

Overview and Scrutiny Task Group – Recruitment and Staff Retention

May – October 2024



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Introduction

**From the Chair of the Task Group Councillor Samantha Martin and Vice Chair
Councillor Arjun Singh**

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Councillor Samantha Martin
Chair

Councillor Arjun Singh
Vice Chair

Summary Recommendations

The recommendations in this report are informed by the views and documentary evidence provided by the range of witnesses and sources engaged throughout the review.

Membership of the Task Group

Councillor Samantha Martin (Chair)
Councillor Arjun Singh (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Irene Amahwe
Councillor Michelle Beach
Councillor Russ Green
Councillor Christine Heydon
Councillor June Molyneaux
Councillor Dedrah Moss
Councillor Kim Snape
Councillor Jenny Whiffen
Councillor Neville Whittam
Councillor Katie Wilkie

Officer Support

Liz Jones, Head of Communities and Housing
Clare Gornall, Democratic and Member Services Officer

Scoping the review

The objectives the Task Group were:

Objectives:

- **Better understanding of the scale in Chorley**
- **Clear idea of the suicide rates and statistics – call out to LCC to provide latest information**
- **Lessons from neighbourhood authorities, police, PCSOs, family liaison officers**
- **Terminology – better understanding of terms used / language (e.g “commit” or “take” their life)**
- **No moral judgment about suicide – seek to Identify various reasons e.g. debt, cost of living, addiction**
- **Reduction in suicide rate (aspirational)**
- **To look at other social prescribing models**
- **To consider Council’s bereavement policy / leave regarding suicide**
- **To communicate the importance of continual support – not just accepting first response the person may give – open questions**
- **To identify and improve support groups at particular risk e.g. LGBTQ+, neurodiverse people**
- **To identify potential funding streams (LCC, Police and Crime Commissioner)**

The Desired Outcomes Were:

Desired Outcomes:

- To formulate a directory of services and contacts
- To offer orange button training to councillors
- Ensure that that councillors who may have mental health issues know where to seek support
- Raise awareness of support services in public places (similar to “Ask Angela” posters in pub toilets / taxis (e.g. Samaritans posters)
- Council webpage / signposting (mental health triage)
- Explore possibility of a dedicated council officer as point of contact for bereaved residents i.e. regarding the process, liaise with police, offer bereavement support
- Discuss/explore access to service provision without need for referral
- National Hub of Hope database – if possible obtain QR code for app
- For information / awareness - A and E Crisis team – source of referral 0800 number IRS
- Chelsea Fisher (Social Prescribing Team Leader) – link to Annual Event in Chorley to coincide with national / world events

Terms of Reference

1. Identify the relevant background information – statistics, suicide rate, other local areas, what the Council and other organisations already do. How different areas collect statistics (like for like) and the reasons why other some area rates have dramatically dropped.
1. Seek better understanding of the issues and identify the reasons behind them
2. Seek to improve what the Council provides and we can work better with partners, such as signposting, raising awareness
3. Share best practice with other organisations

Witnesses

The following witnesses met with the task group and/or provided information.

Bernie Heggarty and Chelsea Fisher – Social Prescribing Team

Lancashire MIND

LCC Public Health

Andy’s Man Club

Beside you in Bereavement (BYIB) – Suicide Bereavement Support Group

Local Police – Designated Officer who deals with Suicide Prevention Team (to be interviewed)

Meetings

The agendas and minutes of each meeting can be found here

[insert link]

Backckground and Context

The Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme was agreed on 1 August 2023. Suicide Bereavement was agreed as one of the Task Group topics.

The Task Group held its first meeting in May 2024 Councillor Samantha Martin was appointed Chair, and Councillor Arjun Singh was appointed Vice Chair.

Meeting - 22 May 2024

Scoping the Review

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group discussed the scope for the review, including the objectives, desired outcomes, and terms of reference.

They also had regard to the notes of the informal “brainstorming” meeting held on 28 March 2024 which identified a number of organisations that may be useful to speak to as part of the review.

The Task Group stressed it was important to keep the review focussed. Throughout this study members regularly reviewed all the organisations it wished to interview.

Presentation by the Social Prescribing Team

Chelsea Fisher, Social Prescribing Team Leader and Bernie Heggarty, Neighbourhood Priorities Officer gave a presentation outlining the Council’s Social Prescribing Service. He explained that most of its clients were people with moderate mental health issues accompanied with, or related to, difficulties in circumstances e.g. social isolation, housing, or financial problems.

The social prescribing service also provided signposting for people in crisis or with severe mental health issues.

They also presented the Council’s Suicide Prevention and Reduction Strategy Action Plan 2022-2025.

It outlined the actions which had the Council had already completed including:

Amparo - Share information with Chorley Central Primary Care Network Multi-Disciplinary Meeting to enable Amparo support to be offered to more residents.

Chorley Council website - Provide residents with up-to-date Mental Health/Suicide information and support details.

World Suicide Prevention Day 2023 - Increased awareness to residents of mental health support in Chorley.

It also included some forthcoming events:

World Suicide Prevention Event – September 2024

World Mental Health Day – October 2023

It also referred to the Chorley Suicide Working Group – which included a range of partner organisations including Chorley Women’s Centre, St Laurence’s Church, Lancashire Mind, Chorley Council Social Prescribing, Chorley Council Public Protection, Bereavement Team (LTHTR), United Reformed Church, All About People, Chorley Buddies, Citizen’s Advice, Amparo, Mindsmatter, Lancashire Wildlife Trust, Library House Surgery, Cllr Samantha Martin, Cllr Aaron Beaver, and CAMHS.

Meeting – 19 June 2024

Liz Jones, Head of Communities and Housing presented a report with additional information to enable them to gain a broader understanding of the issues affecting suicide prevention in Chorley.

The report provided:

Real Time Surveillance Suspected Suicide data – Public Health LCC (May 2024)
Office for Health Improvement and Disparity (OHID) suicide and self-harm data (April 2023).

It was highlighted that on the table of statistics from the Office for Health Improvement and Disparity (OHID) suicide and self-harm data (April 2023) Chorley was the fourth highest in England. The Task Group felt it was important to explore the data further and attempt to identify the reasons for this.

In addition to this data, Liz Jones explained that the Public Health Team at LCC can provide more detailed Real Time Surveillance (RTS) Data which is updated daily. However, the data sets are very small and there is a high risk of cases being identifiable. Therefore, they were happy to attend and share data with members in private session at the next meeting.

Additional Information

Additional information was presented including the Suicide Action Plan provided by Rossendale Borough Council.

Chorley Borough Council's Suicide Action Plan compared favourably as many of the actions were already being done.

Bernie Heggarty suggested that it would be useful to extend information and awareness raising to more venues in the town centre.

It was also proposed that Chorley Council:

- Liaise with partners about providing an information more widely e.g. libraries, gyms, local businesses (barbers, hairdressers, nail bars, Cuerden Valley Café, park wardens); and
- Liaise with mental health organisations such as Lancashire MIND or the Samaritans to provide further training to local employers that request it
- Training for taxi drivers – to be raised at Licensing Liaison
- Recommend to the Member Development Working Group that training for councillors be mandatory.

Meeting – 23 July 2024

Presentation by Lancashire MIND

Karen Arrowsmith from Lancashire MIND attended the meeting. She gave details of the latest campaigns and projects they offer relating to suicide prevention, including:

The orange button pledge – a regional trial is being carried out this year, in partnership with the Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board and Samaritans, with a view to rolling out in future years.

Self harm safe kits (in partnership with Lancashire and South Cumbria ICB) – they include first aid kits, signposting information and “distraction strips” for children

Free e-learning

She indicated that Lancashire MIND was connecting with organisations supporting a range of vulnerable groups (including the five target groups such as LGBTQ+ and neurodiverse people) to deliver training on self harm and access to information that will be free for all.

Information provided by LCC Public Health

Marie Demaine, Public Health Specialist at Lancashire County Council, gave a presentation regarding the latest position with regard to public health data on suicide.

She explained that a full audit was currently being carried out in Lancashire. Lancashire was in the top five highest suicide rates in the UK and as such had attracted funding.

The England average suicide rate was 2.5 per 100,000. Chorley's suicide rate of 14.8.% was considerably higher.

In addition, suicide was one of the leading causes of death in men under 50, which was reflected in the Chorley figures as significantly higher for males.

She indicated that data for neurodiverse people was now recorded, but not yet publicly available.

She referred to the Suicide Prevention Strategy for England 2023 – 2028 which cited LGBTQ+ and neurodiverse people as vulnerable target groups.

A localised Action Plan was being developed for Lancashire.

Responding to a query from the Task Group, Ms Demaine indicated that she could provide more detailed mapping data for Chorley i.e. by ward, or locations most associated with suicide risk, and other contributory factors. This would be part of the full audit being carried out.

Meeting – 20 August 2024

Interview with Angela Allen, Bags for Strife

This 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 2,000th 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.

Meeting – 26 September 2024

Conclusions

Recommendations

1.

Appendices