

Committee	Dated:
Health and Wellbeing Board	07/05/2021
Subject: Suicide prevention in the City of London	Public
Report of: Sandra Husbands, Director of Public Health	For Decision
Report author: Claire Giraud, Senior Public Health Practitioner	

Summary

In 2017, the City of London Corporation established a multi-agency suicide prevention group, in accordance with best practice recommendations, and published a Suicide Prevention Action Plan containing numerous initiatives aimed at reducing the number of suicides in the Square Mile. This report provides an update on the suicide prevention action plan as well as on the number of attempted suicides and suicides occurring in the City of London.

Suicide figures for the City should be interpreted with caution, as they are relatively small in number – this means that any variations may not be statistically significant (i.e. the figures may be due to chance fluctuation); and additionally, recording practices have changed during the reporting period, which may impact upon the figures.

Recommendations

Members of the Committee are asked to:

- Note the progress made on the Suicide Prevention Action Plan
- Note the most recent data for suicide in the City of London
- Approve recommendations for suicide prevention

Background

1. Suicide is the act of intentionally ending one's own life. It is often the end result following a complex range of risk factors, mental illness and significant negative life events; however, suicide is preventable, rather than an inevitable event. In the UK, suicide is one of the most common causes of death in people under the age of 50, with 5,821 reported people dying in this way in 2017. It is estimated that each suicide further impacts between 6 and 60 people. Within the UK, suicide shows significant gender and social inequalities, and is associated with stigma for families affected by it.
2. Over the last 8 years, a number of key policies and reports have been published to improve suicide prevention nationally and locally. In the City, a local audit, suicide prevention action plan and multi-agency suicide prevention group was established in accordance with best practice recommendations.
3. Public Health England (PHE) recommends several priority action areas to include in local suicide prevention plans:
 - Reducing risk of suicide in men
 - Preventing and responding to self-harm
 - Mental health of children and young people
 - Treatment of depression in primary care
 - Acute mental health care
 - Reduce suicides at known 'high risk' locations
 - Reducing isolation
 - Bereavement support for those affected by suicide

Overview for the City of London

4. Between March 2019 to the 20th of April 2021, there had been a total of 10 suicides, with a total of 223 attempted suicides.
5. Between March 2019 to the 14th of April 2021, there had been a total of 150 incidents whereby the subject had contemplated suicide or had suicidal thoughts.¹
6. A Mental Health Triage Nurse attended 505 incidents from January 2020 to March 2021. As a result, an estimated 47% of S136 detentions were avoided.
7. There have been some issues with receiving feedback from hospitals regarding the outcome of the mental health assessments after S136. The City Police Suicide Profile of 2020 recommends that *“an Information Sharing Agreement with the NHS should be established so that requests can be submitted to hospitals which request the outcome of assessment for any individual taken to hospital. This should be completed for every individual that attempts suicide; to ensure that all risk information is shared, and appropriate safeguarding measures completed.”*

¹ We have yet to achieve consensus on the definitions of these terms, creating a challenge for interpreting these data. The City of London suicide prevention steering group have identified this as an issue and aim to achieve consistency in future.

Emerging Trends throughout 2020

Timing and Location

8. Data from the City of London refers to events occurring within its geographic area. The majority of incidents will therefore involve individuals residing elsewhere in London and the country.
9. Over 60% of the attempted suicides occurred during the night and the peak days were Friday and Sunday. It would appear that a decrease in attempts followed the lockdowns put in place throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.
10. Bridges remain the most common location type for suicide attempts within the City, with 73% attempted suicides occurring on bridges. The second most common location was on the street (14%).
11. The qualitative analysis shows that 50% of individuals had a direct journey from their home address to the incident location, meaning it only required one mode of transport and one direct route. None of the individuals stated they worked in the City; however, for 85% of individuals, this was either not known or not recorded. Under the Covid-19 restrictions, individuals were encouraged to stay in their local area.

Demographics at the end of 2020

12. Data from the City of London Police is provided in the table below and covers the period subsequent to the previous City Suicide Prevention Annual Report in 2019. The data covers both completed and attempted suicides. Please note that the most recent data from the coroner was not available for this report.
13. **Age range:** Unlike in 2018, in 2019 and 2020 there was a mixed aged range (between 19 and 58), highlighting that there is not a particular age group at risk.
14. **Gender.** Males represented 60% of attempted suicides, females represented 36% and trans represented 2%.
15. **Home Address:** The majority of individuals travelled into the City from their home address where suicide was completed or attempted.

Summary for Period 2019-2021

2019	Attempt Suicide	Contemplating Suicide	Suicide
Mar	7	5	0
Apr	16	5	under 5
May	8	under 5	0
June	12	9	0
July	10	11	under 5

Aug	9	under 5	0
Sep	13	5	0
Oct	11	9	under 5
Nov	8	under 5	under 5
Dec	7	11	0
Total	101	55	

2020	Attempt Suicide	Contemplating Suicide	Suicide
Jan	6	5	0
Feb	7	7	0
Mar	under 5	5	0
Apr	11	under 5	0
May	8	under 5	under 5
Jun	7	under 5	0
Jul	8	7	0
Aug	12	7	0
Sep	9	7	0
Oct	11	6	0
Nov	under 5	under 5	0
Dec	10	5	under 5
Total	76	37	

2021	Attempt Suicide	Contemplating Suicide	Suicide
Jan	Under 5	Under 5	Under 5
Feb	Under 5	7	0
Mar	16	Under 5	0
Apr*	Under 5	under 5	Under 5

*Data available to 20/04/2021

16. Although the numbers from 2019 to 2020 and into 2021 suggest a downward trend, this interpretation should be treated with caution. Firstly, the numbers are low and thus we would expect to see variation from year to year. It is also likely to be strongly influenced by the national lockdown and government recommendation for people to stay home during the COVID-19 pandemic.
17. Additionally, the activity of the Mental Health Street Triage service has allowed engagement with individuals who might not otherwise have been picked up and recorded as contemplating suicide. This service is a collaboration between City of London Police and East London Mental Health Foundation Trust (ELFT). An occupational therapist and social worker travel with police officers to incidents where there is an immediate threat to life and can offer fast and efficient access to care, avoiding unnecessary 'Section 136' detentions.
18. Increases in suicide rate are associated with periods of economic and political uncertainty.² It is therefore positive to see that the City of London has not seen a corresponding rise to date. However, the impact of national lockdown may hide the true extent of the issue and we must be alert to the possibility of a rise in the medium to long term. Alongside our immediate response to incidents in the City of London, a preventive approach that recognises the social and economic challenges of the pandemic should be captured by a refreshed suicide action plan.

Action Plan Progress Summary

19. Overall, 53 actions have commenced since the launch of the action plan, of which 9 are completed, 44 are in progress. 12 new actions have commenced since the last annual report to the Health and Wellbeing Board.
20. Significant milestones include:
 - (1) The mental health street triage service where NHS nurses accompany the City of London police on call out at peak time has been operational since 2017. The service now runs seven nights a week and has been found to reduce incarceration by 47%, saving police time and resources. We recommend that service continues to be funded.
 - (2) The success of the Dragon Café in the City which runs every other Wednesday, has been run virtually since the start of the pandemic. The café offers various wellbeing activities such as journal writing, massages, yoga, etc, for City residents and workers. The Dragon Cafe coordinating staff have reported increased attendance since the start of the online service.
 - (3) The Thrive LDN surveillance database is a pan-London project that is now operational. This represents a significant improvement in our understanding suicide in the City and will inform our response in future.

² De Bruin et al, 2019. *New insights on suicide: uncertainty and political conditions*. Applied Economic Letters. doi.org/10.1080/13504851.2019.1686453

RAG Status Key and Summary

Status of Actions	
Major Problems	1
Minor Problems	10
In Progress/ongoing	33
Completed	9

21. One action that had not progressed as originally envisaged is:

- (1) *To install infra-red beams on bridges to allow fast identification of which section of a bridge a person is on and approaching the parapet.*
- (2) However, the City of London Police are now restarting work on Vulnerable People And Bridges Security Project within the Secure City Programme

22. One action that had not progressed as originally envisaged but has developed:

- (1) *To put cameras on City of London Bridges to allow fast identification of which Bridge a person is on if they call, with monitoring at high risk times.*
- (2) One Safe City has transitioned to a new programme called Secure City. Funding for this work has been approved by the Resource Allocation Sub-Committee in December 2020 and the City of London Police has updated the chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board as to the current timeline for when this work will be complete.

Action Plan Themes

23. A brief summary of key developments under each of the six themes identified in the Suicide Prevention Action Plan is provided below. These themes are:

- (1) Reduce the risk of suicide in key high risk groups
- (2) Tailor approaches to improve Mental Health in specific groups
- (3) Reduce Access to the means of suicide;
- (4) Provide better information and support to those bereaved or affected by suicide;
- (5) Support the media in delivering sensitive approaches to suicide and suicidal behaviour;
- (6) Support research, data collection and monitoring.

Theme One: Reduce Risk of Suicide in key high-risk groups.

24. This theme aims to reduce the risk of suicide for young and middle-aged men and women drawing on and enhancing the assets, strengths and skills already present within the City of London community. In January 2021 the Samaritans published a new handbook for community-based wellbeing groups targeting men - *Engaging men earlier: a guide to service design*, this handbook is being promoted to providers, partners and stakeholders across the City and London.

25. A key initiative is to support City of London businesses to achieve the London Healthy Workplace Charter award and to comply with HSE Stress Management Standards and NICE Guidance: this work is spearheaded by the environmental health team in Port Health and Public Protection who have a wealth of expertise

in this subject.

26. The City promotes a 24/7 crisis hotline with a marketing campaign targeting primarily male residents and City workers (the "Release the Pressure" campaign).

Theme Two: Tailor Approaches to improve Mental Health in specific groups.

27. The actions in this theme aim to tailor approaches to improving the mental health of children and young people in the City of London
28. Two Suicide awareness training programs for frontline workers who work with children and young people took place in February and March 2021, provided by papyrus. A third one is planned for May 2021. The ASK workshop: *Assessing for Suicide in Kids* is being offered for free by North East London Clinical Commissioning Group (NEL CCG). This was delivered in late March and early April 2021, with next dates in July 2021. NEL CCG is also promoting the Mental Health First Aid Youth 'Champion' (May 2021).
29. Public Health England (PHE) has developed a free online training called "Psychological First Aid: Supporting Children and Young People" which is being widely promoted.
30. The City's social care team has devised a training module to help parents feel competent in protecting their children from harmful suicide-related content online by raising awareness of e-safety education and good practice in creating a safer online environment for children and young people (as compiled by UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS)). City social care also run an Early Intervention Mental Health for UASCs jointly with Coram. This is working to improve gut health and sleep.

Theme Three: Reduce access to the means of suicide.

31. This theme looks at how to reduce the opportunities and means of access to suicide in the City of London.
32. One focus area since 2019 has been becoming a partner of the Tidal Thames Drowning Prevention Strategy. In 2019 several partners and agencies across London developed the Tidal Thames Drowning Prevention Strategy, in 2020 CoL Police and the CoL became partners of the strategy and members of the forum. This multi-agency forum is a valuable conduit to advancing work on Thames safety forward and implementing priority three of the City Suicide Prevention Action Plan.
33. The City has been working with the London Borough of Tower Hamlets and the London Borough of Southwark to get permission to place Samaritans signs on Tower and Southwark Bridges. The steering group is currently in the process of reviewing the size and placing of these signs, investigating if more should be placed on the bridges, and how this change could be implemented given the architectural status of the Bridge.
34. The City's Suicide Prevention Working Group officers have engaged with Transport for London, the British Transport Police and network rail to identify opportunities for further prevention of suicide at their locations especially

around lighting and avoiding darkened areas.

Theme Four: Provide better information and support to those bereaved or affected by suicide.

35. The actions in this theme aim to ensure that those who are bereaved or affected by suicide are informed and supported.
36. The City has been promoting PHE's *'Help Is At Hand'* document to key partners and made it available in City libraries. This is a resource for people bereaved through suicide or other unexplained death, and for those helping them.
37. The City and Hackney Public Health Team is in the process of developing a bereavement pack containing leaflets and a video offering advice on how to deal with bereavement, to support both staff and the wider public.

Theme Five: Support the media in delivering sensitive approaches to suicide and suicidal behaviour.

38. The actions in this theme aim to ensure that the media report on suicide and suicide behaviour sensitively, taking into account guidance and support from other stakeholders.
39. The City has been sharing the 'Samaritans' Media Guidelines for Reporting Suicide with City Corporation, City Police and NHS media teams and various media outlets to ensure that they are aware of the sensitive nature of suicides.
40. The City has promoted Business in the Community's *Suicide Post-vention Toolkit for Employers* to the Business Healthy network.

Theme Six: Support research, data collection and monitoring.

41. The City has worked with the local Coroner in order to aid accurate data collection and aid the development of targeted suicide prevention strategies.
42. The City of London has joined the Thrive LDN real time surveillance database. This innovative suicide surveillance system is designed for use by multi-agency groups, allowing councils, police, mental health services and suicide prevention groups to share real time surveillance data and coordinate responses. The system uses police reports of a potential suicide as the basis for reporting, as opposed to coroner decision of confirmed suicide. This allows a timeframe of days following the incident for information to be added and action to be taken as opposed to months after.

Conclusion and Recommendations

43. Given current data, progress with the Suicide Action Plan, and the unprecedented circumstances of the pandemic, we propose the following recommendations.
 - (1) The Suicide prevention steering group to lead a review of the current action plan and consider which additional actions and re-prioritisation should occur in light of the circumstances of the pandemic.

- (2) To support the prioritisation of improved signage and the roll out of enhanced CCTV provision in recognition of the high suicide risk that bridges represent.
- (3) Identify how all partners can work together to request prompt removal of social media associated with suicide incidents and support broader efforts to oblige social media companies to remove these materials quickly.
- (4) Consider the expansion of access to the Mental Health Street to assist in reducing the number of Section 136 detainments. It has proved successful so far with 47% of incidents avoiding S136 (figures calculated for the last 15 months). Expanding the provision of this service should be considered. We should explore possibilities to extend the availability of this service in response to immediate needs.
- (5) Continue regular patrols on bridges (with higher attendance on London Bridge) during Night Time Economy hours, focusing on the highest-risk period of 10pm and 1am. Consideration should be given to increased patrols following incidents, as media reporting may increase the likelihood of others travelling to the same location.
- (6) Continue regular patrols during the summer period and ensure the City of London Police officers are aware of increased suicide/attempt suicide during the summer months.
- (7) City of London Police to continue their involvement with mental health campaigns and charities to help reduce the risk of suicide.
- (8) City of London Police to continue work on the Vulnerable People And Bridges Security Project within the Secure City Programme.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Suicide Prevention Action Plan for 2017–21

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