

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SPONSOR: AMELIA MORGAN**SCOTTISH CANALS HEALTH AND SAFETY STRATEGY (2025-2028)****Purpose**

This paper presents the draft 3-year Health and Safety Strategy (the strategy) (2025-2028) for Scottish Canals. This strategy outlines Scottish Canals commitment to maintaining a safe and healthy workplace, protecting workers, visitors, and members of the public from the risk of harm, and responding to the wider evolving safety risks associated with canal operations. This strategy aligns with the Scottish Canals Corporate plan (2023-2028) and compliments the principles of good health and safety management by incorporating a strategic approach to organisational health, safety, and wellbeing.

Priority

High priority

Background

As an employer and owner of properties and land, Scottish Canals must comply with a number of legal duties to protect the health, safety and welfare of workers, visitors, and members of the public. An organisations Health and Safety Management System (HSMS) as defined by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) provides structure, focus and targeted action to improve and sustain outcomes for health and safety. At the heart of any HSMS, is a strong strategy for health and safety which reflects both the organisations wider operating environment and the unique risk profile of the organisation. This draft strategy provides a direction of travel for Scottish Canals to address the evolving risk profile associated with operating a customer-focussed, person-centred and values driven public service in Scotland.

Key Points for Noting

Previous strategies for health and safety within Scottish Canals have delivered significant improvements in the way that we manage health and safety risks and protect our workers, visitors, and members of the public from harm. This includes the digitalisation of key elements of our HSMS, the introduction of enhanced lone working arrangements, the centralisation of our uniform and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) contracts, and the review of our approaches to the management of safety risks. Whilst acknowledging our significant achievements, one of the primary challenges that the Health, Safety and Sustainability Department has responded to is the balance between strategic development and operational delivery. This strategy strikes a clear balance between strategic advancement and operational responsiveness to ensure that the department remains agile to respond to day-to-day operational activities relating to health, safety, and Wellbeing.

This strategy has been designed to reflect both the organisations values and key strategic themes outlined within the Scottish Canals Corporate Plan (2023-2028). Three strategic priorities for health,

safety and wellbeing have been identified within the strategy: People (We Care), Place (We Create) and Performance (We Collaborate). A number of health, safety and wellbeing strategic objectives have been outlined within the strategy and aligned to one of the three strategic priorities.

A simple vision for health, safety and wellbeing is outlined within the strategy. We want everyone who works for, volunteers with, is contracted to, or visits Scottish Canals, properties, or land, to be able to do so without risk of harm to their health, safety, and wellbeing from avoidable hazards. This simple vision will drive the strategy and ensure that all the activities outlined within the strategy will contribute to the realisation of this vision.

Ownership of the strategy will remain with the Board and accountability for the delivery of the strategy will remain with the Chief Executive and the Executive Management Team (EMT). The governance structure already in place will remain in terms of monitoring and reporting via the National Health and Safety Committee (NHSC). A Health and Safety Strategy delivery plan will be published each year to support the strategy and align with the wider business plan of both Scottish Canals and the Health, Safety and Sustainability department.

Subject to approval from the Board, this strategy will be implemented from April 2025. A communication and engagement plan will be developed to support the implementation and delivery of the strategy.

Corporate Considerations

- **Strategic Priorities:** This strategy aligns with and supports the delivery of the strategic outcomes outlined in the 2023-2028 Corporate Plan.
- **Health & Safety:** This strategy has a direct impact on health and safety and Scottish Canals ability to maintain a safe place of work for workers and safe spaces for visitors.
- **Risk/Risk Appetite:** The proposals outlined in the paper reflect the risk appetite adopted by the Board in that it is averse to risks associated with health and safety and compliance.
- **Legal:** The strategy outlined in this paper introduces a framework to improve and safeguard compliance with several statutory obligations and reduce the risk of enforcement and regulatory activity because of non-compliance.
- **Financial:** There are no direct financial implications with the adoption of this strategy out with normal budget setting processes and activities.
- **Human Resources:** The proposed strategy will have limited impact on HR policies, procedures, and practices.
- **Fair Work First:** The strategy outlined in this paper complies with the SG Fair Work First criteria.
- **Communication:** The strategy outlined in this paper will have a positive impact on stakeholders' perception of Scottish Canals, including regulatory bodies, on Scottish Canals abilities to manage strategic and operational risks effectively.
- **Community & Third Sector:** The strategy enhances Scottish Canals abilities to meet its strategic objectives relating to partnerships and collaboration.
- **Commercial:** The strategy will have a positive impact on Scottish Canals commercial aspirations.

- **Asset:** The strategy will have a positive impact on Scottish Canals asset management arrangements.
- **Environment:** The strategy will have no direct environmental impact.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The Board is invited to:

1. Review and discuss the draft Scottish Canals Health and Safety Strategy (2025-2028).
2. Approve the implementation of the Scottish Canals Health and Safety Strategy (2025-2028) from April 2025.

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Date: 19 March 2025.



HEALTH AND SAFETY STRATEGY (2025-2028)

PEOPLE, PLACE AND PERFORMANCE

TEXT VERSION FOR REVIEW AND APPROVAL

Draft: February 2025 V2

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To be drafted.

INTRODUCTION

Scottish Canals is a truly unique organisation. We are responsible for the safe navigation across over 140 miles of inland waterways spanning some of Scotland's most beautiful scenery and maintaining a rich and complex natural, engineered, cultural and heritage landscape, steeped in history for Scotland's future. As a Non-Departmental Public Body (NDPB) we are accountable to the Ministers of the Scottish Parliament for the effective, efficient, and sustainable management of all Scottish Canals inland waterways and assets. We are committed and proud to align and champion our organisational goals, functions, and operations to support the wider strategic ambitions for Scotland as defined by the Scottish Government alongside the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda. We do this through thoughtful and purposeful leadership and stewardship of our resources and assets for the benefit of the people of Scotland.

We recognise that without a diverse, dedicated, skilled and ambitious workforce, we will not be able to achieve our mission or vision for Scottish Canals. We place the highest value on ensuring that our workforce, contractors, and volunteers can undertake their activities safely and that everyone who visits our canals, attractions, properties, and land can do so without risk to their own safety and wellbeing. Since 2022, we have made significant changes to transform our approach to health and safety. We have digitalised many aspects of our Health and Safety Management Systems, introduced Minimum and Enhanced Safety Standards, developed an integrated Visitor and Water Safety Risk Assessment Framework and undertaken an in-depth exploration of our Health and Safety Culture. We have also undertaken several significant reviews relating to the safety of our assets and introduced a new approach to learning from experience across the organisation. Whilst these activities have had a positive impact on health and safety within Scottish Canals, we know that there is more to do to ensure that health and safety is not something that we just do, but that it becomes the beating heart of Scottish Canals.

This Health and Safety Strategy sets our objectives over the next three years. We will celebrate and build upon our successes. We are resolute in our ambition to embed the principles of good health and safety and risk management into every aspect of our organisational activity. Creating the right environment where risk-based, proportionate, and focused health and safety activity will act as an enabler to outstanding organisational performance is a key priority for Scottish Canals. Every decision that we make and action that we take will have an impact on our health, safety and wellbeing outcomes and successes.

THE VISION AND MISSION FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY

We have created our vision and mission for health and safety for Scottish Canals based upon our known strengths and areas where we need to prepare and respond as our organisation continues to evolve and grow. Our inland waterways, towpaths and visitor attractions have never been busier, and this vibrancy requires us to identify effective and innovative ways to meet the needs of our customers.

Our vision is simple. We will ensure everyone who works for, volunteers with, is contracted to, or visits Scottish Canals, properties, or land, are able to do so without risk of harm to their health, safety, and wellbeing from avoidable hazards.

Our mission is to foster the highest standards of health and safety performance and governance to ensure safe and enjoyable experiences for all our people, contractors, volunteers and visitors, and that Scottish Canals is recognised as a valued, safe, efficient, and sustainable community-based asset. Over the next three years, we will do this by:

- Continuing to evolve our Health and Safety Culture, focusing on safety leadership behaviours and the contribution that every single person, no matter what their role or responsibilities are, is recognised as a safety ambassador for Scottish Canals through their own attitudes, behaviours, and practices. We call this, "Your Safety Shadow."
- Focusing on improved hazard identification techniques to ensure that physical, chemical, biological, ergonomic, and psychosocial hazards are proactively identified, and that suitable and sufficient control mechanisms are in place based on the hierarchy of control.
- Championing proactive, proportionate, and value-based safety risk management across all operations and functions to ensure that we are forward looking, adaptable and resilient through continuous improvement. We will support all business functions to fully integrate purposeful and impactful safety focused discussions and decision making to ensure local ownership and accountability for managing risks, balancing organisational benefit against potential harm in line with our risk appetite.
- Complying with all health and safety and civil law requirements relevant to us and provide assurance through a robust Compliance Framework focusing on risk-based and proportionate audit, inspection, and review activities.
- Working with our colleagues to promote a Psychologically Safe environment where everyone is empowered to speak up when something does not look or feel right or is unsafe. This is an important element of our Wellbeing Culture, and we will actively encourage our workforce to be fit and healthy in body and mind whilst focussing on workplace stress risk factors.
- Exploring our health and safety training and competency framework to ensure that our technical and professional knowledge and skills develop as our canal networks evolve to meet the needs of our stakeholders and the customers that we serve. We will champion safety leadership development across our entire workforce and create the conditions that will allow the application of theory into everyday practice.
- Collaborating with communities, campaign groups, elected members, customers, and visitors as we embed our new Water and Visitor Safety Risk Management Framework.

It is through our mission that we can strive to create the conditions where everyone can thrive whilst respecting the unique heritage and environment of Scotland's inland waterways. Our mission is reflected in our strategic objectives for health and safety (2025-2028) as outlined below.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The Scottish Canals Corporate Plan (2023-2028) provides a detailed overview of our strategic priorities and how we plan to deliver our ambition of creating a vibrant canal network which helps to improve people's lives and benefit communities across Scotland. As an NDPB, we are committed to playing our part towards advancement of the Scottish Governments National Performance Framework outcomes by improving wellbeing, and sustainable, inclusive economic growth. This Health and Safety Strategy supports this ambition and is also an enabler across the four strategic themes: Explore and Experience, Places and Spaces, Canals for the Future, and People and Business.

Our approach to achieving our strategic ambition and objectives is based on collaboration, inclusivity, adaptability, resilience, openness and being evidence-led. This approach is replicated throughout this Health and Safety Strategy to ensure consistency, focus and impact.

The world of Health, Safety and Wellbeing is continually evolving, and over the next 10 years, several societal, technological, and regulatory changes are likely to have a significant impact on Scottish Canals. This includes:

- **Public Safety:** Balancing safety with increased public engagement in open and shared spaces and managing the risks during infrastructure projects and developments.
- **Mental Health and Wellbeing:** There is a greater focus on how employers prevent and respond to managing stress, burnout, and mental health in the workplace alongside Psychological Safety and the creation of inclusive, caring, supportive environments.
- **Aging Workforce:** Creating adaptive work environments to manage health and safety risks for an aging workforce and retaining corporate knowledge whilst ensuring those joining or developing their career within Scottish Canals can undertake their role safely.
- **Workforce Competency:** Ensuring that we have a competent, skilled, and dynamic workforce that can deliver at pace safely and demonstrate innovative approaches to safety leadership.
- **Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion:** Ensuring that our approaches to health, safety and wellbeing meets the needs of a diverse workforce and prevents discrimination or bias in hazard exposure and response.
- **Workplace Violence and Aggression:** Strengthening physical and digital security measures to protect our workforce and assets alongside mitigating the risks of violence and aggression in customer-facing roles.
- **Regulatory Changes and Compliance:** Increased scrutiny of corporate accountability and reporting coupled with changes to health and safety laws, particularly around security, anti-terrorism, building safety and employee rights and welfare.
- **Technological and Digital Safety:** Ensuring the safe use of automation, user interface, digital fatigue, and the risks from cyber security.
- **Sustainability and Climate Change:** Preparing for extreme weather events impacting workforce safety and infrastructure and managing the risks as we transition to green energy production, use and supply.
- **Pandemic Preparedness and Biosecurity:** Strengthening of business resilience and continuity arrangements to respond to future communicable disease outbreaks including addressing supply chain and environmental biosecurity risks.

This Health and Safety Strategy will lay the foundations for Scottish Canals to respond to these emerging health and safety risks and ensure that we can continue to operate and respond to a changing and challenging operating environment for future generations to come.

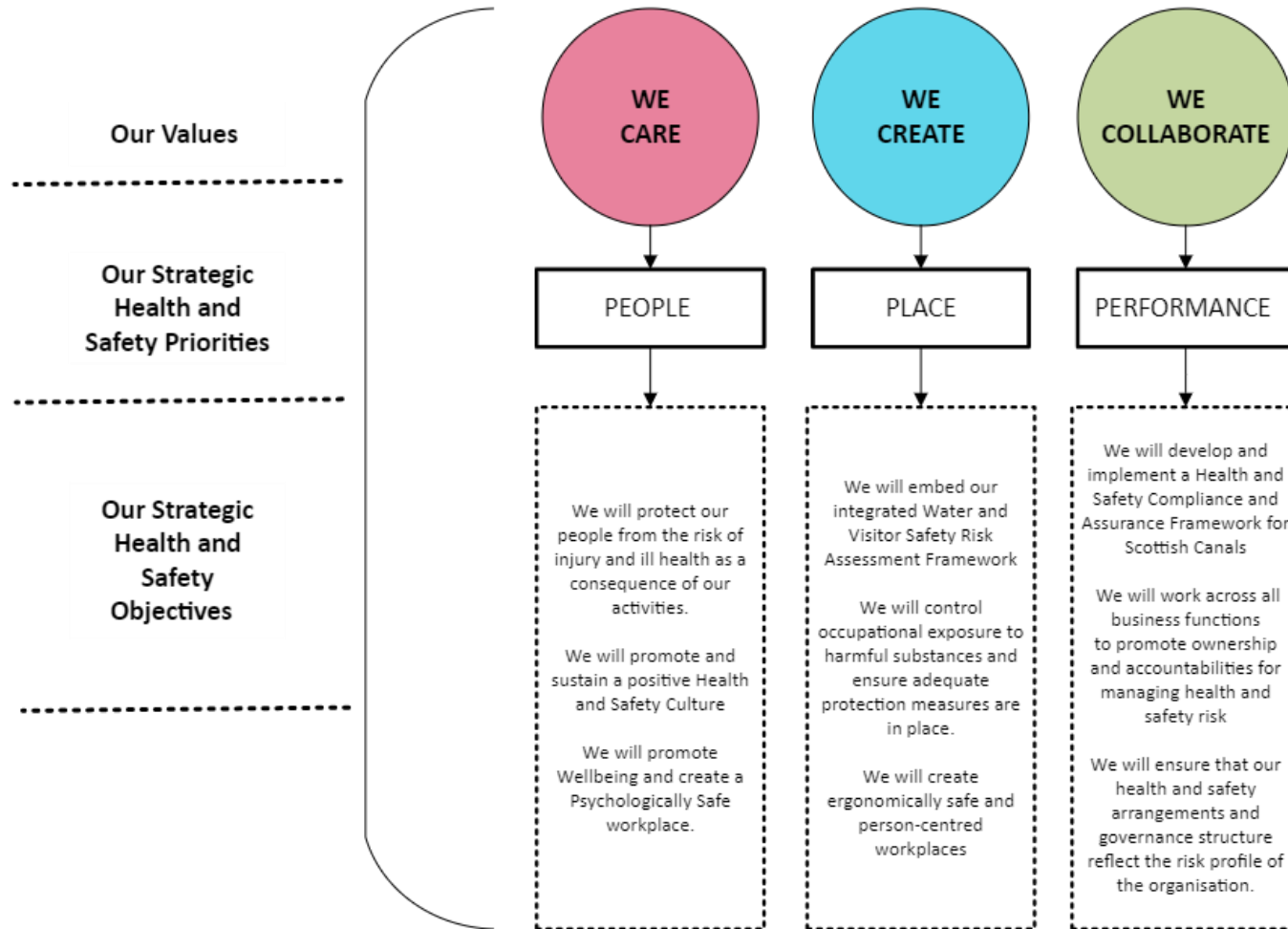
OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES AND OBJECTIVES FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY (2025-2028)

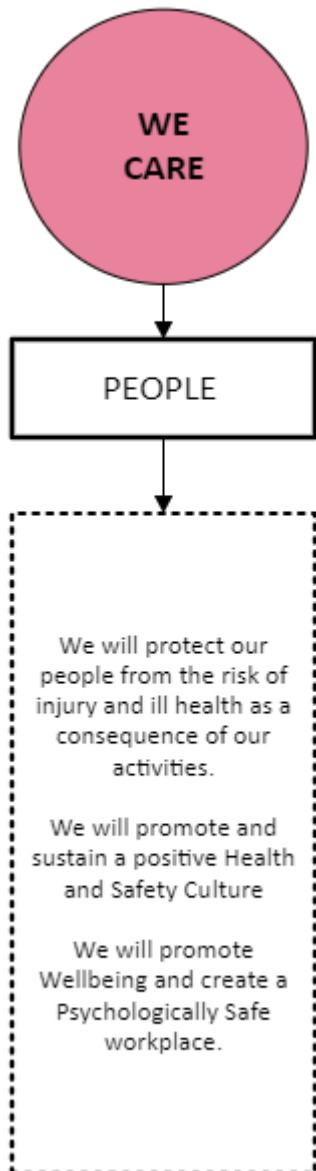
Over the next three years, our strategic Health and Safety priorities will focus on these areas; People, Place and Performance. We have aligned these priorities to our core values of We Care, We Create and We Collaborate as outlined in **diagram 1**. We have identified several strategic objectives which we will develop further each year as part of the annual Health and Safety Business Plan to ensure the effective and efficient delivery of this strategy.

GOVERNANCE AND DELIVERY OF OUR HEALTH AND SAFETY STRATEGY (2025-2028)

The responsibility for the delivery of this strategy rests with the Board. The National Health and Safety Committee, the Local Health, Safety, Wellbeing Action Groups, and the Executive Management Team will monitor progress with achieving the outcomes outlined in this strategy. As part of our Health and Safety Strategy (2025-2028), we are committed to reviewing our governance structures for health and safety to ensure that they are proportionate and evidence led so that the Board, our workers, and stakeholders can be assured that Scottish Canals is a safe and compliant organisation.

Diagram 1: Strategic Overview





We are committed to:

By 2025/26

- Publishing a Scottish Canals Wellbeing Strategy and action plan to support a whole person-centred approach to physical, mental, and social health in the workplace.
- Undertaking 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.
- Publishing the Scottish Canals Health and Safety Culture development plan in response to the safety culture assessment undertaken in 2024.
- Finalising a robust framework to support individuals with appropriate equipment including hybrid and blended working and personal protective equipment.

By 2026/27

- Exploring elements of psychological safety in the workplace and what this would look and feel like to Scottish Canals in collaboration with the workforce.
- Undertaking deep dives into the risks from Violence and Aggression at work, security and terrorism threats, and the management of contractors undertaking high-risk or critical safety work.
- Undertake a strategic review of our health and safety training requirements and publish a Health and Safety Competency Framework outlining our commitment to developing a competent workforce focussed on compliance, safety leadership and safety behaviours.
- Continuing with the delivery of outcomes contained within the Scottish Canals Wellbeing Strategy and action plan, and the Health and Safety Culture development plan.
- Further developing Scottish Canals health and safety leadership capabilities by introducing “My Safety Shadow” to promote and reinforce positive health and safety behaviours across all operational areas of the organisation.

By 2027/28

- Fully embedding a Psychological Safety Charter across Scottish Canals which will drive our commitment to sustaining an open, supported, and collaborative culture underpinned by organisational learning and continuous improvement.
- Undertaking deep dives into the risks from slips, trips, and falls, working near and on water, and managing boat movements.
- Continuing with the delivery of outcomes contained within the Scottish Canals Wellbeing Strategy and action plan, and the Health and Safety Culture development plan.
- Undertaking a review of our workforce capabilities to ensure that Scottish Canals can maintain a confident, competent and resilience workforce that can respond to the operational challenges for the next 10 years.



We are committed to:

By 2025/26

- Publishing an updated and integrated framework for water and visitor safety risk management.
- Completing visitor and water safety risk assessments for 25% of all locations across the canal network.
- Undertaking 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.
- Working collaboratively with key stakeholders, publish an updated Towpath Code of Conduct to reflect the changing needs of the communities that we serve.
- Continuing to support the delivery of the welfare facilities improvement plan and define standards for desk-based workplaces across the canal network.

By 2026/27

- Completing visitor and water safety risk assessments for 35% (total 60%) of all locations across the canal network.
- Undertaking a detailed review of occupational exposure to noise and dangerous substances across all operational locations and where necessary, implemented appropriate risk based and proportionated risk reduction measures.
- Exploring our approach to working safely with contractors and stakeholders to ensure responsibilities, accountabilities and outcomes contribute to safe places and spaces across the canal network and all associated operations.
- Continuing to support the delivery of the welfare facilities improvement plan and improvements to desk-based workplaces across the canal network.

By 2027/28

- Completing visitor and water safety risk assessments for 40% (total 100%) of all locations across the canal network.
- Undertaking a detailed review of occupational exposure to Hand Arm Vibration across all operational locations and where necessary, implemented appropriate risk based and proportionated risk reduction measures.
- Continuing to support the delivery of the welfare facilities improvement plan and improvements to desk-based workplaces across the canal network.
- Working collaboratively with adjacent land and property owners to explore and promote safer access to Scottish Canals land and waterways and ensure visitor and water safety risks and controls are understood and accepted.



We are committed to:

By 2025/26

- Publishing and implementing a Scottish Canals Compliance Framework to reflect both health and safety and wider regulatory compliance obligations relevant to the organisation.
- Undertaking 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.
- Scoping and defining a new approach to health and safety induction for new workers and those moving roles within Scottish Canals.
- Publishing an updated Scottish Canals Public Rescue Equipment Strategy including measures for inspection, monitoring, upgrading and replacement.

By 2026/27

- Undertaking Phase 2 of the Health and Safety Governance and Arrangements Review focusing on Occupation Health and Safety Risk Management, Business Continuity and Resilience.
- Implementing a new Health and Safety induction process for all new workers and those moving roles within Scottish Canals.
- Creating and implementing a new approach to health and safety performance management focusing on leading indicators for safety and the proactive management of risk.
- Implement the updated Scottish Canals Public Rescue Equipment Strategy including measures for inspection, monitoring, upgrading and replacement.

By 2027/28

- Undertaking Phase 3 of the Health and Safety Governance and Arrangements Review focusing on engagement, communication, and organisational learning.
- Reviewing Business Continuity arrangements and emergency procedures to ensure Scottish Canals is resilient, agile, and adaptable during periods of business interruption.
- Delivering refreshed and updated health and safety leadership and management training to all relevant workers across Scottish Canals to ensure that they are confident and accountable for creating and sustaining a safe and compliant workplace.