

DUNDEE CITY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: SOCIAL WORK AND HEALTH COMMITTEE - 28TH MARCH 2011

REPORT ON: CHOOSE LIFE SUICIDE PREVENTION STRATEGY

REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF SOCIAL WORK

REPORT NO: 136 - 2011

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 This report provides an update on the Choose Life National Strategy and Action Plan which aims to reduce by 20% suicide levels across Scotland by 2013. It also provides details of actions being taken locally to achieve this.

1.2 Proposals on the implementation of the Choose Life Strategy were approved at the Social Work and Health Committee in February 2004 (report number 150-2004) and subsequent updates have been provided through Agenda Notes.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Social Work and Health Committee:

2.1 Note changes to the National Strategy and Action Plan for Suicide Prevention in Scotland

2.2 Endorse suicide prevention measures being taken locally, including the provision of training

2.3 Approve the release of funding as detailed to meet the Choose Life suicide prevention agenda for 2011/12.

2.4 Require the Director of Social Work to report back to Committee with plans for the balance of funds.

3.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

3.1 The Choose Life steering group was established to oversee the development and implementation of the local suicide prevention strategy. The sum of £87,000 has been allocated to support suicide prevention within the Social Work Revenue Budget. The cost of the proposals outlined with the report will be £57,000 with a further report to be presented to Committee to confirm the allocation of the remaining £30,000.

4.0 MAIN TEXT

4.1 The national Choose Life strategy was launched in December 2002 by the Scottish Executive as part of the National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Well-Being Action Plan. Choose Life is a 10 year plan aimed at delivering a 20% reduction in suicides in Scotland by 2013.

Following evaluations of the impact of the Choose Life strategy a national suicide review group agreed a refreshed National Strategy and Action Plan for 2010-2013.

There are six revised objectives in the National Choose Life strategy, with objectives 1, 4, 5 and 6 below having been highlighted for local implementation:

1. Identify and intervene to reduce suicidal behaviour in high risk groups.
2. Develop and implement a co-ordinated approach to reduce suicidal behaviour.
3. Ensure interventions to reduce suicidal behaviour are informed by evidence from research and evaluated appropriately.
4. Provide support to those affected by suicidal behaviour.
5. Provide education and training about suicidal behaviour and promote awareness about the help available.
6. Reduce availability and lethality of methods used in suicidal behaviour.

In addition the strategy recognises that certain groups have higher rates of suicide than the population as a whole these include those with a history of mental illness and/or self harm; substance misuse (especially alcohol); low socio-economic status, deprivation and unemployment. Significantly, the suicide rate for males is almost three times higher than that for women.

The approach to suicide prevention was further developed in the Scottish Government publication Towards a Mentally Flourishing Scotland 2009-2011, which supported suicide reduction targets with a specific NHS Health Improvement Efficiency Access Treatment (HEAT) target for 50% of key front-line NHS staff being trained in suicide prevention by December 2010.

4.2 **Prevalence Rates**

National figures on suicide rates published in 2010 indicate that there were 746 deaths by suicide in Scotland in 2009 (deaths from intentional self-harm and deaths of undetermined intent). This equates to a rate of 14.2 per 100,000 population and based on a three year rolling average is an 11.5% fall in the number of suicides between 2000-02 and 2007-09.

Figures indicate that the suicide rate generally increases with the level of deprivation, with completed suicide rates in the most deprived 30% of areas of Scotland being significantly higher than the Scottish average.

There were 23 deaths by suicide in Dundee during 2009, a reduction from 32 in 2008, this equates to a rate of 19.2 per 100,000 population. Figures for 2010 will not be available until 2011 however members will be aware of the tragic events in the summer of 2010 when a number of young people completed suicide over a relatively short period of time.

4.3 **Local Activities and Measures**

In Dundee, the Choose Life suicide prevention strategy is taken forward by a multi-agency steering group operating across Dundee City and Angus and is supported by a jointly funded Mental Health and Wellbeing Coordinator whose post is hosted by Angus Council. Dundee aspects of the work of the steering group are reported to Healthy Dundee as part of the broader health and wellbeing strategy for the city.

4.3.1 Training

In partnership with the University of Dundee, more than 1200 people have been trained in suicide prevention over the last six years with over 260 people trained during 2010/11. Places on the accredited SafeTalk and ASIST courses are available to students, professionals and community members. Increased demand for places is being met through the provision of additional courses. NHS Tayside has also confirmed that Dundee has exceeded the national HEAT target with more than 50% of targeted staff now trained.

Over the next year work is planned to further coordinate the range of suicide prevention training available across Dundee and ensure this is widely communicated, with a focus on increasing the uptake of places by non-professional groups.

4.3.2 Supported Services

Choose Life provides funding to the Dundee Women's Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre (WRASAC) towards the continuation of a post of self harm, self injury and suicide support worker who works with women at risk of suicide who have been sexually abused.

In addition funding is provided to Barnardo's Rollercoaster Project who offer a service to children and young people significantly affected by grief and trauma due to bereavement and provide a proactive, responsive service to support children, young people and their carers whose lives have been affected by suicide and suicidal behaviour. Oversight of this is provided by Children's Services to ensure an integrated approach to other services delivered by Barnados.

The Hot Chocolate Trust adopts a youth work approach to engage with young people of secondary school age to age 21 years and has been financially supported to continue work with young people from across the city, providing flexible diversionary activities.

4.3.3 Awareness Raising

The Self-Harm and Suicide Guidance developed in 2006 by Dundee City and Angus Councils has been updated and during 2010-11 was extended to cover the Tayside area. This document provides useful information for those in contact with young people on how to recognise and respond to self-harm and suicidal behaviours.

In 2010, additional funding was provided to meet the cost of local radio advertising campaigns, additional Freshers' Week publicity and production of publicity materials which were widely disseminated. Free advertising support was also provided by CJC Media Company prior to the festive period targeting pubs and clubs across Dundee.

Activities are routinely planned during annual Suicide Prevention Week in September and these involve a range of partners from the statutory and voluntary sector. In 2010, local service providers undertook a successful day of canvassing in the Wellgate Centre, providing a range of information leaflets and contact telephone numbers for support. Training courses were made available and a media campaign was led by the national Choose Life group with additional local publicity in the university Freshers' Week publication.

The reporting of suicide by the media can be a useful way of highlighting relevant helpline numbers and providing messages of reassurance to readers that support is available. There are challenges around this, including evidence that excessive or inappropriate reporting of suicide can be counterproductive and as such, the press reporting of suicides is governed by the national Editor's Code of Practice which restricts excessive detail regarding the method used.

Whilst work is being progressed nationally on the development of a Suicide Register, discussions are also on-going with community planning partners about local information needs. Tayside Police actively screen for suicide and attempted suicide related incidents and use established adult support and protection referral processes to highlight individuals who may be in need of additional support.

4.3.4 Critical Incident Response

The Education Department process for responding to critical incidents enabled a speedy, multi-agency operational response during the summer of 2010 with a number of agencies working together to identify potentially at risk young people. This work was coordinated and supported by a multi-agency strategic group led initially by Tayside Police and latterly by NHS Tayside.

4.3.5 In order to continue to support the Suicide Prevention Strategy the Steering Group has approved funding for the continuation of the following services:

4.3.5.1 **Barnardo's Rollercoaster Project - £30,000**

The money will be used to continue the Senior Practitioner post within Barnardo's Rollercoaster for a period of one year. This service engages with children and young people significantly affected by grief and trauma due to bereavement and provides a proactive, responsive service to support children, young people and their carers whose lives have been affected by suicide and suicidal behaviour. The project has undertaken significant work in partnership with Education during 2010/11.

4.3.5.2 **Mental Health and Wellbeing Co-ordinator – £20,000**

Since 2006, Angus Council and Dundee City Council have shared a temporary post which initially focused on suicide prevention, this substantive post is hosted by Angus Council has been extended to encompass the wider issues relating to mental health and wellbeing in addition to suicide.

4.3.5.3 The steering group are in the process of considering further funding requests totalling £30,000 and a further report will be made to committee with any request for the release of funds.

4.3.5.4 A fund of £7,000 will remain available to support Suicide Prevention Week during 2011, meet publicity costs and continue the provision of free suicide prevention training places to local professionals and members of the public.

4.4 **Summary**

Whilst some individuals who complete suicide will have had recent involvement with traditional support services, a significant proportion of individuals may not have had contact with any services.

Successful suicide prevention involves the full spectrum of services offered by the Council as well as by partners in both the statutory and third sector. Communities can also contribute to suicide prevention through challenging the stigma of suicide and being alert to signals of suicide risk. Raising awareness of the supports available to people in crisis, as well as the provision of suicide prevention training to improve identification of the risk of suicide and responses to that risk, both therefore remain key to the local Choose Life strategy.

5.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 This report has been screened for any policy implications in respect of sustainability, strategic environmental assessment, anti poverty, equality impact assessment and risk management. There are no major issues.

5.2 An Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out and will be made available on the Council website <http://www.dundee.gov.uk/equandiv/equipact/>.

6.0 **CONSULTATIONS**

6.1 The Chief Executive, Depute Chief Executive (Support Services) and Director of Finance have been consulted in the preparation of this report.

7.0 **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

The following background papers have been referred to in this report:

National Programme for Improving Mental Health and Well-Being Action Plan (Scottish Executive)

Report to Social Work Committee number 150-2004

Towards a Mentally Flourishing Scotland Policy and Action Plan 2009-2011 Choose Life National Strategy and Action Plan 2010-13 (Scottish Government).

Equality Impact Assessment

Alan G Baird

Director of Social Work

Date: 17th March 2011