

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Review of Self-Harm Task and Finish Group – Interim Report

Briefing Paper

1. Recommendation

- 1.1 That the Committee notes the progress and future strategy of the Self-Harm Task and Finish Group.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 The Review of Self-Harm Task and Finish Group (Self-Harm TFG) was established in September 2019 in response to Public Health England data highlighting Warwickshire as an outlier for self-harm in young people.
- 2.2 The membership of the TFG comprises Councillor Jerry Roodhouse (Chair) and Councillor Margaret Bell. The Group is supported by Marina Kitchen (Service Manager, Early Help & Targeted Support), Kate Sahota (Lead Commissioner, Family Wellbeing), Emily van de Venter (Public Health Consultant) and John Cole (Trainee Democratic Services Officer).
- 2.3 The objectives of the Self-Harm TFG are:
 - To explore why Warwickshire has a higher level of hospital admissions than elsewhere in the West Midlands and what can be done to reduce the level of admissions.
 - To make recommendations on preventative actions to reduce the incidence of self-harming behaviours.
 - To identify actions to improve understanding and communication regarding what leads young people to self-harm, how best to support them and improve their resilience. The key areas being - schools, communities (including councillors and key organisations), parents and young people.

3. Initial Evidence and Self-Harm Working Group

3.1 A Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) 'Exploring Self-Harm in Young People in Warwickshire' was completed in 2017. It found that:

- Self-harm admission and referral rates in Warwickshire generally peak at 15 years old.
- Girls and young women accounted for three quarters (75%) of hospital admissions for self-harm in Warwickshire amongst those under 25-years old.
- The lowest rates of hospital admissions for self-harm in Warwickshire amongst 0-25-year olds were in December and August (this aligns with information gathered from stakeholder interviews which suggested a correlation with a fall in academic pressures during these periods).
- Hospital admission rates were associated with deprivation levels (i.e. the higher the deprivation in an area, the higher the rate of hospital admission for self-harm). The majority of self-harm admissions had a primary residence based in Nuneaton and Bedworth Borough.
- The ethnicity profile of hospital admissions was similar to that of the Warwickshire population.
- The majority of self-harm admissions amongst 0-25-year olds in Warwickshire hospitals required an overnight stay, in line with National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) guidelines.
- In 93% of cases, 0-25-year olds were discharged from hospital to return home. This underlines the importance of considering levels of care available to young people following discharge.

3.2 Self-Harm Working Group

In recognition of the findings of the JSNA, the results of the Warwickshire Suicide Prevention Strategy and Public Health England data showing above average rates of self-harm amongst young people in the County, the Self-Harm Working Group was established in July 2018.

The Group's membership includes representatives from Public Health & Strategic Commissioning, Clinical Commissioning Groups, Coventry & Warwickshire Partnership Trust, third sector organisations (including CWMind,

Papyrus), COMPASS (School Health & Wellbeing Service provider) amongst others. The Group reports to the Suicide Prevention Strategy Group for Warwickshire.

The Self-Harm Working Group's Programme Objectives are:

1. To develop a system wide approach to prevention and early intervention of self-harm.
2. To develop and ensure consistent messages about information and signposting (of services and self-help resources) are shared.
3. To reduce the incidence of self-harm.
4. To strengthen the knowledge, skills and confidence of frontline workers in responding to self-harming behaviour.
5. To improve the accessibility of community-based support pre- and post-self-harming.

Support from members of the Council has been welcomed by the Working Group, including areas where the work of the Self-Harm TFG can complement and enhance on-going initiatives, including:

- Scrutiny of the refreshed Self-Harm Reduction Action Plan;
- Raising awareness of the sensitivities and challenges associated with self-harm and promotion of the work being undertaken by the Authority and its partners;
- Building on the findings of the Safeguarding in Schools Review, gathering evidence from schools and academies, and providing leverage to access schools that may be hesitant to engage;
- Supporting efforts to develop the Rise (CAMHS) Community offer; and
- Supporting efforts to make use of creative arts within localities to offer young people alternative ways to maintain and develop their mental wellbeing and resilience.

4. Evidence Gathering

4.1 During the initial meetings of the Group between October 2019 and January 2020, a range of engagement and evidence gathering exercises were proposed.

4.2 Safeguarding in Schools Review

In January 2020, the Group met with Adrian Over (Education Safeguarding Manager) to receive early findings from the Safeguarding in Schools Review relating to levels of self-harm and measures to address the issue within the County's schools and academies.

- Of the 280 schools that responded to the request for information, 260 indicated that they had a mechanism for recording incidents of self-harm; 20 schools reported that they did not have a recording protocol in place.
- The results of the survey suggested that most schools recognised the importance of recording instances of self-harm. In some cases, schools which had not yet introduced a recording mechanism for self-harm were prompted to do so by the Review.
- Adrian Over reported that 2844 incidents of self-harm had been recorded by schools during the academic year. Most cases (2380) were of secondary school aged pupils and in some instances these individuals had experienced challenging circumstances including exposure to exploitation and criminality. A smaller proportion of recorded cases were of primary school aged children.
- Some schools had a high number of recorded instances of self-harm; however, these could be attributed to multiple episodes of self-harming by an individual or a small number of children. Rather than suggesting that these schools had a pronounced problem, the results could indicate that the schools had a rigorous recording procedure and an ethos to address the issue.
- 1246 different students accounted for the 2380 recorded instances of self-harm in secondary schools; and 264 different pupils accounted for the 464 recorded instances in primary schools.
- A provisional shortlist of schools to be invited to participate in engagement and focus group sessions was devised. This included schools which had

recorded low levels or no instances of self-harm, which could suggest that measures were not in place to address the issue effectively.

4.3 Marketing and Communications

In January 2020, guidance was sought from Helen List (Deputy News and PR Manager) and Mabel Jenkin-Smith (Market and Communications Support Officer) to consider marketing, communications, engagement and digital media strategies.

It was considered that a useful line of inquiry during the proposed school focus group sessions would be to find out where and how young people accessed information – which websites, social media platforms or apps.

Attention was drawn to the ‘Stay Alive’ App which is supported by the Coventry and Warwickshire Health and Care Partnership and offers support to anybody experiencing thoughts of suicide, or those with concerns for somebody else. The App covers the six suicide prevention strategies identified in evidence-based clinical guidelines which distinguishes it from similar on-line resources. Usage figures showed that the App was performing well.

It was felt that social media use contributed to a tendency for young people to compare themselves to others which could lead to discontentment; a message to young people to emphasise that it was normal to experience periods of unhappiness could mitigate this effect.

Helen List advised that scope existed to lend support to a campaign to address self-harm and that some existing resources could be utilised to this purpose. However, she advised that to do more the Media and Communications Team would need additional evidence. She suggested that it would be possible to support development of a focus group and to gather evidence by means of an on-line survey.

Mabel Jenkin-Smith referred to suicide prevention initiatives such as ‘Men in Sheds’ and ‘It Takes Balls to Talk’ which were tailored to reach out to a target audience. It was thought that an initiative to address self-harm would need a strategy to ensure the greatest possible impact on groups most affected.

5. Lines of Inquiry

5.1 Engagement with Parents and Carers

During the meeting with Marketing and Communications, consideration was given to the long wait faced by many young people in crisis in accessing support from professional mental health services. This could result in an onus on parents and carers to intervene effectively. It was suggested that parents and carers could be contacted by the Group to evaluate measures that could be enacted to offer support.

5.2 Ofsted Data

In December 2019, the Group heard that Ofsted inspections were increasingly focused upon pastoral care as well as academic performance. Analysis of their findings in Warwickshire's schools could inform the Group's investigations.

5.3 School Health and Wellbeing Service

At the December 2019 meeting, Kate Sahota advised that the School Health and Wellbeing Service had begun asking children at year six if they had considered self-harm, and at year nine if they had self-harmed. Analysis of their findings could provide a useful line of inquiry.

5.4 Warwickshire Safeguarding Board

In December 2019, Nigel Minns (Strategic Director, People) reported that the Warwickshire Safeguarding Board was preparing a targeted inspection of children's mental health services including self-assessment by the agencies involved. This could provide an opportunity to develop the work of the Task and Finish Group.

5.5 Warwickshire Children in Care Council

Liaison with the Children in Care Council (CiCC) could offer insight. A request could be made to the Corporate Parenting Panel to facilitate a dialogue.

5.6 Coventry, Warwickshire and Solihull Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP)

The Group was advised that Caroline Lamming-Chowen (Manager of the Coventry, Warwickshire and Solihull Child Death Overview Panel) had

indicated that CDOP could contribute positively to initiatives undertaken to address the danger of self-harm.

At the January 2020 strategy meeting, it was reported that in cases of suicide amongst children and young people, the cause of death was recorded as self-harm, as it was considered that children were not fully cognisant to make a choice to end their life. A methodology akin to a Serious Case Review was followed when investigating deaths among under 18s.

5.7 Engagement with Charities and Support Organisations

Engagement with local and national charities could provide valuable information. During the Group's initial sessions, it was suggested that contact be made with:

- Coventry and Warwickshire Mind
- Self-Harm UK (part of the Youthscape Service)
- MeeTwo (a confidential mental health support service and app for young people)
- ChatHealth (a confidential text message support service operated by the NHS)
- RISE – with a focus on the 'Dimensions' service
- Warwickshire Community and Voluntary Action (WCAVA)

5.8 Autism and Self-Harm

The relationship between undiagnosed autism and self-harm, especially in teenage girls, was highlighted during the Group's initial sessions.

5.9 'Understanding Self-Harm in Warwickshire Schools'

Prior to the introduction of lockdown measures, the 'Understanding Self-Harm in Warwickshire Schools' project was anticipated to be undertaken by the Self-Harm Working Group between January and May 2020. It is likely that the outbreak of coronavirus has impeded progress. However, the development of this research would be of interest to the Task and Finish Group.

5.10 Arts-based Interventions

Attention has been given to the positive effects of theatre, visual art and other creative outlets. Liaison with arts organisations (including RSC and Escape Arts) and art therapy providers could provide valuable insight, however, it is

acknowledged that coronavirus has had a profound impact on work in this sector.

5.11 Impact of COVID-19

At the December meeting, it was acknowledged that children were more vulnerable during periods away from school. The prolonged closure of schools during lockdown, social isolation and uncertainty regarding exam results have contributed to increased pressure on young people.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that a rise in levels of self-harm amongst young people has been observed since the outbreak of COVID-19, however, data has not yet become available to confirm the extent of the impact of the pandemic.

The Group will seek to assess the impact of COVID-19. The proposed school focus group sessions will provide an opportunity to speak directly with young people who may have been detrimentally affected by the pandemic.

5.12 Primary Schools

Engagement with primary schools has been proposed in response to anecdotal evidence which points to a potential increase in self-harm amongst children at year six and below.

At the meeting of the TFG in October 2020, it was considered that primary schools should be included within the proposed engagement strategy, however, a distinct approach was required. Whereas circulation of a questionnaire to secondary school pupils could provide a valuable line of inquiry, it was felt that this would not be appropriate for younger children.

5.13 Engagement with Schools and Academies

In January 2020, consideration was given to the methodology for the proposed school visits. It was suggested that:

- A focus group would be the appropriate setting;
- Participation should be requested from schools' Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and pastoral workers
- Participation of Mental Health Champion and school nurse, if available (in preparedness for possible risk of disclosure);
- A duration of one hour for each session would be appropriate.

Consideration was given to potential questions:

- What's working well?
- Where do you see gaps in the system?
- Would the introduction of an app present benefits?
- If so, what areas should the app cover?
- Has the RISE Dimensions Tool been utilised, was it beneficial?

In recognition of the potential risk of disclosure, a request for ethical approval would be required prior to engaging with young people.

The outbreak of COVID-19 and introduction of lockdown measures in March 2020 resulted in the postponement of proposals to engage with schools.

During October 2020, discussions have taken place with the Education Psychology Service within WCC to utilise psychology undergraduates to progress the work to engage with schools. The work originally proposed will need adapting to accommodate virtual engagement, however an initial scoping exercise indicates the following could be achieved over coming months:

- Online survey on self-harm to all schools by Christmas 2020 (analysis in January 2021);
- Virtual focus groups with teaching and pastoral staff during February, March and April 2021;
- Virtual focus groups with students during February, March and April 2021;
- Analyse all findings and report writing May/June 2021.

6. Next Steps

6.1 To further develop the research proposal with the Education Psychology Service, including:

- Revising ethical paperwork (previously authorised, but will need amending);
- Development of questionnaire;
- Development of focus group questions;
- Consideration of the best way to engage with schools in recognition of COVID-19 restrictions, utilising Teams, Zoom or other platforms;
- Finalising the list of schools to contact.

6.2 Delivery of the Self-Harm Action Plan through the Self-Harm Working Group.

6.3 The Group will report back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee following completion of the programme of engagement with schools to provide an update of its findings.

7. Financial Implications

None at this stage.

8. Environmental Implications

None at this stage.

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The briefing paper was circulated to the following members and officers prior to circulation:

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse (Chair), Councillor Margaret Bell, Marina Kitchen (Service Manager, Early Help & Targeted Support), Kate Sahota (Lead Commissioner, Family Wellbeing) and Emily van de Venter (Public Health Consultant).