

Agenda Item	6
Report No	HC/21/19

## HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**Committee:** The Highland Council

**Date:** 27 June 2019

**Report Title:** Suicide Prevention

**Report By:** Chief Executive and Chief Superintendent

### 1. Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 Suicide can affect any individual, any family and any community. All organisations, both public and third sector, have a role to play in raising awareness and understanding of suicide and taking a collaborative approach to prevention is critical.
- 1.2 Suicide prevention is recognised as a priority both locally and nationally. This report outlines the approach taken nationally by the Scottish Government but also the action of partners locally. The report also sets out the commitment from the Public Protection Chief Officers group to undertake a piece of research to better understand the current evidence base and experience of suicide in Highland with a view to developing a new preventative model of intervention.

### 2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:
  - Consider the current national and local context for suicide prevention activity,
  - Consider **and agree** the proposal to take forward a piece of research to better understand the current evidence base and experience of suicide in Highland.

### **3. Background**

- 3.1 Suicide can affect any individual, any family and any community. All organisations, both public and third sector, have a role to play in raising awareness and understanding of suicide and taking a collaborative approach to prevention is critical.
- 3.2 Suicide prevention is a priority both nationally and locally. Within Highland, suicide prevention and raising awareness of suicide is a priority for the Council, Police Scotland, NHS Highland and wider Community Planning Partners. There is a commitment within both the Council's Programme and Corporate Plan to raise awareness and seek preventative approaches to suicide.
- 3.3 This report provides background to the presentation from the Council's Chief Executive and Chief Superintendent on developing an improved understanding of suicide in Highland and considering a new model to prevent suicide. This follows agreement of this strategy at the Public Protection Chief Officer's group. The report outlines the national context but also what partnership action has been taken forward in recent years. It outlines the next steps in developing a better understanding of current experiences and trends around suicide and alternative intervention approaches. Through this research it is proposed to develop a collaborative prevention model to address suicide in Highland.

### **4. National Context**

- 4.1 The Scottish Government published Scotland's suicide prevention action plan, *Every Life Matters*, in August 2018. This plan sets out the vision and aims and actions to prevent suicide within Scotland. It sits within a wider context of the 2017 Mental Health Strategy and existing Choose Life programme which began in 2002. The action plan recognises the importance of a cultural change to embed learning and prevent future suicides. The plan has 5 key strategic aims for a Scotland where:
- people at risk of suicide feel able to ask for help, and have access to skilled staff and well-co-ordinated support;
  - people affected by suicide are not alone;
  - suicide is no longer stigmatised;
  - we provide better support to those bereaved by suicide; and
  - through learning and improvement, we minimise the risk of suicide by delivering better services and building stronger, more connected communities.

The national aim is to reduce the rate of suicide by 20% by 2022. This is a challenging target, double the target set by the World Health Organisation in 2013 to reduce suicide by 10% by 2020.

- 4.2 The national action plan outlines a range of actions including:
- The development and implementation of a new mental health and suicide prevention training programme. This includes a focus on ensuring every organisation with physical first aiders also has mental health first aiders. Support for children and young people is identified as a priority with the aim

teaching staff being offered mental health first aid training by the end of academic year 2019/20 and a greater awareness of Adverse Childhood experience and the links with mental health and wellbeing.

- A national public awareness raising campaign to break down stigma, address misconceptions, identify signposting to support and encouraging people to talk more openly about their feelings and experiences.
- To develop and support the delivery of digital innovations that improve suicide prevention. This could include providing online support to those at risk of suicide, raising awareness of support and taking a preventative approach to suicide online.
- Using learning to develop new models of crisis support, including awareness raising and identification of groups at higher risk of suicide.

## 5. Action in Highland

- 5.1 There has been a partnership approach to suicide prevention in Highland over many years. This includes joint training, awareness raising and work with communities. Work is led through a multi-agency Choose Life group. Membership of the Choose Life Steering Group includes: NHS Highland; Highland Council; Police Scotland; Scottish Fire & Rescue Service, Highland Drug and Alcohol Partnership; third sector organisations (HTSI, HUG, Samaritans, Support in Mind, the Hive). This group reports to the CPP Mental Health and Wellbeing Delivery Group.
- 5.2 There has been a multi-agency approach to training on suicide over many years across the four nationally approved suicide prevention training courses: Scottish Mental Health First Aid (SMHFA), SafeTALK, ASiST and STORM. Training is co-ordinated through NHS Highland but jointly delivered by the Council and NHS. Attendees include third sector bodies, Council, NHS and UHI staff.
- 5.3 In addition to the above, internally, the Council provides a range of training and materials which support suicide prevention and awareness raising. This includes:
- A range of Toolbox Talks including Suicide Awareness
  - Postintervention sessions with community and workplace groups affected by suicide
  - Mental Health representatives in Council workplaces who are all trained in Mental Health First Aid
  - Mental Health and Wellbeing Toolkit includes Choose Life [A guide to talking, listening and reducing stigma surrounding suicide](#)
  - ASiST, safeTALK and Scottish Mental Health First Aid: Young People, are promoted to staff within the Council's Care and Learning Service
  - The Primary Mental Health Worker service provide various tailored training to schools regarding mental health including: *Change, Loss and bereavement* (taking account of the risks if a suicide happens in a community and how to support) and *Seasons for Growth* (a programme to support young people who have experienced the loss of someone because of suicide.)
- 5.4 Alongside training, there have been partnership approaches taken in recent years to

raising awareness of suicide, particularly shared messages on national awareness days and also to working with communities on post-intervention activity. The Conversation Café approach was developed in conjunction with Fortrose Academy in response to concerns following tragic events within the community. Hosted by Choose Life, this focused on a wider conversation including wellbeing, mental health along with suicide.

5.5 In 2018, the Community Planning Board agreed that a new approach was required with regards suicide prevention. This was in response to partnership intelligence with regards suicide. The 'breakthrough' achievement for the board for 2018 focused on ways of raising awareness of suicide across agencies and communities. Two strands of activity were developed:

- **Suicide intervention Prevention Programme (SIPP) training:** in recognition that everyone can have a role to play in preventing suicide, the SIPP programme of training is aimed at all staff groups to enable participants to
  - recognise a person at risk of suicide
  - ask about suicide, including the ability to display listening and questioning skills
  - be aware of the impact of attitudes on suicide, and
  - develop risk management skills to keep a person safe.

Delivered jointly by trainers across CPP organisations, training is delivered across Highland to multi-agency groups. A recent decision extends the offer of this training to key third sector and targeted groups. A SIPP training session for Highland Council elected members has been scheduled for 26 September 2019.

- **Suicide Prevention App:** The app aims to provide awareness about suicide and preventative information to support people feeling suicidal or family and friends to support individuals. Based upon positive experience of use of the app in Tayside and Aberdeenshire, it was agreed to roll out the app in Highland.

The focus of the app is to keep someone safe when feeling distressed or suicidal. It includes a prevent suicide safety plan element which can be completed with the help of a trained listener or family/friend and includes sources of support in situations where people are feeling distressed or suicidal. There is also guidance on what members of the public can do to help someone who is feeling suicidal. The app can be downloaded at the following links:  
iTunes Store:

<https://apps.apple.com/us/app/prevent-suicide-highland/id1436026798>

Google Play Store:

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.faffdigital.PSHighland>

## 6. Developing a Suicide Prevention Model for Highland

- 6.1 Suicide not only affects the immediate family and friends of an individual but the wider community. The effects are devastating and cannot be underestimated. The rates of suicide or attempted suicide in Highland have traditionally been higher than the national average.<sup>1</sup> Rates of probable suicide amongst men are higher than women both nationally and within Highland.<sup>2</sup> Although official rates in recent years have shown a decline in the 5-year average, local intelligence suggests an increase in probable suicides over the last 18 months.
- 6.2 Whilst the Partnership continues to prioritise suicide prevention and wider approaches to promoting resilience and wellbeing through its work, it is recognised that a new collaborative approach to suicide prevention is required in Highland in order to address the scale of the current challenge.
- 6.3 It is proposed to undertake a needs assessment focused on suicide prevention. Whilst much is already known about suicide and the frequency and risk factors associated with suicide, a needs assessment would provide an opportunity to assess current evidence across partner data sources and review successful intervention activity related to suicide prevention both nationally and internationally. This would include gathering evidence from key third sector support groups and communities impacted by suicide. NHS Highland and Police Scotland both have data analyst time to contribute to this piece of work however it is proposed that the Council allocates up to £15,000 from the Change Fund to support this research. Early intervention approaches such as these are crucial to taking a more preventative approach to how we support communities and our workforces. This work will inform the development of a prevention model for Highland, including new approaches to suicide prevention.

## **7. Implications**

- 7.1 Resource – Resource has been requested from the Change Fund to take forward a needs assessment to assess current evidence across partner data sources and review intervention activity. Additional resource to implement the findings and recommendations of this work will be considered jointly by community planning partners.
- 7.2 Legal – No implications
- 7.3 Community (Equality, Poverty and Rural) – Suicide can affect any individual, family or community. Evidence suggests however that there are particular characteristics and risk factors known to contribute to raised suicide risk. These can be cumulative and include: adverse childhood experiences, deprivation and poverty, isolation, a long-term condition, LGBT adults and young people and middle-aged men.
- 7.4 Climate Change / Carbon Clever - No implications

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<sup>1</sup> European age-sex-standardised rates (EASR) probable suicide per 100,000 population, 5 year average 2013-17: Scotland=13.0/100,00 Highland=16.7/100,000

[https://www.scotpho.org.uk/media/1654/suicide\\_la\\_overview\\_2018.xlsx](https://www.scotpho.org.uk/media/1654/suicide_la_overview_2018.xlsx)

<sup>2</sup> EASR 2013-17 Scotland=19.3/100,000 Highland=25.1/100,000

- 7.5 Risk – further work is required in Highland to prevent suicide and mitigate the risks of the impact of suicide on families and communities.
- 7.6 Gaelic – No implications

Designation: Chief Executive and Chief Superintendent

Date: 12- June 2019

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