

City of Wolverhampton Suicide Prevention Strategy



Content

Foreword	03
Introduction	05
Our vision	07
Why is suicide prevention important?	08
What do we know about suicides in Wolverhampton?	10
What we will do	12
How we will implement our vision	14
How we will measure our work	15

Foreword

‘Our City, Our Plan’ sets an ambition that sees Wolverhampton, as a city where people live longer, healthier lives. This underpins our intention and commitment to making Wolverhampton a Suicide Safer City also. A life saved from suicide, is no less valuable than any other preventable cause of death. Therefore, the first purpose of our new local strategy is to ensure that there can be no doubt that suicide prevention matters, people who are struggling matter, the lives of those we have lost, matter.

Developing a new strategy offers us space to refocus and re-set, whilst reflecting on the success of the previous strategy we now move on from. So much has happened in that time, and many of those things such as financial instability, undoubtedly pose a threat to our individual and collective mental health-and at the same time, so much has been achieved in our wonderful city.

Whilst there has been a reduction in incidents of suicide in Wolverhampton in recent years, sadly 53 people died by suicide between 2019 and 2022. I want to pay homage to them and their families. This statistic is testament to the fact that more needs to be done; one life lost is one too many. We must do all we can to learn from their loss and consider what might have been done collectively different. At the same time, I am acutely aware that for every tragedy, we must conceive that there are people who survive, people who overcome such pain and we must listen to the stories they have to tell us in order to learn and commit to do more.

Our Strategy is proudly infused with survivor influence. Those voices tell us that intolerable distress that may lead us to consider that our life is not worth living, can and does pass, and therefore, suicide is preventable. Help seeking is often cited in the literature and within survivor voice alike as being one of the most formidable forces in overcoming suicidal distress. However, we must acknowledge some of the relational difficulties and barriers that people sometimes navigate when they do. As such, this strategy commits to work towards creating compassionate, aware, and equipped communities and workforces.

This strategy is also informed by a recent Joint Strategic Needs Assessment. It recognised how financial pressures, domestic abuse, and poor mental health in particular can act as circumstantial risk factors that can expose individuals to a risk of suicide in Wolverhampton. We will work towards achieving better in roads for those living with these challenges and equipping services and professionals to co-explore and develop safety plans that can be referred to in times of distress, whilst supporting those underpinning risk factors.

Any effective suicide prevention strategy has to span three distinct areas of prevention, intervention and postvention. With prevention spanning whole population awareness, stigma reduction and increased safety, intervention focused on those at increased risk of suicide, postvention focuses on support and response within the ripple effect of loss owed to suicide.

We recognise the effect that the tragedy of a suicide has on those who are the first to arrive at the scene, the family, friends, colleagues, and neighbours of someone who loses their life. It is imperative that they have timely access to help and support. The roll out of national and local Real Time Surveillance of Suspected Suicides will enable us to reach more of these individuals who are navigating a complicated and painful loss.

I am delighted to introduce this renewed strategy, it is a piece of work that represents partnership, collaboration, and commitment from the partners within the Wolverhampton Suicide Prevention Stakeholder's Forum. In developing this strategy, we have set out how we can build on the progress made, while identifying and responding to new and emerging concerns. Every single Forum member contributes daily to making Wolverhampton a suicide safer city. The co-production of this strategy will be vital to ensure its success, which will be measured through delivery against annual action plans. These action plans will support

us to take what are our visions and hopes, to become tangible and realised outputs. I would like to thank partners across our forum, their tireless support and campaigning which has driven progress on suicide prevention in Wolverhampton, and I have no doubt has saved the lives of many.

Together we can achieve this vision of a suicide safer city. Together we can be kinder, better citizens and contribute to breaking down the barriers and shame that can deter those in distress from seeking help. Together, we can make Wolverhampton a city that with absolute conviction can offer our young people opportunity and hope. Together, we can save lives.



Cllr. Jasbir Jaspal
Cabinet Member for Adults and Wellbeing



Dr. Clare Dickens, MBE
Independent Chair, Wolverhampton
Suicide Prevention Stakeholder Forum

Introduction

Suicide has a profound impact on everyone involved, causing immeasurable and enduring pain and anguish. The reasons behind any suicide can be multiple and there is no simple solution. However, taking a compassionate approach and offering support during a period of acute distress may, for some, reduce the risk of suicide and help individuals to take a different path.

The City of Wolverhampton continues to be a place where most residents are able to live fulfilling and happy lives¹, with access to a range of amenities and services for the diverse communities that make up the city. Inevitably, at times, people need support for various reasons which need to be addressed if they are to feel good and function well. To help with this, a range of organisations and communities in Wolverhampton provide a vast amount of support; importantly this includes supporting mental wellbeing, which helps uplift residents during time of distress.

However, like many other places, Wolverhampton also faces challenges, which means not everyone accesses support or gets the help they need at the right time. For the city this has led to generally poorer health outcomes¹ and in some cases people dying prematurely due to conditions such as Coronary Heart Disease and Cancer. One of the other reasons for premature death is, sadly, people dying by suicide.

Suicide is profoundly tragic, leaving devastating impact on friends, families and communities. People take their lives by suicide due to various interwoven triggers, typically during a period of extreme upheaval where they feel overwhelmed and overpowered by the feeling of not wanting to live any longer. Tragically this leads to over 5,000 suicides every year in England, this is around 10 people for every 100,000². Whilst Wolverhampton has recently seen a welcome reduction in suicides, there were tragically 53 suicides during the most recent reporting period of 2019-20212, which is around 7 people for every 100,000 in the city.

Suicide disproportionately affects some sections of the community such as: men, who make up 75% of all suicides; certain occupations like construction and nursing; or those living within challenging circumstances such as low incomes, poor health unemployment or addiction to substances. These factors can contribute toward the risk of suicide. Therefore, interventions need to be tailored to recognise and respond to the unique needs of various groups within the wider Wolverhampton population.

The Wolverhampton Suicide Prevention Stakeholder Forum (Wolverhampton SPSF) recognises that suicide is not inevitable and may be prevented through appropriate support. It is with this in mind that partners remain committed to making Wolverhampton a city that is suicide safer and a place where Wulfrunians live longer, healthier lives as set out in 'Our City Our Plan'³. This suicide prevention strategy is testament to the passion of the numerous organisations, communities and people who come together under the SPSF to deliver a range of activity to make the city suicide safer. This strategy sets out the priorities to reduce suicides, how this activity will be delivered and how the work will be directed and governed.

1. Office of National Statistics
2. Office for Health Improvement and Disparities
3. City of Wolverhampton Council - Our City Our Plan



Our vision

Wolverhampton will be a city where suicide prevention will remain a priority for organisations and communities, who will come together to collectively plan and deliver interventions to reduce the risk of suicide for all residents of Wolverhampton.

Partners working together as part of the Wolverhampton SPSF wish for Wolverhampton to be a city where everyone feels they have a role to play in suicide prevention.

Early intervention and prevention to reduce suicides will be embedded across all services, communities will feel empowered to take action and support services will be more accessible, including support for those bereaved by suicide.

Wolverhampton will continue to build on the reduction in suicides seen recently and strive to prevent more avoidable deaths by suicide through a multi-pronged strategic approach set out in the action plan. Efforts of various organisations and communities will be coordinated to continue the strengthened partnership working currently seen in the city; this will ensure efforts to address this important issue are not fragmented.

Wolverhampton SPSF will work within a robust governance system ensuring key boards and groups, such as the One Wolverhampton Integrated Care Board and Health and Wellbeing Together, and their respective subsidiary delivery groups remain involved.

Key domains

Early Intervention and Prevention

Taking an approach of early intervention and prevention to disrupt a downward spiral of wellbeing. Implementing protective measures to address suicide risk throughout an individual's journey and services.

Knowledge, Skills and Awareness

Ensuring the offers of support are well known across the city and that people across various organisations and communities are skilled and knowledgeable about suicide to support people in distress.

Services to support those in need

Offering a broad range of support for everyone, from early help and intervention to postvention, including bereavement support. Importantly, services are linked, accessible and on offered in various forms.

Embedding suicide prevention, making it everyone's business

Working across all organisations, sectors and communities to make suicide prevention 'everyone's business' so that early support can be accessed where required.

Why is suicide prevention important?

Whilst the impact of suicide is devastating for families and communities, we believe that suicides could be prevented with the right support at the right time. A number of expert bodies, strategies and policies advocate that we can all play a part to prevent suicide and in Wolverhampton we recognise these various strategic levers will help us locally to fulfil our vision.

A key strategy was the national suicide prevention strategy, published in 2012, which led to the formation of Wolverhampton SPSF.

A Suicide Prevention Strategy for England 2023-28 (DHSC, September 2023)¹ seeks to deliver a collaborative approach towards reducing the suicide rate over the lifetime of the strategy—with initial reductions observed in the early half. Measures include improving support for people who have self-harmed and have been bereaved by suicide. The recommendations within this national strategy have been considered in the formulation of this local strategy.

Partners from local NHS services that are represented at Wolverhampton SPSF are working towards delivering the NHS Long Term Plan 2019² which reinforces the commitment to reducing the incidence of suicide, through the delivery of an enhanced mental health crisis model and 24/7 access to mental health support.

Locally, in 2019, City of Wolverhampton Council launched Our City: Our Plan³, which outlines priorities for the period between 2019 and 2024. These priorities span the life course ensuring children get the best start possible, families are supported, the economy is thriving, and communities live a healthy and fulfilling life. These priorities are aligned with positive determinants of health and wellbeing, which can act as protective factors in preventing incidents of self-harm or suicide.

The City of Wolverhampton Council Vision for Public Health 2030⁴ aims to enable residents to live longer, healthier lives and ensure everyone is protected from harm, serious incidents and avoidable health threats.

The Wolverhampton Mental Health Joint Needs Assessment⁵ (completed August 2023) indicates that the building blocks of housing, employment and financial security are important to support good mental health and prevent mental ill health.

‘Being mentally well’ for people in Wolverhampton includes feeling emotionally balanced, resilient and able to bounce back or to cope with life challenges. It also includes feeling optimistic about the future, having good social connections and being able to access support when needed.

People feel that getting out and being able to do things would support their wellbeing as well as having time for oneself, more money, someone to talk to, better physical and mental health care and better working environments. All these factors will influence good mental health and wellbeing in residents which contribute towards reducing the risk of suicide.

1. DHSC, A Suicide Prevention Strategy for England 2023-28

2. NHS Long Term Plan, 2019

3. City of Wolverhampton Council - Our City Our Plan

4. City of Wolverhampton Council - Vision for Public Health 2030

5. City of Wolverhampton Council - Adult Mental Health Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2023



What do we know about suicides in Wolverhampton?

Suicide rates in Wolverhampton have declined over the past two decades and are significantly below both the national and the West Midlands regional averages. However, it is important to acknowledge that over 50 people died by suicide within the city during the most recent three-year reporting period which serves as a reminder to system partners that additional efforts are necessary to address the issue effectively.

Gender

Men make up approximately 75% of suicides nationally. In 2021, the suicide rate for males in England and Wales was 16.0/100,000, consistent with rates between 2018 and 2020. For females, in 2021, this rate was 5.5/100,000; this is consistent with rates between 2018 and 2020.

ONS reporting by gender shows that, since 2001, for Wolverhampton the gender split is slightly different with males accounting for 80% of suicides and the remaining 20% of suicides being female. It is recognised that the risk factors affecting men and women are multiple and these can change in relevance throughout an individual's life.

Age

ONS reports that the highest suicide rate in 2021 was seen among people aged 45-54. Among women, those aged 45 to 49 years had the highest age-specific suicide rate at 7.8/ 100,000. Among men, those aged 50 to 54 years had the highest age-specific suicide rate at 22.7/100,000. Furthermore, data indicates that females aged 10-24 years have seen the largest increase in their suicide rate since the time series records began in 1981, albeit from a low base.



Ethnicity

A local data analysis exercise concluded that suicide by ethnicity in Wolverhampton was closely aligned to the ethnic population makeup of the city. It is, however, acknowledged there is an increased exposure to risk factors in people from minority ethnic groups including higher risks of poor mental health and higher levels of unemployment.

Risk Factors and Behaviours

Wolverhampton faces numerous challenges including significant levels of deprivation; the city is currently ranked as the 24th most deprived local authority in England. This is especially relevant considering that those residing in more deprived communities are at a heightened risk of being exposed to factors that in some circumstances have shown to contribute to suicide.

These risk factors include but are not limited to:

History of self-harm: In 2021/22 nearly 500 people were admitted to hospital for intentional self-harm – the number of people with a history of self-harm is likely to be much higher.

Having a mental health disorder: In Wolverhampton 20.5% of people aged 16-64 (33,525 people) and 12.5% of older adults over 65 (5,476 people) have a common mental health disorder.

Alcohol dependence: In 2020 Wolverhampton had the highest alcohol related mortality across the country, with 70 people dying from causes related to alcohol consumption.

What we will do

The aims of this strategy are:

- **To reduce the incidence of suicide in the city through prevention, intervention and postvention measures that recognise and address the risk factors that are known to contribute towards suicide.**
- **To recognise the needs of those affected by suicide and to strengthen the support available to them.**
- **To work collaboratively with partner organisations and strengthen the local support offer.**

Aligned to the four domains highlighted in the vision, the objectives of this strategy are as follows:

Early Intervention and Prevention

We aim to disrupt the downward spiral of wellbeing and implement protective measures early on by developing preventative interventions for the groups recognised as being at higher risk. These include men and those facing challenging circumstances such as domestic abuse, loneliness, substance misuse and gambling related harm.

We also recognise the link between financial hardship and the risk of suicide. We will therefore deliver preventative messages across the city, embed routine enquiries about financial hardship into mental health services and signpost / refer individuals for support. We will highlight and promote the protective factors that protect against suicide ideation, such as community connection and mental wellbeing as part of awareness campaigns.

Knowledge Skills and Awareness:

We will aim to help people across various organisations and communities to be skilled and knowledgeable by rolling out Suicide Prevention Awareness Training across the city, targeting those who work with the groups at higher risk.

Services to support those in need:

We will strengthen and connect the support for everyone, from early help and intervention to postvention, including bereavement support. In doing so we will embed best practice such as NICE guidance on self-harm to ensure services are evidence led and effective.

We will ensure that the offer of prevention, intervention and postvention is equitable and accessible. Services will be assisted to improve the quality of data recorded to understand better who is accessing support and why, what is the local need, and what measures can be taken to address inequalities in access to support.

Embedding suicide prevention, making it everyone's business:

We will work across all partner organisations to influence and strengthen policy around suicide prevention, so that every partner has a role in preventing suicide.

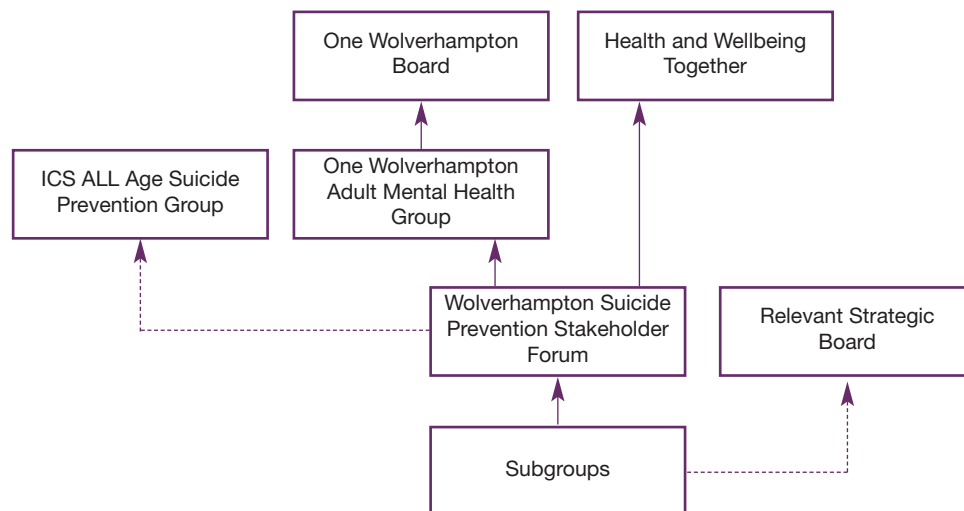
We will continue to work with partners including the council's Highways and Planning Services, Network Rail and Mental Health services to reduce access to means of suicide. We will also monitor incidents of suspected suicides, through a regional Real Time Surveillance System, to ensure timely multi-agency action is taken, including reducing risk of further associated suicides and ensuring bereavement support is available to those affected.



How we will implement our vision

Wolverhampton SPSF will lead on the implementation of this strategy. In doing so, the forum will work in collaboration with a range of partners, to co-create and jointly deliver activities, such as awareness campaigns and training, that reach the communities in Wolverhampton and address the multiple risk factors for suicide as recognised within this strategy.

Wolverhampton SPSF will operate within a robust governance framework which is described in the chart below.



Annual Action Plans

Wolverhampton SPSF will be responsible for developing, monitoring and evaluating an annual action plan aligned to the vision, aims and objectives of this strategy for each 12 month period of the strategy's lifetime.

This will allow an annual refresh of actions, informed by any national or local developments and by local data on incidents of suicide, obtained through Coroner's office data and Real Time Surveillance of Suspected Suicides.

Assurance reporting

Regular updates on the development and delivery of the strategy will be taken to the Black Country Integrated Care System (ICS) All Age Suicide Prevention Strategy Board and the One Wolverhampton Adult Mental Health Group.

How we will measure our work

The overarching purpose of this strategy and of the collective efforts of the Wolverhampton SPSF is to prevent suicide.

Measuring the impact that this strategy will have, however, is not straightforward. As we know, each tragedy of a suicide is down to a number of contributing factors, and therefore our strategy encompasses a range of activities to address these factors.

Each project or activity delivered within the scope of this strategy will be evaluated and reported upon to Wolverhampton SPSF.

In addition, each of our Annual Action Plans will be evaluated by Wolverhampton SPSF.

We will also monitor other surveillance data that will provide longitudinal data on the incidence of suicide in the city. This data includes:

Nationally published indicators

There are a number of nationally reported indicators that this Suicide Prevention Strategy will contribute towards; these will be monitored throughout the duration of this strategy. These include Public Health Outcomes Framework (PHOF) indicators which include suicide rates for all persons, males, and females.

Coroner's Office data

Regular reports on incidents of suicide in Wolverhampton from the West Midlands Coroner's Office will be reviewed by Wolverhampton SPSF.

This will allow for the forum to recognise any contagion - series of suicides that are linked by method, geography or motivation - which will enable the forum to undertake targeted prevention work in response with partner organisations and services.

Real Time Surveillance of Suspected Suicides

Officers will have access to a Black Countrywide Real Time Suspected Suicide Surveillance system which will allow for analysis of suspected suicides rapidly, without having to wait for a Coroner's inquest to conclude.

Reviewing this data will enable Wolverhampton SPSF to monitor any increase or decrease in suspected suicides and allow for data informed, targeted intervention where this is indicated.

You can get this information in large print, braille,
audio or in another language by calling 01902 551155
or emailing translations@wolverhampton.gov.uk

wolverhampton.gov.uk 01902 551155

  [WolverhamptonToday](#)  [Wolverhampton_Today](#)  [@WolvesCouncil](#)

City of Wolverhampton Council, Civic Centre, St. Peter's Square, Wolverhampton WV1 1SH