

**From the Permanent Secretary
and HSC Chief Executive**



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Dear Mr Downey

Thank you for your correspondence of 10 April 2019 in relation to a motion passed by the Council expressing concern around suicide rates, and support for suicide prevention measures.

I very much welcome the Council's recognition of the devastating impact of suicide and its willingness to work with others to reduce suicide rates in Belfast. Suicide prevention is a societal issue and it is incumbent on all organisations to work together to address the wider risks of suicide and self-harm. Local government has an important role to play through community development, in spreading awareness and supporting local services.

The Council has expressed support for resourcing of groups that work in counselling and suicide prevention. A total of £8.7m is currently invested each year in suicide prevention through Protect Life and covers a wide range of services including Lifeline, Self-Harm Improvement Programme, training, bereavement support and community and voluntary sector support. In the Belfast area £1,526,028 was invested in suicide prevention in 2018/19 across both the statutory sector and through community and voluntary organisations.

Additionally the Public Health Agency (PHA) supports a range of projects aimed at improving mental health and wellbeing via the small grants scheme. A total of £63k was awarded to 18 projects, with 1187 beneficiaries, in the Belfast area in 2018/19.

The Council motion supports training for all citizens so that Belfast can react positively to assist those in need. The PHA currently supports the SafeTalk and ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) programmes in Northern Ireland. In 2017/18 a total of 484 people attended 34 courses in the Belfast area. The PHA also supports a range

of courses in mental and emotional wellbeing such as Mental Health First Aid, Mood Matters programmes and Mindset training.

A number of projects which form part of the new Protect Life 2 Suicide Prevention Strategy have already commenced through additional transformation funding.

The Derry Crisis Intervention Service pilot aims to provide a non-clinical response to those individuals who find themselves in situational and emotional distress, and where there is a high likelihood of suicide or self-harm. The pilot also hopes to alleviate pressure on other agencies such as the PSNI, Emergency Departments and Foyle Search and Rescue. The Derry pilot is led by the local Council and began in January 2019 and is operated by Extern. The service is operating from 8pm on a Thursday night to 8am on a Monday morning.

The Belfast Crisis De-escalation Service pilot commenced on 29 March 2019. Inspire were awarded the contract to provide the community and voluntary element of the Crisis De-escalation Service. This service is delivered in partnership with Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and is located in Inspire's premises in Elmwood Avenue, in close proximity to the Alcohol Recovery Centre and the City and RVH hospitals in case of onward referral to either premises.

Both the Derry and Belfast pilots will be evaluated to determine whether these approaches would be suitable for longer-term investment and roll-out across other areas of Northern Ireland.

A Multi Agency Triage Team (MATT) is being delivered in partnership between South Eastern HSC Trust, PSNI and the Northern Ireland Ambulance Service and has been operational from July 2018. The pilot is due to run until March 2020. The project involves two Police Officers, a Mental Health Nurse and a Paramedic working together to respond to people with mental health problems, aged 18 and over, who have accessed the 999 system. The service is currently operational between the hours of 7pm and 7am on a Friday and Saturday night and primarily covers the Lisburn and Castlereagh and Ards and North Down areas of SEHSCT. Plans are in place to extend this successful service into South and East Belfast.

A Regional Towards Zero Suicide Mental Health Collaborative Programme has been established across the five Health and Social Care Trusts which focuses on patient safety to reduce suicide within Adult Mental Health Services using the Zero Suicide approach. Towards Zero Suicide is not a target but describes a powerful intent to relentlessly pursue improved patient safety and a reduction in suicides in those who seek help. The Towards Zero Suicide programme sits within a wider context of patient safety and quality improvement in each Health and Social Care Trust.

A Regional Zero Suicide Co-Ordinator has been appointed to support strategic co-ordination across HSC Trusts, and act as a central point for implementation, data collection, performance monitoring and communication. Towards Zero Suicide Improvement leads have been appointed in each of the five Trusts, to support local implementation of evidence based practice and training.

The Council motion also seeks to challenge the taboos of mental health and suicide. The PHA, in conjunction with Inspire, run *Change Your Mind*, Northern Ireland's

regional campaign to tackle stigma and discrimination around mental health. The project is partly funded by Comic Relief and focuses on challenging stigma amongst the general public, and in workplaces, schools, community and sporting organisations. For schools and young people *Change Your Mind* offers a range of talks, information resources and awareness raising sessions.

I note that the Council has called for implementation of the Protect Life 2 Suicide Prevention Strategy. In the absence of the Assembly, and of a Health Minister, the Department is continuing to review all health and social care policies/strategies on a case by case basis and is taking decisions, with legal advice, when it is in the public interest. This Department is currently seeking agreement from other stakeholders on their actions contained within the draft Protect Life 2 strategy prior to my consideration for publication. However, it must be clearly understood that despite the delay in publication of the new strategy, suicide prevention services continue to be supported and developed and, as outlined above, a number of new initiatives from the draft strategy are being piloted using the transformation monies. Our priority is to continue to provide safe services which deliver the best possible outcomes for our citizens.

I trust you find this update helpful.

Yours sincerely



RICHARD PENGELLY