

**TITLE OF REPORT: Suicide; Every Life Matters – Evidence Gathering
(session 1)****REPORT OF: Iain Miller, Programme Lead**

Summary

This report gives details of the evidence gathering session that will take place on 10 September 2019. The Committee will hear from HM Senior Coroner for Gateshead and South Tyneside, Mr Terence Carney. Also attending will be a person with lived experience who will discuss the circumstances of their attempted suicide.

The views of the Committee are being sought on the evidence presented and the ongoing work on Suicide Prevention in Gateshead.

Background

1. Care Health and Wellbeing Overview and Scrutiny Committee have agreed that the focus of its review in 2019-20 will be Suicide.
2. Trends data show that suicide rates in Gateshead increased since 2010 – 2012 for all three categories; All Persons, Male and Female. If we look at the number of deaths for Gateshead during this period it has increased from 33 people in 2010-12 to 51 people in 2015-17. In the latest reporting period (2015 – 2017), Gateshead rates for All persons have levelled out, have decreased slightly for Females and increased slightly for Males.¹ This is against the national trend which has seen rates falling in All persons since 2012/14, falling in Males since 2013-15 and falling since 2014-16 in females.
3. Since 1984 it has been consistently held in England that the standard of proof in suicide cases should be the same as in criminal prosecutions, that is, beyond reasonable doubt. However, in the case of suicide there is no crime involved and an inquest is not a criminal trial. The comparative difficulty in obtaining a conclusion of suicide may well mean that official statistics significantly underestimate the occurrence of suicide. However, a recent judgment in the Court of Appeal in the case of *Maughan -v- HM*

¹ <https://fingertips.phe.org.uk/profile-group/mental-health/profile/suicide/data#page/0/gid/1938132828/pat/6/par/E1200001/ati/102/are/E08000037>

Senior Coroner for Oxfordshire (Maughan) [2019] EWCA Civ 809² has confirmed that the standard of proof required for a jury to return a conclusion of suicide is the civil standard, i.e. the balance of probabilities. This is likely to lead to an increase in the numbers of Suicide across the country, including Gateshead.

4. Lived experience participation refers to the many ways people with a personal experience of mental illness, service use and recovery are participating in the design and delivery of mental health services. Embedding the perspective of people with a lived experience in service delivery has been shown to improve outcomes for people using services in ways that can be measured from both clinical and recovery perspectives.³

Purpose of this session

5. The scoping report agreed by OSC on 25 June 2019 identified the issues in Gateshead and proposed that the first evidence gathering session would provide a detailed overview of suicide from a Legal/Coroners perspective, especially the change in the standard of proof required for a jury to return a conclusion of suicide from a *legal perspective*, “beyond reasonable doubt”, to the *civil standard*, “the balance of probabilities”.
6. Recent Audits of Suicide and unintentional deaths in Gateshead have identified the impact this could have with around a third of the files reviewed by Council officers showing a verdict of Suicide, the others include; Open Verdicts, Accidental/Misadventure and Narrative verdicts.
7. The paper also proposed that the first evidence giving session would look at the impact of suicide from someone with lived experience, enabling information to be presented to provide members with insight into the key factors involved and the impact of suicide on a community. This first evidence gathering session will hear a presentation of fifteen minutes each from:
 - HM Senior Coroner for Gateshead and South Tyneside, Mr Terence Carney
 - Paul Sams, Service User Project Co-ordinator with Northumberland Tyne and Wear NHS Foundation Trust

Issues to Consider

8. When considering the evidence outlined above the Committee may wish to consider the following:

² <https://5essexcourt.co.uk/resources/news-view/r-maughan-v.-hm-senior-coroner-for-oxfordshire-judgment-today>

³ Promoting Lived Experience Perspective: Discussion paper prepared for the Queensland Mental Health Commission Dr Louise Byrne, Lecturer in Lived Experience Mental Health, CQ University Australia.

- Gateshead has lower than Regional rates of Suicide and similar rates to England.
- Suicide rates in Gateshead had increased from 2010 – 2012 up until the last reporting period of 2015 – 17 when there was a plateau for All Persons and a decrease for Women.
- Suicide is the leading cause of death among young people aged 20-34 years in the UK and it is considerably higher in men, with around three times as many men dying as a result of suicide compared to women.² It is the leading cause of death for men under 50 in the UK. Those at highest risk are men aged between 40 and 44 years who have a rate of 24.1 deaths per 100,000 population.⁴
- The change in the method of recording suicides is likely to see an increase in the suicide rates in Gateshead.
- Suicide Prevention work impacting on Gateshead is being taken forward at Regional, Northumberland Tyne & Wear and Gateshead level.

9. Subsequent evidence gathering sessions will include presentations from;

- 9.1. Members of the Public Health Team describing the current process and findings of local Audits of Gateshead data on Suicide and undetermined injury with an outline of a real-time surveillance system being introduced in the coming months.
- 9.2. Regional leaders and our partners from Newcastle Gateshead Clinical Commissioning Group and on the work at Integrated Care System (ICS) level and sub regional sub groups.
- 9.3. Representatives from the Criminal Justice system and Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) identifying high risk groups and what can be done to minimise risk.

Recommendations

10. Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to agree the scope, process and timescale as set out in this report.

Contact: **Alice Wiseman**
 Director of Public Health
 Ext: 2777

⁴ Office for National Statistics (2017). Suicides in the UK: 2016 registrations. Available at: [https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarri...](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths) [Accessed on 21/08/18].