

**County Council Meeting – 16 May 2024****Question to Councillor Wilcox  
Cabinet Member for Health and Care****By Councillor Hussain**

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**Question**

Unfortunately, suicides occur often in our communities. What extra steps can Staffordshire County Council take to avoid such tragedies, improve mental health, and help suicide survivors in the future also, could the council provide county-wide data on this tragedy?

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**Reply**

In the decade prior to 2018 there were typically about 70-80 suicides registered by the coroner per year in Staffordshire. We saw a rise from 2018 to 2020 with numbers all between 90-100 which raised our suicide rate significantly higher than the national average. However, it is important to note that this coincided with a relaxation in the standard of proof required for coroners to record deaths as by suicide. As such, we cannot be sure if or how much of that sharp increase was an actual true reflection of an increase in suicidal activity in Staffordshire. Nevertheless, from 2021 to 2023, total numbers have reduced somewhat to an average of 82 suicides per year and are no longer significantly higher than the national rate. Whilst men remain more likely to take their own lives, at present, the published rate of suicides in women in Staffordshire remains significantly above the national average (there were more than 30 incidents in 2020), but unpublished annual figures do suggest that numbers are returning to being similar to the national average.

We have a number of ongoing initiatives around suicide prevention. Most notably our Suicide Prevention Awareness Training (delivered by North Staffordshire Mind) which has reached nearly 2,300 people since we launched it in 2021. We are the lead commissioners for the NHSE funded Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Suicide Bereavement Service which launched towards the end of last year, and which is working well. A close working relationship with Staffordshire Police means that we weekly monitor all new suspected suicides with a view to spotting any potential trends or clusters, and we also monitor public sites where suicidal activity is more prevalent, for example Shobnall Fields, where we are working with partners and the community on a range of interventions to tackle high

levels of suicidal activity at a local bridge. We are just beginning a project to develop a toolkit/guidance for schools and colleges who experience suicide in their setting.

Broadly speaking, we have the Staffordshire Good Mental Health Strategy and action plan to keep us on track with promoting mental health and wellbeing, and this includes a number of suicide prevention actions. Suicide Prevention is most effective as a partnership activity, and we are currently developing a new joint Strategic Action Plan for the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Suicide Prevention Partnership.

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