

TO: Communities, Housing and Planning Policy Board

ON: 26 October 2021

REPORT BY: Director of Communities and Housing Services

HEADING: Draft Renfrewshire Water Safety Policy

1. Summary

- 1.1. Water Safety in Renfrewshire is and has been a priority for Renfrewshire Council. At the Council meeting on 24 June 2021, following a tragic drowning incident at the River Gryffe, Councillor Alison Dowling presented the following motion which received the unanimous support of Council.

“Council notes with sadness the recent drowning accident in the river Gryffe and notes that a number of incidents have taken place along the Gryffe.

The council undertakes to work with local community stakeholders including Houston, Linwood and Bridge of Weir Community Councils to boost safety in and around the river Gryffe and to investigate contributing to community efforts for the provision and maintenance of safety measures such as pole mounted buoys and throw-lines. Officers will report back to members at the next scheduled meeting of the Council on 30th September”

- 1.2. As requested, a paper was presented to the Council on 30 September 2021, outlining the work undertaken to formalise water safety actions across Renfrewshire. One of the key actions outlined was to prepare a draft Water Safety policy for Renfrewshire.
- 1.3. This report outlines work undertaken to date and presents the draft Renfrewshire Water Safety Policy attached as Appendix 1. It should be noted that this remains in draft and under consultation. The final policy will be brought back to this Board for approval in January 2022.
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2. Recommendations

- 2.1. It is recommended that the Communities, Housing and Planning Policy Board;
- (i) notes the content of this report and work undertaken so far to formalise arrangements to support water safety across Renfrewshire; and
 - (ii) notes the content of the draft Water Safety Policy for Renfrewshire and requests that the finalised policy be brought back for approval at the next meeting of the Board on 18 January 2022.
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3. Background

- 3.1. A formal Renfrewshire Water Safety Working Group has been established with the following membership:

Renfrewshire Council – Communities and Regulatory Manager (Chair)	Police Scotland
Renfrewshire Council – Community Safety	Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Renfrewshire Council – Environment and Infrastructure (Roads)	Scottish Ambulance Service
Civil Contingencies Service (CCS)	Open Water Rescue
Renfrewshire Leisure	Health and Social Care Partnership – Suicide Prevention

- 3.2. In addition to the above, Children’s Services, Glasgow Humane Society and Scottish Water have been contacted to facilitate the discussion of actions with each organisation. This is due to their different roles with regards to Water Safety. Links will also be made with the Council Community Learning and Development team to seek assistance to further educate the wider community and tie in with local area partnerships where appropriate.
- 3.3. A key remit of the Group was to prepare and develop a Water Safety Policy for Renfrewshire. The draft policy is attached as Appendix 1. The policy remains under consultation and has been issued for discussion with key partners and agencies.
- 3.4. The policy looks at all waterways across Renfrewshire and in particular focuses on:
- Background/legislation
 - Renfrewshire Incidents
 - Council responsibility
 - Private Landowner responsibility
 - Renfrewshire Water Safety Working Group
 - Education
 - Suicide Prevention
 - Public Rescue Equipment (PRE)
 - Risk Assessments
 - Renfrewshire Council commitment to Water Safety

- 3.5. This policy and the work being undertaken supports Outcome 2 of Renfrewshire's Council Plan: Building strong, safe and resilient communities as well as the Community Planning Priority, Our Renfrewshire is safe: Protecting vulnerable people, and working together to manage the risk of harm.
 - 3.6. Following approval at this Board, the policy will be passed to Communications and Graphics to insert pictures and appropriate design to allow the policy to be easy to read and follow. The final policy will be brought back to the next meeting of the Communities, Housing and Planning Policy Board for approval.
 - 3.7. Once complete, the policy will be placed on a dedicated landing page on the Renfrewshire Council website that is currently in the process of being designed.
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Implications of the Report

1. **Financial** – There is a financial implication to assist communities in assessing land and erecting poles, signage and public rescue equipment.
2. **HR & Organisational Development** – None
3. **Community Planning**

Renfrewshire is Safe – By producing a Water Safety Policy for all waterways in Renfrewshire, all efforts are being made to understand the dangers and prevent, wherever possible water related deaths/injuries.
4. **Legal** – None
5. **Property/Assets** – None
6. **Information Technology** – None
7. **Equality & Human Rights** -
8. **Health & Safety** – None
9. **Procurement** – None
10. **Risk** – There is a risk that Renfrewshire Council will be asked to take on responsibility for the erection and maintenance of life saving equipment on privately owned land. Whilst willing to assist communities, Renfrewshire Council cannot accept this liability or responsibility.
11. **Privacy Impact** – None

12. CoSLA Policy Position – N/A

13. Climate Risk – N/A

List of Background Papers

- (a) Water Safety in Renfrewshire – Renfrewshire Council meeting 30 September 2021.

The foregoing background papers will be retained within Communities and Housing Services for inspection by the public for the prescribed period of four years from the date of the meeting. The contact officer within the service is the Communities and Regulatory Manager.

Author: Chris Dalrymple

Email: chris.dalrymple@renfrewshire.gov.uk

RENFREWSHIRE WATER SAFETY POLICY

2021

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Policy will be reviewed regularly to ensure it remains up to date.

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1. Introduction

Water Safety Scotland's document –“Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy” has a key objective to “***develop water safety across Scotland's 32 local authority areas and promote the development of water safety policies***”.¹

Within this, there are two key activities:

- Encourage all local authorities to develop a water safety policy
- Support local authorities in the development of a water safety policy

This Renfrewshire Water Safety Policy sets out how the Council and its partners will work to improve water safety across Renfrewshire by reviewing and tackling potential water safety issues/dangers.

This policy supports the Renfrewshire's Council Plan outcome of “Building strong, safe and resilient communities” as well as the Community Plan Priority “Our Renfrewshire is safe: Protecting vulnerable people and working together to manage the risk of harm”.

2. Renfrewshire Context

Waterways are prevalent across Renfrewshire with the River Clyde flowing to the north of the local authority boundary and the River Cart flowing from the south. The River Gryfe also feeds in to the River Cart with many burns feeding into and off these rivers and there are also numerous reservoirs, dams and quarries across the authority area.

Within Renfrewshire, there have been two fatalities over recent years and these unfortunate and tragic incidents reinforce the requirement for a formalised approach to promoting water safety across Renfrewshire.

3. Renfrewshire Water Safety Policy 2021 – Aims and objectives

This Policy aims to ensure that the Council has effective, efficient and sustainable water safety management which will be applied consistently across Council land. It acts to formalise the Council's position and assist dialogue with partners and when responding to the public and those with responsibility for privately owned land.

This Policy aims to reduce accidental and deliberate entry to water by members of the public and reduce incidents across Renfrewshire. It sets out how areas will be risk assessed and where required, how appropriate action will be taken using a partnership approach involving key stakeholders and landowners.

The responsibility for ensuring the objectives of the Renfrewshire Water Safety Policy are met lies with the Renfrewshire Community Safety Partnership through the Renfrewshire Water Safety Working Group – as outlined in section 5 of the Policy.

¹ [Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy](#)

4. Responsibilities and applicable legislation

Renfrewshire has many waterways. Renfrewshire Council does not own or have responsibility for most of the land around the waterways, this normally falls to private landowners, for example farmers or Crown Estates.

However, Renfrewshire Council and its partners carry out a number of functions in relation to water safety including the following:

- Erecting and maintaining life belts in and around key water areas to promote safety, particularly on land within Paisley Town Centre around the River Cart and ensuring these are checked on a weekly basis.
- Expanding the network of Public Rescue Equipment to other areas that have been identified where youths are known to swim as set out in the section below outlining the work of the Renfrewshire Water Safety Working Group.
- Environment and Infrastructure Services assist with the procurement and erection of appropriate poles, signs and Public Rescue Equipment and monitors water ways within parks to ensure they are safe and major hazards associated with these are controlled.
- Renfrewshire Council Community Safety Partnership is responsible for assisting Police Scotland with monitoring waterways and responding to calls about anti-social behaviour in and around waterways.
- Renfrewshire Community Safety Partnership assist with school talks and deliver an annual Safe Kids event which is used to increase awareness of a range of hazards and safety issues - including water safety.
- Renfrewshire Leisure Limited is responsible for assisting with training and awareness raising in relation to water safety issues and collaborating with partners to discuss and provide practical awareness and life skills which may include Cold Water Shock and life-saving/First Aid skills.

Private landowners have responsibility under the Occupiers Liability Scotland Act 1960 to take reasonable steps to safeguard their land and this policy sets out how the Council and partners will support landowners to fulfil these responsibilities including work undertaken with landowners to discuss water safety and where ongoing danger/continued incidents are identified, support the erection of water safety equipment. (Where Renfrewshire Council works with landowners or communities to erect Water Safety equipment, the Council cannot and is not taking responsibility and liability for that equipment).

The Council and other landowners have a duty to uphold the right of responsible access to most land and water given by the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. This Act and accompanying guidance place the responsibility for personal safety largely on the individual.

The policy notes that with regard to reservoirs within their ownership, Scottish Water encourage individuals not to access these waters given the hidden dangers that exist and the heightened risks reservoirs pose. Regular press and social campaigns are undertaken to highlight this, working collaboratively with partners to broaden the reach of shared water safety messaging.^{2 3}

5. Renfrewshire Water Safety Working Group

The Renfrewshire Water Safety Policy is led by the Renfrewshire Community Safety Partnership to ensure appropriate actions (short, medium and long term) are undertaken. To assist in this, in June 2021, the Renfrewshire Water Safety Working Group was established. Current membership includes:

Renfrewshire Council – Communities and Regulatory Manager (Chair)	Police Scotland
Renfrewshire Council – Community Safety	Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Renfrewshire Council – Environment and Infrastructure (Roads)	Scottish Ambulance Service
Civil Contingencies Service (CCS)	Open Water Rescue
Renfrewshire Leisure	Health and Social Care Partnership – Suicide Prevention

The membership of the group is kept under review and discussions are held on a regular basis with partners such as Glasgow Humane Society, Children’s Services and Scottish Water.

The Renfrewshire Water Safety Working Group works with the Council’s Community Learning and Development Service to raise awareness in the wider community and tie in with local area partnerships where appropriate.

The Renfrewshire Water Safety Working Group is currently meeting regularly to review the short-term actions around the River Gryfe; however, it will then meet on a quarterly basis (or by exception if required) to ensure continued commitment to water safety across Renfrewshire.

Key areas the group will continue to develop include:

Education - One of the key issues always has been and remains, the education of members of the public, especially youths, with regard to the dangers of water. This will be tackled by

- **Formal Education** – Scottish Fire and Rescue, Scottish Ambulance Services and Renfrewshire Council have all undertaken water safety talks in schools over the years and work is ongoing with Children’s Services to coordinate this and target certain schools where issues/youths are known to frequent the water.

² [Scottish Water Safety Campaign](#)

³ [Scottish Water - Respect Our Reservoirs](#)

- **Informal education** – Where youths continue to swim in rivers against the best advice, work will be undertaken by the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and Renfrewshire Wardens to informally speak to youths on site and advise of dangers. This will be a softer approach and an appeal to highlight the risks of undertaking this activity.

Suicide prevention - Whilst the Policy has a focus on the prevention of accidental drownings, the Water Safety Working Group will also consider opportunities to intervene to prevent suicides across the Renfrewshire area.

- Colleagues from the Health and Social Care – Suicide Prevention team will sit on the Group and offer assistance to the Group in highlighting potential issues.
- Whilst not every piece of land, walkway or bridge can be designed to stop someone attempting to take their own life, by looking at everything holistically and early, good design may be able to incorporate elements that make it harder for someone to take their life. The Policy will seek wherever possible, to follow the guidance from the Glasgow Humane Society – Architectural Handbook for Safe Waterways.⁴

Public Rescue Equipment (PRE) - Public Rescue Equipment (PRE) is only useful as part of a drowning prevention strategy and policy and is not a key risk control measure in itself.

- Public Rescue Equipment (life belts) is currently located at key areas on Council owned land across Renfrewshire. Some privately owned land also has Public Rescue Equipment in place. This policy does not seek to make the wider public into lifeguards. The drafting of this policy and provision of Public Rescue Equipment is to give individuals the chance of saving a life without endangering their own and anyone seeking to assist in an incident must first ensure their own safety at all times.
- Following a review, additional Public Rescue Equipment will be put in place along the River Gryffe at areas where youths are known to frequent and swim. These areas were highlighted by the Community and in particular by local angling clubs who understand the flow of the river, the depths and the dangers it poses. Some of the sites are on Council owned land and others are in private ownership.
- Phoning the emergency services should be the priority for anyone witnessing an incident. This message will be prominent on all signage and Public Rescue Equipment. In addition, Public Rescue Equipment will be provided where there are known and recurring incidents of accidental or deliberate entry to water and the local conditions allow for its safe and effective use.
- A GPS located sign will also be erected with the equipment and will have a unique identifier e.g. R4N1. This will be GPS located (Eastings and Northings) and Police Scotland will be informed of the locations which will be placed on the STORM control database within their Command and Control Centre. This will allow Police Scotland/Scottish Fire and Rescue to know the exact location quickly and send assistance immediately to the correct location.

⁴ <https://parsonageriverman.com/images/Resources/architecture.pdf>

- Public Rescue Equipment will only be provided where there are known and recurring instances of deliberate or accidental entry to water and where risk assessments determine it can be regularly inspected and maintained and used safely and effectively.

Risk Assessments for Water Safety across Renfrewshire - Renfrewshire Council assesses Council owned land on a regular basis, including provision of Public Rescue Equipment and fencing etc. Where there is an incident involving a water way, a further risk assessment will be undertaken by appropriately trained staff.

- Risk assessments will include Identifying the hazards in and around the water and those who may be exposed (e.g. public, employees, etc). Analyse the likelihood and the severity of exposure to the hazard and consider appropriate measures to reduce or eliminate the risk to an acceptable level.
- Where Renfrewshire Council staff are working at or near a waterway, a dynamic risk assessment will be undertaken in conjunction with the Corporate Health and Safety Team.

Communications - Renfrewshire Council Corporate Communications team form part of the Renfrewshire Water Safety Working Group (as required) to assist in linking with partners and getting public messages out:

- Communications strategies will tie in with relevant national bodies and seasonal key safety messages with regard to water safety.
- A dedicated landing page will be designed for Renfrewshire Council's website to include this policy and highlight the work being undertaken by the Renfrewshire Water Safety Working Group. In particular, it will also signpost people to the correct teams if they spot an issue e.g. dangerous location or if Public Rescue Equipment is missing.

6. Renfrewshire Council's Water Safety Commitment

Through the Renfrewshire Water Safety Policy, Renfrewshire Council commits to:

- Ensuring water safety remains a priority at all Council levels
- Chairing the Renfrewshire Water Safety Working Group
- Using the correct platforms to raise awareness and educate young people and members of the public about the dangers of entering the water
- Set up and maintain a dedicated landing page on the Council website
- Highlight to landowners and/or undertake inspections and risk assessments at locations where regular incidents occur to identify if more can be done to ensure safety
- Undertake routine and regular assessment of Public Rescue Equipment on Council land
- Erect appropriate signage at key locations across Renfrewshire where required