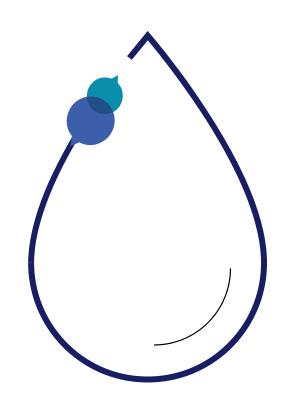


Scotland Five Years On

Version: 1 Date: October 2018 Authors: C. McAvoy D. Walker C. Reid





# **Executive Summary**

Responsibility for managing water safety in Scotland is a key policy issue for RoSPA. This research report focusses on the approaches adopted by local authorities in Scotland. It is a five-year follow-on study from the original research which took place in Scotland in 2013<sup>i</sup>.

Overall, as in 2013, a mixed picture was found. Several local authorities are addressing water safety but there is still very little consistency or uniformity. Many of the local authorities are aware of Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy and the strategic targets, aims and objectives that have been set nationally. It is clear however, that more work needs to be done to raise awareness and/or to highlight the existence and purpose of the Strategy.

The main findings of the study are:

- Scotland's local authorities rank water safety as an important or a neutral issue in respect to other demands
- Leadership of water safety is very mixed. Just under half of the respondents note that there is a person or department responsible for water safety
- Approximately 40 per cent of authorities have a water safety policy
- Water safety is afforded some awareness within the local community. However, many of the local authorities had not run a campaign and only half provide information to key groups
- Local authorities cite a lack of resources as their main barrier to water safety
- Just over half of Scotland's local authorities are aware of Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy.

Our key recommendations include:

- Local authorities join Water Safety Scotland to share practice, challenges and successes
- Local authorities should work towards a policy level commitment
- Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy needs to be better promoted to link up the national and local approach.



### Contents

Executive Summary	2	
Introduction	4	
Background	4	
Original Research	4	
Geographic Context	4	
Drowning Fatalities	5	
Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy	6	
National Programmes	6	
The Objectives of the Research	6	
Methodology	7	
Data Collection	7	
Analysis	7	
Responsibility for Water Safety	8	
Corporate Priorities	8	
Leadership and Organisation	8	
Good Practice	10	
Partnership Working	11	
Community Partnerships	11	
Inter-agency Working	12	
Provision of Information	13	
Barriers to Water Safety	14	
Strategic Direction	16	
Discussion and conclusions	17	
Recommendations		
Appendix One		
Appendix Two		
References	23	





# Introduction

In recent years, water safety has gained increased focus both politically and publically due in part to the role of Water Safety Scotland and the 2018 release of <u>Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy</u>. This strategy provides Scotland with strategic targets, aims and objectives to reduce drowning fatalities.

Despite clear national strategic aims, it is less clear how the various local governmental and community bodies interpret water safety and carry out drowning prevention work in their local areas.

### Background

The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents' (RoSPA) mission is to exchange "*life-enhancing skills and knowledge to reduce serious accidental injuries*". RoSPA is keen to enable healthy, active lives through the promotion of key skills and knowledge whilst seeking reasonable limits to potential harms.

RoSPA is committed to the aims of the Scottish National Performance Framework and in particular the Communities outcome which states that: "We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe".

The responsibility for managing water safety has been a key RoSPA policy issue for a number of years. This research follows on from the original research report that was undertaken in 2013 on the same issue. The underlying aim is to understand the current picture of water safety at local government level with the hope to enable those responsible to develop policies and programmes which better address the issue of drowning.

### **Original Research**

This research is a five-year follow-on from the original <u>Local Authority Approaches to Managing Water Safety</u> that was released in 2013. The original research found a mixed picture of water safety in Scotland with several local authorities addressing water safety yet with little in the way of uniformity.

Managing water safety ranked as being very or quite important in relation to other service demands among 70 per cent of authorities, however less than half had a policy level commitment on the issue.

More than two thirds of authorities were aware of groups that covered water safety issues, and 80 per cent worked with multiple agencies and external organisations. However, more than half of local authorities said they did not have a specific person or group who took control.

### **Geographic Context**

Scotland makes up the northern third of the United Kingdom and has an estimated 30,000 freshwater lochs<sup>ii</sup> and a huge coastline giving residents and visitors considerable access to water.



### **Drowning Fatalities**

Scotland carries a disproportionate rate of accidental drowning fatalities in comparison to other areas within the United Kingdom. Scotland's rate of accidental drowning is 0.89 which is also almost double the UK average of 0.48 (See Figure 1).

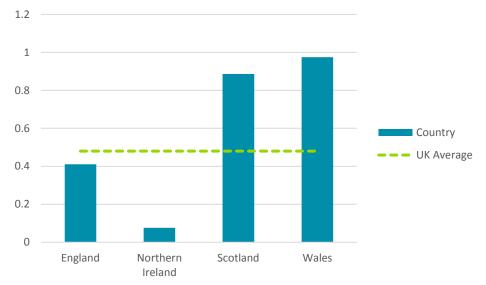


Figure 1: Average rate of accidental fatalities per 100,000. (Source: WAID 2013 – 2017, ONS 2015 Population estimates)

The most recent data taken from the Water Incident Database (WAID) shows that there were 46 accidental drowning fatalities in Scotland and a further 26 water related suicides in 2017. Although there have been small decreases in accidental fatalities, it is clear that drowning fatalities and water-related harm is a serious issue for Scotland.

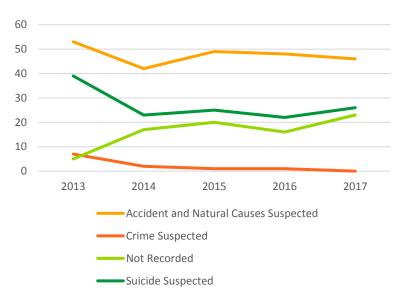


Figure 2: Scotland Water-related fatalities 2013- 2017 (Source: WAID)





### **Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy**

<u>Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy</u> was launched in 2018 to help reduce drowning fatalities in Scotland. The strategy has two overall targets:

- Reduce accidental drowning deaths in Scotland by 50 per cent by 2026 and reduce risk among the highest-risk populations, groups and communities
- Contribute to the reduction of water-related suicide.

The strategy has six main objectives. One of these objectives is to "develop water safety across Scotland's 32 local authority areas and promote the development of water safety policies". RoSPA's research into the management of water safety is anticipated to help provide up to date information on how water safety is currently managed in Scotland's local authorities. This will help to provide a focal point for promotion and could help with policy development.

#### **National Programmes**

Scotland comprises of 32 separate local authorities which take responsibility for local public services and provisions. Each local authority in Scotland is collectively represented by the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA).

In line with Scotland's National Performance Framework, community safety plays a key role. Each local authority creates a Community Safety Partnership (CSP) in association with a number different agencies, such as the Fire and Rescue Service, Police and Health Boards. Its purpose is to create a safer and healthier local community.

Closely linked to this, is the Building Safer Communities programme. Building Safer Communities is a Scottish Government-led programme which has created a partnership between national and local agencies. Its vision is of "a flourishing, optimistic Scotland in which resilient communities, families and individuals live safe from crime, disorder, danger and harm."

In 2017, a <u>National Strategic Assessment for Unintentional Harm</u> was released and included water safety as a key theme.

### The Objectives of the Research

The key objectives of this research are to understand the current picture of water safety in Scotland at local government level and in particular:

- To understand the responsibility for water safety, current policy arrangements and commitments that have been made towards managing water safety
- To understand shared approaches and barriers to the implementation of water safety work
- To identify a clear understanding of the strategic national direction in Scotland and how this relates to local government.



# Methodology

This research focussed on an online survey which was distributed to contacts within Scotland's 32 local authorities.

### **Data Collection**

In order to ensure anonymity, a self-completion questionnaire was used. The purpose of the survey was to gather information and insight into the management of water safety without singling out a specific local authority. All responses were treated as confidential and were not shared with any third party.

The online questionnaire was distributed to contacts within all 32 local authorities in Scotland. Prior to the survey being undertaken, RoSPA Scotland's Community Safety staff identified appropriate contacts to participate in the survey. Non probability sampling was therefore used in order to ensure an appropriate person within the local authority answered the questionnaire. All of the contacted members responded to the survey with a 100 per cent completion rate.

### Analysis

All responses have been analysed in both a univariate and bivariate way. Charts and graphs have been used to illustrate data due to their easy interpretation.

All responses to open-ended questions were thematically analysed and then categorised.

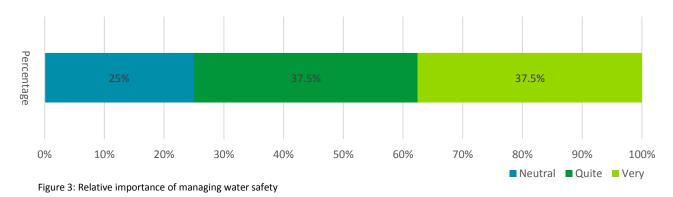




# **Responsibility for Water Safety**

#### **Corporate Priorities**

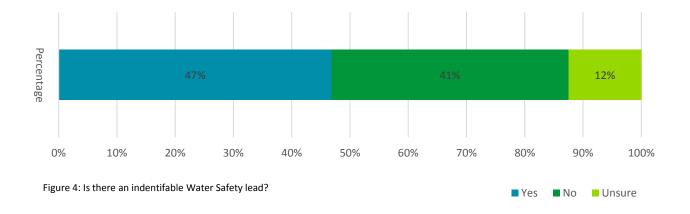
Each local authority was asked how they rate the importance of water safety, in relation to other services provided by the authority, such as environmental protection. **Three quarters (75 per cent) responded positively** to the importance of water safety with an even split believing that it was very important or quite important. The remaining quarter of local authorities responded neutrally to the question as can be seen in figure 3.



These figures are reassuring and show that water safety is considered a serious issue within local authorities in Scotland. Over the past five years this has increased by six per cent<sup>i</sup>.

#### Leadership and Organisation

Local authorities were asked whether or not there is a specific officer, group or committee that deals with water safety within their council area. Just under half (47 per cent) of the respondents noted that there is a person or department responsible for water safety.





Local authorities that responded positively were then asked to expand on who takes this responsibility. A range of departments and individuals were identified. The most frequently named were the Community Safety Teams and Partnerships and Leisure Services (see figure 5).

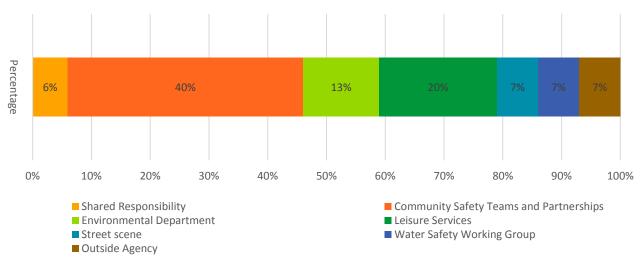
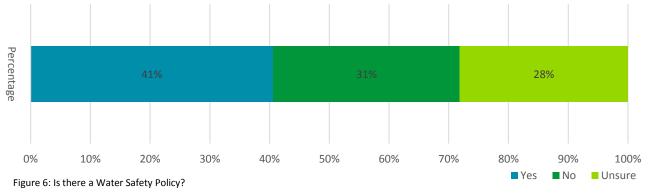


Figure 5: Involvement in managing water safety

These results are not particularly different from the original 2013 research which found that 44 per cent of local authorities had a person or department responsible for water safety with the Community Safety teams and Partnerships and the Environmental Department most frequently cited<sup>i</sup>.

Respondents were also asked how water safety is currently managed in their local areas. Responses focused on work through the Community Safety Partnerships, water safety working groups, country parks, and leisure services and through risk assessment procedures. The most frequent explanation concentrated on water safety being a shared responsibility through numerous departments. **The management of water safety within a specific water safety policy was mentioned only once.** 

Each local authority was asked whether their area had a specific water safety policy. Thirteen of the local authorities noted that they did have a specific policy (41 per cent) with the remaining respondents noting they did not or were unsure.





When compared to the original research in 2013, it is clear that there still much disparity in Scotland. The original research found that 14 local authorities had a water safety policy<sup>i</sup> suggesting that the number of **water safety policies have actually decreased within the five years.** 

#### **Good Practice**

There is some correlation between local authorities that make a clear policy commitment and have clear leadership. For example, of the 13 local authorities who had specific water safety policy in place, around two thirds (69 per cent) had a specific officer or group with remit to address water safety.

There is also some correlation between local authorities that have made a clear policy commitment addressing the issue and who commit water safety into practice. For example, roughly half (46 per cent) of local authorities that have a water safety policy have also run a water safety campaign in the last three years.

#### Key Points :

Managing water safety is ranked positively in relation to other service demands.

Just under half of local authorities have a person or group designated as the lead on water safety issues.

The range of departments involved in the management of water safety suggested little uniformity in approach.

Roughly 40 per cent of local authorities have a policy commitment on the issue.

Having a specific water safety policy linked to clear organisational leadership, and in half of the local authority cases, related to actual practice.



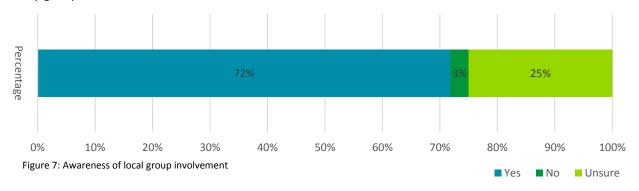


# **Partnership Working**

This section explores partnership working and how local authorities work with external organisations and agencies to help reach the community. It also considers potential barriers to water safety implementation.

#### **Community Partnerships**

Local authorities were asked whether there were specific groups in their area that are involved with water activity. **Just under three quarters (72 per cent) of respondents are aware of groups involved in water activity.** One quarter (24 per cent) note that they are uncertain and three per cent note that they are unaware of any groups in their local area.



A range of groups has been identified including: rescue services, third sector organisations, recreational water groups, water safety groups and local rescue teams and sport centers:

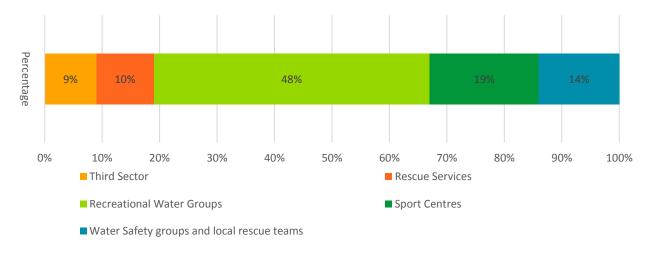


Figure 8: Local groups involved in water activity

The wide range of different groups identified as being involved in water activity is extremely positive.



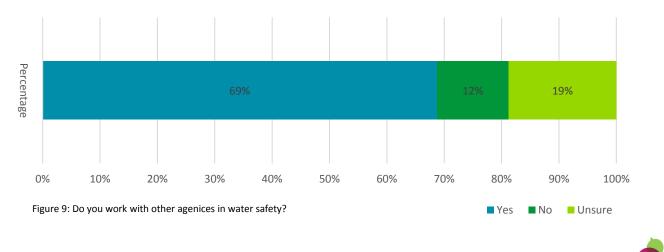
This also is similar to the original 2013 research which found roughly two-thirds of respondents were aware of groups involved in water activity. The type of groups suggested were also very similar.

#### **Inter-agency Working**

Respondents were asked if there were any specific organisations and agencies that they worked with in regards to water safety. **Over two thirds (69 per cent) note that they work with specific organisations and agencies** (see figure 9). These included:

- British Red Cross
- Cross Party Group on Accident Prevention and Injury Awareness
- Glasgow Humane Society
- Health and Safety Executive
- HM Coastguard
- Institute of Sport Recreation and Management
- Local leisure centers
- Local water safety groups
- Mountain Rescue
- Police Scotland
- 🗭 RLSS
- 🗭 RNLI
- 👂 RoSPA
- Scottish Canals
- Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
- Scottish Swimming
- Scottish Water
- 🗭 SEPA
- Water Safety Scotland

HM Coastguard and the Scottish Fire and Rescue service were the most frequently cited, followed by Water Safety Scotland, RNLI, RoSPA, Scottish Water, Police Scotland and local water safety groups.

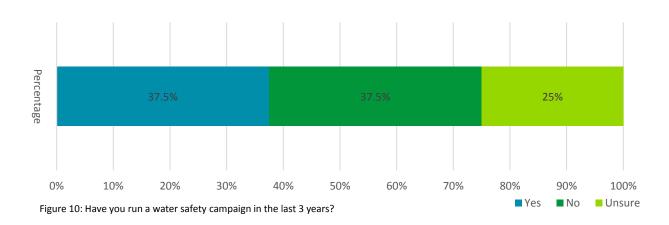




#### **Provision of Information**

Participants were asked if their local authority had a run a water safety campaign in the last three years. This was to gain an understanding on what practical work local authorities were doing in water safety. **Over a third of local authorities (37.5 per cent) have run a campaign in the last three years** with a further 25 per cent unsure.

This is an increase from the original research in 2013 where only 25 per cent of local authorities had run a water safety campaign in the last three years<sup>i</sup>.



Of the local authorities that did participate in recent campaigns to raise awareness of the dangers of water, there were a number of positive practices and ideas. The campaigns included the following:

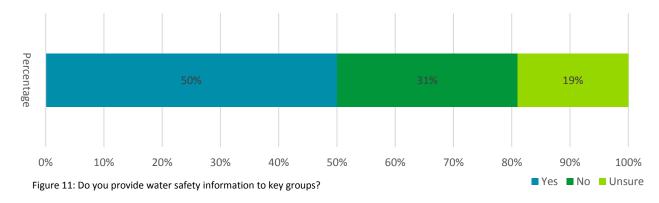
- Support of national campaigns such as Drowning Prevention Week
- Support of other organisations' campaigns at specific seasons in the year
- Implementation of safety signage
- Experiential learning
- A focus on boat and craft safety
- School talks and programmes.

Local authorities were asked if they gave water safety information to key groups. **Half of the participants noted that they did** (see figure 11). This is 14 per cent less than the original 2013 research found<sup>1</sup> but could be due to a number of issues and barriers which we discuss later in figure 12.





Local Authority Approaches to Managing Water Safety



The most common ways in which local authorities share water safety information is through the following methods:

- Club meetings
- News bulletins
- Partner organisations
- School presentations
- Signage
- Swimming lessons
- 🌻 Training
- Water safety workshops
- 🗭 Websites.

Using partner organisations and school presentations were the most frequently cited, followed by information on the council website.

#### **Barriers to Water Safety**

Local authorities were asked what they believed were the most important barriers in regards to water safety. A lack of resources was cited as the most popular barrier (53 per cent) closely followed by a lack of funding and water safety not being a statutory duty.

The "other" category made up 31 per cent of the barriers and included the following: worry of duplication, landowner issues, no lead for water safety within the council, staff reductions and too much water within the council area.



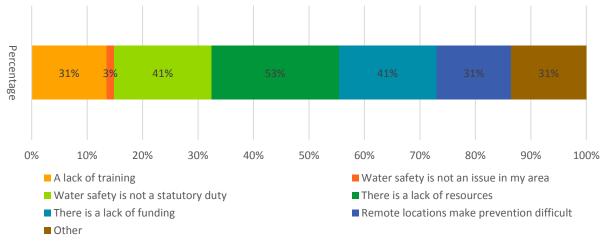


Figure 12: Barriers to Water Safety

#### Key Points :

Just under three quarters of local authorities were aware of groups that were involved with water activity, and around 69 per cent worked with multiple external organisation and agencies on water safety.

Over a third of local authorities had run a campaign in the last three years and only half of local authorities provided information to key groups.

Local authorities cited a lack of resources as the most common barrier to water safety.

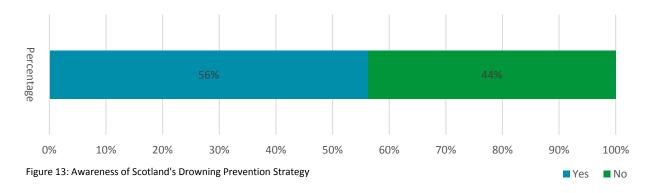




# **Strategic Direction**

Local authorities were asked two new additional questions about the strategic direction of water safety which was not asked in the original 2013 research.

Firstly, they were asked if they were aware of Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy which was launched in January 2018 and developed to reduce drowning fatalities across Scotland. Just over half (56 per cent) were aware of the national strategy.



Secondly, respondents were asked if they planned to contribute to Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy. Forty four per cent of respondents suggested that they planned to contribute but over half (53 per cent) were unsure on whether they would or not.

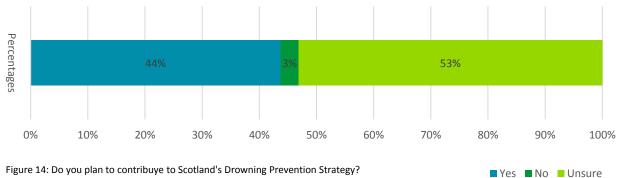


Figure 14: Do you plan to contribuye to Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy?

No specific feedback was given on why they would not contribute other than the respondent being unaware of

the strategy. **Key Points :** Just over half of local authorities were aware of Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy. Just over 40 per cent of local authorities planned to contribute to the implementation of the strategy.



# **Discussion and conclusions**

This study was a five-year follow-on from the original 2013 research<sup>i</sup>. Caution should be noted with regards to deducing too much from this study. We did however find some improvements but overall there is still a very mixed picture.

- Scotland's local authorities ranked water safety as an important or a neutral issue in respect to other demands
- Leadership of water safety was very mixed. Just under half of the respondents noted that there was a person or department responsible for water safety. This was very similar to the situation in 2013 and provides insight that the leadership of water safety has not changed in Scotland and is still very mixed with different departments and individuals taking the lead
- Approximately 40 per cent of authorities have a water safety policy. This was a slight reduction since 2013 and suggests that policy commitment and management of water safety is still very ad-hoc without a specific approach
- There was some correlation between policy and leadership suggesting that local authorities that had a policy were more likely to have a specific lead on the issue. There was also some correlation between policy and practice but this was inconsistent suggesting an uncertain approach to water safety
- Water safety was afforded some awareness within the local community. Many different organisations, agencies and groups were noted as being involved in water safety and some authorities had run a campaign in the last three years. However, many of the local authorities had not run a campaign and only half provided information to key groups. Awareness therefore needs to be priority within local authorities
- Local authorities cited a lack of resources as their main barrier to water safety
- Many of the local authorities seemed unaware of the national strategic direction of water safety
- Roughly only half of Scotland's local authorities were aware of Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy.

Overall the evidence indicates that although many local authorities are involved in the promotion and awareness of water safety and some do have specific policy commitments on the issue, there is still no clear universal approach. Each local authority seems to differ in its policies and how it approaches and manages water safety. In addition, there appears to be disparity between the national strategic direction of water safety and what is happening locally.





# **Recommendations**

It is recommended that local authorities should share practice and successes in water safety by joining Water Safety Scotland. Water Safety Scotland is a group of organisations from across Scotland that meet to discuss water safety and how drownings can be prevented. Created by RoSPA in 2014, this is an excellent platform for local authorities to share ideas and practice.

Local authorities that do not currently have a policy should aim to have one by 2026 (in line with Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy).

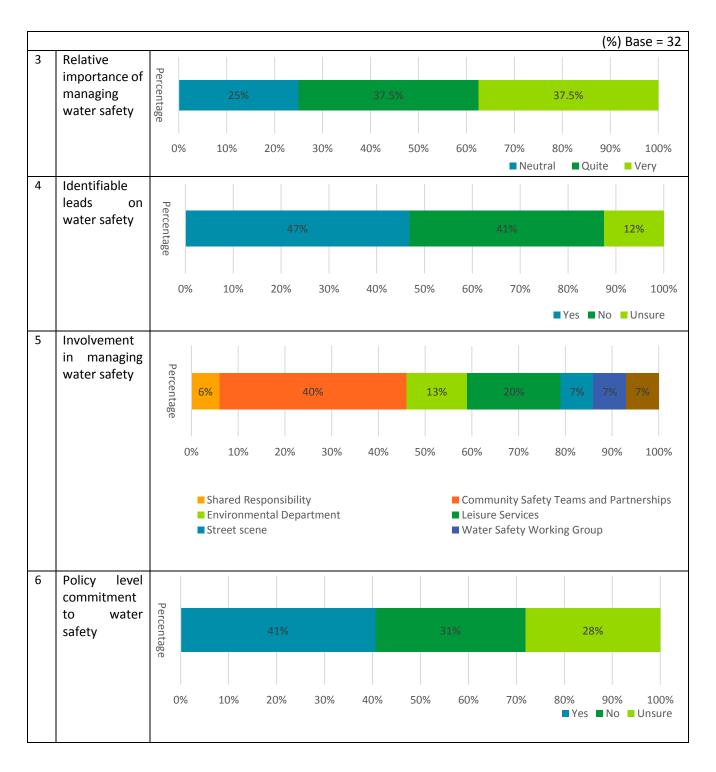
Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy needs to be better promoted to the local authorities so that they have a better understanding of the national strategic direction and how this can then be translated locally into policy and practice.



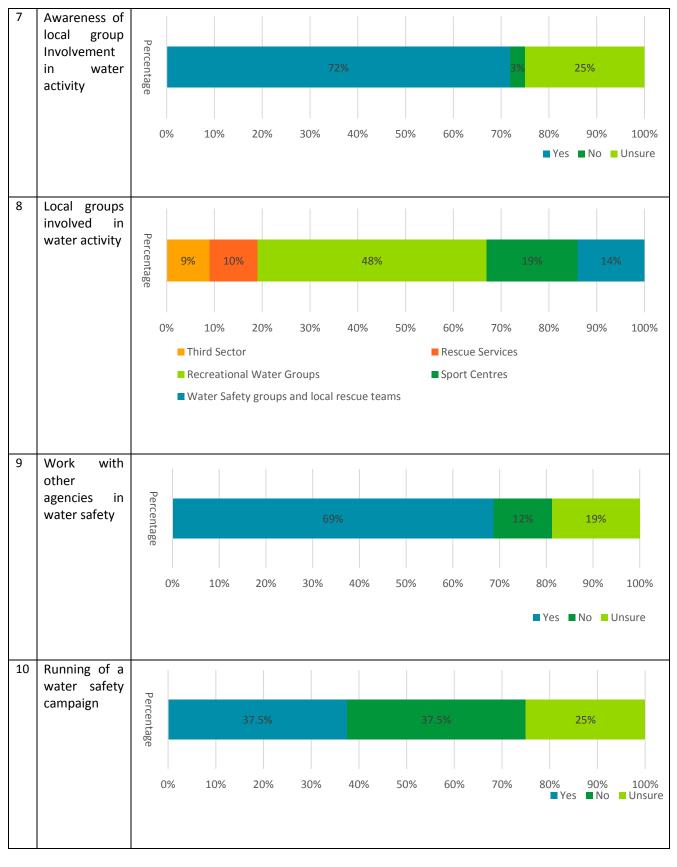


# **Appendix One**

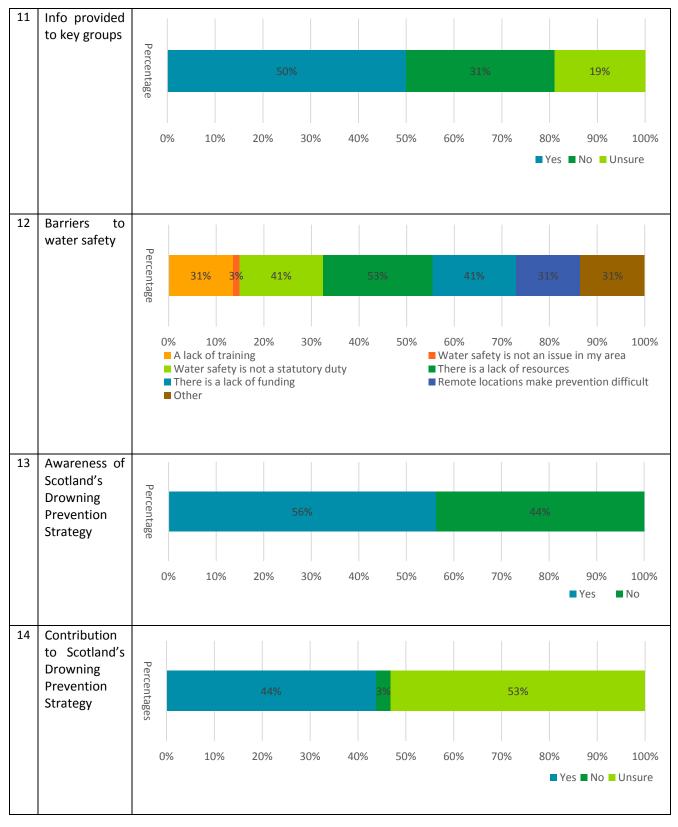
#### 2018 Key Results Dashboard















#### 2013 Vs 2018 Dashboard Key Results

Question	Percentage 2013	Percentage 2018	Percentage Difference
Relative importance of managing water safety	69	75	6
Identifiable leads on water safety	44	47	3
Policy level commitment to water safety	44	41	-3
Awareness of local group involvement in water activity	69	72	3
Work with other agencies in water safety	79	69	-10
Running of a water safety campaign	25	38	13
Info provided to key groups	64	50	-14



<sup>i</sup> RoSPA (2013) Local Authority Approaches to Managing Water Safety. Available at: <u>https://www.rospa.com/rospaweb/docs/advice-services/leisure-safety/approaches-to-managing-water-safety.pdf</u> (accessed 30/07/2018)

<sup>ii</sup> Scottish Natural Heritage (2018) Freshwater Lochs. Available at : <u>https://www.nature.scot/landscapes-and-habitats/habitat-</u> <u>types/lochs-rivers-and-wetlands/freshwater-lochs</u> (Accessed 02/07/2018)



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