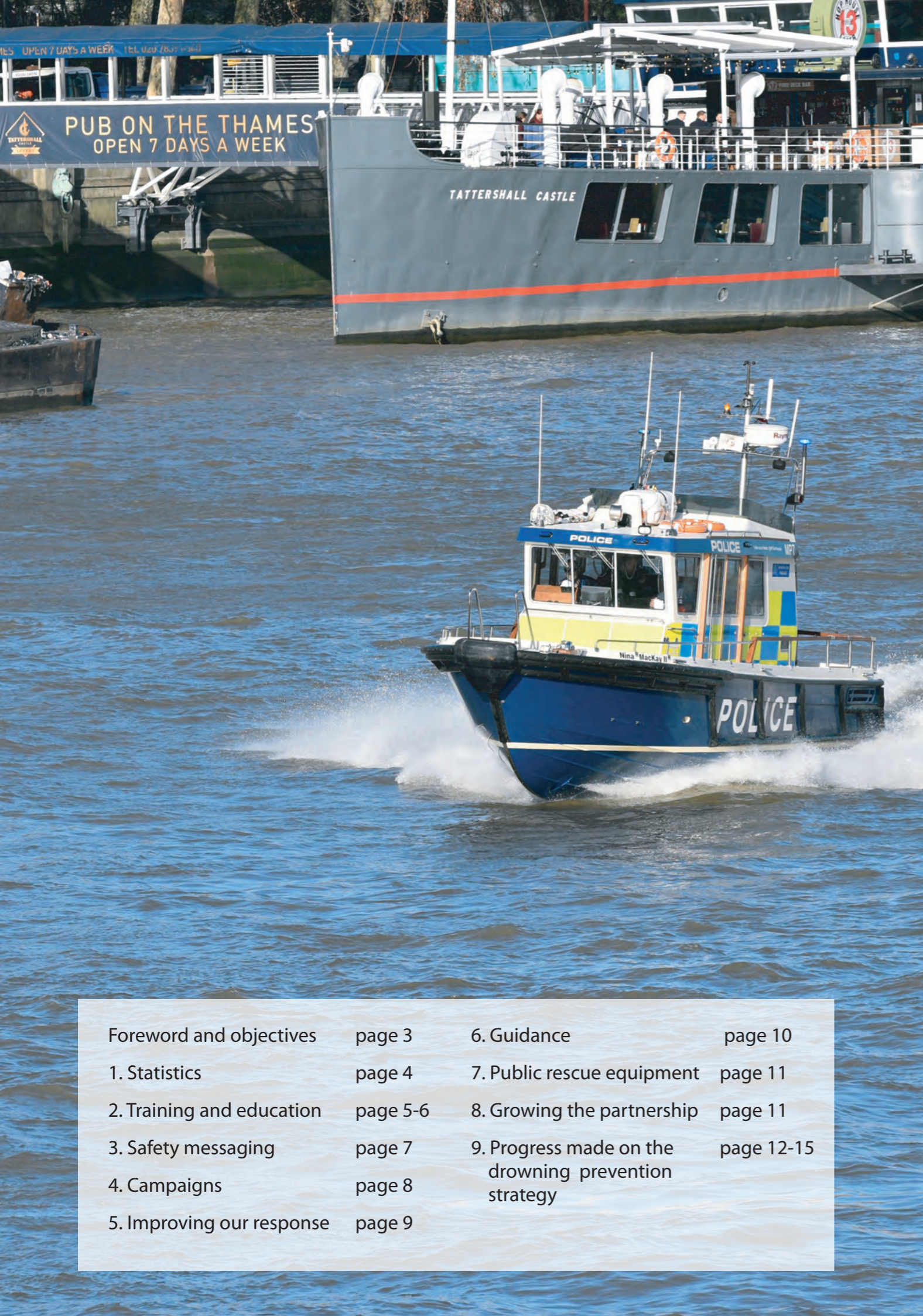


# Tidal Thames Water Safety Forum Progress Report May 2019 – May 2021



*Working together for a #SaferThames*



## Foreword and objectives

The Tidal Thames Water Safety Forum (TTWSF) is committed to reducing the number of people who drown in the tidal Thames, either accidentally or deliberately.

Launched in May 2019 by HRH The Duke of Cambridge, our [Drowning Prevention Strategy](#) sets out our collective ambition to improve safety on the tidal Thames, in line with our commitment to make it as safe a river as possible.

Since the launch, the forum’s founding members – Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI), London Fire Brigade (LFB), HM Coastguard (HMC), Metropolitan Police Marine Unit (MPMU), London Ambulance Service (LAS) and the Port of London Authority (PLA) – have been joined by City of London Corporation (COLC), Transport for London (TfL) and the City of London Police (COLP). All are committed to playing their part in delivering a safer Thames.

Two years on, this report provides information on our progress with delivering the strategy.



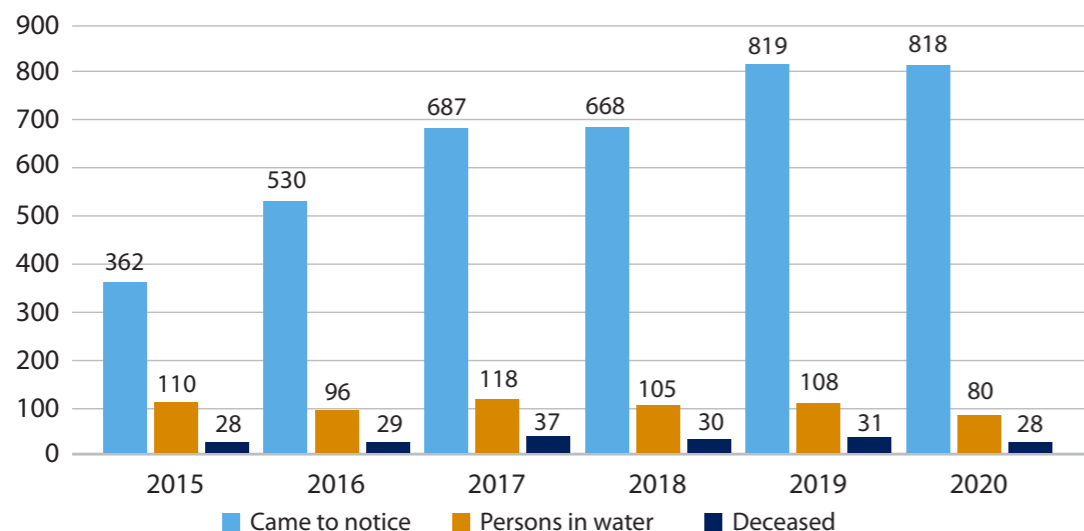
### Objectives

Our core objectives as set out in the Strategy, are to:

- 1:** Raise the awareness of self-harm and accidental drownings on the Thames with key policy makers, stakeholders and the public.
- 2:** Support the development and implementation of a programme to reduce the number of river-related suicide and self-harm drownings.
- 3:** Implement a robust, multi-layered programme to deliver education and water safety to targeted groups and events.
- 4:** Continue to maintain and improve the Search and Rescue response to incidents on the river.
- 5:** Ensure that safety is an intrinsic part of all future development.
- 6:** Establish the River Thames as an independently identifiable risk area.

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### 1. Statistics



Note on definition of categories

**Came to notice:** Number of times the emergency services were alerted to a person threatening to enter the water. These reports come through from sources including members of the public, concerned friends and relatives, people working on the river and the individuals themselves.

**Persons in water:** The number of people who entered the water.

**Deceased:** The number of people who drowned or took their lives on the tidal Thames. These figures are all individual counts, and the categories do not overlap.

Statistics provided by the NHS Police Liaison Officer for the tidal Thames.



### 2. Training and education

This table relates to the work of the partners in raising awareness of the risks of the tidal Thames and delivering education and water safety to targeted groups and events – two of our core objectives.

#### Community engagement

Event	Young People's Forum	National Junior Indoor Rowing Championships (NJIRC 2020)	Cadet training	Lifejacket workshops
Partners	LFB & LAS	RNLI & PLA	LFB	RNLI & PLA
Approx. Participants	15	1,800 teenagers	12 young people trained	120 adults
Description	Young people were brought together at Lambeth Fire Station to learn about water safety, drowning prevention and water safety first aid.	Partners worked together to run a safety stand at this event in east London, run by London Youth Rowing. Young people were able to ask questions and access free resources.	LFB cadets received water safety training. The LFB plan to extend this training across multiple borough cadet units.	As restrictions on outdoor sport eased, the RNLI and PLA provided online workshops for the watersports community, preparing for a safe return to boating.

#### CPD figures

Event	Water Safety Wednesdays	Safety First	Throwline training	Community Responder Initiative
Partners	RNLI	LFB & MPU	LFB	LFB & RNLI
Approx. Participants	Over 50,000 viewers	496 children in 3 schools (since March 2021)	120 adults	25 LFB staff
Description	Formed the <a href="#">Water Safety Wednesday</a> programme for children learning from home with learning materials, creative resources and video tutorials. Content has been converted into a short film for learning materials in and out of school.	<i>Safety First</i> is a Bluelight Collaboration funded by Met Police to deliver a wide range of topics to Year 8 students. LFB deliver water safety training (as well as road and fire safety). Delivery began in March 2021.	120 non-operational and control room staff trained to use throwlines.	This initiative upskills staff so that they are able to go out into the community and instruct others. Providing more training courses for staff based at venues along the water, such as bars and restaurants, is a key objective for 2021.

### Samaritans' suicide intervention training

The Samaritans have developed a one-day online training course for the TTWSF, aimed at people working on or near the tidal Thames. Using real-life case studies, it trains participants to identify vulnerable people and make an intervention. It focuses on key areas such as listening, understanding trauma and developing personal resilience. Due to the pandemic, this training was developed for an online setting – a first for the Samaritans.

**Jason Jaspal, assistant director of business development at the Samaritans, says:**

“Our vision is that fewer people die by suicide. We are very proud to be part of this industry-wide approach to create a safer environment for everyone. We are pleased to have worked with the TTWSF to develop intervention training for those working on or near the river. Together we are working to make the river a safer place for everyone. Together we can make change that saves lives.”



**Neil Withers, RNLI area lifesaving manager for the Thames, says:**



“As someone who is responsible for search and rescue on the river with a team of 400 volunteers and staff, this training is excellent on many levels. Foremost, for managing our own wellbeing and mental health, and for checking and monitoring people in crisis. Ultimately, this gives us the tools to safeguard how we work with people in need of help and assistance.”

### 3. Safety messaging

#### i) Adapting to behaviours

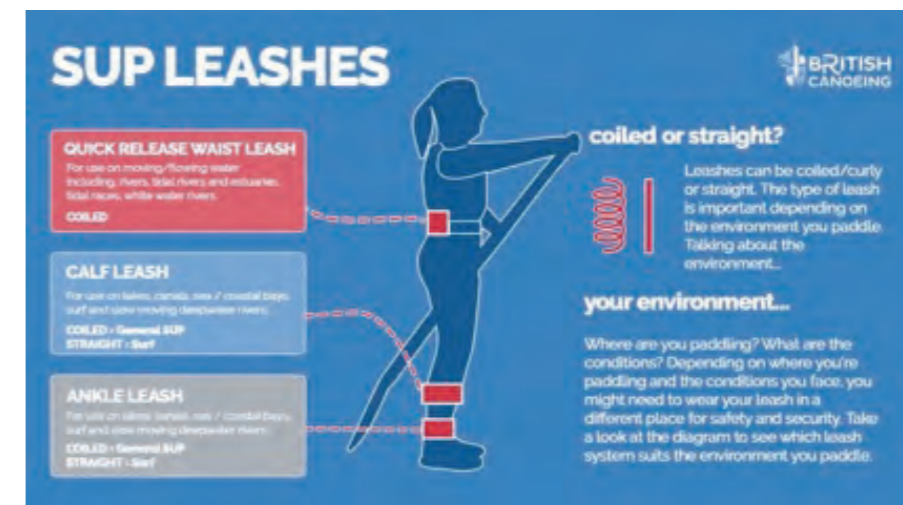
Warmer weather and travel restrictions meant hundreds of new river users were drawn to the water for the first time in summer 2020. Many beginners were unaware of the risks of the tideway or where to go to access reliable advice and we saw an increase in unsafe behaviour in West London.



More affordable equipment has opened up access to watersports and waterways. The forum is keen to support and promote safe recreational use of the tidal Thames. It is crucial for all involved to have the right skills, experience and equipment to take on the tideway.

#### ii) Paddling community advice

Equipment for the increasingly popular sport of stand-up paddleboarding (SUP) is often sold without any accompanying safety advice. In response to a near-miss incident in Richmond, we worked with delivery partners and British Canoeing to promote messaging on the appropriate use of leashes. Quick-release waist leashes are recommended for tidal water, ankle leashes are not.



## 4. Campaigns

### i) Time to Talk

In 2008, Neil Laybourn stopped a stranger from taking his own life on a bridge in central London. This stranger was Jonny Benjamin MBE who, years later, found Neil and thanked him for saving his life.

Since then, both Neil and Jonny have become leading advocates for mental health and co-founded the charity [Beyond](#).



Neil worked with the PLA to produce a [film, which was released on Time to Talk day](#) (4 February 2021), encouraging the public, particularly men, to talk more openly about their mental health.

The film highlighted the PLA’s work to look after both its employees and the tidal Thames; creating a culture of care for its employees by expanding its internal network of mental health first aiders, and looking after the river by working in partnership to enhance water safety. It has had over 1,400 views to date.

The film highlights the difference employers can make through having mental health first aiders, how colleagues can support one another during difficult times, and how the kindness of a stranger can make the difference between life or death.

### ii) GoodGym

Members of the public are key to highlighting safety issues on the river. They might be the first to witness an incident and call 999, to flag something that doesn’t look right, or directly approach someone if they look as though they are in distress. Lockdown meant that streets and bridges on the Thames were very quiet without the usual footfall of pedestrians, and street pastors were not present along the riverside.

Responding to a call to action for volunteers to patrol the riverside, [Good Gym](#) incorporated the Thames into ‘Mission Runs’. Volunteers combined exercise with looking out for people in distress and over 70 mission runs were completed in February and March. Although nobody came to the attention of the volunteers, it was reassuring to see that members of the public were willing to patrol the river.

Julia Shmotkina, GoodGym group operations, said: “We are really pleased to have supported the Safer Thames campaign through running, cycling, or walking by the Thames. Our mission is to combine doing good whilst getting fit, and I am very proud with the response of GoodGym members during the COVID-19 pandemic.”



## 5. Improving our response

### i) Search and rescue (SAR)

Coordinating search and rescue on the river, HM Coastguard work to ensure response times are as quick as possible. This is achieved through regular inter-agency debriefs and collaboration between partners and the regular review of emerging technology to ensure they are as effective as possible.

### ii) Improved facilities and equipment

Continuous improvements to facilities and technology help keep response times as quick as possible. Recent innovation by partners on the river to improve safety include:

- A HIAB crane fitted to both new fireboats at the LFB will be used for recovery of casualties and equipment from the water.
- LFB also now use thermal image cameras, which enhance vision in conditions such as fog and smoke.
- The Met Police has invested in facilities at Wapping Police Station, enhancing the process of understanding causes of any loss of life.

### iii) Mental health support

The emergency services might be called to situations where individuals are threatening to take their own lives. Within central London, there are trained mental health practitioners on standby to accompany police officers when alerted to people in distress near the river. They are able to access digital care records at the scene and, through understanding the history of the individual, treat the people involved more effectively.

Specialist teams such as this, with a mix of professions informing the response, can provide a speedy access to alternative pathways of care.

Additionally, a mental health nurse and NHS police liaison officer are now permanently based at Wapping Police Station, working alongside the Marine Police Unit, covering incidents from Dartford to Hampton Court. Their work ranges from liaising with multiple agencies and care workers, as part of an individual’s health care plan, to providing evidence to support the prosecution of criminal behaviour linked to the river.

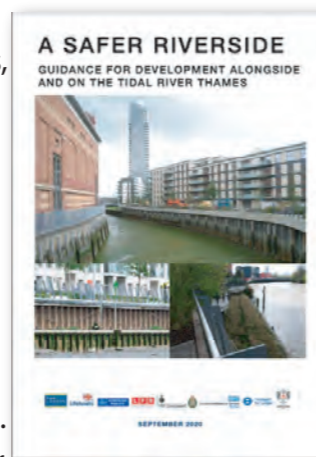


## 6. Guidance

### i) [A Safer Riverside](#)

A *Safer Riverside* is a guidance document for riverside landowners, setting out expectations for water safety within planning applications. It gives specific consideration to bridges, riverside edges, piers and jetties.

Lucy Owen, PLA deputy director of planning and environment, said: “Combining insight from multiple areas of expertise is the best way to make the river safer. This publication represents the consolidation of knowledge from all the relevant experts on how developers and planners can make the tidal Thames a safer place. We look forward to seeing it implemented within applications for a river works licence.”



Recommendations in the guide include adequate lighting and protected edges, to make accidental entries into the water less likely, and the installation and maintenance of public rescue equipment, such as grab chains and lifebuoys.

### ii) [Riverside Community Water Safety](#)

London’s population continues to grow, with more than ten million residents expected in the city by 2041.

Launched in Drowning Prevention week, our *Riverside Community Water Safety Guide* aims to educate those new to living or working by the tidal Thames. It advises on the dangers of the water, explains what to do in an emergency, and highlights where to find more information on how to enjoy the water safely.



### iii) **Event Organiser Guidance**

As well as providing [guidance for those organising an event on the tidal Thames](#), the PLA Harbour Master team provide their expertise to many organisations looking to run events on the river. Where notified and necessary, TTWSF partners attend events, expanding supervision along the tidal Thames.

## 7. Public rescue equipment

The extent to which public rescue equipment is managed along the Thames varies between locations. Within river works licensing applications, the PLA promotes the appropriate provision and maintenance of equipment, such as lifebuoys, throwlines and ladders.

The PLA is conducting an extensive mapping exercise to identify the current locations of public rescue equipment. Working in conjunction with local authorities and landowners, the aim is to ensure that missing or defective equipment is replaced or repaired promptly.

## 8. Growing the partnership

In 2020, the forum welcomed the City of London Corporation, TfL and City of London Police as members.



**City of London Corporation:** The governing body of the Square Mile, which also acts as the Port Health Authority for the tidal Thames.

**Transport for London, London River Services:** LRS is a division of Transport for London. It is responsible for the safety of all users of TfL-owned passenger piers, and for licensing charter and scheduled services operators within the TfL managed network.



**City of London Police:** Responsible for policing the Square Mile, which includes Tower Bridge, London Bridge, Blackfriars Bridge, Millennium Bridge and Southwark Bridge.

Whilst the majority of drownings on the tidal Thames occur in central London, the work of the forum does not stop at the capital’s boundary.

To share learning from this group as the strategy is delivered and explore issues in other areas of the tidal Thames, a second water safety forum was established in Kent in January 2020, focusing on the wider estuary. Its members include Kent County Council, Kent Fire and Rescue Service, RNLI, Rochester Bridge Trust, Kent Police, HM Coastguard, Highways England, PLA, South East Coast Ambulance Service, Gravesham Borough Council, Medway Council and Peel Ports.

Knowledge and best practice developed through the partnership is being replicated in other parts of the UK too. We have presented the work of the forum at the [RoSPA](#) Water Safety Conference, shared learning with police forces in other coastal locations around the country, and we have also joined the [National Suicide Prevention Alliance](#) and the [National Water Safety Forum](#).

We continue to consult with the Samaritans, RoSPA and RLSS on the delivery of the Drowning Prevention Strategy.

## 9. Progress across all areas of the Drowning Prevention Strategy

	What we intend to do	How we intend to do it	What we have done so far
1	Raise the awareness of self-harm and accidental drownings on the Thames with key policy makers, stakeholders and the public	Raise the profile of the TTWSF through positive engagement with politicians, public bodies, decision-makers and the public	A high profile strategy launch event, Samaritans engagement, alignment with the UK Drowning Prevention Strategy and the National Water Safety Forum, membership of the National Suicide Prevention Alliance and ongoing delivery of community education.
		Raise awareness of the risks and hazards associated with the Thames educating all who live, work and visit	Water safety educational programme is underway with schools. Launched a community responder programme, training people working in riverside pubs, bars and restaurants. Regular events and workshops held with sports clubs, cadets and community groups. Commissioned and launched Samaritans suicide intervention training, bespoke to the water.
		Understand and affect key behaviour changes towards the Thames	Developed an incident database for the tidal Thames which provides insight on behaviours. Many of those who come to notice are referred for specialist support.
		Influence and change policy to support the strategic aims and objectives	For new riverside developments we are actively encouraging developers to install public rescue equipment, and have provided riverside design guidance that highlights best practice.
2	Support the development and implementation of a programme to reduce the number of river-related suicide and self-harm drownings	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	We joined the national suicide prevention alliance and, between the forum members either sit on or Chair numerous safety, drowning and suicide prevention forums including City of London's Suicide Prevention group, the National Water Safety Forum and London Water Safety Forum. Our work with the Samaritans, community education and regular safety campaigns also contribute to this objective.
		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	The Samaritans intervention training was developed to meet this objective, as does the community responder programme. The Thames Skills Academy (supported by the PLA) also provide first responder training. Mental health support is now provided by each of the Forum members to their staff.
		Work with the NHS, charities, riverside communities and event organisers to expand supervision along the Thames to support an overall reduction in fatalities	Forum partners attend events throughout the year as part of supervision and to provide community education.
		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 effected	With mental health practitioners supporting emergency service calls, the care of individuals can be more specifically tailored. The emergency services have established places of safety to be able to provide immediate support and triage.
3	Implement a robust, multi-layered programme to deliver education and water safety to targeted groups and events	Change behaviours, in and around the water, of those who either witness someone, or who are themselves suffering mental crisis	We are working with mental health campaigners to raise the awareness of mental health, supporting positive intervention by the public.
		Help the public and river users to save more lives through campaigns to change behaviour	Our strongest examples of work on this have been the Samaritans suicide intervention training, the community responder programme and education of young people in water safety awareness.
		Deliver a water safety education programme, targeting schools and community groups	Our community engagement figures, provided in the document, show how we have done this and how we adapted to online measures during lockdown.
		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	TTWSF partners work closely with event organisers to ensure safety is paramount with all events, attending where required.

Continued ►

	What we intend to do	How we intend to do it	What we have done so far
4	Continue to maintain and improve the Search and Rescue (SAR) response to incidents on the river	Establish a single database, to provide accurate baseline information, enabling informed decisions to be made about SAR response	HM Coastguard coordinate SAR, and data established by the NHS police liaison officer and mental health team help to inform the response.
		Increase frequency of multi-agency planning exercises	SAR debriefs are in place, reviewing incident responses to ensure responses are as fast and effective as possible.
		Improve inter-agency debriefs and reviews when incidents occur	This is factored into the debriefs, as above.
5	Ensure that safety is an intrinsic part of all future development	Educate and influence bridge owners on the issue of suicide on the Thames and the work undertaken to tackle the issue at similar locations	Members of the TTWSF attend a quarterly meeting for bridge owners to brief on incidents, water safety and the work of the forum.
		Promote and where appropriate regulate the placement of public rescue equipment at high risk locations and at new riverside developments and crossings	Within river works licensing applications, the PLA promotes the appropriate provision and maintenance of equipment, such as lifebuoys, throwlines, and ladders.
		Engage with developers and riparian boroughs to improve the provision of public rescue equipment along the banks of the Thames, and fill in any gaps	Whilst this is underway for new developments, existing equipment is often poorly maintained. We will work with riparian boroughs to encourage better management of life saving equipment.
6	Establish the River Thames as an independently identifiable risk area	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	The Thames is now established as its own risk area in London.
		Establish a Forum of partners to develop a Thames Risk Register	Thames Resilience Panel established and a risk register is in development. The top 14 risks have been identified, including self-harm drowning and accidental drowning.







***We are committed to reducing the number  
of people who drown in the tidal Thames.***

***This document and other water safety information can be  
downloaded from [www.pla.co.uk/watersafety](http://www.pla.co.uk/watersafety)  
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