhance and provide consistent water safety campaigns and messaging across the county.
- 28 The OWSG was responsible for planning and implementation of water safety educational campaigns throughout 2021/22. Whilst these were significantly impacted during the reporting period in terms of not being able to deliver assemblies as in previous years, there remained a range of awareness activities delivered. These 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 Further interventions, particularly regarding education and awareness for young people in the Chester-le-Street riverside complex area, were progressed following an incident in that area in 2021. With the support of AAP coordinators, local councillors and residents, group leaders delivered plans to provide all schools in this area with the opportunity to have open water safety assemblies. These were delivered by Council officers, emergency services and featured the Council's dying to be cool

campaign, supported by Fiona Gosling who assisted in the presentations.

- 30 Work has been undertaken in Shotton to address regular anti-social behaviour that has been affecting provision of public rescue equipment at Shotton pond. Local youths have, over a prolonged period of time, been deliberately setting fire to life rings installed at the pond. Clean and Green colleagues have been replacing this equipment on an ongoing basis for a number of years. A life ring was deployed by a 12-year-old boy to assist in saving a man at this location in 2017 and therefore it has been essential that damaged equipment has been replaced. Such has been the frequency of damage, a decision has been taken to install alternative vandal resistant equipment in the form of throw lines which are secured within metal cabinets in order to prevent arson attacks. These will be installed in September 2022 and users of the equipment will be required to call 999 and ask for the fire and rescue service to provide a code to gain entry and access to the lifesaving equipment. It is hoped that this approach will reduce the risks of life saving equipment not being available and reduce replacement costs for damaged life rings that have been incurred during the last few years. Communications have been issued regarding this with the AAP coordinators and with local councillors.

Conclusions

- 31 Recent national statistics in June and July 2022 have indicated that open water safety related risks very much remain and there is a requirement on responsible organisations to impart risk-based education 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. A return of an offer for water safety assemblies within county schools in 2023 is crucial in terms of educational impact.

- 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 2022/23 and beyond, with particular emphasis being placed on preventative and educational initiatives for local schools and to ensure key water risks are appropriately managed and communicated to stakeholders. The development of a calendar of water safety initiatives and events for 2022/23 will be effective in coordinating approaches and avoidance of duplication of campaigns and activities.

Background papers

- None.

Other useful documents

- None.

Author(s)

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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.