

To: Council

On: 30 September 2021

Report by: Director of Communities and Housing Services

Heading: Water Safety in Renfrewshire

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 detailed at the meeting by the Communities and Regulatory Manager, work had been undertaken for a number of years in relation to water safety, however, following the decision of the Council in June, further steps have been undertaken to formalise this work.
- 1.3 This paper outlines the progress to date and also advises of proposals moving forward including the development of a draft Renfrewshire Water Safety Policy that will be presented to the Communities Housing and Planning Policy Board at the meeting on 26 October 2021.
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2. Recommendations

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Council:
- (i) notes the content of this report and the work undertaken to ensure water safety across Renfrewshire, including assisting communities with life-saving equipment where appropriate.
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3. Background and actions

- 3.1 Water Safety within Renfrewshire Council is led on by Communities and Public Protection with assistance from other colleagues including Environment and Infrastructure Services and the Civil Contingencies Service. The Council inspects and maintains life-saving equipment on Council owned land on a weekly basis. Following the tragic incident in the River Gryffe in June 2021, work has been undertaken to formalise this work and to consider short, medium and long term actions to improve water safety across Renfrewshire.
- 3.2 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	

- 3.3 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.
- 3.4 The Group has now met several times in the short term to allow it to be established, but more importantly, to identify short term measures to assist the community at the location where the young man died – known locally as the ‘Clay Pits’.
- 3.5 The community approached the owners of the land, Elderslie Estates who allowed and agreed for life-saving equipment to be placed on their land.
- 3.6 With assistance from the Glasgow Humane Society, temporary life belts, poles and throw ropes have been located on the riverbanks along the River Gryffe at the Clay Pits. Whilst there has been some damage/vandalism to these temporary poles and ropes, the poles and ropes were regularly being checked by the community and then replaced by Glasgow Humane Society when issues noted.

- 3.7 The Communities and Regulatory Manager has liaised with the family of the young man, and the local community activists who raised issues, and recently walked the riverbanks with 2 angling clubs to identify dangerous areas predominantly where youths continue to congregate and swim. In addition, and as requested by the Council Motion, contact has been made with the 3 Community Councils to update them of the actions to date.
- 3.8 There have been 6 areas along the River Gryffe that have been highlighted as potentially dangerous areas, both due to the depth but also the fact that youths are known to swim at these areas. As a result, work is underway to erect 2m yellow poles that will hold a life belt and throw rope that will be supplied by the Council. There will be signage e.g. "Danger – Deep Water/No Swimming" but more importantly, GPS signage that will be located at each site that will identify to emergency services, exactly where the call has been made from. There will also be throw ropes located, in a unique colour and only used for water safety, therefore, if it is used for other uses, it can be tracked back to one of the locations.
- 3.9 This is the same system used by Glasgow City Council along the River Clyde (and created by Glasgow Humane Society) and Renfrewshire will be the second Council to adopt this. The signage will give a specific code e.g. R4N1 which will allow Police STORM Control to identify the location quickly and dispatch officers. Police Scotland colleagues on the Renfrewshire Water Safety Group have had this confirmed with the Command and Control Centre at Police Scotland.
- 3.10 With regards to the 6 locations, 4 of these, including the Clay Pits are on private land, therefore it needs to be stressed that Renfrewshire Council cannot and do not accept liability or responsibility for this land or the safety equipment placed on it. This responsibility technically lies with the landowner. Renfrewshire Council will work with the community to assist if it is damaged or requires to be replaced, however, the community (or landowner) will require to ensure that it remains in place – this has been discussed and agreed by members of the community who will monitor the equipment.
- 3.11 It should also be noted that it is not intended that Renfrewshire Council will install life-saving equipment routinely across all waterways - areas will be risk assessed and reported incidents considered, however, the Council does not own or maintain many of the riverbanks/waterways across the Council area.
- 3.12 One of the key actions facing the Renfrewshire Water Safety Working Group is the education of youths with regards to the dangers of water and in particular 'cold water shock'. Partners currently undertake regular water safety talks (undertaken by Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and Scottish Ambulance Service) in addition to the Safe Kids event, attended by all primary 6 pupils across Renfrewshire. Renfrewshire Leisure are also looking at swimming activities, including looking at the impacts of Open Water swimming as part of the Active Schools activities.

- 3.13 Work is underway to coordinate this approach and target schools and discussions have taken place with Children's Services to assess how this can be maximised. However, in addition to formal education, some informal education is required and has been undertaken. Both Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and Renfrewshire Wardens have visited rivers and spoken to youths about the dangers of swimming in these locations. There are, however, no powers to prevent them doing this, therefore education is critical.
- 3.14 As mentioned above, in addition to looking at rivers across Renfrewshire, contact has been made with Scottish Water who own or are responsible for inland waterways e.g. reservoirs. Whilst they will not formally sit on the Group, a key contact has been established who can facilitate discussion as and when required.
- 3.15 A Renfrewshire Water Safety Policy is currently being prepared and a draft will be presented to the Communities, Housing and Planning Policy Board on 26 October 2021. This will cover plans, including the above, to try and ensure the safety of waterways across Renfrewshire.
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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 life-saving equipment.
2. **HR & Organisational Development- None**
3. **Community/Council Planning –**
 - *Our Renfrewshire is safe – by reviewing areas where youths swim or there is danger, life saving equipment will hopefully assist in keeping people safe should they get into trouble.*
4. **Legal - None**
5. **Property/Assets - None**
6. **Information Technology - None**
7. **Equality & Human Rights**
 - (a) The Recommendations contained within this report have been assessed in relation to their impact on equalities and human rights. No negative impacts on equality groups or potential for infringement of individuals' human rights have been identified arising from the recommendations contained in the report. If required following implementation, the actual impact of the recommendations and the mitigating actions will be reviewed and monitored, and the results of the assessment will be published on the Council's website.
8. **Health & Safety - None**
9. **Procurement -** Discussions are on-going with regards to the procurement of appropriate signage, life belts and throw ropes.

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.
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List of Background Papers

- (a) Background Papers- None
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