



**Norfolk Water
Safety Forum**

Norfolk Water Safety Strategy

2024-2026



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1. Foreword

Norfolk, with its picturesque coastline, serene waterways, and vibrant recreational opportunities is a place where water plays a central role in the lives of its residents and visitors. We want to ensure that everyone can enjoy water-based activities safely so the Water Safety Forum has developed its first Water Safety Strategy. This strategy aligns with the United Kingdom's national approach, and encompasses local initiatives tailored to the unique characteristics and risks posed by Norfolk's landscape.

Water safety is a vital concern, and Norfolk partners recognise the importance of proactive measures to reduce the numbers of water-related incidents which occur in our County. Sadly, over the last 5 years 22 people have drowned in Norfolk. These are preventable deaths, and each one is both a personal tragedy, with ongoing ramifications for families and friends, and has a lasting impact on emergency services and partner agencies involved.

The aim of our strategy is to forge strong partnerships across local authorities, emergency services, community organisations and clubs to ensure a coordinated approach to water safety so that we can reduce the number of fatalities in future.

Our strategy sets out five priority areas. We need:

- better **data and information** about who is at the greatest risk of water safety incidents so that we can target our resources;
- to ensure that our children and young people are **educated** about water safety;
- to understand how to mitigate **high risk behaviours** – such as drinking alcohol while out on the water – and **high risk sites**;
- to build on our already good **communications** to ensure our message is clear, accessible, coordinated and understood by all; and,
- to bring **leadership and resources** to promoting water safety.

Thank you for reading our strategy. Together we can be more effective than ever by targeting our activities, raising awareness of risks and making our communities safer.



C Sumner

**Ceri Sumner,
Chief Fire Officer, Norfolk**

2. Vision, aims and objectives

The purpose of Norfolk's Water Safety Strategy is to:

Prevent drowning fatalities, and other water safety incidents, in Norfolk by working in partnership to ensure consistent guidance for the safe enjoyment and management of activities in, on and around water.

This strategy has been developed by Norfolk's Water Safety Forum and is Norfolk's first Water Safety Strategy. The Forum aims to reduce both the numbers of fatalities in Norfolk and the number of water-related incidents, and to reduce water-related risk amongst the highest risk populations, groups and communities.

The strategy aims to help to deliver the UK Drowning Prevention Strategy 2016-2026 in Norfolk, by working in collaboration with partners.



3. Why do we need a strategy?

Over the past 15 years the policy on drowning prevention has changed radically. In 2014 the World Health Organisation stated that drowning is a serious and neglected global public health issue, claiming a shocking 372,000 lives each year¹. One of the key recommendations from this report was to encourage countries to develop national water safety plans, and so it was in 2016 that the National Water Safety Forum published the UK's first UK Drowning Prevention Strategy.

In response to the increased emphasis on drowning prevention activities Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service mobilised partners to set up the Norfolk Drowning Prevention Forum in 2015, to better understand and address water safety in the County.

Drowning is largely preventable.

Each year in the UK people die and suffer life-changing injuries as a result of incidents in the water. It is among one of the leading causes of accidental death. According to the National Water Safety Forum on average around 400 people in the UK die from accidental drowning each year, while a further 200 take their own lives in water. The Water Accident Information Database recorded 436 deaths by drowning in the England in 2022. Figure 1 shows the suspected headline causes. In 42 cases drugs and alcohol were found to be a contributing factor.

Figure 1:

Causes of drowning deaths 2022	
Accidental	145
Crime related	4
Natural causes	6
No cause recorded	127
Suicides	154
Total	436

Of those deaths thought to be accidental or from natural causes, 96 were amongst men – over 3 times the number amongst women.

¹World Health Organisation 2014: Global Report on Drowning: Preventing a leading killer

Norfolk has 84 miles of coastline, an extensive river network and, together with Suffolk, is home to the Broads National Park, with more than 125 miles of navigable waterways. The County provides water and land-based recreational opportunities all year round which thousands of local people and visitors enjoy. Tourism is important to Norfolk's economy, and the Broads alone attract over 7 million visitors each year.

In the summer months, the Broads and rivers are particularly busy with day-cruisers and holiday makers renting boats for a couple of weeks. Others paddleboard, canoe or sail.

Norfolk also has both residential and live aboard boaters. The former community live on official moorings with planning permission and facilities but live aboard boaters tend to move around the system and some may moor illegally for short or longer periods of time. Some members of this small but growing live aboard community are vulnerable which can lead to increased risks to safety.

Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service has attended over 200 incidents relating to water safety over the last 5 years and of these 22 resulted in fatalities. The service recorded a further 177 incidents which were dealt with by other emergency services, which resulted in a further 10 deaths.

There is some anecdotal evidence to suggest that a high proportion of water-related incidents were amongst people who were not native English-speakers, but data recording about protected characteristics is inconsistent and unreliable.

Drowning not only ends lives early, and leaves some with life changing injuries, it also has a huge impact on families, friends and on communities. It places a significant burden on society both in terms of direct costs and the years of life that are lost.

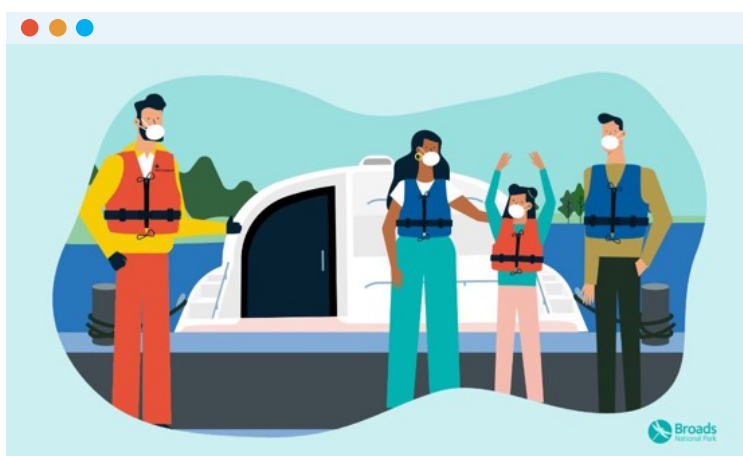
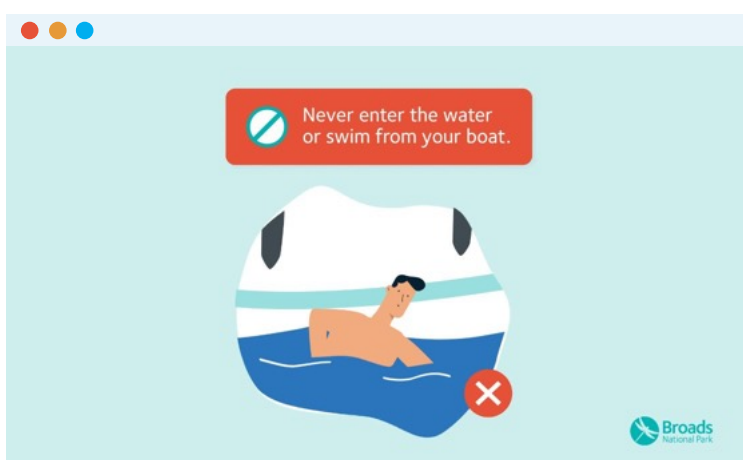


Case study:

Boards Authority Safety Videos

On July 4 2020 lockdown restrictions across England were eased by the Government and although travel restrictions to foreign destinations were still in place, domestic travel, public houses, hotels and restaurants were allowed to reopen. This unlocking saw demands from visitors on open spaces, domestic holiday locations and importantly for the broads, access to The Broads National Park. Hire Operators saw an increase from the public wanting day boats and longer-term hires, self-catering accommodation demands and overall visitor numbers increased.

In response to this, the Broads Authority produced 9 animated safety videos developed in partnership with other water safety organisations. These videos provide information on preparing for a trip, cover basic boat manoeuvres, such as mooring up, and also provide guidance on how to safely pass under bridges and across the tidal Breydon Water. The videos had over 50,000 YouTube views during the 2021 season and results from the Hire Boat Questionnaire show that 62% of those asked watched them, with 52% doing so prior to arriving for their holiday hire period. A further video, 'what to do in an emergency' was added at the start of the 2022 season.



4. Collaboration and partnership

“Collaboration is essential if we are to succeed in reducing fatalities around the waters of the UK. A step change in our approach is needed.”

George Rawlinson, Chair – National Water Safety Forum
UK Drowning Prevention Strategy 2016-2026

Norfolk’s Water Safety Forum is a broad partnership that encompasses all organisations who are interested in water safety and those representing water-related recreational activities.

None of the partners involved in drowning prevention activities would be able to have the same impact on water safety individually that the partnership has together.

Leadership, clarity of roles and responsibilities and engagement with different communities is key to make lasting change. Without the focus that the Forum brings to drowning prevention and the ethos of partnership working much less would be achieved.

Among the forum’s membership are:

- Rescue services
- Regulators
- Navigation and harbour authorities
- Local government and the Broads Authority
- Mineral Products Association
- Public Health
- Water sports and leisure activity groups
- Educational Services

5. Priorities

This strategy reflects the roles and responsibilities, and the aims and objectives of its constituent members and separates broadly into five key areas:

- Better data and knowledge
- Education
- High risk behaviours and high risk sites
- Communications
- Leadership and resources



Better data and information

Understanding the nature and extent of issues relating to water safety; causes of drowning fatalities and other incidents; and, evidence on which groups are most at risk from water related incidents is the key to making informed policy and decisions to reduce harms. Currently data is patchy and inconsistent, different organisations have different understanding of the numbers of fatalities and the causes of them. Data regarding those most at risk from drowning is particularly patchy with little or no recorded data about the protected characteristics of those involved in incidents. Holding this data could help partners target responses to communities particularly at risk. Equally better understanding of data on suicide in water would allow better mitigation measures to be put in place, if appropriate.

Norfolk's Priorities

- Implement a new database in Norfolk to better understand the nature of the water safety incidents and resources used to respond to them
- Work with the National Safety Forum on development of its revised Water Incident Database (WAID) to better understand the nature of water safety incidents as well as fatalities, and work with Coroners and the Marine Accident Investigation Branch
- Database of landowners adjacent to watercourses
- Collect better data on the protected characteristics of people involved in water safety incidents to enable targeting of water safety activities to communities most at risk
- Understand better the nature of water self-harm and investigate potential mitigation measures

Education

We need to ensure that young people not only learn to swim but are educated about water safety and risks that exist around rivers, lakes and broads, and at the seaside.

Swim England estimate that nationally 1 in 3 children will not be able to swim the recommended 25 metres when leaving primary school between 2021-22 and 2025-26. Swimming is the only sport to be included within the national curriculum physical education programme of study. All primary schools must provide swimming and water safety lessons in either key stage 1 or 2, but research has consistently shown that only half of pupils meet the required standard. Each pupil on leaving primary school should be able to:

- Perform safe self-rescue in different water-based situations
- Swim at least 25 metres
- Be able to use a range of strokes

Training is not just for the young however. The Forum can build on the excellent programme it has developed educating businesses – bars, restaurants and clubs in particular – located in areas near water to ensure the safety of their customers. And first responders can undertake training in sensitivity to the needs of those with different knowledge and understanding, and those from different cultures and religions to improve outcomes for all.



Case study:

Waterside Responder Programme

Since 2016 the Waterside Responder scheme has been actively rolled out nationally and has proved invaluable in Norfolk due to the vast network of the Broads which welcome an increasing number of visitors each year.

The programme aims to give waterside communities a better understanding of potential risks and hazards in and around the water, provide safety advice to those enjoying the waterside and to provide training in safe rescue using a throwline in the event of an emergency.

Since the roll out on the Broads network began, 32 waterside businesses have been trained and those premises now hold a throwline as lifesaving equipment. Emergency services have reached out to high risk areas of the night time economy in Norwich City Centre, for example, but also areas of high tourist population and remote areas such as Wroxham and Horning.

The program involves;

- A multi-agency approach including the RNLI, HM Coastguard, Norfolk Marine Police and Norfolk FRS
- Local liaison with local waterside businesses and organisations
- Licensing teams from Norfolk County Council
- Supporting the various national drowning prevention campaigns e.g. #BeWaterAware

Both nationally and locally the training has proved a success and lifesaving action has been taken as a direct result of the waterside responder training received.

Once again, this proactive training is breaking the drowning prevention chain and therefore has the potential to reduce drowning incidents and fatalities in Norfolk. The program ensures that waterside communities are continuing to work with us to make drowning prevention a priority.



Norfolk's Priorities

- Develop a better understanding of the extent of school swimming programmes in Norfolk and the barriers to running such programmes
- Improve the numbers of Norfolk primary school children able to meet the Swim England standard by the age of 12.
- Develop programmes with and for schools to promote children's understanding about the risks around water
- Develop and promote adult swimming programmes particularly targeted at those communities at greater risk of water safety incidents
- Develop further training programmes with first responders to develop understanding of those with different knowledge, cultures and religions in respect to water safety incidents
- Continue to deliver business education, especially focused on the night-time economy, to ensure safety of customers leaving bars and nightclubs near water



High risk behaviours and high risk sites

Several high risk behaviours are thought to be instrumental in many water safety incidents such as drinking alcohol while undertaking recreational activities on water, or not wearing lifejackets whilst on the water in a boat or canoe, for example. The Forum would like to trial behavioural science techniques, such as COM-B or the behaviour change wheel, to change these behaviours.

Meanwhile a number of high risk sites exist in Norfolk where it would be helpful to have set risk assessments and management plans in place involving all partners prior to problems arising. These plans could ensure clarity between partners on roles and responsibilities, and crucially include all partners involved helping to draft management plans.

On the flip side, promotion of sites where there is supervision or lifeguards in areas adjacent to high risk sites will help to manage risks.

Norfolk's priorities

- Identify risky behaviours to target through behaviour change techniques and work to develop, implement and evaluate interventions
- Develop risk assessment and management plans for high risk sites, setting out clear roles and responsibilities for relevant landowners and agencies
- Create and maintain a database relating to high risk sites to share amongst relevant partners

Case study:

Brancaster

Brancaster Beach is a popular beach to visit on the North Norfolk Coast attracting a wide a range of visitors throughout the year from the UK and abroad.

The beach itself has a shallow shelving sand topography which creates inshore sandbars due to its extensive tidal range. This attracts coastal walkers exploring the coastline, swimmers and bathers as well as kite surfers and windsurfers. A combination of the picturesque coastline and the sandbar topography tends to invite beach users to walk out to a local wreck 'SS-Vina' which is partially exposed. The wreck itself sits on a sandbar which is accessible at low tide but poses a significant risk on an incoming tide as the water floods around the sandbars cutting off access back to dry land.

Over recent years there have been numerous incidents where people have become cut off by the tide whilst exploring the wreck. In just one weekend in 2019 the Coastguard and the RNLI co-ordinated the rescue of 20 people. And in 2020, 60 people were rescued on Brancaster in July and August.

As a result emergency services, landowners and the local community have worked together to educate visitors about the dangers, as well as improving surveillance and proactive interventions on Brancaster beach. And network meetings with the National Trust, Natural England, Royal West Norfolk Golf Club, the Coastguard and the RNLI have been held to better understand the issues and responsibilities.

Interventions included:

- Beach signage assessments and public rescue equipment audits
- Education posters and resources for hospitality businesses
- High risk patrols by Coastguard Rescue Teams
- Introduction of a new National Coastwatch Institution surveillance post
- Introduction of face-to-face interactions through a new RNLI volunteer scheme

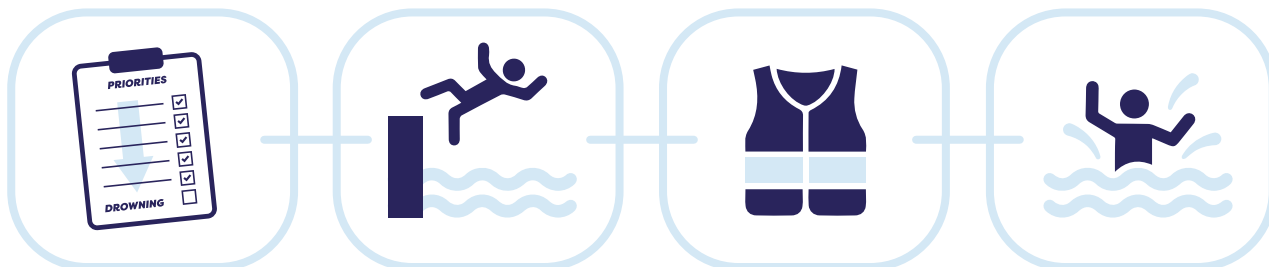
All aspects of the work is ongoing through regular liaison with the partners in the local area and via increased beach interventions over the summer months, and already has proven beneficial with a 50% reduction in call outs in the summer months of 2021 compared with 2020. There has been an upsurge in the community response leading to an increase in volunteers to carry out patrols and interventions at Brancaster.

In addition, the work is enabling us to introduce a positive break in the drowning prevention chain.

The Drowning Chain

Why are people dying in the water?

There are some key links in the chain that lead to drowning:



Preventing drowning is not a priority

Places are not safe / people are isolated

People cannot – or do not – behave safely

People cannot look after – or save themselves

Landowners are making drowning prevention a priority; patrols, surveillance and interventions are ensuring people are not isolated; and people are openly encouraged to act safely preventing the occurrence of incidents where people cannot save themselves.

HM Coastguard **Lifeboats**

DANGER! DISAPPEARING BEACH

Every year, RNLI crews rescue people exploring the Norfolk coastline.

Brancaster, Scolt Head, Wells-next-the-Sea and Hunstanton are prone to interlocking sandbars that create deep water channels and fast flowing water. They may look safe at low tide but the sea floods back in very quickly, cutting sightseers off from land. Some have drowned trying to escape.

You won't outswim the powerful currents and will end up in serious danger. **Don't risk it!**

The poster features an illustration of a family of five walking away from the viewer on a beach.

HM Coastguard **Lifeboats**

IN AN EMERGENCY
call **999** or **112** and
ask for the coastguard

The poster features an illustration of a family of five standing on a small, isolated sandbar in the middle of the ocean, looking distressed.

The RNLI is the charity that saves lives at sea
Royal National Lifeboat Institution, a charity registered in England and Wales (209628), Scotland (SC287788),
the Republic of Ireland (2002810), the Bailiwicks of Jersey (19), Guernsey (10), the Bailiwicks of Guernsey and Alderney

Communications

Norfolk's Water Safety Forum already undertakes much joint communications and campaigns work. Developing this work further, by setting up a website housing information and advice for the general public and teachers, for example, will help to reinforce the messages the Forum wish to promote. Full use should be made of national resources developed by the National Water Safety Forum, and their visible and recognisable brand #respect the water.

Norfolk's priorities

- Manage joined up communications and campaign calendars
- Ensure advice and guidance is share across the partnership to avoid promoting confusing messaging
- Develop shared resources, and use national resources, to be promoted through a Water Safety website for Norfolk



Leadership and Resources

The Norfolk Water Safety Forum, with the weight of its membership behind it, should be prepared to provide leadership in water safety management and be able to communicate and lobby government and speak with one voice to communicate messages. For example, better understanding and clarity of the statutory duties of Fire and Rescue services in water safety would ensure activities are not marginalised. Or, as referred to earlier, pushing government to ensure Ofsted includes swimming in its inspection regime would help to raise swimming up the agenda for primary schools.

Equally to fully deliver this strategy will take resources. A key role for the Forum going forward will be to find ways to fund and staff initiatives to promote water safety. A key action coming out of this strategy is to find funding to appoint a dedicated drowning prevention officer to be tasked by the Forum.

Norfolk's priorities

- Develop joint lobbying messages for government
- Joint bid for funds to roll out water safety initiatives
- Funding for a dedicated water safety officer

6. Governance and reporting

The Norfolk Water Safety Forum was set up in 2015, led by the County’s Fire and Rescue Service, and has brought together key agencies keen to address water safety issues and prevent drowning. However, the forum does not have statutory weight or escalation routes to address unresolved issues.

The Terms of Reference for the Norfolk Water Safety Forum (updated in February 2022) are attached at Appendix A. Clear governance is key in delivering the new more proactive approach set out in this strategy.

It is therefore proposed that the Norfolk Water Safety Forum reports into the Norfolk Community Safety Partnership.



This current strategy runs from 2024 to 2026 to ensure alignment with the National Water Safety Forum’s UK Drowning Prevention Strategy 2016-2026. It is proposed to establish links with the National Water Safety Forum by providing Norfolk representation to both its coastal and inland waters subgroups.

The Norfolk Water Safety Forum aims to draft annual implementation plans to set out its priority actions for each year on the basis of calendar years. Each year the forum will provide a progress report to NCCSP setting out its achievements and challenges in the previous year.

Appendix A

Norfolk Water Safety and Drowning Prevention Group

Terms of Reference

The Norfolk Water Safety and Drowning Prevention Group is aligned to the National Water Safety Forum UK Drowning Prevention Strategy 2016-2026 to deliver the aims and objectives of this strategy within Norfolk.

The group supports the principle that as far as is reasonable open water should be a public amenity and participation in water-based activity is encouraged.

The aim of the group is to prevent drowning fatalities in Norfolk by working in partnership, to do this the group is comprised of the key stakeholders within water safety and drowning prevention in Norfolk which includes:

- Broads Authority
- HM Coastguard
- Mineral Products Association
- Norfolk Constabulary
- Norfolk County Council
- Norfolk Fire and Rescue Service
- Royal Lifesaving Society
- Royal National Lifeboat Institution
- Local Authorities
- Public Health
- Key Environmental and Land-owners
- Water sports and Leisure activity groups
- Environment Agency

Other stakeholders will be included where appropriate

The objectives of the group are:

- Contribute to the WAID database to build up information on water related incidents in order to identify patterns and target prevention and education campaigns and direct prevention work.
- Support the delivery of national drowning prevention and water safety strategies, campaigns and messages in Norfolk.
- Develop a multi-agency approach to the delivery of Norfolk's drowning prevention strategy.
- Provide consistent and uniform messages across Norfolk.
- Work in partnership to prevent drowning and reduce water related incidents.
- To increase the awareness of water related risks within communities in Norfolk and where appropriate to target specific at risk groups.

The group will meet quarterly but the timescale may be reduced when water safety activity is expected to increase