Item 4

PORT BOARD **21st JANUARY, 2016**

UK DROWNING PREVENTION STRATEGY (2016 - 2026): REGISTRATION OF COMMITMENT BY PORT OF SUNDERLAND

REPORT OF THE MARINE SERVICES MANAGER

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek the Board's approval for the Port of Sunderland to support the aims of the UK Drowning Prevention Strategy (2016 - 2016).

2.0 DESCRIPTION OF DECISION

2.1 The Port Board is requested to consider and agree to the contents of the letter attached to this Report and for it to be forwarded to the National Water Safety Forum under the signature of the Chairman of the Port Board.

3.0 INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND

3.1 On 21st October, 2015, the Port of Sunderland was represented at the National Water Safety Conference at Durham, which was organised by RoSPA in partnership with the National Water Safety Forum (NWSF).

3.2 RoSPA is a registered charity with a stated mission to save lives and reduce injuries, while its vision is to lead the way on accident prevention.

3.3 The NWSF is an association of organisations that have a wide variety of interests and responsibilities for water safety and works in partnership with RoSPA. The Forum's Coordinating Group oversees the works of its six specialist Advisory Groups, with the Forum being granted aided by the Department for Transport, which is also represented on the Coordinating Group.

3.4 The key element of the National Water Safety Conference was the launch of UK Drowning Prevention Strategy (2016 - 2016), which is to be formally introduced in January, 2016.

3.5 RoSPA and the NWSF are actively encouraging relevant organisations (including local harbour authorities) to endorse and agree to supporting the aims of the UK Drowning Prevention Strategy on a local level, the objectives of which are to reduce accidental drowning fatalities in the UK by 50% by 2026 and reduce risk amongst the highest risk populations, groups and communities. There are on average about 400

drowning related death nationwide each year - not including deliberate acts of self-harm.

3.6 Members will be aware of the accidental drowning of two teenage girls at Fatfield in July, 2013 together with other occasional drowning incidents on the River Wear, some of which can be attributed to deliberate acts of self-harm.

4.0 CURRENT POSITION

4.1 The Port of Sunderland is in a position to support the strategy locally by the following means:

(a) The existing targeted and proactive use of Water Patrols on the River Wear, especially during high levels of seasonal activity;

(b) Continuing to work in partnership with internal and external stakeholders, including Search and Rescue assets, Emergency Services, relevant Council service areas and external water-based leisure organisations;

(c) Discouraging inappropriate swimming activity in the River Wear, including by the proportionate application of the Port of Sunderland Byelaws where appropriate;

(d) Exploring ways of encouraging pleasure boat users to utilise appropriate safety equipment, including the use of lifejackets; and

(e) Where appropriate, engaging with local and national water safety campaigns and initiatives.

4.2 In practice, the Port is already undertaking many of these measures, namely:

(a) **Water Patrols:** Between Easter and the end of September over the past four years Water Patrol Officers have demonstrably played a key role in promoting water safety to water and riverside users by fulfilling their core functions, namely:

- Providing education and advice to water users, aimed at ensuring safe operation of leisure craft and vessels, compliance with the Port of Sunderland Byelaws, 1978 and other maritime legislation, minimising anti-social behaviour and prevention of harm to environment.

- Initiating legal enforcement action in conjunction with appropriate Port of Sunderland / Council officers, Northumbria Police and/or other external agencies when advice, guidance and education have failed to achieve their objectives and/or where serious violations have taken place.

- Performing additional tasks as may from time to time be directed by the Harbour Master and his assistants, such as reporting on aids to navigation, reporting/securing flotsam, reporting defective public rescue equipment, investigating occurrences/incidents, keeping navigation channel clear of small craft, etc.

- Proactively engaging with persons (especially young people) on shore to prevent and minimise risk of drowning or other injury, especially in the riverside environment, including structures such as piers and breakwaters.

- Providing assistance to persons and craft in potential difficulty / danger as necessary and to assist declared search and rescue assets and/or emergency services at incidents if requested.

(b) **Partnership working:** The Port's Marine Services Department, as a whole, already enjoys excellent working relationships with the emergency services, search and rescue organisations, relevant Council departments and water-based leisure groups over matters of water safety. Port staff will continue to consolidate and improve upon such associations.

(c) **Discouraging inappropriate swimming activity:** Besides proactive intervention by Water Patrols and other marine resources, the new draft Port of Sunderland Byelaws (currently under progression) seek to prohibit swimming in the River Wear, subject to certain exceptions. The Board are aware of this ongoing project.

(d) **Encouraging utilisation of safety equipment by pleasure boat users:** As an incentive for pleasure boat owners to carry and use basic safety equipment, the Harbour Master and Port Director have previously given consideration on a case by case basis to voluntarily discount harbour dues at their discretion for such craft, providing that owners can evidence compliance with requirements.

Informal discussions have previously taken place with the local Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) Sea Safety Officer over applying the RNLI's voluntary "Advice Onboard" scheme as a means of certifying safety equipment compliance. The RNLI has indicated that it is keen to cooperate with the Port over this issue, which has not yet been progressed for various reasons.

In addition, Water Patrol Officers regularly engage with boat owners regarding the use of safety equipment, particularly lifejackets.

(e) **Engaging with water safety campaigns and initiatives:** In recent months, the Port of Sunderland has collaborated with the Corporate Communications team in support of Sunderland City Council's Drowning Prevention initiative by participating in promotional

videos. Additionally, the Port's 2016 Tide Table booklets have been printed with the Council's drowning prevention message and graphic design on the rear cover.

5.0 REASONS FOR THE DECISION

5.1 As a responsible public body, the Port of Sunderland may wish to endorse and support the aims of the UK Drowning Prevention Strategy for reasons of public safety and to take reasonable and proportionate steps where appropriate on a local level to support these aims.

5.2 The endorsement of these aims will also enhance the Port's commitment to complying with Port Marine Safety Code (PMSC) principles so far as they relates to promoting safe use of the Harbour.

6.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

6.1 The alternative option would be for the Port to not support the aims of Strategy. However this is not recommended for the reasons stated above. To take no further action in relate to this Report but rely upon other organisations and groups to carry forward the principles of the Drowning Prevention Strategy.

7.0 IMPACT ANALYSIS

7.1 There are no adverse impacts upon any person in relation to equality, privacy and crime and disorder issues.

8.0 OTHER RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 **Financial implications:** Apart from te potential waiver of harbour dues (see para 4.2 (d)) for pleasure craft, which would be considered on a case by case basis based on the discretion of the Port Director and Harbour Master, , no cost implications are envisaged as arising in connection with endorsing the objectives of the Strategy.

9.0 LIST OF APPENDICES

9.1 Proposed letter to be forwarded to the National Water Safety Forum under the signature of the Chairman of the Port Board subject to Board approval.

10.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

10.1 If required, the full **UK Drowning Prevention Strategy (2016 - 2016)** document can be obtained by email on request to Neil Mearns, Marine Services Manager, Port of Sunderland (neil.mearns@portofsunderland.com / tel 0191 553 2147)