

**Minutes of** **Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Suicide Bereavement and Prevention**

**Meeting date** **Tuesday, 20 August 2024**

**Members present:** Councillor Samantha Martin (Chair), Councillors Irene Amahwe, Michelle Beach, Russ Green, Christine Heydon, June Molyneaux, Kim Snape, Neville Whitham and Katie Wilkie and attending virtually, Councillors Arjun Singh (Vice Chair) and Jenny Whiffen

**Officers:** Liz Jones (Head of Communities and Housing) (attending virtually) and Ben Storey (Democratic and Member Services Officer)

**Apologies:** Councillor Dedrah Moss

**16 Declarations of interest**

No interests were declared.

**17 Minutes of the last meeting held on Tuesday, 23 July 2024**

The minutes of the last meeting, held on Tuesday 23 July 2024, were agreed as an accurate record.

**18 Interview with Angela Allen, Bags for Strife**

The Chair welcomed Angela Allen from the charity organisation Bags for Strife to the meeting and invited her to say some introductory comments.

The charity was established in the aftermath of personal experiences with suicide and as a response to the gap between the support available, and the support that was needed at such a devastating time.

The name and concept was born out of the four feelings those affected by suicide most commonly experience, Blame, Anger, Guilt and Sadness (BAGS). Very simple concept of a bag full of practical information, guidance on local services and other symbolic items such as tea bags, chocolate and self-care products as reminders to talk to others, eat and take time to look after yourself.

The bags are provided to other organisations and partners to distribute to families and loved ones affected by suicide. Lancashire Police had been integral to this when responding to instances of suicide and delivering the news to family and friends, or

subsequently when Family Liaison Officers provide further support. The charity also work with other police forces, universities, Coroner's Office's and other local groups to distribute the bags.

The charity operates nationally and has recently delivered it's 2,000<sup>th</sup> bag with future plans including developing a bag specifically targeted to younger people.

A number of questions were asked by members with responses summarised below:

- Information provided in the bags do vary and will include guidance on localised services and support groups that are available. Every bag includes a 'Little Book of Help' which contains experiences and stories of others affected by suicide so people don't feel as alone in their grief.
- It is vitally important to reach out and widen the circle of support, those closest to you will be experiencing their own grief and it can be overwhelming to offer support and care to others when experiencing it themselves. Everyone deals with things differently so is about finding your own person able to support you.
- It was disappointing that Lancashire Police ceased distributing the bags when responding to a suicide around six months ago with members supportive of urging this decision to be re-considered. The bags support officers delivering tragic news so they can provide better help/signposting to the affected loved ones.
- As it is often specialised and trained officers who visit families of suicide victims, including the bags as standard in all police vehicles was unlikely to be implemented.
- Aside from the Police, faith leaders, funeral directors, coroners and other local charities across the country helped to distribute the bags to those in need. On whether the council could play a role in the delivery of bags, it was noted that officers and councillors would likely not be sufficiently equipped or trained to provide specialist mental health support that may arise.
- A barrier to organisations working more collaboratively on projects such as this centred around sharing of information and data protection.
- Suicide support services commissioned by the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and provided by AMPARO in Lancashire were discussed and questions raised about the extent of and effectiveness of the service. Members expressed a desire to explore this further.
- In relation to the support police officers provide to families and loved ones, it was suggested that groups such as Andy's Man Club, BAGS for Strife and others could facilitate training for officers to better equip them to deal with these distressing situations.

### **Potential Recommendations of the Task Group**

- To urge Lancashire Police to reconsider the decision not to provide bags to the family and friends affected by suicide.
- To write to AMPARO and/or the ICB to request further information on the suicide support services they provide in Lancashire.
- To request a representative from AMPARO attend a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to deliver a presentation on the services they deliver in Lancashire and answer questions from the Committee.

## 19 Interview with Andy's Man Club

The Chair welcomed Luke Tetlow-Cross from the charity organisation Andy's Man Club to the meeting and invited him to say some introductory comments.

The charity was established in 2016 by relatives of Andy Roberts who died by suicide. Suicide was and still is a leading cause of death in men, with around 4,500 male suicides in 2023. The club centres around weekly support groups where men are encouraged to talk about their feelings and support each other over a brew and biscuits, breaking down cultural stigmas around doing so.

There were now 23 clubs established across the North West and over 200 nationally with 4,500 men attending meetings.

A key part of Luke's role is raising awareness of the club and promoting men's mental health more widely, this is achieved through social media, attending conferences and events and fundraising endeavours.

A number of questions were asked by members with responses summarised below:

- There are currently around 60 men attending meetings held weekly at Chorley Football Club. There is enough space at the venue but this is regularly reviewed. Aim for any new clubs to be at least five miles apart – currently looking at venues in Leigh and Wigan that may be suitable to host a club.
- Although the Women's Wellbeing Club offer a similar service, there was no plans for Andy's Man Club to establish a female division.
- The only criteria to attend a club meeting is that you must permanently identify as a man. Clubs welcome men of all ages, sexuality, religion or race to their meetings.
- The charity is entirely donation led and is driven by range of fundraising activities. There is funding that could apply for but decision made not to as often are limitations and restrictions as to how funding is spent.
- Clubs offer a number of different activities that club facilitators organise, these can be hikes, walks, pool nights or other sports.
- The Club delivers extensive in-house training for all of its facilitators and covers safeguarding, scenarios, how and where to signpost people too. The Club acknowledge facilitators have a challenging role in supporting others while managing their own mental health. Offer a lot of support to facilitators, they can access counselling and other support funded by the Club and Head Office will make a decision to stand facilitators down if they think it is in their best interests.
- The Club benefits from extensive advertising support from a number of organisations free of charge. Notable companies include Network Rail which displays Andy's Man Club adverts at train stations, and Clear Channel which display adverts at bus stops and other locations across towns and cities across the country.

## 20 Next Steps

Members noted the suggested items for the next meeting, which included inviting a representative from Lancashire Constabulary and also the relevant Executive Cabinet Members.

**21 Any urgent business previously agreed with the Chair**

There was no urgent business.

**22 Date of next meeting**

Members noted the date of the next meeting on Thursday 26 September 2024.

Chair

Date