

READING HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

Date of Meeting	19 January 2024
Title	Berkshire Suicide Prevention Strategy 2021 – 2026 Progress Report
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report author	Michael Bridges VR Martin White
Job title	Consultants in Public Health
Organisation	Reading Borough Council
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the Health and Wellbeing Board note progress on the Berkshire Suicide Prevention Strategy (2021-2026); 2. That the Health and Wellbeing Board note and endorse the Reading Local Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2023/24.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report provides the Reading Health and Wellbeing Board with an update on the Berkshire Suicide Prevention Strategy 2021 - 2026. A revised action plan has been developed, outlining specific, targeted actions aligned with the original goals of the Berkshire Suicide Prevention Strategy 2021–2026 and the latest National Strategy of 2023. The priority actions outlined in the action plan will support the refresh of existing suicide prevention action plans in the six Berkshire local authorities.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1. Suicide prevention has been a national political priority since 2016 and remains a high priority for public health teams across Berkshire. The complexity of the Public Health System in Berkshire with six different local authorities encompassing diverse populations, presents significant challenges to a strategic approach to suicide prevention.
- 2.2. The Berkshire Suicide Prevention Strategy (2021 – 2026) (see Appendix 1) was developed in 2020 and endorsed by the Health and Wellbeing Board in October 2021. In July 2022, it was recommended to the Health and Wellbeing Board to refresh the strategy due to changes in the policy landscape. This period coincided with significant changes to local public health and healthcare system. Due to these challenging circumstances, the Berkshire Suicide Prevention Strategy (2021 – 2026) was not universally adopted by all six local authorities. Consequently, the coordination, production, and oversight of the strategy refresh was delayed.
- 2.3. On 11th September 2023 the Government published a new national 5 year cross- sector suicide prevention strategy for England with a national action plan. The aim of the national strategy is to bring everybody together around common priorities and set out actions that can be taken to:
 - reduce the suicide rate over the next 5 years – with initial reductions observed within half this time or sooner
 - improve support for people who have self-harmed
 - improve support for people bereaved by suicide.

- 2.4. After reviewing Berkshire Strategy for 2021-2026 to ensure that approaches were aligned to the new national strategy, the Berkshire local authority suicide prevention leads agreed to focus on refreshing their suicide prevention action plan at a local operational level. This will facilitate local implementation across the six Berkshire Local Authorities and result in local preventative activity.

3. Implementation of Berkshire Strategy and Local Action Plans

- 3.1. To date, the following actions have taken place to support the implementation of the Berkshire Suicide Prevention Strategy (2021 – 2026). These include:
- The appointment of a Lead Director of Public Health (Berkshire West / East).
 - The appointment of a Lead Consultant (interim) in Public Health and Assistant Director of Public Health.
 - A review of the current Berkshire position with a set of immediate priority actions recommended to Director/s of Public Health.
 - An audit of the strategy recommendations, mapped at a system level with potential lead organisations identified.
 - Establishment of Berkshire Suicide Prevention Public Health Leads meetings to review current local activity and establish a network to support good practice and delivery.
 - High level Berkshire actions identified and operational action plan along with the with the development of an audit tool.
 - Arrangement of a Thames Valley Real Time Surveillance System meeting for late January 2024 early February 2024.
 - Local Public Health teams reviewing their local action plans against the operational action plan audit tool.
- 3.2. The Berkshire Suicide Prevention Group, chaired by one of the Berkshire Directors of Public Health, has consistently convened quarterly meetings with the objective of driving the suicide prevention agenda forward. The group advocates for a collaborative approach, actively working towards effecting tangible change in the prevention of suicides across Berkshire through coordinated actions taken by member organisations.
- 3.3. To progress local implementation of the Berkshire Suicide Prevention Strategy an operational action plan has been collaboratively developed with the six Berkshire suicide prevention leads and co-leads. This plan encompasses high-level system actions across the Thames Valley, BOB Integrated Care Board, and Berkshire. These actions are:
- Continued investment in commissioned Bereavement Support Services
 - Review of the Real Time Surveillance (RTS) System
 - Review of the Berkshire Suicide Prevention Group
 - A suicide audit for Berkshire
- 3.4. There will be different approaches to implementing the Berkshire Strategy at the local level. In support of Local Authorities, the audit tool has been developed for leads and suicide prevention groups. This tool serves as a comprehensive mechanism for evaluating strengths, identifying areas for improvement, and establishing connections with pre-existing local strategies, ensuring the efficient delivery of actions. The insights gained from the audit tool will play a pivotal role in developing the local implementation plan, prioritising key areas, and outlining specific actions, including considerations related to resources and capacity
- 3.5. Suicide is a complex issue, and prevention should be integrated into other local strategies and programs, including the commissioning of other public health and well-being services across the life course.

- 3.6. It is important to note that each local authority should maintain or establish a local multi-agency suicide prevention group that reports to their respective Health and Wellbeing Board, being accountable to local residents. Recognising the complex mix of factors contributing to suicidal tendencies, no single agency can prevent suicide in isolation. Both the Berkshire Suicide Prevention Group and the local multi-agency suicide prevention action planning groups can facilitate and promote collaborative efforts at both strategic and operational levels to prevent self-harm and suicides among Berkshire residents.

4. Reading Suicide Prevention Action Plan

- 4.1. The Reading Suicide Prevention Action Planning Group has met regularly on a quarterly basis since March 2023. Led by the Reading Consultant in Public Health, it operates in close collaboration with the Principal Child & Educational Psychologist and the Strategic Lead for Mental Health & Emotional Well-being at Brighter Futures for Children. The group consistently has attendees from statutory organisations and voluntary community partners, which also includes representation from an autism charity.
- 4.2. The action planning group has actively engaged and established a network of stakeholders. It continues to diligently seek meaningful connections with local employers, the mental health trust, and other healthcare partners, including maternity services, to foster collaboration and enhance its outreach efforts.
- 4.3. The most recent meeting took place on October 4, 2023. During this session, the group continued its review of the local plan, building upon the previous version implemented since 2019. The primary focus was on prioritising and updating preventative actions that can be feasibly achieved within the existing capacity. The recent publication of the new national suicide prevention strategy in September provided an opportunity to align local prevention actions with broader national strategic intentions. It also facilitated coordination at scale with partners across Berkshire, particularly in the areas of real-time surveillance, bereavement support, and coroner's audit. These efforts are integral to the ongoing Pan Berkshire suicide prevention strategy, led by Berkshire West interim colleagues.
- 4.4. The Reading action plan has been shared as a model with neighbouring authorities, and a collaborative group convenes regularly to exchange good practices. The overarching objective of the review is to pinpoint three priority actions for Reading that align with the priorities outlined in the suicide prevention local profile and the national strategy. These actions are targeted to be achievable within the next year, considering the existing capacity. Presently, the identified priorities are focused on the early part of the life course, particularly linked to the experience of self-harm; middle-aged men; and measures aimed at restricting access to means, such as potential high-frequency locations.

5. Contribution to Reading's Health and Wellbeing Strategic Aims

- 5.1. Suicide touches all aspects of health and wellbeing, and the impacts on individuals, families, and communities are devastating. Death by suicide can affect anyone and remains a public health prevention priority. Issue. Unfortunately, 1 in 20 people will attempt suicide at some point in their life. However, deaths by suicide are preventable, individuals recover from a crisis and with the right support can avoid reaching a crisis in the first place.
- 5.2. Living through the COVID-19 pandemic has left few people unscathed; the health, social, and economic impacts, as well as loss and bereavement, have been experienced by many individuals and communities. While we emerge from the pandemic, hardships persist for many Berkshire residents as the cost of living rises, and people struggle in these times of financial crisis and uncertainty.
- 5.3. The National and Berkshire Suicide Prevention Strategies align with the Adult Mental Health and Wellbeing Priority Area 5 of the Berkshire West Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

6. Environmental and Climate Implications

- 6.1. Not applicable.

7. Community Engagement

7.1. A Suicide Prevention Summit took place on 15th December 2022, preceded by a survey. The recommendations from the summit were incorporated into the high-level action plan for Berkshire, which will be further developed by the six Berkshire Public Health leads. This process will involve identifying appropriate lead organisations across Thames Valley, BOB ICB, and Berkshire.

8. Equality Implications

8.1. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) was conducted in conjunction with the development of the Berkshire Suicide Prevention Strategy (2021-2026).

9. Other Relevant Considerations

9.1. Not applicable.

10. Legal Implications

Not applicable.

11. Financial Implications

11.1. Currently, suicide prevention is unfunded but recognised as a public health priority.

12. Timetable for Implementation

12.1. Not applicable.

13. Background Papers

13.1. There are none.

Appendices

1. Berkshire Suicide Prevention Strategy 2021-26
2. Pan Berkshire Action Plan 2023/24
3. Reading Local Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2023/24