

Briefing Note

Title: Public Mental Health During the Covid-19 Pandemic (Adults)

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Prepared by: Jamie Annakin

Job Title: Principal Public Health Specialist

Intended Audience:

Internal

Partner organisation

Public

Confidential

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 To provide members of the Health and Wellbeing Together Board with an update on Public Mental Health (PMH) approaches by City of Wolverhampton Council (CWC) and strategic partners to promote adult population mental wellbeing and provide support pathways for adults experiencing mental health problems during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 1.2 To outline future PMH workstreams including a review of CWC digital support pathways to ensure universal mental health promotion messages are cascaded across the City, strategic partnership work to facilitate mobilisation of community support networks for mental health service users and carers, understand the impact Covid-19 has had on mental health across the City and the provision of support to those most at risk of mental health problems.
- 1.3 To provide an update from the Suicide Prevention Stakeholder Forum (SPSF) on activities cross sectoral partners who coordinate delivery of the City's suicide prevention strategy and action plan.

2.0 Background and Context

- 2.1 A Public Mental Health approach aims to ensure people feel good, and function well, including a focus on mental health promotion, mental illness prevention and recovery throughout the life course. Key goals include, reducing inequalities in mental health and wellbeing and promoting access to care and support, as well as challenging stigma and supporting recovery.
- 2.2 CWC and Wolverhampton Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCG) 'Public Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2018-2021' sets out our joint vision for every resident in the City of Wolverhampton to have the best mental health that they can at every stage of their life.
- 2.3 During the COVID-19 pandemic, a City-wide response has included the provision of universal and targeted approaches to promote population wellbeing and sign post people to more structured support when mental health problems arise. Strategic

partners oversee the provision of mental health services, as well as supporting holistic recovery of people across the City of Wolverhampton.

3.0 Universal Mental Wellbeing Promotion (Adults)

- 3.1 Due to the Coronavirus pandemic many people have found themselves having to cope with significant life changes. Whether it's working from home instead of the workplace, home schooling children, being unable to work and furloughed, worrying about the health of loved ones, job insecurity, financial issues, or coping with COVID-19 specific issues such as shielding, isolation and new social distancing measures.
- 3.2 To support people across our City, information and advice have been made available on things people can do now to help keep on top of their mental wellbeing, and cope with how they may feel while staying at home.
- 3.3 The CWC digital platform Stay Safe Be Kind (SSBK) www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/stay-safe-be-kind provides mental wellbeing promotion information for local people that offers evidenced based public health advice on staying mentally healthy during the coronavirus pandemic, as well as sign posting to both local and national sources of support for people who need more structured interventions to support their wellbeing, bereavement advice, or help to manage a mental health crisis.
- 3.4 Clinically vulnerable people who are shielding have been provided by CWC with a Wolverhampton 'ten ways to stay mentally healthy whilst at home' infographic in their food parcels to support them in finding ways to keep physically and mentally active, discovering a new interest or hobby on-line, and how to stay in touch with loved ones for emotional support whilst being confined to the home.
- 3.5 Anyone calling the City council's coronavirus support hotline that disclosed a mental health concern have been provided with key mental health support information by call handlers using a Public Health designed resource pathway.
- 3.6 Callers to the hotline who expressed feelings of loneliness or isolation were sign posted by call handlers to the Wolverhampton Voluntary Sector Council (WVSC) Social Prescribing Service. Public Health provided resources and information to support social prescribers in helping people know how and where to get access to mental health information and support.
- 3.7 Since lockdown began, the Council's Community Support Team has arranged weekly wellbeing calls for vulnerable residents and has helped more than 500 people who have felt isolated so far. The team is working with Age UK, Silver Line, Healthwatch Wolverhampton and volunteer organisations, as well as making calls themselves, to ensure people have felt reassured and thought about during lockdown.
- 3.8 The Council's Carer Support Team have spoken to more than 730 carers since the beginning of lockdown. Carers are often isolated within their caring role, so staff are offering wellbeing calls.

- 3.9 CWC staff who field customer calls on the coronavirus hotline are provided with their own mental wellbeing support offer co-designed by public health and Human Resources from mental health first aid (MHFA) trained staff.
- 3.10 Staff in care homes were provided with resources to support them to stay mentally well, and access psychological therapies and bereavement counselling should they need more structured support.
- 3.11 Several press releases have promoted national mental health resources from www.everymindmatters.co.uk which offer people an opportunity to take the mental quiz , get a personalized mental health plan and access advice about sleep, exercise, managing stress, anxiety , and how to help others.
- 3.12 SSBK has promoted access to a new Single Point of Access (SPoA) 'Black Country wide' support hotline that has been commissioned by the CCG. The hotline acts as an umbrella function above existing mental health services ensuring people get the right help they need, at the right time.
- 3.13 SSBK has also promoted awareness of a new Rethink 24/7 365 days a year telephone line that has been commissioned across the Black Country by the CCG. This provides listening advice and support for people seeking more general advice about their mental health and wellbeing.
- 3.14 A strategic City-wide campaign for this year's Mental Health Awareness (MHA) Week 18-24 May 2020, ensured key safeguarding messages regarding supporting people struggling with their mental health were cascaded via press release, social media and four separate radio interviews across several stations, and in targeted settings.
- 3.15 The public were encouraged to share acts of kindness during the coronavirus pandemic as well as being asked to say what kind of society they wish to be part of as we emerge from the coronavirus pandemic, further information can be found at Appendix 1.
- 3.16 The 'PIOTA app' (for smart phones and tablets) provides mental health service users, carers and BCHC staff with timely access to support for themselves and others in respect of mental wellbeing promotion, mental health support and what to do in a mental health crisis.
- 3.17 Pathways have been refined for adults requiring support from Primary Care for their mental health problems including self-referral pathways into Wolverhampton's Healthy Minds service avoiding the need to make a GP appointment
- 3.18 As patients experiencing mental health problems are believed to be at increased risk if they are having to self-isolate (and are having reduced contact with friends and family for support) guidance has been developed to enable GPs to titrate existing patient's medication without the need for a face-to face appointment.

4.0 Workforce Wellbeing

- 4.1 Interventions have been utilised by a range of strategic partners to support the mental health of their workforce during the coronavirus pandemic. One example of this is the NHS, CWC and Care Homes providing staff with digital mental health support tools including the CCG commissioned *silvercloud* platform and sign posting to specific bereavement support services.
- 4.2 A workplace communications toolkit has been developed for use by employers during MHA week to help keep staff advised on ways they can look after their mental health and wellbeing.
- 4.3 As it is challenging to represent the wide range of work all organisations have undertaken to support the mental health of their staff during the coronavirus pandemic, a 'snapshot' of this is represented from a CWC perspective in the remainder of this section.
- 4.4 The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provides advice, help and support for a range of workplace issues, including physical and mental health problems. Public Health and Human Resources (HR) at CWC have co-designed a package of support interventions on a new '*staff wellbeing portal*' providing digital resources to help staff with issues such as anxiety, low mood, poor sleep and general wellbeing during COVID-19. These resources have been circulated to all staff and managers.
- 4.5 A network of Mental Health First Aiders (MHFA) staff provide more structured support to employees in crisis, as well as established links to local Samaritans support. CWC have secured additional counselling support for bereaved employees during the coronavirus pandemic.
- 4.6 The profile of MHFA support has been illuminated via the circulation of communications including the following video recorded by MHFA trained staff , telling people what they do, how they can help, and how to contact them if you are feeling distressed regarding your mental health <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vs2SINH-JN4&feature=youtu.be>
- 4.7 MHFA trained staff are also being supported themselves through development of peer support networks facilitated jointly via Human Resources (HR) and public health.
- 4.8 During MHA week staff were able to access virtual yoga, mindfulness and physical activity sessions, as well as online virtual choir sessions to improve wellbeing.
- 4.9 Ongoing development of staff side support includes formation of peer support networks for MHFA trained staff, new staff wellbeing champions and webinars outlining the five ways to wellbeing and how to access support via the CWC EAP.

5.0 Developing Public Mental Health Support across the City: Next steps

- 5.1 Next steps in mental health support for adults include a review of the CWC mental health digital support pathways on SSBK, supporting strategic re-mobilisation of community resources/ assets to support people with existing mental health problems

and their care givers, and the provision of targeted support for groups at high risk of mental health problems.

Review of digital mental health promotion pathways

- 5.2 A review of CWC (SSBK) digital mental health support pathways (for adults) will be undertaken to ensure key information is made available universally to people in relation to keeping active, eating well, managing stress, anxiety, low mood and poor sleep as we emerge from the acute phase of the coronavirus pandemic. A re-orientation of support information will be required towards topics of high priority including tenancy management, mortgage support, housing support, debt advice, employment support pathways, welfare rights advice, citizens advice support, what to do if you are struggling to cope with mental health difficulties, where to get support and advice and what to do in a mental health crisis.

Mobilising community mental health support pathways

- 5.3 Voluntary sector groups/ forums and peer support networks play an integral role in providing support for people with (or at heightened risk of experiencing) a mental health problem, and the wellbeing of care givers. Multi agency work is required to re-mobilise these vital assets following interruption in the ability for groups to meet and support each other due to general social distancing measures, isolation (for those who are symptomatic), and shielding for those deemed at clinically high risk during the coronavirus pandemic.
- 5.4 Strategic partners should work collaboratively in commencing a re-engagement and mapping exercise (following social distancing guidelines) of mental health community assets. Suggestions for the type of information this activity may look to collate are listed below:
- Who did you/ your group/ organisation / peer network provide support to pre-COVID- 19 (capturing equality monitoring data where possible)?
 - What support did you provide and how did people engage with you pre-COVID-19?
 - What support if any have you been able to provide during COVID-19?
 - How do you plan to re-engage with people now social distancing regulations are being relaxed?
 - What help does your group/organisation or network need to re-mobilise community support (i.e. Public Health guidance on re-commencing a group meeting whilst adhering to COVID-19 social distancing guidance)?
 - Support may include helping groups source access to some alternative community locations, or switching to use of digital tools to connect with people (particularly those who are deemed clinically vulnerable and at high risk)
- 5.5 An existing directory <https://wolverhamptonmentalhealth.net/> of mental health community support could be further populated with information galvanised from community groups to help people who want to find and access support networks to improve their mental wellbeing in their local area.

- 5.6 Voluntary sector organisations are well placed to offer additional support to community groups in respect of mental health. The CCG have provided voluntary sector funding to support community work of this nature in Wolverhampton. Proposals from Wolverhampton Voluntary Sector Council (WVSC) to bolster the social prescribing offer, reduce loneliness and isolation, and provide access to digital technologies for vulnerable groups.

Ensuring targeted mental health support information for at risk groups

- 5.7 Public Health England (PHE) have outlined several groups who are identified as being of high risk of mental health problems <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/better-mental-health-jsna-toolkit/3-understanding-people>. The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) mental health policy team has commissioned Public Health England (PHE) to provide regional evidence packs on the impact of COVID-19 on the determinants of mental health. Learning from these resources will shape HWT strategic partners focus towards providing targeted support to those in need.
- 5.8 Targeted information will continue to be made available to people with existing mental health problems and their carers via the PIOTA app. Access to the app will be promoted via the Council's SSBK platform.
- 5.9 A Black Country wide strategic workstream is strengthening support pathways for people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities in accessing mental health support services.
- 5.10 Wolverhampton Safeguarding Together Partnership (WSTP) are conducting a review of available data to better understand the impact of the coronavirus pandemic on mental health. Any learning should shape future provision of support resources.

6.0 Suicide Prevention Update

- 6.1 The Suicide Prevention Stakeholder Forum (SPSF) consists of a range of cross sectoral partners who coordinate delivery of the City's suicide prevention strategy and action plan, this forms an integral part of the overall mental wellbeing approach. SPSF aims to provide annual updates to HWBT against the strategy and action plan. Full details of the strategy, action plan and minutes of meetings can be accessed via the Wolverhampton Information Network: http://win.wolverhampton.gov.uk/kb5/wolverhampton/directory/service.page?id=5_TFMj7QUfk
- 6.2 A full report submitted by the Chair of SPSF can be found at Appendix 2. The Forum's meeting scheduled for March was cancelled due to Covid-19, the next meeting will take place on 25 June 2020.
- 6.3 It is too early to fully understand the impact Covid-19 has had on suicidal ideation, attempts and actual suicides. However, as outlined in earlier sections, risk factors associated with poor mental wellbeing have been starkly exacerbated during the last

ensuing months. On the more severe spectrum of impact, of these risk factors intensifying, suicidal thoughts and attempts are more susceptible to increase. The Forum continues to support system partners with the collective effort to promote mental wellbeing of residents of Wolverhampton.

- 6.4 The report submitted by the Chair of SPSF sets out progress of the Forum in engaging primary care in suicide prevention training, accessing coroner data, strengthened bereavement support, focus on suicide prevention in the mental health trust and roll out of community-based promotion such as the Hopewalk and suicide prevention awareness campaigns. However, these key pillars of work are in early stages in some cases, and will continue to grow moving forward, such as embedding suicide prevention tools within primary care setting, establishing a real time surveillance system where clusters/patterns can be identified early and family and friends can receive support immediately after a bereavement.