Briefing for Adult Social Care & Health Scrutiny Committee January 2020

Stockport Mental health response to COVID-19

Report from the Director of Public Health

1. **Introduction**

   1.1 Health emergencies are known to affect mental health, and the ongoing pandemic has resulted in unprecedented hazards to public mental health. These affect those with pre-existing mental health conditions, as well as the frontline workforce, and the population at large.

   1.2 This report summarises the Stockport response to date to protect public mental health and prevent suicides.

2. **Public mental health and the pandemic**

   2.1 Mental illness and substance misuse together account for over 21% of the total morbidity burden in England, and it is estimated that 1 in 6 adults experiences a mental health disorder (e.g. anxiety) every week. Already pre-COVID, mental health was associated with many inequalities – in prevalence, access to support, as well as opportunity and outcomes (Public Health England 2018).[1]

   2.2 As the pandemic severely disrupts key determinants of health (income, education, social networks, health services, physical environment), it has the potential to impact considerably on mental health and its determinants in a number of ways.

   2.3 The potential psychological impact of the pandemic may arise from fear of the virus for one's own health or that of loved-ones, the actual impact of the disease, loss or bereavement, as well as the impact of the pandemic control measures (such as restrictions and social distancing) on people, or the impact of the pandemic on risk factors of poor mental health outcomes (such as loss of security, threats to relationships, resilience and ability to cope).

   2.4 The psychological impact may be short-term for some, but there is the potential for a considerable medium- or longer-term burden for others from for example complex grief reactions, post-traumatic stress disorder, or exacerbation of previous mental health conditions.

   Current indications of the mental health impact of the pandemic

   2.5 Nationally, the scores for happiness, life satisfaction, and the feeling that things done in life are worthwhile have remained lower than pre-pandemic levels since March, and higher for anxiety (happiness briefly reached pre-pandemic levels during summer) (ONS 2020).[2]

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[1] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-matters-reducing-health-inequalities-in-mental-illness/health-matters-reducing-health-inequalities-in-mental-illness

[2] ttps://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/healthandsocialcare/healthandwellbeing/bulletins/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsongreatbritain/18december2020

2.6 There is a growing evidence base suggesting that the mental health burden has risen as a result of the pandemic with levels of depression, anxiety and stress exceeding pre-pandemic levels (Jia et al 2020; Xiong et al 2020). In the UK Household Longitudinal Study, mental health problems have risen from 24.3% (2017-19) to 37.8% in April 2020 (31.9% in June 2020) (Daly et al 2020). Younger adults, women, and those from socially disadvantaged backgrounds or already suffering mental health conditions are particularly affected (O'Connor et al 2020), as are those living with young children (Pierce et al 2020).

2.7 The reported increased levels of distress and anxiety in children and young people during lockdown may have been precipitated by worries about school, the future, and feelings of loneliness. Adverse family conditions, such as pre-existing mental health conditions or having key worker parents, but also being affected by violence or socio-economic disadvantage, may have exacerbated the impact of the lockdown on some children (Millar et al 2020).

2.8 The data also identifies growing inequalities in mental health during the pandemic as its impacts seem to be more pronounced on those already suffering mental health problems previously, or being at already greater risk.

2.9 It has been suggested that the drivers of poor mental health during the pandemic include social isolation, job and financial loss, housing insecurity and quality, working at the 'frontline', loss of coping mechanisms such as staying in touch with friends, and reduced access to services (Marshall et al 2020).

2.10 Some surveys have also explored how people cope during the pandemic, and identified the main mechanism as maintaining contact with family and friends, particular activities or exercise, being outdoors, or ensuring sufficient sleep. An increased community spirit is also considered favourable to mental wellbeing.

3 **Mental health response - nationally**

3.1 The Department of Health and Social Care has recently published a plan for staying mentally well this winter (November 2020).[3] This follows early guidance on how to maintain mental wellbeing and access support during the pandemic, for adults[4] and children[5], and builds on ongoing work aimed at general public awareness and self-care, support for those at risk, support for the frontline workforce, wider communities, and mental health service developments.

3.2 The mental health winter plan includes:
1. Self-care, empowering people to look after their wellbeing
2. Support in communities
3. Strengthening mental health services
4. Supporting frontline health and social care workers.

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[3] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-mentally-well-winter-plan-2020-to-2021/staying-mentally-well-this-winter
[4] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-public-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing/guidance-for-the-public-on-the-mental-health-and-wellbeing-aspects-of-coronavirus-covid-19
[5] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing

3.3 NHS England and the NHS Improvement National Mental Health Director also mandated that all mental health trusts should establish 24/7 urgent NHS mental health telephone support lines, this was achieved for both mental health trusts in the Greater Manchester area (Pennine Care and Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Foundation Trusts).

3.4 In addition, suicide prevention plans have been strengthened both nationally and locally. Although suicidal behaviour is not limited to people with mental health conditions, the risk factors likely to be impacted negatively by the pandemic largely overlap, including depression, post-traumatic stress, loneliness, hopelessness, feelings of entrapment and being a burden, substance abuse, violence and abuse, unemployment and financial insecurity (John et al 2020).

4   Stockport emotional wellbeing and mental health response to COVID-19

4.1 In the lead up to the pandemic, relevant work has been developed in mental health as well as suicide prevention, which could be built on and deployed rapidly. This section outlines key developments by the Council and partner organisations. Communication of the new offers and signposting to them has been a major focus also.

Supporting self-care:

4.2 In addition to supporting the national Every Mind Matters campaign https://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/, we have developed a comprehensive emotional wellbeing and mental health support section on our Council Coronavirus help pages (https://www.stockport.gov.uk/mental-wellbeing-support-coronavirus).   This provides direct links to a range of self-help resources, including the national Every Mind Matters site, as well as high-quality online reading resources from the Living Life to the Full range on a variety of topics. The site also includes signposts to a wide range of local support options (see further below).

4.3 Our social media campaign regularly includes messages to encourage people to contact and look out for friends and family for mutual support, and also advice on how to support others in distress.

Online support and therapy:

4.4 Both Stockport Council and Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership have commissioned a number of online support options free to residents, which are signposted from both the Council and Greater Manchester websites https://www.stockport.gov.uk/mental-wellbeing-support-coronavirus/self-help-advice-and-resources-coronavirus. They include

- **Togetherall** - a peer support platform for anyone aged 16+, offering resources and peer support, and professional monitoring and support as required.
- **Kooth.com** - an online service for young people aged 11-18, including counselling and emotional wellbeing support.
- **SilverCloud** – offering online programmes and therapy for all Greater Manchester residents aged 18 and over, to help with stress, anxiety, low mood and depression, or build resilience. A supported offer is available also via IAPT services (Improving Access to Psychological Therapies).

- **Blue Ice** - An evidence-based App to help young people manage their emotions and reduce urges to self-harm, administered by Child and Adolescent Mental Health (CAMH) services.
- We also promote **SHOUT** – a 24/7 free text service providing support by trained crisis volunteers.

Support for the workforce:

4.5 An enormous amount of work has been undertaken during the pandemic in order to support the health safety and wellbeing of council employees. A workforce steering group has been established with strong representation from across the council to co-design our response to the pandemic and supporting colleagues in this changing environment.

4.6 Examples include
- messages from the Chief Executive with a regular emphasis on physical and mental health, and signposting to sources of support and advice,
- a series of 'Supporting our Wellbeing' emails to all staff, with practical measures to support wellbeing, as well as featuring colleagues' experiences during the pandemic,
- significant engagement with the workforce through 'Let's Talk' surveys on wellbeing, flexible working, and equality and inclusion,
- sessions on 'Developing Emotional Resilience and Wellbeing',
- a significant number of wellbeing calls to the workforce by the workforce development team, which in turn inform the development of further offers,
- training for managers to adjust to remote working,
- a team of qualified internal coaches offering coaching sessions which have supported colleagues with particular challenges in their working lives.

4.7 A range of suicide prevention and online mental health training options have been compiled into a training matrix and shared.

4.8 For the wider workforce in Stockport, we have compiled resources for employers and businesses (https://www.stockport.gov.uk/mental-wellbeing-support-coronavirus/support-for-businesses-and-employers), as well as employees and the self-employed. We have also contributed material on locally available mental health support to the Marketing Stockport, SK Recovery, and Jobs Match websites, and worked with unions to publicise local sources of mental health support.

4.9 The Greater Manchester Resilience Hub, which was originally commissioned following the MEN Arena bombing, offers a comprehensive, and responsive service to Greater Manchester frontline health and care workers; this has also been shared with care homes for their staff.

4.10 Frontline services, including health, social care, education, emergency and essential services, can also access support nationally via https://www.mentalhealthatwork.org.uk/ourfrontline/ to receive 1:1 support from trained volunteers any time 24/7.

Support for communities:

4.11   The strong VCSE sector and community response through VCSE partner organisations and mutual aid groups, and volunteering schemes, is seen as a vital part of the local emotional wellbeing support system.

4.12   Volunteering not only provides vital services and support in our communities but also brings mental wellbeing benefits to the volunteers. Many people have been unable to continue their voluntary work during the pandemic and this loss may have further undermined their wellbeing and resilience. At the same time, many other people have discovered the rewards of newly engaging in voluntary activity to support their communities, creating opportunities to strengthen our future volunteer 'workforce'.

4.13   Access to mental health support was part of the early humanitarian response in March, with existing mental health VCSE sector partners being part of the response from the outset.

4.14   A wide range of local VCSE organisations continue to provide support to existing clients and others in a variety of ways possible within current restrictions.

4.15   The new Greater Manchester Bereavement Service is available online and by phone and provides helpful signposting to available support and services locally and nationally. It now also incorporates the Greater Manchester Suicide Bereavement and Information Service which pre-dates the pandemic.

4.16   Loneliness has increased as a result of the pandemic, especially among young people and those facing challenges such as unemployment, low income or loss. When extended over time is an important factor in mental health and wellbeing as well as physical health. While therapeutic interventions are sometimes needed to address chronic loneliness, the long-term solutions can only be found within our communities. The Council has worked with Sector 3 and other voluntary sector partners to produce a 'Loneliness Toolkit' including tips and resources for helping to address loneliness in our communities. It was widely distributed shortly before Christmas via networks within the public and voluntary sectors, and is available at https://www.sector3sk.org/resources.

Financial inclusion work:

4.17   Concerns about work and income can be sources of serious distress to people. The Council and partners have developed a significant programme of work to support residents in financial difficulties.

4.18   We are developing signposting links to ensure frontline staff in organisations providing support for people facing such challenges are equipped to support or signpost anyone who needs it to emotional or mental health support.

Support for children and young people:

4.19   Mid-April saw the launch of the integrated Emotional Wellbeing Hub for children and young people up to the age of 25. The Hub provides access to a variety of information, guidance, and support options via a single phone number on 0161 217 6028 (Monday to Thursday from 8:30am to 5pm and Friday from 8:30am to 4:30pm).

4.20   A School and Wellbeing Planning Group has worked on a number of priorities to support the wellbeing of both young people and the related workforce. Key actions have included:

- Supporting headteachers and school staff in the return to school following the lockdown
- Assessing the needs of schools, pupils and parents
- Piloting of a wellbeing assessment tool with primary schools
- Developing an integrated training offer for schools and Stockport family staff who support wellbeing
- Supporting schools to access external support services

4.21   Regular support for young people who identify as LGBT+ is provided by the Proud Trust, which has created an online support group to replace the face to face group and provides virtual and telephone 1:1 contacts.

Primary care:

4.22   In spring, the Healthy Minds team developed a script for primary care staff to support any welfare calls to registered patients with depression. Practices have been supplied with posters and leaflets throughout to support signposting.

4.23   In November the primary care masterclass event included a session on suicide prevention for GPs, as well as signposting advice for other staff. GPs were given the opportunity to acquaint themselves with Safety Plans. The session was accompanied by an online resource pack, including training options, and support and signposting material, and a suggested text message for practices to send to all practice patients.

4.24   We also continue to offer the previously available suicide prevention course for primary care clinicians in an online format.

4.25   The Wellbeing and Self Care service provided by Viaduct Care supports patients in practices with a range of issues, such as long term conditions, including mental health problems, lifestyle and financial issues, loneliness/social isolation and caring issues.

Mental health services:

4.26   In mid-April, the new 24/7 'Open Door' mental health crisis support helpline commissioned by NHS Stockport Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) became operational, in combination with a new daytime Safe Haven offer. The Safe Haven initially operated virtually, but has since opened as a physical space, located in the town centre (72-74 Prince's Street SK1 1RJ). Following a 'no wrong door' approach, anyone can attend without appointment, or call for emotional support; the service also accepts referrals from other providers, and is able to signpost to others.

Table: Open Door service activity between April and October 2020:

Service	April	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct
Telephone Line	80	160	183	139	156	170	262
Safe Haven (new people)	5	16	11	8	16	26	37
Safe Haven (contacts)	5	20	18	19	24	43	48

4.27   All commissioned mental health services continue to operate with a move towards more remote (telephone and video conferencing) support, but continuing to provide

face to face interventions for those clients based on risk assessment and assessment of need.

4.28   Stockport CCG increased investment to enable the Mental Health Liaison Team (based at Stepping Hill Hospital) to extend its offer to assess children and young people under 16 years who attend the emergency department with a mental health presentation.

4.29   Specifically for children and young people, a Rapid Response Team (RRT) can be accessed via NHS 111. This team offers support to complex young people who would not benefit from either a paediatric admission or an admission to a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service in-patient bed. The RRT can provide a package of support for up to 72 hours.

4.30   All Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) services continue to operate using a blended model of telephone support and increased use of e-therapy.

4.31   Memory Assessment Services were initially suspended due to the risks towards the older people population, but these services resumed in July 2020.

Communication campaign:

4.32   We have developed and widely shared a core signposting leaflet which includes a range of support options, for both adults and children, and caters for a variety of issues potentially causing distress. The leaflet continues to be promoted widely to frontline staff, including NHS and other partner organisations, as well as the community via a wide range of routes (latterly through the testing and vaccination sites)

4.33   A poster with access numbers for support has also been distributed and widely distributed alongside the leaflet, both online and directly delivered through council teams to shops, services and other community buildings in local areas, as well as NHS services.

4.34   We continuously post a variety of social media messages publicising available support services and amplifying relevant campaigns, as well as encouraging people to support and look out for others, and signposting them to guidance to support others in distress. We have also boosted social media campaign efforts for particular groups and through community networks.

4.35   In autumn all Stockport households received a leaflet with COVID-19 safety messages, as well as emotional wellbeing messages, and details of key mental health support services available.

Suicide prevention

4.36   Much of the work described work is relevant to suicide prevention. Further relevant actions have included:

- Free suicide prevention awareness training offers shared with partners, including our online directly delivered course, as well as self-study options; courses are also available for primary care staff (see above). ASK training is aimed at those working with children.

- Ongoing social media messaging, including boosting social media messages towards an adult male audience; social media coverage on Suicide Prevention Day reached 90,000 with one tweet alone.
- Removing outdated Samaritans signage on motorway bridges.
- A local group has come together to develop support for men, involving a range of voluntary sector and community members, supported by Council staff.

5 Conclusion

The pandemic presents unprecedented mental health hazards; whereas people with pre-existing mental health conditions are at particular risk, the impacts are not limited to those with existing diagnoses.

Work described focusses on the following:

- ❖ Active self-care to maintain resilience and wellbeing, including encouraging people to look out for each other, and remain connected with those close to them
- ❖ Focussing on the determinants of (mental) health such as social inclusion, financial support
- ❖ Raising awareness of local support options, so everyone knows where to get support, should they or others need it (awareness of the community, as well as frontline services)
- ❖ Supporting the workforce, particularly those in frontline services
- ❖ Supporting different risk groups
- ❖ Providing an integrated service offer for those who need mental health care, from online therapies to crisis support.

References

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