



Belfast City Council

Report to:	Strategic Policy and Resources Committee
Subject:	Suicide Awareness and Prevention
Date:	Friday, 21st May, 2010
Reporting Officer:	Mr. Liam Steele, Head of Committee and Members' Services (extension 6325)
Contact Officer:	Mr. Gareth Quinn, Development Officer (extension 6316)

Relevant Background Information

Members will be aware that the Committee, at its meeting on 23rd April, agreed to receive a report detailing the actions which the various Council Departments were undertaking in relation to suicide awareness and prevention.

The prevention of suicide has been a major issue for some time with the numbers of such deaths in Northern Ireland running at extremely high levels, as illustrated in figure 1.

Figure 1: Deaths from suicide across Northern Ireland by age and gender 2005 – 2008

Year	Age (years)								Gender	
	1-14	15-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65-74	75-84	85+	Male	Female
2005	3	77	45	40	31	11	6	0	167	46
2006	3	112	69	61	32	9	4	1	227	64
2007	4	80	52	51	30	15	9	1	175	67
2008	3	105	75	50	27	14	8	0	218	64

Source: DHSSPSNI, NISRA statistics, Registrar General Quarterly reports

Suicide is a recognised problem within Belfast as illustrated in Figure 2, with the north and west of the city recording the highest numbers of deaths.

Figure 2: Deaths from suicide and undetermined intent

	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	Total
Belfast East	2	4	9	9	14	38
Belfast North	14	16	16	24	20	90
Belfast South	9	9	15	16	13	62
Belfast West	11	9	11	22	22	75
Total	26	38	51	73	69	257

Source: DHSSPS, NINIS statistics

Furthermore, it is well documented that these areas suffer from extreme social and

economic deprivation and that the aftermath of the 'Troubles' has left a legacy of poor mental and physical health and wellbeing.

The problem in Northern Ireland led to the government introducing a Suicide Prevention Strategy, 'Protect Life – a shared vision', in October 2006 which advocates innovative and comprehensive local multi-sectoral approaches to help reduce the problem.

Key Issues

The Council recognises the urgent and imperative need to address actively the issues of suicide awareness and prevention. Various initiatives and activities have been undertaken in an effort to help deal with this problem. A list of these is set out below:

- In response to concerns about suicide rates in North and West Belfast, a multi sectoral Implementation Group for the prevention of suicide and self harm was established in October 2006. The Council has representation at both Member and officer level.
- The Council has taken a lead role in developing a community response plan which aims to provide a co-ordinated approach to enable early detection of possible suicide clusters in order to prevent further suicides by supporting those individuals at risk. The plan also aims to ensure that information is gathered effectively and that the success or otherwise of each case is reviewed so that improvements can be made where necessary.
- The Council has entered into a partnership with the Public Health Agency and Belfast Health and Social Care Trust to form the Belfast Health Development Unit. This unit aims to produce an integrated city wide plan for tackling health inequalities and improving health and wellbeing, with mental health and wellbeing having been identified as an overarching theme for its work.
- Under Peace III, funding has been administered to groups who are undertaking work which will have a positive effect on the issue of suicide awareness and prevention. A summary of this funding is included in Appendix 1.
- As a major employer the Council has a duty to protect and promote the health and wellbeing of its employees, which includes providing support for employees who are affected by suicide.
- The civic dignitaries, both current and past, have attended events organised by suicide awareness groups from across the city. Furthermore, the current Deputy Lord Mayor is hosting later this month a charitable event in the City Hall for the PIPS Project.
- A youth column was recently featured in City Matters about depression and included the suicide prevention helpline number among other details. The following pieces have also been published in the magazine:
 - Launch of Suicide prevention helpline number - Spring 08 issue
 - Suicide prevention article expressing support for the recent World Suicide Prevention Day on 10th September – November 09 issue
 - Christmas Blues article with helpline numbers for young people – written by Youth Forum columnist – November 09 issue
- The Development Department is exploring currently bespoke training for play staff regarding suicide, particularly identification of early signs and support for children who have been affected by suicide.
- A sub-group of the Youth Forum examined in depth the issue of suicide,

undertaking training and organising visits to external organisations dealing with suicide. An expert panel discussion, hosted in City Hall in April, engaged young people, policy makers and practitioners.

- Community Development staff have organised and participated in a range of suicide related training courses in conjunction with key community based organisations like FASA and the PIPS Project. In turn, awareness level and other relevant training sessions have been organised for volunteers. Several examples are cited below:
 - December 2008, Community Services organised a training session to raise awareness of Suicide in our society. The accredited training was delivered by the PIPS Project and was given to staff from Community Services as well as Youth Forum members.
 - Nineteen people in total took part in the 'Lifeguard Training', which sought to raise awareness amongst ordinary people and front line staff of the signs that might give an indication that someone might be at risk from self harm or suicide.
 - The Highfield area via Upper Springfield Healthy Living Project can now avail of services around Mental Health Alternative Therapies based in Highfield Community Centre. Personal Counselling in Forthspring is also being planned.
 - FASA's Suicide Awareness project has previously used the Hammer Area Pavilion to run playschemes at Easter and during the summer. These targeted children who had lost a family member as a result of suicide.
 - Both FASA and PIPS have had free use of Duncairn Community Centre for meetings and counselling and therapy sessions.
 - Approximately 12 volunteers in Inverary Community Centre completed PIPS training in Suicide awareness. This training was also rolled out to 12 volunteers from other community groups in the Inner East of the City.
- In addition, grant aid is provided via revenue grant to support organisations like FASA.
- The West Belfast Sub-Group of the District Policing Partnership has funded the Suicide Awareness and Support Group in West Belfast to produce an information leaflet in relation to youth issues. Funding in the sum of £500 was provided in March, 2010.
- The West Group of the District Policing Partnership has supported the work of the Suicide Awareness and Support Group through inviting them to present to a group of visitors from Tallaght West on an exchange project between West Belfast and Tallaght West. This was supported financially by the Northern Ireland Policing Board.

On a number of occasions the Council has unanimously passed notices of motion requesting that this important issue receives the required attention, most notably on 1st April, 2004 and again on 12th November, 2007, when the relevant statutory authorities were called upon to set up a task force to address the growing problem.

Members will also be aware that the Review of Public Administration will give Councils a new power of wellbeing. The Council will be able to utilise this functionality to become much more involved in promoting health and wellbeing in partnership with other key stakeholders. Furthermore, through the new duties associated with Community Planning, the Council will be able to support greater co-ordination of services in these fields throughout the City.

It is apparent from the above information that the Council is undertaking a significant amount of work in relation to suicide awareness and prevention.

Resource Implications

N/A

Recommendation

To note the information provided and to agree that the problem of suicides in the city finds expression in the planning process for the new Corporate Plan and that detailed action lists on the actions the Council can usefully take in relation to the exercise of its functions are prepared as part of the planning process.