

Report of the Cabinet Member for Homes & Safer Communities

River Safety Update

Introduction

1. This report provides an update on the work that the council is undertaking to address issues around river safety, how it is working in partnership and requests the release of capital funding to support physical improvements to reduce the risks associated with the rivers in York.

Background

2. York is situated at the confluence of two rivers, the Ouse and the Foss. Both rivers are major features of the city and are part of its attraction as one of the most popular tourist destinations in the UK. Whilst the rivers are attractive to visitors and residents, they also pose a risk. In particular, the Ouse has strong currents and at times can be fast flowing, particularly when in flood.
3. When considering incidents relating to the rivers compared with other incidents that can cause harm, they are rare, however when they do occur they can often have the most devastating outcomes. Since 2011 there has been an increase in fatalities associated with the river. In 2011 alone, three fatalities occurred, leading to the 'Think don't swim' campaign. The campaign included a hard hitting educational film and beer mats carrying a message about the danger of jumping into York's rivers being disseminated in bars and clubs across the city.
4. York experiences very few incidents during the day time associated with the river, the majority of fatalities associated with the river occur during the late night early morning period. The common denominator in the majority of fatalities has been over consumption of alcohol leading to risky behaviour, whether that be voluntarily jumping into the river or accidentally falling in.
5. The council along with its partners have taken a number of actions / interventions to help address the impact of alcohol within the city with

the desired outcome being the reduction of harm, including harm associated with the rivers. Actions / interventions have included:

- **Operation Safari** - This is a multi-agency operational model to combat alcohol related violence and disorder at key times of the year;
 - **Operation Erase** - This is a multi-agency operation to tackle the large number of people coming to York at weekends and consuming large amounts of alcohol;
 - **Work with Pubwatch**- Discussions through Pubwatch to look at the issue of 5pm-8pm closure of businesses in the city and ways to encourage visitors to visit or remain in the city at this time;
 - **Alcohol Restriction Zone (ARZ)** - The new ARZ covers the area within the Bar Walls. Under the development of the joint police/City of York Council Anti-social behaviour Hub, Council Enforcement Officers will also have the power to seize alcohol granted by the Chief Constable under the Community Safety Accreditation Scheme.
 - **Cumulative Impact Zone Review (CIZ)** – The CIZ has been extended to include the Back Swinegate area, expansion to the Goodramgate area and expansion into the Fossgate area as well as inclusion of missing properties in Spurriergate.
 - **Under-age drinking/test purchase operations** – The council Trading Standards team undertakes test purchasing operations.
6. Whilst the above important interventions are taking place, to ensure that we were also considering the physical issues associated with the rivers, earlier this year the council commissioned The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) to conduct an inland water safety review. The overall aim of the review was to identify any areas where physical controls need to be changed to meet current safety expectations and to identify any overall management arrangements that need to be implemented to maintain an acceptable level of public safety across the Councils' portfolio.
7. The key actions arising for the council from the report are:

Provision of rescue equipment:

- Replace the 35 lifebelts currently on the Ouse and 14 on the Foss
- Develop a revised Programme of inspecting lifebelts
- Update safety Information on the use of life rings

Public realm design, including edge protection, physical barriers

- RoSPA recommends standard design edge protection
- Post and chain fencing to be upgraded or replaced with new standard edge protection at Wellington Row, Blue Bridge area and Queen Staith;
- Survey and refresh existing grab rails and install new ones especially on the canalised sections of the rivers;
- Minor renovation works for handrails, painting and surfaces will be reviewed and refreshed;
- Consider use of limited or permanent fixed emergency-only lighting for sections near and under Ouse Bridge – will be discussed with Fire and Rescue.

Education and Campaigns

RoSPA's recommended water safety campaigns, training on raising the alarm and education.

In the intervening period between the commissioning and receipt of the report a number of initiatives have already been developed:

- From this term, the National Curriculum will include water safety and aquatic skills and the ASA are launching a new swimming award scheme. CYC's pools each have 12 primary schools using their pools for in-school lessons.
- During Drowning Prevention Week (21–29 June 2014) CYC funded water safety lessons and awareness sessions with CYC's Energise Leisure Centre
- Plan Safe, Drink Safe, Home Safe. Launched in July the campaign was developed and market-tested by York St John University Students' Union and adopted by River Safety Group. The campaign aims to give people clear, practical advice on planning a great, safe night out and a safe journey home.
- CYC's advised University of York Student Union on its new NightSafe service with volunteers patrolling the City Centre on Wednesday and Sunday nights, including riverside areas.
- Don't Drink and Drown will be launched by the Royal Lifesaving Society on 2 October at University of York in Freshers' Week, warning students to steer clear of open water when under the influence of alcohol.
- Training will be given to security staff, Street Angels and others working/volunteering near the river banks, in how to deploy life

belts, to ask for Fire and Rescue when dialling 999 and how to raise alarm.

Leadership and Co-ordination

RoSPA recommends a board level-agreed water safety policy strategy is developed and reviewed and jointly held by SYP members.

- The River Safety Group was established earlier this year in addition to CYC's existing emergency planning service.
- A Strategic board is jointly chaired by the council Cabinet Member, Cllr Simpson-Laing & the Police & Crime Commissioner, Julia Mulligan has been established.

Options

8. **Option 1** – Approve the release of capital funding from contingency to undertake the physical works arising from the recommendation from the RoSPA report as outlined in Para 7 under the headings, Provision of Rescue Equipment and Public realm design, including edge protection, physical barriers
9. **Option 2** – Not release funding to undertake all or some of the works outlined in Para 7 under the headings, Provision of Rescue Equipment and Public realm design, including edge protection and physical barriers

Analysis

10. Approval of option 1 will enable the council to undertake the necessary work to upgrade and increase rescue equipment and physical improvements to remove some of the risks associated with the city's rivers.
11. A lot of the work associated with the recommendations under the headings, Education & Campaigns and Leadership & Co-ordination are already underway. Additional work will be undertaken through the city's Community Safety Partnership, Safer York Partnership.
12. It is estimated that the costs of the recommended capital works is in the region of £100k (final costs will be determined following procurement). There is currently £483k available within capital contingency in 2014/15.

Council Plan

13. The work associated with river safety specifically supports the Protecting Vulnerable People priority within the Council Plan.

- **Protect vulnerable people** – the proposed works will ensure that, as far as possible, a safe environment is maintained to help ensure the risk of injury or harm is reduced.

Implications

14. The implications arising from this report are:

- **Financial** - It is estimated that the costs of all the physical works is in the region of £100k. It is requested that this funding is released from Capital Contingency to ensure that these urgent works can be carried out. All works will be procured in accordance with the council's procurement policies. There are sufficient funds within Capital Contingency.
- **Human Resources (HR)** - None
- **Equalities** – None
- **Legal** - None
- **Crime and Disorder** - The works outlined in this report, along with the wider interventions around education and understanding the impacts of alcohol on personal safety will have a positive impact on reducing crime & disorder.
- **Information Technology (IT)** - None
- **Property** – None
- **Other** – Significant work has been undertaken in the last few years as part Reinvigorate York on public realm design and materials standards in the city centre. Whilst clearly the design of any physical measures need to be fit for purpose, i.e. meet the safety requirements, any physical works should take account of the design standards established.

Risk Management

15. The risks associated with approving the recommendation of this report are minimal. If the cabinet choose not to release the funding to

undertake work associated with the RoSPA report, there is potential that this could present a reputational risk to the council.

Recommendations

16. Cabinet are asked to:

- Approve Option 1 to release funding from capital contingency to undertake the physical works arising from the recommendation from the RoSPA report as outlined in Para 7 under the headings, Provision of Rescue Equipment and Public realm design, including edge protection and physical barrier.

Reason: To ensure that the council's river safety measures are up to date and reduce the potential for harm associated with river incidents.

Contact Details

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	Report Approved	√	Date 26 th Sept 2014
Wards Affected: <i>List wards or tick box to indicate all</i>	All		√
For further information please contact the author of the report			

Annexes – None

Background Papers: RoSPA Report 2014

List of Abbreviations used in the report:

RoSPA - The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents

SYP – Safer York Partnership

ARZ - Alcohol Restriction Zone

CIZ - Cumulative Impact Zone Review