

# Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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Thursday, 30th July, 2020

## MINUTES

### Present:

Councillor Joe Baker (Chair), and Councillors Salman Akbar, Michael Chalk, Debbie Chance, Peter Fleming, Pattie Hill, Andrew Fry, Ann Isherwood and Mark Shurmer

### Also Present:

Councillor Nyear Nazir (Portfolio Holder for Community Services and Regulatory Services)

### Officers:

Kevin Dicks, Sarah Sellers and Judith Willis

### Democratic Services Officers:

J Bayley and J Gresham

## 15. SUICIDE PREVENTION TASK GROUP - FINAL REPORT

Councillor Debbie Chance, in her role as Chair of the Suicide Prevention Task Group, presented the report to the Committee.

The Committee was informed that in total the group had held 11 meetings and spoken to eight witnesses between June 2019 and June 2020. There had been a slight delay in bringing the report before the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Suicide Prevention was a very sensitive subject to investigate and the members of the group had learned a lot about the impact of death by suicide on bereaved families and friends. Members were advised that on average one person died each week as a result of suicide in Worcestershire. In Redditch, for the three year period from 2015 to 2017, there were 26 deaths by suicide of which 84% were among men.

The group had been really surprised by the data around the economic cost of death by suicide and the evidence of the long-

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term effects on bereaved relatives. Research showed that those who had lost a loved one to death by suicide were at a higher risk of suicide themselves. Another surprising finding was that many of the deaths were amongst persons not previously known to mental health services, or who had not confided in anyone that they were struggling.

The Committee was asked to note that the investigation had focused on issues outside the day-to-day service remit of Redditch Borough Council and had relied on a number of external witnesses. There was a Suicide Prevention Plan for Worcestershire and locally this was co-ordinated and led by Worcestershire County Council.

The two main areas the group focused on in detail were:

- 1) Suicide prevention generally and in particular the Worcestershire Suicide Prevention Policy. In these discussions the group was greatly assisted by Officers from Worcestershire Public Health.
- 2) Mental health services available in Redditch, including the options that were available for people in crisis, and the role of the voluntary sector.

The feedback received from witnesses during the review had highlighted the need for awareness raising and training and this was reflected in the group's recommendations. The group had also been guided by the Council's Policy Team to identify how the Council's Equalities Strategy could be updated to include actions that supported suicide prevention. The final recommendation from the group covered the benefits of promoting awareness around suicide prevention.

Following the presentation of the report Members discussed a number of points in detail:

- The important work that had been undertaken by the group and the impact that suicide could have on friends and families.
- The evidence that had been submitted by Mr Mike Lewington to the group. The Committee was informed that sadly Mr Lewington had since passed away and therefore the report was dedicated to him.
- The financial implications of the proposals detailed in the report. Officers advised that this information had been received after publication of the report and it was anticipated

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that the action proposed could be covered within existing budgets. Members were asked to note that, if it was discovered during implementation by Officers that more significant financial resources were needed, then a further report would be presented inviting Members to approve additional funding.

- The incidence of suicide within all communities and the higher incidence of suicide amongst young men compared to other sections of the population.
- The work that Members could undertake to address suicide following the completion of the review. The Committee was asked to note that Members could ensure that mental health considerations were taken into account during the policy setting process. Elected Members could also help to raise awareness within the local community and signpost local constituents to support services where they were reporting mental health problems.
- The difficulty in terms of helping people who did not display any mental health difficulties prior to suicide.
- The role of the Redditch Partnership in the community and the fact that mental health had been identified as a priority area to address. The group were suggesting that Members' findings should be taken into account by the partnership.
- The actions of Members of the Task Group and the Democratic Services Officer who supported the group. They were thanked for their hard work.

During consideration of this item Councillor Nyear Nazir was invited to speak to the Committee in her capacity as Portfolio Holder for Community Services and Regulatory Services as well as a former member of the group. She highlighted the value of the review in terms of raising awareness of the impact of suicide in the community and the importance of suicide prevention work. Members were asked to note that the subject of suicide prevention was very complex and the group had interviewed a wide range of witnesses. Councillor Nazir concluded by thanking all the Members, Officers and external witnesses who had contributed to the review.

**RECOMMENDED that**

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- 1) the Redditch Borough Council Equalities Strategy should reflect the Council's commitment to suicide prevention and supporting good mental health, and that in producing the updated version of the Equalities Strategy for 2020 to 2024 objectives and actions should be included to cover the following:-
  - a) that officers continue to publicise messages around positive mental health to staff and promote opportunities to participate in training and events;
  - b) that officers develop the signposting information available on the intranet to support staff in being able to signpost either service users or colleagues to the relevant support services;
  - c) that officers mark suicide prevention awareness day in September 2020 including using this as an opportunity to promote the work of local groups that support suicide prevention;
  - d) recognising that not all staff may undertake the Mental Health First Aid training, that officers arrange for some alternative web based training resources to be provided for staff, to be aimed at those working in front line posts;
  
- 2) support to local voluntary sector organisations around improving promotion of their organisations:
  - a) that officers from the Communications Team work with the Partnership Manager to identify local voluntary sector organisation which offer support around mental health and wellbeing and/ or promote suicide prevention;
  
  - b) that the organisations identified be invited to participate in workshop training sessions to be provided by the Communications Team to help them to better publicise the support and services their organisations provide through use of social media and other publicity; and
  
- 3) publicise the findings of the Task Group:

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**given that suicide prevention work is carried out by multiple agencies and stakeholders, that officers be tasked with publicising the outcome of the Task Group in the Wellbeing in Partnership Newsletter and by giving details of the findings to the Worcestershire Suicide Prevention Plan Partnership Group (sub-group of the Health and Well-being Board).**

The Meeting commenced at 6.47 pm  
and closed at 7.23 pm