

Establishing a Water Safety Partnership

Guidance Document



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Introduction

Wales boasts 870 miles of coastline and is home to the second largest tidal range in the world. The country also features a diverse range of inland water bodies, including lakes, reservoirs, canals, rivers, and streams. Both rural and urban communities in Wales are situated in close proximity to these water sources.

On average, 51 people lose their life each year due to a water-related fatality in Wales. 25 of these are classified as accidental, which gives an accidental drowning rate of 0.80 per 100,000 population. This rate is more than double the drowning rate of the UK as a whole.

Background

Water Safety Wales (WSW) has a vision of a Wales without drowning. It works to prevent water-related fatalities through the implementation of Wales' Drowning Prevention Strategy (WDPS), which has seven key aims:

- Improve water incident data and intelligence in Wales
- Promote and develop learning to swim and water safety education
- Promote and support the development of water safety plans
- Promote public awareness of water-related risks and ensure consistent messages reach the right people at the right time
- Promote the safe participation in water activities across Wales
- Contribute to the reduction of water-related suicide
- Work with families affected by water-related incidents.

In 2022, The Welsh Parliament Petitions Committee published Mark Allen's Law in response to the death of Mark Allen who tragically drowned in 2018. Part of the recommendations in Mark Allen's Law called for Welsh Government to:

- Allocate a specific minister to co-ordinate and lead on water safety and drowning prevention
- To formalise the relationship between WSW and Welsh Government
- Provide funding for the delivery of WDPS.

The Welsh Government responded to these recommendations by incorporating drowning prevention into the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Change and Rural Affairs' portfolio, establishing formal connections between WSW and the Welsh Government, and allocating funds to WSW, via the Royal Society for Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA), to help implement WDPS.

The importance of local groups

While the Welsh Government's commitment to drowning prevention is evident and WSW has set the strategic direction through WDPS, interventions to prevent drowning deaths also need to occur at the local level.

A partnership approach to raising water safety awareness and reducing drowning means agencies can combine the knowledge and experience of those individuals and organisations in local communities that best understand their local risks. It also links to the national strategic direction set by WSW and is the preferred method for delivering water safety at local or regional level.

A Water Safety Partnership (WSP) should:

- Be guided by data and local knowledge to prevent future incidents
- Develop and implement a plan to reduce drowning
- Share and recognise existing good practices currently undertaken by partner agencies
- React to emergency incidents to reduce their reoccurrence and impact.

The purpose of this document

This guidance document has been developed to assist local authorities, emergency services, third sector organisations, landowners and other groups with an interest in water safety to establish WSPs in Wales. Using local knowledge and with the support of WSW, WSP's can help work towards a reduction of drowning fatalities in a given area.

It is acknowledged that some areas in Wales do already have established and successful WSPs. However, there is no consistent approach within Wales and this is something that both the Welsh Government and WSW hopes to address through this document.

In addition to this document there is additional guidance on WSP's (or similar groups) from across the UK:

- The National National Water Safety Forum – [Water safety partnerships - Guidance](#)
- Royal Life Saving Society UK – [A practical implementation guide to setting up a Water Safety Action Group and designing a local Water Safety Plan](#)
- Water Safety Scotland – [Partnership Approach to Water Safety \(PAWS\)](#)

Case study

Pembrokeshire Water Safety Partnership

In 2019, various agencies in Pembrokeshire were conducting water safety education and drowning prevention initiatives. To enhance effectiveness, the Pembrokeshire Water Safety Forum was established in late 2019, chaired by the RNLI. The Forum meets quarterly, involving multiple organisations, including Pembrokeshire County Council.

The Forum shares data and local knowledge to identify trends and prioritise at-risk groups. Working groups focus on specific projects to address these priorities.

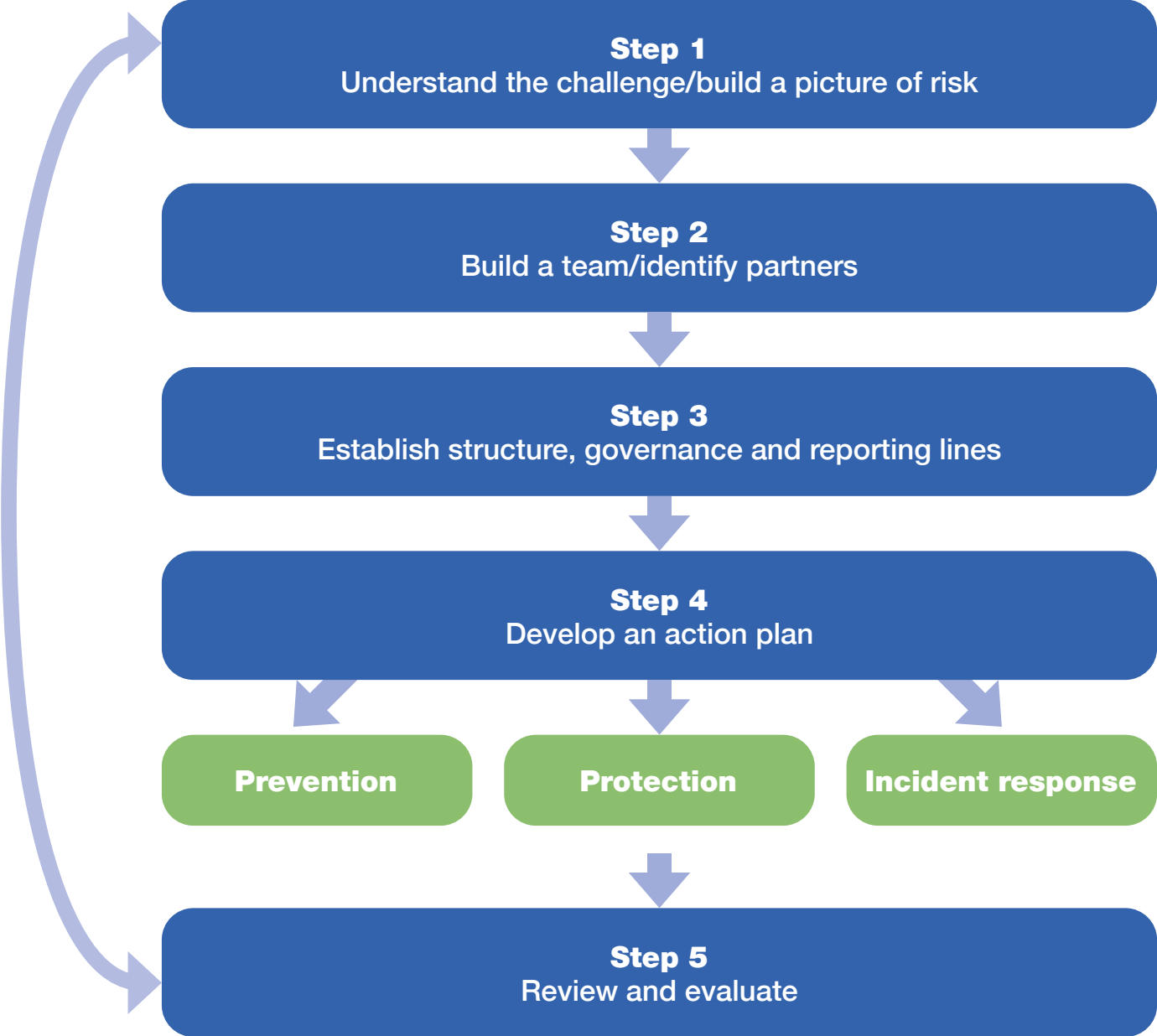
Key activities include:

- **Open Water, Jet Ski, and Stand Up Paddleboard subgroups:** Running events, sharing resources, and promoting safety.
- **Blue Lagoon, Abereddy:** Improved signage and education interventions have led to a reduction in emergency calls.
- **Breakwater and Wave Events:** Multi-agency education events on cliff jumping and tombstoning for local students.
- **Pembrokeshire Coastal Forum:** Training outdoor activity instructors on water safety conversations and emergency roles.

Since its inception, the Forum has made drowning prevention work more coordinated, visible, and effective. Organisations collaborate, share resources, understand risks, and implement best practices.



Steps for the establishment of a successful WSP



Step 1

Understand the challenge/build the picture of risk

Risks should be identified through using established datasets such as the Water Incident Database (WAID) and incident data.

WAID is a service developed by the National Water Safety Forum (NWSF) to bring together water-related incident data from a wide range of sources within the UK search and rescue region. Its annual reports include demographic and incident-based data as well as information about the location type for drowning incidents. These reports are available on the NWSF [website](#). Other data should also be considered such as Search and Rescue incident data on non-fatal incidents.

A risk profile should be built to identify priorities for the WSP to focus on

- **Locations:** Where are people drowning or getting into difficulty?
- **Activities:** What were people doing when they drowned or got into difficulty (walking, boating, swimming etc.)? What were the circumstances which led to the incident?
- **Demographic:** Who are the people most at risk. Consider factors like age and sex.

Step 2

Build a team/identify partners

WSPs should identify and invite local landowners, stakeholders, and agencies or individuals currently involved in water safety activities, awareness campaigns, or incident response.

The WSP should be clear in its aims to enhance existing good practices and expand their impact through a co-ordinated approach that is agreeable to all local partners.

Suggested partners include (but are not limited to):

- Local Authority (safety advisor, education lead, public health, swimming coordinator)
- Fire Rescue Service
- Coastguard
- RNLI
- RoSPA
- Police
- Canal and River Trust
- Natural Resources Wales
- Mineral Products Association (Quarrys etc)
- Private landowners
- MP's/MS's/Councillors
- Leisure providers.

Step 3

Establish structure, governance and reporting lines

WSW recommends the following basic governance procedures:

- Each group should have a Terms of Reference which outlines the expectations of the group and their link to WSW (see appendix 1)
- Each group should have a reporting link to the Local Authority. The Local Authority should also be encouraged to create a water safety policy
- Each group should elect a Chair to steer and lead the WSP (role of chair outlined in appendix 2)
- Each group should meet biannually or more frequently if required (a suggested agenda is provided in appendix 3). More frequent meetings are likely to be needed as new groups are being established
- Each group should report to WSW (contact info@watersafetywales.org.uk), with a member of the WSW Steering Group to sit on the WSP.

Step 4

Develop an action plan

An action plan should be created and focus on prevention, protection and incident response.

Prevention

Communications – WSW produces bilingual communication toolkits which contain prevention messaging, social media posts and images to help communicate water safety messages on a range of topics (these are available by contacting info@watersafetywales.org.uk). These toolkits communicate both what to do in an emergency and preventative measures. The WSP should encourage water safety messaging to be communicated in a coordinated and consistent manner within their area.

- **Education** – Water safety education is delivered in Wales by several organisations, including charities and emergency responders. The WSP should work to promote water safety education within their area.
- **Campaigns** – Water safety campaigns can be a useful way to draw attention to water safety in the local area. In addition to supporting the national campaigns below, partners should consider if a local campaign is needed.

Campaign	Organisation
<u>Float to Live</u>	RNLI
<u>Respect The Water</u>	NWSF
<u>Coast Clever</u>	HMCG/MCA
<u>Don't Drink and Drown</u>	RLSS UK
<u>Be Water Aware</u>	NFCC
<u>Drowning Prevention Week</u>	RLSS UK
<u>World Drowning Prevention Day</u>	WHO
<u>Water Safety for Little Explorers</u>	Canal & River Trust
<u>One last breath/Beautiful but deadly</u>	Dŵr Cymru
<u>Be adventure smart</u>	Adventure Smart

- **Location action plans** – Where a concerning location has been identified, partners should consider introducing a site-specific action plan to reduce the activity in that area. A concerning location can be categorised as follows:
 - Any location (5km radius) that has two or more water fatalities in a calendar year.
 - Any location (5km radius) that has three or more fatalities in a five-year period.
 - Any location that local partners have specific concerns over due to geographic or behavioural characteristics.
- **Suicide prevention** - WAID data shows that suicide is a significant cause of drowning deaths within Wales. Public Health Wales' Real Time Suspected Suicide Surveillance report shows that drowning is a growing mode of death for suicide in Wales. Suicide prevention efforts in Wales are coordinated at a national level by the Public Health Wales National Advisory Group for suicide and self-harm prevention. Regional forums also exist for North, Mid and West and Southeast Wales. WSP's should appoint their own suicide prevention lead and co-ordinate with sub-regional and localised suicide prevention forums (where applicable). In addition to this, consideration should be given to linking with The Healthboard and Local Authority leads for suicide prevention.

Protection

- **Signage** - Consistent water safety signage is an important preventative measure and the WSP should highlight this to landowners and promote best practice and coordination. WSW has undertaken research in this area and a guidance document, which includes templates, for consistent water safety signs is due to release in 2025.
- **Personal Rescue Equipment** – Personal Rescue Equipment (PRE) includes lifesaving equipment such as throw bags. Consideration should be given to where could benefit from the installation of PRE and who could be trained to use them near waterways. PRE should only ever be installed if required after a suitable risk assessment has been completed.
- Other interventions which could be considered include:
 - **Lighting:** Improve lighting both to prevent slips, trips and falls but also a driver to encourage people to take a path away from the water
 - **Engineering:** Such as barriers, foliage and ecology
 - **Access Management:** Managing accessibility to waterways.

Incident response

- **Bystander training** – Consideration for members of the community such as porters, door security, wardens, shopkeepers etc to be trained in the use of PRE and water safety. Additionally, information should be provided to the public on “what to do in an emergency”, including best practice for making a 999 or 112 emergency call
- **Supervision** – Supervision such as lifeguarding may be required at certain locations
- **First responder training** – Where applicable first responders should be up-skilled
- **Search and rescue (SAR) interoperability/joint training** – The WSP can provide the structure for a multi-agency SAR training exercise in known locations of increased risk. WSPs should encouraged the creation a multi-agency operating procedures for high-risk areas to enhance ability to respond effectively to incidents or emergencies
- **Post incident reviews** – Each WSP meeting should begin with a review of incidents that have taken place since the last meeting and consider prevention measures that arise from these discussions.

Step 5

Review and evaluate

Where possible the WSP should review and evaluate the impact of measures undertaken. For example, the reach of communications/campaigns can be measured and the number of people who have been trained to use PRE. It should be made clear to members of the group that feedback is needed to better build a picture of risk and to better target the WSP’s efforts.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Terms of Reference - template

Name: This group will be known as _____ Water Safety Partnership (_____ WSP)

Aims:

1. To reduce lives lost to drowning.
2. Promote safety in and around the water within _____.
3. Assist with the seven key aims of Wales Drowning Prevention Strategy.

Geography: _____ WSP will restrict itself to the boundaries of _____ Council(s).

Meetings:

- The _____ WSP main group will meet quarterly
- Subgroups will meet as required to further the work of _____ WSP.

Outputs: To promote water safety and drowning prevention by following the five step process outlined in the Water Safety Wales Water Safety Partnership Document.

Members: By invitation and agreement of the _____ WSP membership.

Roles: Every 24 months the _____ WSP membership will elect.

- Chair (responsibilities outlined in _____)
- Education lead
- Suicide prevention lead
- Communications lead

No one organisation will hold multiple roles, the Chair may nominate a secretariat to assist with their responsibilities.

Minutes and Agendas: The chair will take responsibility for arranging meetings, circulating the agenda, creating and issuing minutes.

Appendix 2 - Responsibilities of the Chair

The following are key responsibilities of a WSP Chair:

Meetings

- Arrange meetings quarterly
- Issue an agenda in advance of the meeting
- Record and progress actions arising in meetings
- Create and issue minutes to all partners after the meeting
- Report to the Local Authority after each scheduled meeting on activity in the area to improve water safety.

Education

- Promote the WSW Education Resources as the primary engagement tool for partners.

Communications

- Promote the WSW Communications Toolkits as the primary online engagement tool for partners.

Signage

- Encourage and support landowners to use water safety signage
- Encourage local authorities to create a water safety policy.

Hotspot Action Plans

- Ensure Hotspot Action Plans are in place for locations that meet the criteria.

Suicide Prevention

- Establish a link with local suicide prevention partners to ensure that any water environments used to attempt or complete suicide are highlighted and managed.

Appendix 3 - Agenda - template

[insert WSP group name]

Agenda

[insert date]

[insert time]

[insert location]

Strategy objective	Agenda	Lead
	Welcome and introductions	
	Previous minutes and actions	
Incidents	An opportunity for a multi-agency discussion on recent incidents and prevention measures that arise from discussion Retrospective, Forward look	
Data and emerging trends	Discussion on latest WAID report (if applicable) and emerging trends Retrospective, Forward look	
Education	Delivery and promotion of water safety education assets Retrospective, Forward look	
Policy	Update from local authority on water safety policy Retrospective, Forward look	
Communications	Delivery and promotion of the WSW toolkits Retrospective, Forward look	
Suicide prevention	Update from suicide prevention lead Retrospective, Forward look	
	Local to national link	
	AOB	
	Next meeting	



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Cymru
water safety
Wales