

CORPORATE / ASSURANCE / OPEN

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PURPOSE

To summarise progress with the implementation and delivery of the Scottish Canals 3-year Health and Safety Strategy (2025-2028).

RECOMMENDATION

The Board is invited to note the progress and performance against the Health and Safety Strategy (2025-2028) strategic objectives and delivery plan.

BACKGROUND

The Board approved the revised 3-year Health and Safety Strategy in March 2025, and I am pleased to advise the Board that significant progress has been made to implement the key strategic objectives and activities outline in the delivery plan as outlined in **Appendix 1** of this report.

ASSESSMENT

The Board can be assured that progress with safeguarding and improving employee, customer, visitor and public health, safety and wellbeing continue at pace. Adjustments were made to the delivery plan during 2025/26 to reflect a number of operational challenges, however this has not impacted the team's ability to deliver on several key commitments as outlined in the year-one delivery plan. Some activities across the 3-year plan were reordered to reflect the changing risk profile of the organisation and evolving priorities associated with complex project work involving assets.

Key challenges that impacted on the 2025/26 delivery plan outcomes include:

- 30% loss in team capacity with the Head of Health, Safety and Sustainability moving to the Interim Director of People, Safety and Governance role without backfilling the role or providing any additional dedicated Health & Safety resource. For 2025/26, the Health and Safety team consisted of 2 Full Time Equivalent Health and Safety Advisors. The Health and Safety Team continues to work above what would be considered a reasonable capacity in terms of volume and capability which has until now, been mitigated by the professional and technical capabilities and leadership of the Interim Director of People, Safety, and Governance.
- Excessive demands on the Health and Safety Advisors to support operational teams particularly in destinations to manage recurring and non-recurring risks associated with projects and development work.
- Responding to a significant number of unplanned events including severe weather, serious accidents. and incidents which required investigation and/or risk control interventions.

There are a number of challenges that the Health and Safety Team will be required to respond to in 2026/27, namely:

- The professional and technical capability and capacity of the Health and Safety Team is not reflective of the complexity or risk profile of the organisation.
- Emerging legislative and statutory obligations that Scottish Canals will have to respond to including the Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025, will require the diversion of the expertise within the Health and Safety Team and will also require significant time and additional resources to develop the structures, systems and processes to ensure compliance with our obligations.
- The planned 16% increase in headcount to fill critical roles across engineering and operations in response to a refreshed strategic focus on asset health, compliance and governance, will place additional demands, pressures, and burdens on the Health and Safety Team.

Strategic Priorities	This report is intended to provide assurance to the Board that progress has been made with delivering year 1 of the Health and Safety Strategy (2025-2028). However, a number of challenges as described in this report has impacted on the pace of delivery and a number of adjustments were made to the delivery plan during 2025/26.
Health & Safety	Although significant progress has been made with implementing the delivery plan, a number of challenges has impacted both the pace and impact of delivery.
Financial	N/A
Legal	The Health and Safety Strategy is broadly aligned with legal objectives and compliance obligations expected of Scottish Canals as an NDPB and employer.
Risk / Risk Appetite	The Health and Safety Strategy is reflective of the Boards risk appetite towards health, safety, and compliance.
Sustainability	N/A
Environment	N/A
People	The Health and Safety Strategy ensures that our people including visitors and customers are protected from avoidable harm from our activities.
Fair Work	N/A
Communication	N/A
Community & Third Sector	N/A
Commercial	N/A
Asset	N/A

APPENDIX 1

Our Values	Activity	Progress	RAG*
WE CARE	Publish a Scottish Canals Wellbeing Strategy and action plan to support a whole person-centred approach to physical, mental, and social health in the workplace.	The Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee focussed on developing an organisational behaviour framework including an in-depth benchmarking exercise with other similar government, third sector and private organisations. This delayed work starting on the Wellbeing Strategy. However, research and benchmarking for the Wellbeing Strategy is now complete and we are now in the early stages of staff engagement and drafting the strategy document. This work will be complete by Q2 of 2026/27.	
	Undertake deep dives into the risk from fatigue, Critical Safety Work (CSW) and driver safety across the organisation and implement suitable and sufficient, risk-based, and proportionate management response in collaboration with the workforce.	Deep dives were undertaken in relation to the supply of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Confined spaces which were scheduled for later years. Work on Driver Safety has now commenced and will be complete by the end of Q1 of 2026/27. A deep dive into Critical Safety Work will be complete by the end of Q3 of 2026/27	
	Publishing the Scottish Canals Health and Safety Culture development plan in response to the safety culture assessment undertaken in 2024.	The Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee focussed on developing an organisational behaviour framework which will underpin the Safety Culture Development Plan. This work is due for completion by the end of Q2 of 2026/27.	
	Finalising a robust framework to support individuals with appropriate equipment including hybrid and blended working and personal protective equipment.	We refreshed our approach to providing work equipment for people working from home including referrals to Occupational Health for review in complex cases. Equipment can be supplied as and when required. We reviewed and strengthened our contract with ScotDirect, and PPE is supplied upon induction and replaced/upgraded as and when required.	

Our Values	Activity	Progress	RAG*
WE CREATE	Publish an updated and integrated framework for Water and Visitor Safety Risk Management.	New integrated framework for Water and Visitor Safety Risk Management has been created and implemented.	
	Complete visitor and water safety risk assessments for 25% of all locations across the canal network.	There were a number of challenges and competing demands to release staff to attend and for Health and Safety Staff to provide training, and this delayed roll out across the canal network. As of 31 March 2026, less than 15% of locations across the canal network have been assessed. However, this has now been included in the Local Health and Safety and Wellbeing Action Plans (LHSWAPS) and will be driven locally with support from the Health and Safety Teams	
	Undertake a detailed review of occupation exposure to dust and fumes across all operational locations and where necessary, implemented appropriate risk based and proportionated risk reduction measures.	Fully complete across all known high-risk operational locations. Ongoing monitoring will continue at locations of concern.	
	Working collaboratively with key stakeholders, publish an updated Towpath Code of Conduct to reflect the changing needs of the communities that we serve.	Initial drafts of an updated Code of Conduct for Towpaths have been prepared; however, we were unable to commit time or resources to undertake meaningful stakeholder engagement. This will now be undertaken during 2026/27.	
	Continue to support the delivery of the welfare facilities improvement plan and define standards for desk-based workplaces across the canal network.	This programme of work is being led by Placemaking and all requests for assistance and support have been complied with.	

Our Values	Activity	Progress	RAG*
WE COLLABORATE	Publish and implement a Scottish Canals Compliance Framework to reflect both health and safety and wider regulatory compliance obligations relevant to the organisation.	There have been robust discussions at Executive Management Team (EMT) throughout the year regarding organisational compliance structures, accountabilities, and responsibilities. Baker Tilly have been instructed to include compliance arrangements as part of the Strategic Workforce Review which will be completed by end of Q1 2026/27.	
	Undertake Phase 1 of the Health and Safety Governance and Arrangement Review focusing on structures, relationships, accountability, and assurance in line with legal requirements and best practice.	A rapid appraisal regarding statutory governance arrangements has been undertaken focussing on policy, competent person(s), arrangements, and accountabilities. Phase two focussing on risk management will be undertaken during 2026/27.	
	Scope and define a new approach to health and safety induction for new workers and those moving roles within Scottish Canals.	Updates to the induction process were delivered during 2026/27. Further amendments will be made following the implementation of the Human Resource Management System (HRMS) to ensure a single system approach to employee induction.	
	Publish an updated Scottish Canals Public Rescue Equipment Strategy including measures for inspection, monitoring, upgrading, and replacement.	This work has been integrated into the Water and Visitor Safety Risk Management Framework and supported by the Asset Inspection Protocol (AIP).	

*** RAG KEY**

80% or Less of Target Met	
81-91% of Target Met	
91% and above of Target Met	
100% Complete	