



water safety
Scotland

Developing a water safety policy: a workshop for local authorities

Evaluation report 2023



Background

On average, 50 people accidentally drown in Scotland each year and a further 29 people take their own lives around Scotland's waters. In January 2018, Water Safety Scotland released Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy which includes a key objective to **“develop water safety across Scotland's 32 local authority areas and promote the development of water safety policies”**. 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

In 2013, RoSPA released the first [“Local Authority Approaches to Managing Water Safety”](#) research piece which examined how local authorities across Scotland address water safety. This research was conducted again in [2018](#) and in [2023](#), giving a 5- and 10-year comparative analysis. Overall, the research showed that more focus is now given to the importance of addressing water safety by local authorities, but there remains little consistency across the country in terms of developed and embedded water safety policies.

In response to this research and to implement the relevant Strategy objective in Scotland, Water Safety Scotland and its partners host an annual workshop aimed at helping local authorities understand water safety policy creation and implementation by sharing key information and 'how to' advice.

The 2023 workshop was supported by The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA), Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS), Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park (LLTNPA) and the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI).

The workshop

The 2023 workshop was held in Perth on November 7th and featured the following presentations:

- *Importance of water safety policy development* – Recorded welcome note from Siobhian Brown, Minister for Victims and Community Safety
- *Steps involved in the development of a water safety policy* – Carlene McAvoy, RoSPA/WSS
- *Case study example - Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority (LLTNPA)* – Leigh Hamilton, Ranger manager LLTNPA
- *What guidance and resources are available* – Carlene McAvoy & Jen Foley, RoSPA/WSS
- *Facilitated session on what you need from WSS* – Michael Avril, RNLI

The invitation to attend was issued to all thirty-two local authorities, with eight local authorities represented on the day via ten individual attendees.

This report highlights attendees' opinions of the workshop, as well as the impact it has had on their intention to develop a water safety policy and general knowledge of water safety.

Evaluation approach and methods

A questionnaire was issued to attendees via email before and after the workshop. 9 respondents (90%) completed the pre-workshop questionnaire and 3 (30%) completed the post-workshop questionnaire.

Results

WAID

We wanted to capture information about how many local authorities are aware of/signed up to the Water Incident Database (WAID). WAID is a web-based system designed to accept data from a wide range of data sources either through direct entry via the web or bulk uploads. It is designed to enable a search of the data for multiple records of a single incident which will then be 'merged' into a single 'Incident Record'. Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy suggests the use of WAID data as the agreed source for fatality data for consistency across the country.

63 per cent of the local authorities represented weren't sure if they were signed up to WAID, with 25 per cent signed up to WAID and 13 per cent not.

Understanding of water safety policies and the need for focus on prevention activity

During the workshop, speakers outlined the importance of water safety policy and the steps involved in creating one. Additionally, speakers suggested incorporating elements that compliment a policy that have already been developed by WSS, such as an awareness-raising comms plan and assets as well as the WSS education materials that have been developed in conjunction with Education Scotland. 87.5 per cent of those in attendance felt confident that they understood the need for developing a water safety policy - and the need to focus on prevention activity - before attending the workshop, with this increasing to 100% after attending (Fig.1). Confidence wasn't as high in being able to identify risks associated with water and how to focus on prevention activity pre-workshop (75%) but this rose to 100% post-workshop (Fig. 2).

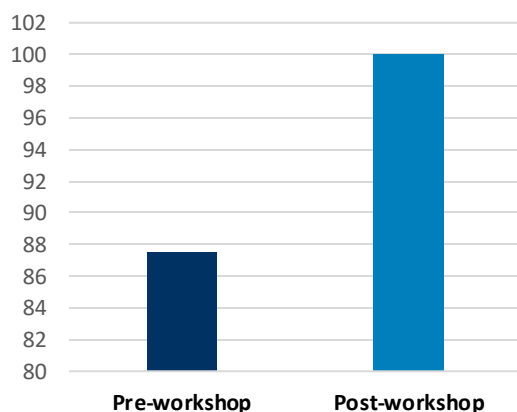


Figure 1: Learned understanding of need for policy and prevention

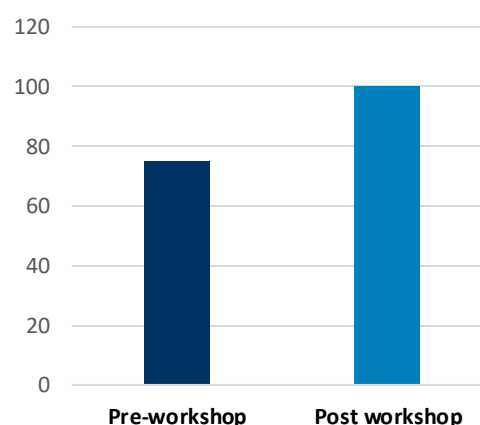


Figure 2: Confidence levels relating to focussing prevention activity

Personal learning and sharing the learning


It is encouraging to note that, having attended the workshop, 100 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they would share learning from the workshop within their teams.

Development of a water safety policy

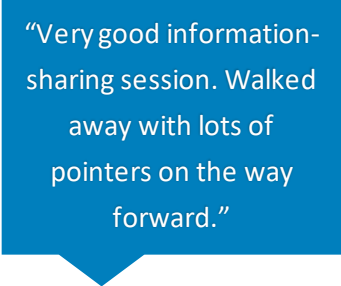
A water safety policy is a key preventative process which can help to reduce the risk of fatal drownings and accidental incidents. Of the three local authorities that responded following the workshop, all stated that they did intend to develop a water safety policy and were happy to stay in touch with Water Safety Scotland to inform the organisation of policy progress.

Comments from participants

Respondents were asked to provide comment on the workshop as a whole:



“The presentations and discussions were very helpful, particularly the examples from elsewhere and the opportunity to discuss with those who are further ahead on their policy”



“Very good information-sharing session. Walked away with lots of pointers on the way forward.”

Summary

The evaluation of WSS local authority workshop has shown that an event such as this is very worthwhile as it allows the dissemination of information about the support that is available, both in terms of documentation and guidance and also shared experience of those who have already developed a policy.

The results of the questionnaires are encouraging as they strongly indicate that learning has taken place and will be shared among colleagues. In addition, there is strong evidence to suggest that a high percentage of the local authorities in attendance intend to develop their own water safety policy. However, it is worth noting that any interpretation should be made with caution due to the low number of responses received post-workshop.