

Questions and Answers

Health and Wellbeing Board

Thursday 8 December 2022

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Public Questions as specified in the Council's Procedure Rules of the Constitution

(A) Question submitted to the Executive Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care by Mr Stuart Gourley:

"It was concerning to read in the Newbury Weekly News (24/11) yet further concerns from a coroner raised to the CQC about the provision of care at the Birchwood Care Home in Clay Hill, so what steps have WBC put in place to address the issues raised, and improve the care given?"

The Executive Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care answered:

As you would expect, we have expressed our sincere condolences to the family of this gentleman and have also communicated with the families of the current residents of Birchwood so that they know the work that we are doing. In the case of Birchwood, we have made substantial changes. This includes changes to relevant policies and processes, changes to personnel and the management structure. We have a dedicated and comprehensive ongoing improvement programme for Birchwood to drive up standards across all of the areas which affect the wellbeing of residents. This includes additional monitoring and audit, improved training and greater use of technology.

As Portfolio Holder, I have been meeting regularly with the key managers responsible for driving forward the improvements and I can vouch for the commitment they have shown to maintain high standards and ensuring we are providing good quality care to all our residents. Senior Officers and fellow Members share this commitment.

The Board will be aware of the national picture in Adult Social Care and the significant difficulties facing Local Authorities in the areas of staffing and resources. I am content that we are bringing focus and energy to the delivery of care in our services, but it should be noted this is within an increasingly challenging landscape.

(B) Question submitted to the Director of Public Health for Berkshire West by Mr Stuart Gourley:

"With suicide likely to increase post pandemic, and with the cost of living crisis increasing in intensity and damage caused, will West Berkshire Council consider reviewing the focuses of the Berkshire Suicide Prevention Strategy as a lot has changed since Sept 2021 adoption?"

Thank you for your question, one that helps keep this important subject on the agenda. Your assessment of the data and context in which we consider the risks and indicators of harm relating to suicide and suicide prevention are well made and have, as you state, changed considerably since the Suicide Prevention Strategy was published in October 2021.

Following a review of the strategy a paper was taken to the Health & Wellbeing Board in the summer of 2022, to gain support to re-establish the Pan-Berkshire Suicide Prevention Partnership to review and update the document.

The Pan-Berkshire Suicide Prevention Strategy has now been refreshed and a Consultation Draft will be published on the 12th of December 2022. It has a reframed Vision for Suicide Prevention across all age groups and specific sections addressing the post pandemic and impact of cost-of-living crisis agenda areas. This Vision seeks to embrace the concepts championed by the “[Zero Suicide Alliance](#)” and [National Confidential Enquiry into Suicide and Safety in Mental Health](#) that support the [National Suicide Prevention Strategy](#).

A ten-point plan was agreed to provide a framework for continuing our work on the agenda whilst the strategy development work takes place.

1. Introduce suicide prevention across all policy
2. Improve methods to tackle root cause vulnerability
3. Establish a trauma informed approach
4. Assess and strengthen ways of tackling inequalities
5. Establish focus on debt and cost of living
6. Improve focus on children and young people
7. Establish means to address female suicide rates
8. Strengthen focus on links between mental health, self-harm and suicide
9. Continue to develop and establish support for people bereaved by suicide
10. Develop means for family support to ensure individual wellbeing

In summary the Pan-Berkshire Strategy seeks to outline the regional support approach and assistance available for local responses to the 7 National Suicide Prevention Priorities. The Strategy provides a way for local areas to align their efforts and aims to strike a balance between the national, regional and local elements of suicide prevention for all age ranges and specific vulnerable groups.

Whilst Suicide Prevention works must address all groups – *as no suicide is inevitable and all suicides are individual tragedies with devastating consequences* – a particular focus is given to a range of priority groups where there are known risk factors or trends of concern.

This includes, as a non-exhaustive list: men in early to middle age – particularly those encountering life challenging circumstances; women of all ages impacted by domestic abuse; children and young people; and a range of other priority groups, including people known to mental health services, those struggling with their financial situation and home context and neuro-divergent and LGBTQ people.

A key element of the Strategy reflects the development of Real-Time Suicide Surveillance and the imperative to continually refresh the works we are delivering so that suicide prevention responses are tailored to meet the needs of emerging agendas flowing from trends identified in the data and that local ownership and championship of suicide prevention works and community awareness is enabled to flourish.

As we move through winter, and with the context of the Covid 19 pandemic and the emerging economic turbulence, it is essential that we continually review and renew the works we deliver to prevent suicide, and with this in mind there will be an annual refresh of the five year Pan-Berkshire Strategy to ensure it is supporting local area prevention of suicides alongside supporting the

delivery of bereavement support and capturing all possible learning we can from those deaths that we are unable at this time to prevent.

Over the past few months, the Partnership has worked to develop data and are working towards real time data surveillance. The Strategy has been refreshed, and the draft will be launched for consultation at the Suicide Prevention Summit which will take place on 12th December.

Following the consultation process, the Strategy will be updated to reflect feedback and will be taken back to Health and Wellbeing Boards ahead of publishing in the spring of 2023.

West Berkshire District has the benefit of a Suicide Prevention Action Group that is led by Volunteer Centre West Berkshire. The Action Group is comprised of local stakeholders, including West Berkshire Public Health officers and Transport officers, all of whom are interested to reduce suicide. The group has been successful and employs an outreach worker who delivers accredited suicide prevention training and provides resource material to targeted groups. The group also arranges for suicide prevention signs to be installed on bridges, car parks and other sensitive locations. Finally the group established a valuable website resource

<https://westberksiresuicideprevention.org>

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