

**MEMBER QUESTIONS**  
**COUNCIL 21 MARCH 2024**

**Question from Councillor Dan Thomas**

This year a former Town Councillor and community activist took his own life, shocking the Much Wenlock Community. His family will clearly never overcome this loss.

In a personal capacity I am a member of the Shropshire Roots Brotherhood, a community group that encourages men across Shropshire to meet and discuss issues affecting their mental health. Suicide is now the leading – and increasing - cause of premature mortality in men below the age of 50.

There are a number of occupations where suicide rates are high, and one is farming. This is important in Shropshire which is a predominantly rural county and one where farming is a significant -and often solitary - activity. In recent years suicide prevention campaigns have focused on men, who apparently still have a much higher rate than women in all age groups and are over three times more likely to die by suicide than women. However, recent global reports reveal that suicide has overtaken maternal mortality as one of the highest incidences of premature death in young women.

It is vital that Mental Health Services have adequate risk assessments and procedures in place so that the risk of suicide is recognised and minimised.

Would the Portfolio Holder articulate the measures that are in place to provide support and intervention in order that individuals can get their lives back onto an even keel, so that families do not have to suffer the anguish that has afflicted too many in Shropshire during the last couple of years?

**Response from Councillor Cecilia Motley, Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care and Public Health**

Thank you for your question and interest in this important issue. Every loss of life due to suicide is devastating and may I start my response by sending my deepest sympathies and condolences to all our Shropshire residents who have been personally impacted by the loss of a family member or friend.

Suicide prevention has been a priority for Shropshire health and care system since 2017. There are around 5,200 lives lost to suicide every year in England and around 35 each year in Shropshire. Every one of these deaths leaves behind family, friends and communities shattered by the loss. We know the results of an individual attempting to take their own life are wide reaching and every death by suicide is a tragic loss with major impact on our communities.

We believe that suicide is preventable; but it requires all of us to seek every opportunity to achieve this. Through promoting more awareness and conversation about suicide throughout the health and care workforce and in our communities, we hope to tackle stigma and to encourage anyone struggling with or impacted by

suicide to reach out as early as possible. There is no one reason why someone may decide to end their life and anyone can be affected at any time in their life, which makes prevention complex. National evidence identifies a range of factors that can increase suicide risk. These can include recent challenges such as the cost-of-living crisis, ongoing global conflicts and the impact from the pandemic which can also influence poorer mental health and increased suicide risk. We also know from national evidence there are a range of groups with a higher risk of suicide.

To this end, in September 2023 a revised partnership Shropshire suicide prevention strategy for was published, which sets ambitions and commitments of raising awareness of suicide risk across our communities and workforce, enhance skills and confidence talking about suicide to reduce stigma and promote early help seeking behaviour, ensure the right offers are available to the right people at the right time and ensure those who have been impacted or bereaved by a suicide or unexpected death have access to the support that best address their needs. An online version of the Strategy can be found here: [Shropshire Suicide Prevention Strategy 2023 - 2026 | Shropshire Council](#).

The refreshed Strategy recognises national evidence that there are some groups within society that are at greater risk of suicide compared to the general population and as such, the new Strategy includes the need for targeted offers in addition to universal services. This includes men (as a group), people with protected characteristics (including neurodivergent conditions), people in contact with mental health services, people with long term physical health conditions, young people and young adults and our farmer/rural population.

The Strategy and Programme in Shropshire is delivered by the multi-agency Shropshire Suicide Prevention Action Group led by our Public Health Team. This partnership group includes the local NHS, Mental Health Trust, Shropshire Council, Emergency services, Criminal Justice, Drug & Alcohol services, Voluntary and Community Sector partners (including Shropshire Mental Health Support, Samaritans and Papyrus) and experts by experience who have been impacted by suicide amongst others with an interest in supporting the programme.

Aligned to the Strategy, there are a series of programmes already in place and new ones being developed within the new action plan.

Below are some of the highlights of what has been delivered to date;

1. **Skills based suicide prevention understanding and awareness training** for those most likely to be working with vulnerable and high-risk groups. This continues to be targeted across all above partner agencies including the Royal Shrewsbury Hospital Mental Health Liaison team within the Emergency Department, frontline workers in the Mental Health Trust and Adult Social Care teams within the Council. Subsidised (and sometimes free to access) training has also been targeted to additional agencies working with veterans and homeless/at risk of rough sleeper populations, people working in pharmacies, abuse support services, drug alcohol services, money and financial worries support, sports and youth clubs, carer groups as well as many other community groups and services. An overview of the training options currently are highlighted below.

- **Zero Suicide Alliance free online training available** at: [Free online training from Zero Suicide Alliance](#). Zero Suicide Alliance is one of the country's leading suicide prevention charities and they provide easy access and digestible information on how to talk about suicide, how to spot risk and how to signpost. There are also versions available in Welsh language and also targeted at specific groups including veterans, taxi drivers, prisons and probation staff.
- **Suicide Awareness** – a 2-hour interactive webinar delivered by our local Shropshire Joint Training team based at Shropshire Council aimed at anyone with an interest and reach to support suicide prevention and assuming no prior knowledge. The purpose is to explore the myths and stigma on suicide, raise awareness of risk and build confidence in applying the Zero Suicide Alliance approach. More details can be found at: [Suicide Prevention Awareness | Shropshire Council](#)
- **Suicide First Aid: Understanding Suicide Intervention** – a 1 day more in-depth training session to practice skills and knowledge to identify someone who may be thinking about suicide and competently intervene to help create suicide safety in any professional or personal setting. More details can be found at: [Suicide First Aid: Understanding Suicide Intervention | Shropshire Council](#)
- **Suicide First Aid: Children and Young People** – a 1 day programme to develop knowledge and skills to identify a child or young person who may be thinking about suicide with the opportunity to build confidence to intervene

2. **Bespoke local resources and materials to promote support for suicide risk**. The Action Group designed and widely shared the Pick Up The Phone You Are Not Alone z-card – a wallet sized fold-out information card that provides first point of contact details and advice for anyone concerned about suicide in themselves or someone else. Printed copies have been shared with GP practices, pharmacies, libraries and a range of other public facing services across the Shropshire Council area. A digital version can be found online at: [pick-up-phone-z-card-single-pages.pdf \(shropshire.gov.uk\)](#)

**Targetted offers to high-risk populations**. A recent project taking a health check offer to farmers and being delivered at livestock markets launched in 2023 using grant funding with support from the Suicide Prevention Action Group, Shropshire Council, the Public Health Outreach Team, Shropshire Rural Support and NFU. The purpose of this project is to reduce barriers for farmers and those working within the rural community to talk about their health and wellbeing, to have an opportunity to check their blood pressure, access advice and also to have an opportunity to discuss emotional wellbeing and mental health concerns with a mental health first aid and suicide first aid trained practitioner. In addition, we are seeking opportunities to connect with those who work alongside the sector to target skills-based training on recognising and understanding suicide risk, how to have a difficult conversation and

how to signpost or appropriately intervene. We are continuing to work with representatives from the farming community to explore what could and should be within the suicide prevention action plan that could best support local needs.

3. **Support for people impacted by suicide**. A Suicide Bereavement Service was launched in 2021 for people who are bereaved by suicide or possible suicide, which is being delivered in partnership by Shropshire Mental Health Support and Telford Mind providing support for the county of Shropshire. This service recognises that people bereaved by suicide can be at greater risk of a mental health crisis or suicide and works closely with the Coroner team as well as wider partners including the police to promote the offer. The service is available to anyone impacted by a suicide death (recent or previous). It provides practical and advocacy support to ensure client needs are best met. In addition, a new peer support group led by the charity Survivors of Bereavement by Suicide group was launched in Shrewsbury and Oswestry in 2023. The purpose is to provide a safe space to talk about their experiences and support each other, with support from trained facilitators who themselves have been bereaved by a suicide death. More details about local bereavement support can be found at: [Bereavement support | Shropshire Council](#)
- You raise, that it “is vital that Mental Health Services have adequate risk assessments and procedures in place so that the risk of suicide is recognised and minimised”. Please see detailed response from Midlands Partnership NHS Foundation Trust below.

More information on local mental health and wellbeing offers a dedicated site has been created on the Healthy Shropshire webpage at: [Mental health and wellbeing | Shropshire Council](#). This provides access to;

- Information, tools and resources on how to keep mentally well – including the locally invested online peer support portal TogetherAll, which provides a safe, secure and anonymous community for anyone aged 16+ who lives in an area served by Shropshire Council and who may be stressed, anxious or feeling low
- Local support for an emotional health or mental health concern
- A dedicated page for concerns about suicide (including link to the Shropshire Telford and Wrekin Suicide Prevention Resources page at: [Suicide and suicidal thoughts - NHS Shropshire, Telford and Wrekin \(shropshiretelfordandwrekin.nhs.uk\)](#))
- A first point of contact resource that provides suggestions on local support that could support both mental health and other influencing factors that may impact on mental wellbeing (including money worries, employment, health and social care needs, families and unpaid carers and impacted by abuse)

### **Midlands Partnership Foundation Trust**

Query:

[It is vital that Mental Health Services have adequate risk assessments and procedures in place so that the risk of suicide is recognised and minimised.](#)

## **Suicide Strategy and Planning**

Midlands Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust (MPFT) takes its responsibilities around effective suicide mitigation seriously. We have our own suicide prevention plan which was aligned to the 'Suicide prevention in England: 5-year cross-sector strategy' on its publication in September 2023.

In line with the national strategy and plan, we work closely with our partners in the Shropshire suicide prevention partnership and have strong alignment with their work and plan. We are an active member of the Suicide Prevention Action Group in Shropshire and support their targeted working groups.

## **Risk Assessment and Targeted Intervention**

In relation to risk assessment, we have been working with the recommendations of the National Institute of Health and Care Excellence (NICE). Its guidance on 'Self-Harm: assessment, management and preventing recurrence' (NG225), published in September 2022 states that mental health services should not use risk assessment tools and scales to predict future suicide or repetition of self-harm. It has been identified through research that such scales have a low efficacy in predicting suicide (as low as 5%).

Instead, NICE recommends focusing the assessment on the person's needs and how to support their immediate and long-term psychological and physical safety.

Within its national strategy the Department of Health and Social Care has convened a national safety planning working group, which is expected to publish its suicide safety planning guidance by March 2024 and roll out its training by March 2025.

MPFT has chosen not to wait for the outcome of this and undertaken to train our own clinical trainers in suicide awareness and mitigation training developed by 4MentalHealth. We have already trained over 1,200 staff on suicide awareness and mitigation and are currently building the SafeTool safety planning document into our electronic patient record to support this.

In line with the national suicide prevention strategy, we recognise the need to ensure that our mental health services are aligned to high-risk groups and those in mental health crisis. As such we have in place:

- Mental health crisis intervention and home treatment services
- Mental health 111 services (from April 2024)
- Liaison mental health services in urgent care
- Mental health support teams in schools
- 72-hour follow up of those discharged from mental health inpatient services, in line with national guidance

## **Learning**

MPFT implemented the national NHS Patient Safety Incident Response Framework (PSIRF) in December 2023, which includes the use of a system-based patient safety learning response review for all unexpected deaths of those accessing our services

or discharged within six months. These reviews involve all services involved in supporting the person. In addition, we seek to engage families in the review through the support of our family liaison officer who ensures their voice is included in the learning review and they receive appropriate support and sign posting to postvention support.

The learning we take from our review of patient safety incidents is shared widely across services to offer the widest opportunity to mitigate further impact. Our learning from deaths reporting is shared at multiple levels of the Trust including the Trust Board and incorporates an analysis of the data, learning themes and any associated learning from system and national activity (such as the national confidential enquiry into suicide and homicide). We share learning with system partners through the Shropshire Suicide Prevention Action Group.

### **Oversight and Assurance**

In terms of objective scrutiny of our systems and processes, regular Quality Standards Assurance visits are carried out in clinical services by MPFT corporate quality staff. Partners such as Healthwatch and Integrated Care Board (ICB) commissioners often accompany quality visits. These, together with the regulatory oversight framework of the Care Quality Commission, ensure that teams and services are independently audited and held to account to deliver any action plans that arise.

Additionally, MPFT staff and teams always aim to work collaboratively to assess and mitigate risk with service users and their families, but also with other partners, both statutory and non-statutory (proportionate to need and where information sharing is justified). There is a history of close collaboration at team, service and organisational level between the Trust and Shropshire Council with regards the suicide prevention agenda and this work is a key feature of the multi-agency Mental Health, Learning Disability and Autism Operational Group, which reports into the ICB.