

SERVICE UPDATE

<u>Name of Function:</u>	Operations
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<u>Title of Update:</u>	Water Safety 2023
<u>Report Author:</u>	Steven Shaw
<u>Chief Officer:</u>	Mark Reilly
<u>Contact Details:</u>	stevens@aberdeencity.gov.uk

UPDATE:

The report provides an overview of Aberdeen City Council's involvement in the Aberdeen Water Safety Group and gives an update on this group and Environmental Services' current initiatives.

Aberdeen Water Safety Group

The Aberdeen Water Safety Group was fully established in 2017 with the aim to develop a collective and consistent approach to water safety in Aberdeen. The main purpose of the group is to save lives through the education and promotion on water safety. The group is currently chaired by Graham Dutton from the Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS) and Sport Aberdeen. The group is not statutory.

The group's membership is wide ranging, with experts from many fields relating to public safety and partnership working. The group includes representatives from Aberdeen City Council, The Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS), Aberdeen Sports Village, Royal National Lifeboat Institution Aberdeen (RNLI), Aberdeen Surf Lifesaving Club, Surf Live Saving GB (SLSG), Police Scotland, Sport Aberdeen, Her Majesty's Coastguard (HMCG), SEPA, Water Safety Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, Aberdeen Harbour, Scottish Association for Mental Health, and other national charities. The group is also supported by Aberdeen City Councillors.

In 2021 the partnership took another positive step and became a formal PAWS group.

The Partnership Approach to Water Safety (PAWS) is a multi-agency approach to improving water safety that combines the knowledge and experience of those individuals and organisations that best understand, and can manage, risks in and around water.

There are 3 key stages:

Prevention:

Raising water safety awareness through education, engagement, and media platforms.

Improved Incident Response:

Training the public how to safely respond in the developing stages of a water emergency and conducting multi-agency training events with Search & Rescue partners.

Review:

Reviewing significant water events via Drowning & Incident Review (DIR) to gather information and gain an understanding of contributory factors or trends to allow a focused approach to drowning prevention.

This partnership approach to water safety work very well in Aberdeen and is a natural step for the Aberdeen Water Safety Group to take.

Key outcomes from the Aberdeen Water Safety Group to date include:

- Creation of a local water safety group who are members of Water Safety Scotland.
- Adopted a PAWS approach to water safety in Aberdeen.
- Support for and development of the risk assessment of Aberdeen's beach front.
- Primary and secondary signage with a unique code location installation and monitoring. This includes new signage planned at North Donmouth for 2023.
- Promotion of water safety campaigns, safety awareness messaging and initiatives.
- Group members participating in Drowning and Incident Review (DIR) Training.
- Water safety education in schools.
- Consultees on the Draft Aberdeen Beach Development Framework.
- Assessing safety improvements i.e., CCTV camera provision in the Beach vicinity.
- Regular sharing and discussion of water incidents and statistics from 2018 to present.
- Clean Up Aberdeen members.

The group meets regularly to consider progress against the collective plans, and to update and discuss insights from the jointly held incident plans. These inform the risk profile, education campaigns and search and rescue resources.

Aberdeen Beach Risk Assessment

A full beach risk assessment of Aberdeen beach is undertaken every 3 years by the RNLI and Aberdeen City Council. The assessment is due at the end of 2024.

The risk assessment is comprehensive and provides an action plan based on the observations reported in this assessment. It is the responsibility of Aberdeen City Council to manage and complete the plan.

The risk assessment and plan are communicated to and discussed with the Aberdeen Water Safety group. This gives assurance to ACC and provides for a wider discussion on Aberdeen's beach safety. It also ensures any recommendations

resulting from the assessment are talked through fully by the group prior to being implemented.

Public Rescue Equipment

Environmental Services has currently 71 pieces of public rescue equipment (life belts) in place on Aberdeen City Council land and has the responsibility for maintaining them. The Service maintains location maps showing all sites (beach, rivers, and ponds) with lifebelts, and undertakes a physical inspection of the equipment including relevant signage, to ensure equipment is accessible and useable. Inspection is undertaken a minimum of once per week (the beach front is inspected daily in the summer and twice a week in the winter).

41 lifebelts inspected twice weekly (4264 inspections in a year)

30 lifebelts inspected daily (10920 inspections in a year)

Total inspections per year – 15184

All inspections are recorded digitally. The digital recording gives 'live' information on inspection data and the system also flags up where an inspection has been missed. This ensures that any missed inspections are picked up and rechecked on the same day.

Inspections are reported to the Net Zero, Environment and Transport Committee through the performance report. An inspection target of 100% is set.

Signage has been added to the equipment which gives details of who to contact should the life belt be missing or vandalised. A new, full process and procedure has been adopted by the team.

Aberdeen Beach Signage

One of the key early priorities agreed by the Aberdeen Water Safety Group was to put in place new signage along the beach front. This work has been completed.

The 40 secondary signs have been sited along the lower promenade. Each sign has a unique reference number printed on the front and back of the sign, linked to its location. The road-facing side of the signs feature information about water safety, while the reverse includes the code which can be quoted to emergency services to help them find the location. These location codes have been passed to all the emergency services. This helps pinpoint closely any incidents that may occur along the beach.

The Primary Entrance Signs have been sited at various points along the seafront, from the Donmouth to Footdee. The signage gives onlookers their exact location, safety advice, beach information and guidance around hazards in the area, together with highlighting the nearest safety equipment.

New secondary signage is to be added to North Donmouth later in 2023.

RNLI Spot the Danger signs aimed at children have also been put in place at the beach front and placed at the two play parks along Aberdeen Beach at Footdee and the Beach Ballroom. This signage is also being considered for the Torry Battery.

Campaigns

The group includes all partners in the sharing of information and data and encourages all members to actively engage with each other's safety campaigns, both locally and nationally.

These campaigns have included, the National Marine Week Campaign, RNLI's Respect the Water campaign and Swim Safe program.

Aberdeen beach, A 'Ton of Water' display on the promenade has been in place for several years to help raise safety awareness in the area.

This display is simply a cube containing water and is used to successfully promote safety elsewhere in the UK. The RNLI have used the display as a focal point when promoting safety at the beach, setting up the gazebo nearby and issuing general safety information to passing members of the public.

The group also promote water safety in schools. This is done through information sharing and presentations.

Seaside Award

2023 saw Aberdeen retain its Seaside Award. This is the 16th year in a row that Aberdeen's beach has been recognised and awarded in this way. This is a fantastic achievement and recognises and celebrates all the hard work of our staff and the many volunteers who help care for the beach.

Awarded beaches demonstrate excellent beach management and environmental best practice ensuring the maintenance of high standards. The awards started in 1993 and are administered by Keep Scotland Beautiful.

The awards aim to celebrate all of Scotland's beaches and coastal communities whilst driving up the environmental standards around our coastline. Focusing on local environmental quality, the award is designed to complement the work currently undertaken by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency on bathing water quality and the RNLI on beach safety.

Awarded beaches demonstrate excellent beach management and environmental best practice ensuring the maintenance of high standards. The award recognises excellence across three key areas:

- Access, facilities, and safety – risk assessment, hazard warnings, rescue equipment, emergency plan.
- Local environmental quality – water quality information, pollution incident information litter, graffiti dog fouling etc.
- Community and heritage – community engagement, events and activities, interpretation panels and trails.

Aberdeen gained its first beach award in 2007 and has retained it every year since. The benefits of the award include,

- Independent accreditation showing the public that the beach area is well managed.
- Recognising and celebrating the efforts of all partners involved in offering an excellent beach experience.
- Well managed facilities offer recreational, educational and health and wellbeing benefits to the community.
- Economic benefits from high profile beach area which is attractive to tourists and increased revenue opportunities.

The Seaside Award is an important award that recognises all the hard work involved in keeping Aberdeen's beach front well maintained, accessible and safe.