

Minutes of the North Belfast District Policing and Community Safety Partnership

Public Meeting

Girdwood Community Hubb, Belfast
Tuesday, 4th October, 2016

Political Members

Councillor Mary Ellen Campbell
Councillor Mary Clarke
Alderman Patrick Convery
Alderman Guy Spence

Independent Members

Jennifer Cornell (Vice-Chair)
Gerald Solinas

Designated Organisations

Chief Inspector Stephen Burns, PSNI
Mark McBride, EA
David McComisky, NIFRS

Gabi Mornhinweg, H&SCT
Mark Nicholson, PBNI
Sergeant Nick Williams, PSNI

Staff Present

Richard McLernon, Safer City Coordinator
Katharine McCrum, Partnership Support Officer
Andrew Charles, Project Officer
Trevor McDonald, Anti-Social Behaviour Officer

Apologies

Councillor Nuala McAllister (Chair)
Alderman Gareth McKee

1. Welcome from the North Belfast DPCSP Vice Chair

- i. The Vice Chair welcomed Members, key speakers and members of the public to the North Belfast DPCSP Public Meeting on Suicide Prevention and invited the new Local Policing Chief Inspector, Stephen Burns, to introduce himself to the audience.
- ii. She noted that the topic of the meeting was a sensitive one and advised that if anyone found the content difficult, or wished to talk about concerns, the speakers in attendance would be happy to stay behind to offer additional support.

2. Suicide Prevention Discussion

- i. Speakers from the Ashton Centre, PIPS, Mindskills, Lighthouse and the PSNI provided the audience with information on the prevalence of suicide, strategies and consultations dealing with mental health and suicide, support services, emerging pilot schemes and resilience training.
- ii. Ms. Irene Sherry from the Ashton Centre, provided an overview of the ongoing work within North Belfast with regards to suicide prevention including working towards the establishment of a Belfast Alliance for Suicide Prevention. She advised that of the 55 sudden deaths recorded last year, 20 of them were in North Belfast. The audience were updated on meetings regarding the establishment of Street Triage, practitioners meetings, the Protect Life Strategy, and the Take 5 Survey, the initial results of which would be released later in the year.

- iii. The PIPS representative, Julie McCann, provided information on their walk-in service, hospital follow-ups and outreach counselling. She advised that resourcing was one of the biggest issues facing the sector.
- iv. Mr. Philip McTaggart from Mindskills provided an overview of the work that he had been involved in regarding suicide prevention. He informed the group of the importance of maintaining positive mental health and the need for politicians to play a more active role in supporting mental health. He noted that 318 people died as a result of suicide last year and that Northern Ireland had one of the highest rates of self harm. He further commented on the need to build a level of resilience and confidence in young people.
- v. Jo Murphy, Lighthouse, talked about the impact that suicide had on families and the stigma associated with mental health issues. She also provided information about the Flourish! Programme for members of the clergy, a Sunday Worship resource and Self Care Toolkit.
- vi. Sergeant Nick Williams informed the group of the role of the PSNI when they are called to a sudden death and the increased training that was being undertaken by Officers. He also pointed out the warning signs and the risk factors associated with suicide.
- vii. The group were advised of the role of SD1 forms which are completed when a death is suspected to be as a result of suicide and forwarded to health care trusts to allow support to be offered to families, if requested. Sergeant Williams advised that the PSNI was also looking at a pilot scheme offering support to those who had attempted suicide.

3. Discussion

- i. A member of the public suggested that the drug Lyrica was becoming widely used in communities and asked if it had been linked to suicides.
- ii. The panel agreed that its use was very prevalent and while it may be involved in some cases, it was not thought to be a major cause. It was however noted that drug related deaths were not recorded as sudden deaths and so no SD1 form was completed.
- iii. Philip McTaggart added that drugs often enhance existing negative feelings, effect brain chemistry and decision making thus changing people's motivations.
- iv. Discussion took place regarding the need for a quiet room in hospitals to allow vulnerable people the space to talk and be listened to. Irene Sherry advised that this had been pushed at a community level and groups were lobbying for improvements.
- v. In response to questions about the profile of those committing suicide, the panel advised that a wide range of people were effected and that the a range of issues were involved such as drugs and alcohol, poverty, unemployment, lack of meaningful employment, legacy issues, the impact of recession, and depression. They also cautioned against the term 'committing suicide' as this suggested that a crime had

been committed, and instead suggested that death by suicide or loss via suicide was more appropriate.

- vi. A member of the public questioned the message being delivered to communities, and whether it was effective.
- vii. The panel suggested that the stigma around mental health issues and suicide made it difficult, and that people were much more aware and comfortable with physical symptoms, and that doctors were often more likely to prescribe medication than talk through issues.
- viii. Members of the public were urged to listen to those expressing suicidal thoughts as a small gesture could save a life. They were also advised of the resilience training available to communities and the other 'up-skilling' that could be offered to improve awareness of suicide, drugs and alcohol.
- ix. In closing Irene Sherry pointed to the number of lives that were saved through preventative and crisis work.

4. Close

- i. The Vice Chair thanked the keynote speakers for their informative discussion around suicide prevention and thanked members of the public for their attendance. She asked that people provide their names and email addresses on the sign-in sheets should they wish to receive more information about North Belfast DPCSP events.
- ii. She also advised the group about the North Belfast Friendship Club which is open to all and meets every Tuesday night at the R-City Café, Houben Centre, 432 Crumlin Road.