

REPORT TO: Halton Health Policy & Performance Board
DATE: 20th February, 2024
REPORTING OFFICER: Director of Public Health
PORTFOLIO: Health and Wellbeing
SUBJECT: Suicide Prevention
WARD(S) Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 Report will provide an overview of work taking place to reduce suicides at a local level, regional level, and national level.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That the report be noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The effects of suicide are far reaching and have a devastating impact on families, friends, communities, and colleagues. An estimated 130 people are greatly impacted for every suicide that occurs and there are approximately 25 people attempting suicide for every person that takes their own life. Therefore, even if numbers of deaths by suicide may appear low, they are just the tip of the iceberg and don't reflect those impacted and those attempting.

3.2 Suicide risk is greater in areas of deprivation, such as Halton, due to the wider determinants of health. The wider determinants of health are a diverse range of social, economic, and environmental factors which influence people's mental and physical health. Although suicide is incredibly complex, we are aware of certain risk factors which make some individuals more vulnerable to suicide such as being a middle-aged man, living with a with long term condition, those dealing with substance misuse problems, those who Self-Harm, those struggling with financial difficulties especially those unemployed, and those who are bereaved.

3.3 Evidence demonstrates that suicide is preventable. In Halton the local suicide prevention partnership group meet quarterly to drive the suicide prevention agenda and evidence-based action plan.

3.4 Halton has a Real Time Surveillance system in place which means Public Health receive notifications from the coroner of any suspected suicides.

3.5 Table 1 demonstrates a reduction in the suicide rate for Halton from 10.8 (2018-2020) to 9.3 (2020-2022) resulting in Halton having a suicide rate

lower than the Northwest average and England average of 11.8 and 10.3 respectively, despite being an area of significant deprivation and therefore higher suicide risk.

Table 1- ONS Data suicide rates

Number of deaths and age-standardised suicide rates per 100,000 population	2018-2020 rolling 3-year aggregate.	2019-2021 rolling 3-year aggregate.	2020-2022 rolling 3-year aggregate.
Halton	10.8	10.1	9.3
Northwest	10.6	11.3	11.8
England	10.3	10.4	10.3

3.6 Local suicide prevention action plan

3.6.1 Halton has had a local suicide prevention action plan in place since 2017. The action plan is based on local suicide audits and national suicide prevention guidance and evidence. Each year Public Health performs an audit of those who have died by suicide. Themes from the audits are used to shape the local action plan.

3.6.2 The most recent 3-year audit summary highlighted the following:

- 66% of suicides locally are male.
- Average age 45
- Personal problems at time of death included:
 1. Unemployed
 2. Physical health problems
 3. Relationship problems
 4. Financial problems
 5. Bereavement
 6. Substance misuse
 7. Self-harm and previous suicide attempts

3.6.3 Please be aware suicide is complex and the above themes can indicate possible contributing factors but not necessarily the cause.

3.6.4 The action plan focuses on the following areas as per national guidance:

- Reducing the risk of suicide in key high-risk groups
- Tailoring approaches to improve mental health in specific groups.

- Reducing access to means
- Providing better information and support to those bereaved and affected by suicide.
- People who Self-Harm
- Supporting research, data collection and monitoring
- Supporting the media to deliver sensitive approaches to reporting suicidal behaviour.

3.7 **Key Actions and successes**

3.7.1 **Reducing suicides in Middle aged men**

3.7.1.1 Due to males making up a large percentage of suicides both nationally and locally there is a specific focus on reducing suicides in men within the action plan. A dedicated member of staff has been recruited to lead on this area of work. A campaign and dedicated website [Calm Your Mind](#) has been developed with local middle-aged men and lived experience champions. Evidence tells us men are less likely to take notice of generic marketing material as they think it isn't for them. Calm your mind focusses on raising awareness of what men can do to calm their minds as well as letting them know where they can get help should they need it. The campaign uses local lived experience stories to raise awareness and the direction of the work is driven by local lived experienced champions.

3.7.1.2 The campaign and website have been active since June 2023 and receive just under 400 visitors per month. Although too early to evaluate its impact the number of notifications for male suicides in 2023 is just over half of what it was in 2022.

3.8 **Workforce development via training offer**

3.8.1 Since 2017 Halton Health Improvement Team has provided suicide awareness training to those who live or work in the area. The aim of the training is to increase knowledge regarding risk factors related to suicide and help signpost to support available. Since 2017, 1774 have been trained. Those who work with vulnerable cohorts are actively encouraged to attend such as those who work with people who are unemployed.

3.9 **Financial insecurity**

3.9.1 **Food bank**

3.9.1.1 Additional funding sourced regionally was utilised to implement additional financial support for those accessing food banks ensuring the most vulnerable were connected to Citizens Advice Halton regarding financial worries. Unfortunately, the additional funding was non recurrent therefore this specific piece of work was only in place from May 2022 to April 2023. However, Citizens Advice Halton continue to work closely with Halton Food banks because of this additional project.

3.10 **Additional support for those struggling with Mental Health and Financial insecurity.**

3.10.1 Additional funding was sourced via Public Health England's Better Mental Health Fund to provide additional resource to Citizens Advice Halton to support those struggling with their mental health and financial insecurity. Unfortunately, this funding was non recurrent and ended in August 2023. However, Citizens Advice Halton are funding by Public Health to support those struggling with their mental health and financial insecurity.

3.11 **Suicide attempts in children and young people**

3.11.1 A guidance document has been developed collaboratively with local partners and Secondary schools to provide consistent guidance to education settings on how to support students when they disclose, they have attempted suicide. The guidance is being trialled by secondary schools locally before being finalised. Secondary schools and Riverside college have also agreed to share Self-Harm and suicide attempt incidences with the safeguarding in education lead on a termly basis. This will enable themes to be monitored and education settings to be supported.

3.12 **Bereavement services**

3.12.1 Additional funding was sourced via Public Health England's Better Mental Health Fund to commission bereavement support for children and young people and adults. Child Bereavement UK and Listening Ear were funded to provide support from September 2021. Unfortunately, the funding is non recurrent and will end Sept 2024 however providing effective bereavement support is an action in the new national suicide prevention plan and will be led by National Health Service England (NHSE).

3.13 **Bereavement awareness training**

3.13.1 NHS Cheshire and Merseyside have provided funding to Child Bereavement UK to deliver bereavement awareness training to Halton organisations. The aim of the training is to increase the number of people who feel comfortable supporting someone who is bereaved.

3.14 **Work taking place at a regional level which Halton contribute to and benefit from**

3.14.1 **Champs public health collaborative**

3.14.1.1 The Collaborative is a long-standing formal partnership of Cheshire and Merseyside's nine Directors of Public Health and their teams. The Collaborative tackles several priorities, that are common to every area and where progress can be best made through collective action. One of these areas is preventing suicide throughout the Cheshire and Merseyside region with the development and implementation of a suicide prevention strategy which can be viewed via <https://champspublichealth.com/suicide-prevention/>.

Champs also oversee various pieces of work at a regional level that local areas, such as Halton, benefit from.

3.15.2 Post Vention Support

3.15.2.1 Champs is responsible for the commissioning of post vention support services, provided by Amparo, across the region. Post vention refers to support provided after someone dies by suicide. Amparo provides emotional and practical support to anyone affected by suicide and can be accessed by those who live or work in Halton. The service has been available for 8 years and although can be accessed via a self-referral process most beneficiaries are made aware of support available via the coroner.

3.15.2.2 To access support from Amparo please Tel: 0330 088 9255 or email amparo.service@listening-ear.co.uk for further information visit <https://amparo.org.uk/about-us/>

3.16 Lived Experience Network

3.16.1 Champs commission Wirral Mind to co ordinate a Lived Experience Network (LEN). The Lived Experience Network acts as a critical friend ensuring those with experience of suicidal thoughts or suicide attempts inform development of strategies, action plans and services. The network has 59 members. Local areas can request input from the LEN regarding any work they are implementing. One of the LEN members attends Halton's suicide prevention partnership meetings, providing lived experience input.

3.17 Real Time Surveillance System

3.17.1 Champs is responsible for co ordinating Cheshire and Merseyside's Real Time Surveillance system which tracks the number of potential suicides. Champs receive notifications from coroners when they suspect a death may be due to suicide, details are then shared with local Public Health teams. Although the amount of data received is small and doesn't provide personal identifiable information this process does enable potential themes and trends to be monitored and responded to. The Real Time Surveillance system has been in place since 2017 in Cheshire and Merseyside and is now also being implemented at a national level.

3.18 Samaritans' media advice service

3.18.1 Champs commission Samaritans to provide a media advice service. This involves media guideline training, providing advice to media outlets regarding unsafe reporting of potential suicides, monitoring and assessment of news reports relating to suicides and providing guidance to local suicide prevention leads.

3.18.2 Samaritans are best known for their helpline available 24 hours a day 7 days a week. Trained volunteers are available to listen whatever someone is going through. Call 116123. Free to call from landlines and mobiles.

3.19 **Domestic Abuse**

3.19.1 The link between domestic abuse and suicide has been reported nationally and data from Cheshire and Merseyside suspected suicide real time surveillance systems has indicated this is indeed a problem for Merseyside. Currently real time surveillance data for Cheshire doesn't capture links to domestic abuse due to this information not being available to the coroner. In Merseyside the police provide the data for suspected suicides and are therefore able to share information on when there are potential links with domestic abuse. Champs are working with Merseyside Police and partners to explore how suicide risk can be reduced in those experiencing domestic abuse. Although the work doesn't currently involve Cheshire Champs will look to replicate effective practice across the whole of the region when possible.

3.20 **Beyond Children and Young People Transformation programme**

3.20.1 Established April 2021, the Beyond programme was set up to improve Children and young people's health across the whole of the Cheshire and Mersey region, making sure services from health, local authorities, education, the voluntary sector work together well.

- The focus of the transformation programme is prevention and work takes place in the following areas:
 - Emotional wellbeing and mental health
 - Respiratory and Asthma
 - Learning Disabilities and Autism Healthy Weight and Obesity
 - Epilepsy
 - Diabetes

3.20.2 Within the Emotional wellbeing and mental health workstream work is taking place to reduce and prevent Self-Harm in children and young people across the region. To understand the true number of children and young people who are self-harming work is taking place to capture Self-Harm data from Secondary Schools and Colleges across the region. Currently Cheshire East Secondary schools have agreed to share their data on a termly basis starting from 2024. Conversations are currently taking place with all other areas within Cheshire and Merseyside including Halton. Once a clear picture is established regarding the number of children and young people who are self-harming across the region the data will be analysed, and next steps explored.

3.20.3 Work is also taking place to develop a suite of safety plans that front line staff can use when working with young people who are struggling with suicidal thoughts or Self-Harm. A safety plan is a tool for helping someone navigate suicidal thoughts, helping them to keep themselves safe.

3.21 **National Suicide Prevention Strategy**

3.21.1 The newly updated National Suicide Prevention strategy was launched September 2023. The full strategy can be viewed via the following link [Suicide prevention strategy for England: 2023 to 2028 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/118121/suicide-prevention-strategy-for-england-2023-to-2028.pdf).

3.21.2 The cross-government national strategy aims to reduce the suicide rate within 2.5 years by focussing on the following areas:

- Improving data and evidence
- Providing tailored and targeted support to priority groups
- Addressing risk factors
- Online safety, media and technology
- Providing effective and appropriate crisis support
- Tackling means and methods of suicide
- Providing timely and effective bereavement support
- Making suicide prevention everyone's business.

3.21.3 All the areas the national strategy focuses on are already included in the local action plan however there are some considerations to be explored locally in relation to the suicide prevention and the following areas:

- Autistic people
- Pregnant women and new mothers
- Gambling
- Social Isolation and Loneliness
- Domestic Abuse

3.21.4 Locally a focus already exists on; pregnant women and new mothers via the Family Hubs work, gambling, overseen by Public Health, social isolation and loneliness overseen via one Halton age well workstream and domestic abuse via Halton Domestic abuse partnership strategy. This enables the link between suicide prevention and these areas of work to be explored more easily.

3.21.5 In relation to those who are autistic the national strategy is less clear regarding how suicide risk can be reduced in this cohort however Champs will be exploring this further in 2024.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 There are no new Policy implications as a result of this report.

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 There is an economic cost of approximately £1.6 million for every person who takes their own life. Work to reduce suicides mitigates against this economic cost and the unseen implications on the wider system.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES** ([click here for list of priorities](#))

6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

The local suicide prevention action plan contributes to the safeguarding of Children and Young people.

6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

The local suicide prevention action plan contributes to employment prospects of residents through training staff, enabling the identification of suicide risk, and connecting to relevant support.

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

The local suicide prevention action plan contributes to a healthier community by working to reduce risk factors for suicide and connect those who need it to relevant support.

6.4 **A Safer Halton**

The local suicide prevention action plan contributes to a safer Halton through the reduction in suicides.

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

No implication on Urban Renewal.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 None.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 The risk of suicide is inequitable and impacts those in areas of high deprivation.

9.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 No climate change implications identified at this time.

10.0 **LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

10.1 'None under the meaning of the Act.'
