



TIDAL THAMES WATER SAFETY FORUM

Drowning Prevention Strategy

May 2019

1. Background

Foreword

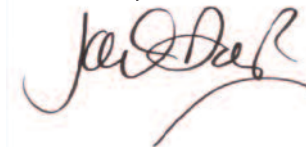
I am delighted to support the Tidal Thames Water Safety Forum which brings together vital agencies across maritime, coastal and emergency services to keep the tidal Thames safe for everyone. Our aim is to reduce the number of avoidable deaths from drowning in the tidal Thames targeting a 'zero harm' policy.

Stretching 95 miles from Teddington in the west to the North Sea in the east, the tidal Thames is the UK's busiest waterway, used all year round by commercial and recreational vessels alike. It is iconic and its bridges are known the world over.

In 2018, 30 people drowned in the river, accounting for 8% of drowning-related deaths nationally. Over the year, there were 688 recorded cases of people threatening to enter the Thames to take their life. 105 people actually entered the water, triggering interventions by the emergency services. As Minister for suicide prevention I see all these incidents as preventable. I am determined that we make our public areas safe and put in place appropriate measures to reduce risk.

Lasting positive change can only be achieved through clear leadership and close collaboration between policy makers, authorities and the public. It is imperative we succeed, to reduce the risks for all the capital's residents and visitors and make London the safest global city.

I thank all of the people involved in the Forum and especially the professionals on the frontline who make lifesaving interventions on a daily basis and show such dedication to their duty.



Jackie Doyle-Price MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Mental Health, Inequalities and Suicide Prevention

May 2019



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1.1: Membership:

The TTWSF involves the full range of regulators, emergency services and voluntary groups involved in managing safety on the tidal Thames:



Port of London Authority (PLA): the statutory harbour authority for the tidal Thames; a public trust, established to administer, preserve and improve the Port of London.

Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI): a charity that saves lives at sea, whose operation extends along the tidal reaches of the Thames, with stations providing cover as far upriver as Teddington.



Metropolitan Police Service: a 24/7 frontline marine policing response unit, based on the river at Wapping.

London Fire Brigade: has a water-borne response capability, as well as an extensive community outreach programme, part of which focusses on water safety.



HM Coastguard

HM Coastguard: Her Majesty's Coastguard is the part of the MCA responsible for national maritime search and rescue; on the Thames this is co-ordinated by London Coastguard.



London Ambulance Service: the NHS Trust covering an area of about 620 square miles. Its Hazardous Area Response Teams (HART) provide paramedic care in environments beyond the capability of standard units.

1.2: Scope

Purpose: To prevent accidental and self-harm drownings in the Thames by working in partnership to ensure consistent guidance for safe enjoyment and management of activities in, on and around the water.

Our Aim: To reduce the number of deaths in and on the tidal Thames by targeting a strategy of 'zero harm'.

Developed by representatives of the emergency services, regulatory bodies and voluntary organisations involved in managing incidents on the Thames, this strategy outlines our priority actions, governance and how we will track progress.

It has been prepared partially as a response to the UK National Drowning Prevention Strategy, which aims to halve accidental drowning fatalities in the UK by 2026 and reduce risk amongst the highest risk groups and communities.

It will be a framework for TTWSF's activities up to 2022.

1.3: The London Picture

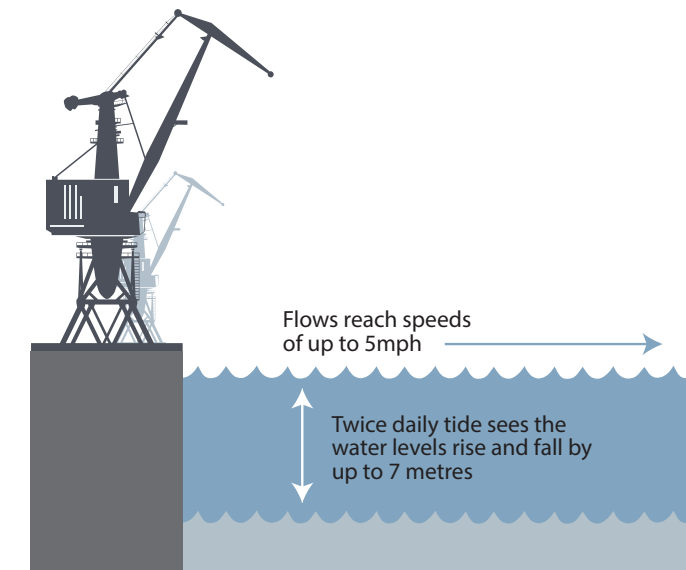
England's longest river, the Thames is tidal from Teddington in west London out to the Thames Estuary.

The tidal Thames is also the UK's busiest waterway by a significant margin.

The Port of London is the UK's second largest hub for the import and export of commercial freight. The river's rich history and iconic skyline make it a magnet for tourists from around the world; recreational use of the river – for sailing, rowing, fishing and walking and other sports are also growing rapidly.

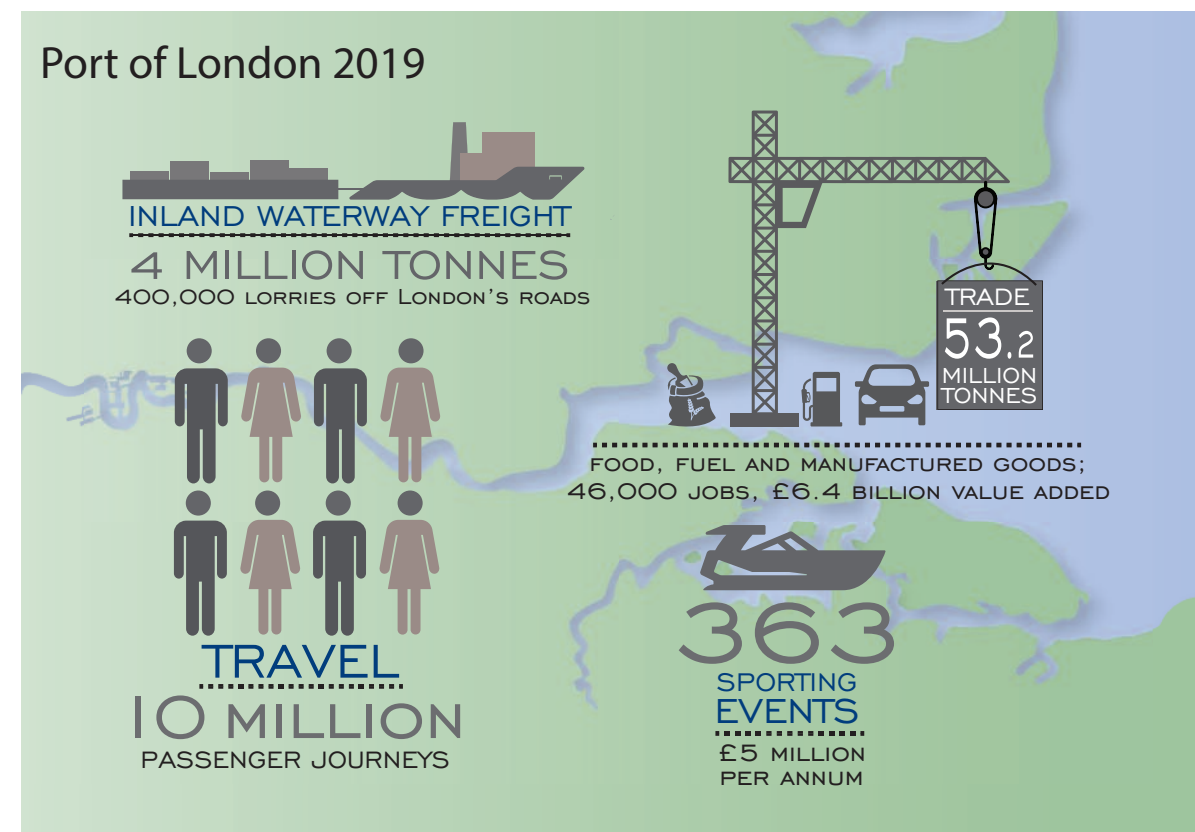
The Thames is also a challenging river, a twice daily tide sees the water levels rise and fall by up to 7 metres; flows reach speeds of up to 5mph.

Currently good management and well-maintained riversides mean the risk of fatal



accidents affecting the residents, commuters and tourists in the capital is relatively low.

But there is no room for complacency; projected growth of river usage – both commercial and recreational – pose a parallel increased risk of accidents and deaths due to drowning.



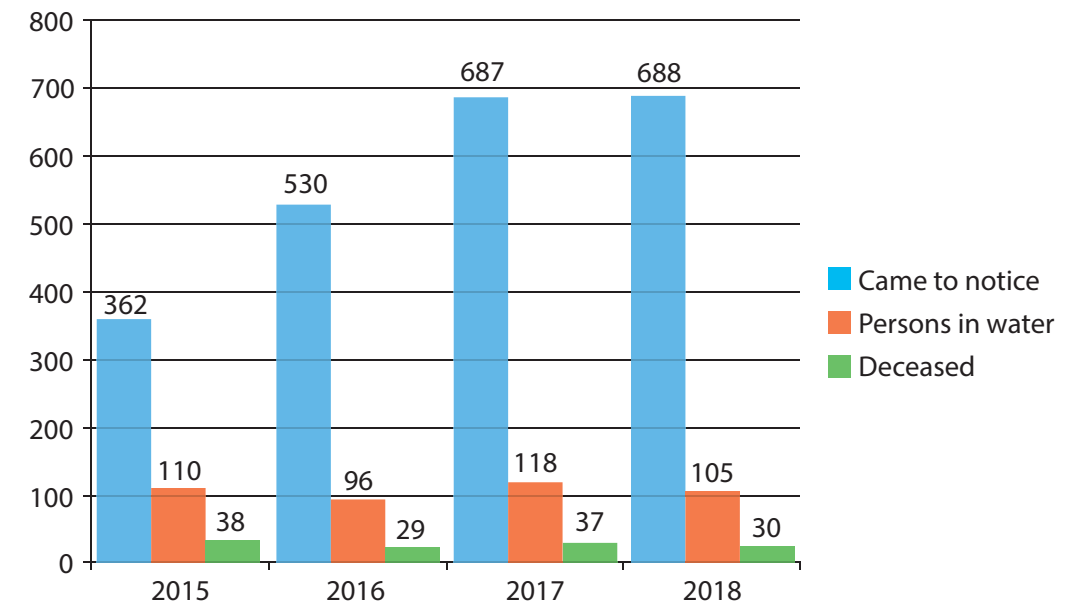
Suicide related incidents account for approximately one half of the Search and Rescue (SAR) missions on the river

1.4: Rising suicide rates

Suicide is the most frequent cause of drowning in the River Thames, accounting for 90% of all deaths.

Suicide related incidents account for approximately one half of the Search and

Rescue (SAR) missions on the river. Prevention measures are very limited, as resources are primarily focussed on rescue operations.



1.5: Coping with London's growth

This strategy coincides with rapid growth in London's population, which is set to rise from 8.6 million today to 10 million by 2035, and to 11 million by 2050.

The growth is forecast to be concentrated in the east, much of it likely to be along the river.

The Thames Estuary Growth Commission is leading the development of a plan to deliver the infrastructure that will be required to accommodate this expansion over the next three decades.

The strategic transport network will need to be developed. Transport for London has proposed an additional 13 crossings over the Thames, mostly in the east of the capital.

The 2035 Thames Vision

In partnership with a broad range of organisations linked to the river, the PLA has also developed the Thames Vision, an

ambitious set of goals designed to maximise the commercial, social and recreational potential of the tidal river.

The Vision goals for delivery by 2035 include:

- Handling 60-80 million tonnes of cargo.
- Carrying over 4 million tonnes of goods on the river.
- Doubling the number of people travelling by river to 20 million.
- Achieving greater participation in sport and recreation, on and alongside the water.

It goes without saying that all the goals must be achieved without compromising safety. All the contributors are committed to working together to make sure safety is central to the Vision's delivery.





The Water Accident Incident Database shows that nationally half of those who drowned had no intention of being in the water in the first place

1.6: The case for community safety

The TTWSF will take a proactive approach to reducing drowning.

There is significant evidence that prevention is the key to reducing the likelihood of incidents, injuries and fatalities.

There are three fundamental strands:

- **Prevention** – to minimise the likelihood of an incident happening.
- **Protection** – to minimise the likelihood of an incident happening through the appropriate design of bridges and waterside developments, and the availability of water rescue equipment.
- **Response** – the search and rescue element on the Thames, when an incident occurs.

As identified in the Thames Strategic Review, there is limited scope to increase the speed with which SAR units are currently deployed.

This means an educational, supervision and influencing approach, targeting users of the river and its banks, is required to achieve the desired reduction in accidents and lives lost in addition to further improvements to safety on and alongside the river.

The Water Accident Incident Database (WAID) shows that nationally half of those who drowned had no intention of being in the water in the first place.

Activities often deemed as relatively safe – such as running and walking – may actually be where the greatest risk lies. The National Water Safety Forum (NWSF) categorises these groups, including dog walkers, as being at the highest risk of drowning.

Simple interventions, such as advising dog walkers to call the emergency services rather than follow their pets into the water, can make a big difference; whilst the animals are usually able to get safely back to dry land, it is invariably their owners who get into difficulty.

2. Strategic objectives

2.1: Overview

There is no single, miraculous, “cure all” remedy that can prevent any particular type of fatality.

The TTWSF intends to utilise the ‘RISE’ (Rescue, Influence, Supervise and Educate) delivery model, developed by the RNLI.

It requires all modes of protection to be addressed, without one taking precedence over another.

Using this philosophy, we aim to:

- Affect change by raising awareness of self-harm and accidental drownings on the Thames with policy makers, regulators and the general public.
- Support the development and implementation of a programme to reduce the number of river-related suicide and self-harm drownings.
- Implement a robust and multi-layered programme to deliver education and water safety to targeted groups and events.
- Continue to maintain and improve the SAR response to incidents on the river.
- Ensure that safety is an intrinsic part of all future development.
- Establish the River Thames as an independent, identifiable risk area.

2.2: Raising Awareness

Achieving these objectives will require all the organisations involved to work together.

Tackling safety on the Thames in London is not a new initiative, but we must collaborate even more effectively together across organisations to gain momentum and save more lives.

To be as effective as possible, the Forum and its work need to be visible and accessible to all the organisations involved



and the public at large. There is strong public awareness around cycle and fire-related deaths in London in particular, but also across the UK. Far fewer people are aware of the number of fatalities linked to drowning in the Thames.

A priority for the Forum is to develop a publicity campaign, in conjunction with relevant experts, to reverse this situation and be a catalyst for concerted, co-ordinated action.

Self-harm is a subject many organisations feel is outside their remit; individuals also feel they are not empowered to act. This must change.

We will:

- **Raise the profile of the TTWSF through positive engagement with politicians, public bodies, decision-makers and the public.**
- **Raise awareness of the risks and hazards associated with the Thames, educating all who live, work and visit.**
- **Understand and effect key behaviour changes towards the Thames.**
- **Influence and change policy to support the strategic aims and objectives.**



2.3: Tackle river-related suicide and self-harm drownings

Every year the emergency services deal with hundreds of calls relating to people in crisis, threatening to jump into the Thames from bridges spanning the river or the footpaths adjacent to it.

Those affected do not always follow through on their threats, but the statistics remain alarming. Of the 688 cases reported in 2018, 105 people entered the water and 30 people died.

The vast majority of those affected were found to have ongoing mental health issues, even if they had not directly stated an intention to complete suicide.

Intervention training

There is greater opportunity for last-minute intervention when attempted suicides occur in public places.

The first response is much more likely to come from a passing stranger, rather than from a family member, professional carer, or member of the emergency services.

This makes it imperative that we equip people from all walks of life with the skills and confidence to intervene when they see a person in crisis in a public place.

Replicating work successfully delivered by Network Rail for its partners, a training

programme for individuals living and working near the Thames would be a major step forward in expanding the ranks of people able to respond in this way.

To this end, in consultation with all the relevant, qualified experts, we plan to facilitate the development of an appropriate training programme.

It would teach participants how to recognise a person in crisis, based on their behaviour, and how to summon appropriate help.

Pier staff, marine crews, the emergency services and CCTV operators are among those groups who could be effectively targeted for training of this kind, to increase the levels of monitoring and supervision available at key locations.

Members of the public could also be educated on how to spot and intervene to help people in crisis, including what action to take if a person has already entered the water.

It is vital to give members of the public the confidence to intervene in such situations and reassure them that they will be supported, whatever the outcome.

Case study

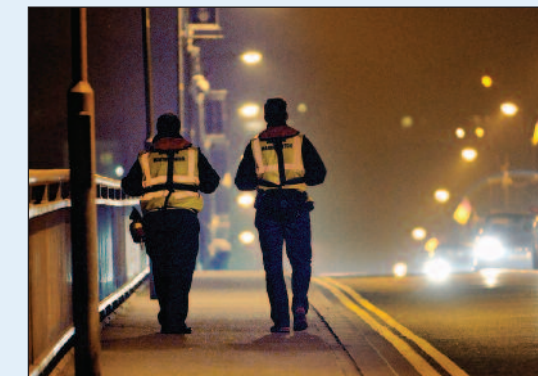
Wexford MarineWatch

Wexford is a town in the South Eastern corner of Ireland sitting at the estuary of the River Slaney.

Whilst a beautiful spot with a strong community feel, Wexford has suffered with loss of life through suicide and accidental drowning around the bridge, quay and harbour areas. According to the best available information, on average between 2000 and 2012 Wexford saw in excess of 3 deaths per year in the water around the town.

In response to this ongoing problem and a quick succession of suicide deaths that sent shockwaves through the community in 2012, the Wexford MarineWatch was established.

Wexford MarineWatch sees patrols of trained volunteers monitoring the harbour, bridge and quay areas during the key 'at risk' times. The volunteers have been trained in skills to intervene with those suffering mental crisis as well as basic water rescue skills. They are



supported extensively through local donation and fundraising and critically through close collaboration with the emergency services in the County of Wexford.

The impact has been significant. In the 6+ years (2012–2018) since MarineWatch was introduced the number of fatalities has been reduced to 2 and the volunteer patrols have been directly involved in 335 incidents and intervened on 157 separate occasions where people were indicating their intent to enter the water for suicide.

Bridge Watch

We intend to support the development of a programme that can emulate the Wexford MarineWatch approach to direct intervention at the 'precipice'.

Within the densely populated areas of London, there are significant opportunities to work with key partners and stakeholders including specialist charities, to physically monitor and supervise identified high risk areas, such as the Thames bridges and piers. The focus is to directly engage with vulnerable individuals before they jump into the river and coach them to a place of safety.

Along with the desire to develop a resource of trained volunteers with the capability to directly make an intervention there is scope to add another 'layer of vigilance'. With minimal upskilling, existing personnel that work on or around the river can act as extra eyes to offer early alert to somebody exhibiting the warning signs of mental crisis.

Case study

Mental health nurses & practitioners on patrol with police

NHS mental health nurses and practitioners have joined patrols by officers from the various police forces.

Two permanent teams of mental health professionals are embedded within British Transport Police, working across England and Wales. Nurses and practitioners work directly alongside police officers to assist in dealing with referrals from incidents, and undertake proactive patrols.



The City of London Police helped pioneer the approach. The mental health professionals accompany officers to incidents as they occur, meaning that people showing signs of mental health issues can be assessed on the spot by a trained professional and appropriate steps taken immediately, ranging from admission to hospital, through to referral to a GP or counsellor in less urgent cases.

Such knowledge sharing brings benefits for both the NHS and the police. Medical professionals are alerted to incidents they may otherwise have been unaware of and officers can be informed if a person is deteriorating, or likely to become an increased risk.

Early indications also suggest the collaboration leads to improved patient welfare, more efficient use of NHS services and a considerable reduction in detentions under the Mental Health Act.

We will:

- Work with suicide prevention organisations to develop a sensitive and effective approach to tackling the issues of accidental and self-harm drowning on the Thames.
- Promote life-saving interventions by training communities linked to the river in the skills necessary to successfully intervene with a person in crisis; and provide appropriate support to individuals when they do.
- Work with the NHS, charities, riverside communities and event organisers to expand supervision along the Thames.
- In partnership with others, develop and deliver a strategy to support the high numbers of persons in crisis in and around the Thames, to establish what immediate care, treatment and appropriate support is available for those affected.
- Change behaviours, in and around the water, of those who either witness someone, or who are themselves suffering mental crisis.



2.4: Implement a robust, multi-layered programme to deliver education and water safety to targeted groups and events

The Thames is an integral part of London; we want residents and visitors alike to be able to enjoy the river and its surroundings, safely.

By making those who live in, work in, or visit London aware of the risks that the river holds, we can reduce the number of drownings that occur each year.

There is already excellent prevention work taking place surrounding accidental drowning. TTWSF intends to build on this, utilising tools and campaigns already available to ensure they are effective in tackling the unique complexities of the Thames.

We will work with all interested parties to support further behavioural changes through water safety education programmes.

There are five key areas of water safety messaging:

- Advice for those who are near, but not on the water such as dog walkers and joggers.
- Advice for river users, such as rowers, sailors, paddle boarders and marine crews.

- Guidelines for people who spot someone in difficulty in the water.
- Self-rescue: what individuals should do if they get into difficulty in the water.
- Guidance for event organisers. Some national campaigns have already had a very positive impact and will continue to engage many of our target audience.

RNLI's **Respect the Water – Float to Live** campaign, concentrated on 'fighting your instinct, not the water' to reduce the impacts of cold water shock.



#DontDrinkandDrown

Royal Life Saving Society's **Don't Drink and Drown** campaign targets summer drinkers, Christmas party goers and students during Fresher's Week.

Events and water safety awareness

There has been a rapid increase in the number of social and sporting events on and around the River Thames annually, both planned and unplanned. These attract large and diverse crowds, from far and wide.

On average there are 400 planned events on the tidal Thames each year, ranging from firework displays to rowing regattas and sailing races.

There is a need for a smarter and more robust approach to safety, for both participants and spectators.

We will work collaboratively with event organisers during the planning phase, to identify risks and timely, innovative solutions, improving water safety for both participants and spectators.

Case study

In recent years the safety of spectators watching the **Oxbridge University Boat Race**, held annually on the River Thames between Putney and Chiswick, has improved significantly as a result of closer pre-event collaboration between the organisers, the PLA, the RNLI and Emergency Services.

RNLI lifeguards steer crowds on the foreshore away from areas at risk from fast-rising tides, which in previous years have dangerously left some spectators stranded in the river.



Case study

When England hosted the **Rugby World Cup** in 2015, the RNLI launched patrols close to riverside pubs in West London, immediately before and after every match.

This was a direct response to the increased risk of fans seeking to swim in the river after drinking alcohol, unaware of the risks posed by the life-threateningly cold temperature of river water and the force of the tides.



We will:

- Help the public and river users to save more lives through campaigns to change behaviour.
- Deliver a water safety education programme, targeting schools and community groups.
- Establish improved procedures for the management of events on or near the river, to ensure that organisers fully factor the safety of participants and spectators into their plans.



2.5: Continue to maintain and improve the SAR response to incidents on the river

Whilst the greatest gains in tackling the numbers of fatalities on the river are to be made through prevention and education, it remains critically important that SAR capabilities on the Thames are maintained and improved.

Dedicated Search and Rescue services were introduced following the Marchioness disaster of 1989, in which 51 people lost their lives.

SAR services on the tidal Thames now comprise:

- Her Majesty's Coastguard Operating Centre; co-located at the PLA's Control Room at the Thames Barrier Navigation Centre in Woolwich.
- RNLI vessels.
- London Fire Brigade water rescue resources and land based appliances.
- Vessels operated by the Metropolitan Police's Marine Unit.
- PLA vessels.
- Commercial vessels.
- Leisure craft.

Recent data shows a significant increase in recorded SAR incidents.

This trend is projected to continue, and will be accelerated by population growth, additional riparian development and increased use of the river.

Advances in technology, staff turnover and lifestyle changes all underline the continuing need for SAR procedures to be regularly tested and rehearsed.

We will:

- Establish a single database, to provide accurate baseline information, enabling informed decisions to be made about SAR response.
- Eliminate all causes of time delay, from initial alert of an incident to deploying an effective response to the scene.
- Increase frequency of multi-agency planning exercises.
- Improve inter-agency debriefs and reviews when incidents occur.

2.6: Ensure that safety is an intrinsic part of future development

Improving the safety of existing bridges, waterside buildings, footpaths and recreational areas is essential to reducing accidental and self-harm drownings in the tidal Thames.

RNLI data shows that between 2008 and 2014, 68% of suicide attempts occurred from bridges, with 32% occurring from the river bank or piers along the Thames.

The data underlines the importance of securing the support of key policy makers, developers and riverside land owners to include water safety considerations in the planning of new developments.

The extensive, planned development of the Thames, particularly in east London, is an opportunity to improve waterside design; it will require close collaboration with the Mayor of London, the Greater London Assembly and riparian boroughs.

We will work closely with planners, designers, architects, developers and engineers to ensure river safety is integrated into wider decision making and design out risks associated with new-build infrastructure.

Consideration must also be given affecting retrospective improvements to the design of bridges and riverside edges.

There are a number of locations throughout the world where considerable improvements have been made to existing infrastructure with impressive results in reducing fatalities.

We will:

- **Educate and influence bridge owners on the issue of suicide on the Thames and the work undertaken to tackle the issue at similar locations.**
- **Promote and where appropriate regulate the placement of public rescue equipment at high risk locations and at new riverside developments and crossings.**
- **Engage with riverside developers and riparian boroughs to improve the provision of public life-saving equipment along the banks of the Thames and fill in any gaps.**



Case study



High-level suicide prevention barriers installed on the **Prince Edward Viaduct** in Toronto, Canada incorporated 450 metres of coloured LED lights, which change to reflect fluctuations in air temperature, as well as wind direction and velocity, creating a "living" piece of illuminated public art.

Case study



Following the installation of barriers on the **Clifton Suspension Bridge** in Bristol in 1998, fatalities halved from an average of 8.2 per year (1994-1998) to 4 per year (1999-2003). At the same time there was no evidence of a parallel increase in male suicide attempts from other sites in the Bristol area.

2.7: Establish the River Thames as an independently identifiable risk area

There is currently no specific Thames Risk Register available to help the relevant agencies design, plan and deliver their prevention and response activities on the tidal Thames.

Lord Harris' recent review of the capital's preparedness to respond to major incidents highlighted the criticality of the River Thames as a transport hub for London. It urged the London Resilience Forum (LRF) to establish a sub-group to consider resilience on the Thames.

We will:

- **Engage with the London Resilience Forum to highlight the risk of accidental and self-harm drowning on the Thames and establish the Thames as a separate risk area within London.**
- **Establish a Forum of partners to develop a Thames Risk Register.**



3. Delivering the strategy

Improving the safety of existing bridges, waterside buildings, footpaths and recreational areas is essential to reducing accidental and self-harm drownings in the tidal Thames.

RNLI data shows that between 2008 and 2014, 68% of suicide attempts occurred from bridges, with 32% occurring from the river bank or piers along the Thames.

The data underlines the importance of securing the support of key policy makers, developers and riverside land owners to include water safety considerations in the planning of new developments.

The extensive, planned development of the Thames, particularly in east London, is an opportunity to improve waterside design; it will require close collaboration with the Mayor of London, the Greater London Assembly and riparian boroughs.

Working together over the coming years is essential to turning this strategy into reality. Development of the strategy has been convened and led by the TTWSF, and delivery falls to this Forum as well as a whole host of organisations and groups. Delivery will vary according to the priority actions required to deliver the goals:

- The TTWSF will be leading some of the priority actions and as individual organisations we are working to ensure we are well-placed to deliver.
- In other cases, different organisations may take the lead such as charities directly involved in suicide prevention.

- Others are working together to strengthen the voice of stakeholders on key decisions affecting the Thames, such as river operators and terminal operators working alongside Government and national authorities to double the underlying intra-port freight carried by water or to improve road and rail access to the port.
- Some established meetings and groups may need to consider more focus of the issue on the Thames, championing mental health and wellbeing of Londoners. The TTWSF will also work closely with the GLA and local authorities in delivering the strategy.

3.1 Tracking progress and delivery

Building on the co-design approach to developing the Vision, delivery will continue to be with a broad range of organisations and partners. Each of the six work streams will be met through a rolling series of time-bound priority actions with Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

Governance will use existing fora wherever possible, for example the TTWSF and Thames and London Waterways Forum, or convening new groups where necessary. Progress will be reported against actions through an annual report.

4. Strategic summary

Purpose: To prevent accidental and self-harm drownings in the Thames by working in partnership to ensure consistent guidance for safe enjoyment and management of activities in, on and around the water.

Our Aim: To reduce the number of deaths in and on the tidal Thames by targeting a strategy of 'zero harm'.

What we intend to do:	How we intend to do it:
Raise the awareness of self-harm and accidental drownings on the Thames with key policy makers, stakeholders and general public	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Raise the profile of the TTWSF through positive engagement with politicians, public bodies, decision-makers and the public. • Raise awareness of the risks and hazards associated with the Thames educating all who live, work and visit. • Understand and affect key behaviour changes towards the Thames. • Influence and change policy to support the strategic aims and objectives.
Support the development and implementation of a program to reduce the number of river related suicide and self-harm drownings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with suicide prevention organisations to develop a sensitive and effective approach to tackling the issues of accidental and self-harm drowning on the Thames. • Promote life-saving interventions by training communities linked to the river in the skills necessary to successfully intervene with a person in crisis; and provide appropriate support to individuals that do. • Work with the NHS, charities, riverside communities and event organisers to expand supervision along the Thames to support an overall reduction in fatalities. • In partnership with others, develop and deliver a strategy to support the high numbers of persons in crisis in and around the Thames to establish what immediate care, treatment and appropriate support is available for those affected. • Change behaviours, in and around the water, of those who either witness someone, or who are themselves suffering mental crisis.

What we intend to do:	How we intend to do it:
Implement a robust, multi-layered, programme to deliver education and water safety to targeted groups and events	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help the public and river users to save more lives through campaigns to change behaviour. • Deliver a water safety education programme, targeting schools and community groups. • Establish improved procedures for the management of events on or near the river, to ensure that organisers fully factor the safety of participants and spectators into their plans.
Continue to maintain and improve the Search and Rescue response to incidents on the river	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish a single database, to provide accurate baseline information, enabling informed decisions to be made about SAR response. • Eliminate all causes of time delay, from initial alert of an incident to deploying an effective response to the scene. • Increase frequency of multi-agency planning exercises. • Improve inter-agency debriefs and reviews when incidents occur.
Ensure that safety is an intrinsic part of all future development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate and influence bridge owners on the issue of suicide on the Thames and the work undertaken to tackle the issue at similar locations. • Promote and where appropriate regulate the placement of public rescue equipment at high risk locations and at new riverside developments and crossings. • Engage with developers and riparian boroughs to improve the provision of public life-saving equipment along the banks of the Thames, and fill in any gaps.
Establish the River Thames as an independently identifiable risk area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage with the London Resilience Forum to highlight the risk of accidental and self-harm drowning on the Thames and establish the Thames as a separate risk area within London. • Establish a Forum of partners to develop a Thames Risk Register.



For more information email: info@pla.co.uk

