



Subject:	Suicide Prevention in Public Places
Date:	6 th March 2018
Reporting Officer:	Nigel Grimshaw, Director of City & Neighbourhood Services
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Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues
1.1	The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the ongoing work in the city associated with suicide prevention in public places and to seek endorsement from Committee regarding this work and the Council's role in it.
1.2	Protect Life Strategy The Council works closely with the health trusts, the police, the Public Health Agency and community and voluntary sector organisations in suicide prevention work in the city. It is a member of the Belfast Protect Life Implementation Group and while the Public Health Agency takes a lead in implementing the government's Protect Life Strategy all partners are fully

	engaged in the work to minimise the impact these tragic deaths have on families, communities and local areas.
2.0	Recommendations
2.1	<p>The Committee is asked to;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ note the information contained in the report and to agree the proposed approach for Cavehill Country Park, in particular consulting with local stakeholders and organising a spring programme of activities to promote the positive image of the Park. ▪ grant approval for the free use of Ormeau Park for the Darkness into Light event subject to the organisers meeting all legal and statutory requirements and providing an event plan.
3.0	Main report
	<u>Key Issues</u>
3.1	<p>Work to improve mental health and emotional resilience is well publicised but suicide prevention work less so. This is because reporting on suicide and work directly associated with it can be difficult. Harmful reporting by the media and speculation and inaccurate posting on social media can bring damaging attention to a death which is not only extremely distressing for family members but can increase fear and anxiety for individuals and communities. This can lead to further deaths by similar methods or at the same or similar locations and is why some of the work directly associated with suicide prevention and response is not widely publicised.</p>
3.2	<p>Following a number of public incidents in recent years involving open space in the city, the Council trained its Park Wardens and Safer Neighbourhood Officers in the internationally recognised 'SafeTalk' training to enable them to provide support to anyone they come across who may be feeling anxious or distressed. More recently the Council and a number of other partner organisations started working on a project specifically aimed at preventing suicide in public places.</p>
3.3	<p>The project team has been using the practice resource 'Preventing Suicide in Public Places', published in November 2015 by Public Health England (PHE). It contains a useful step by step guide to identifying locations and taking action. This involves the systematic collection and analysis of local data and developing an action plan for priority locations. The publication also contains practical examples and evidence of effectiveness of interventions to prevent suicide in public places.</p>

3.4	<p>The project team began by reviewing the information on deaths by suicide in public places in Belfast over a number of years. However, to enable a more comprehensive understanding of locations and necessary preventative work it determined that information on attempted suicides and additional information on how far people had travelled to a location, etc. should also be collected. This proved difficult as there was no single data collection system for this type of information. Partner organisations have been working together on sourcing the relevant data within established information sharing protocols and the project will connect with other work streams in informing a future data collection system.</p>
3.5	<p>However, rather than let the data collection issue hold things up it was decided to consider opportunities for suicide prevention work in certain public places as part of other planned development work; for example, the refurbishment of Marrowbone Park. The connection was made between the development of the park and a community based 'Care Zone', which has been designed and led by local people and continues to work with numerous agencies and organisations to build hope in that particular area of the city. This connection gives local people the opportunity to consider how the park can be reimaged and used in the future but it also takes into account the sensitivities associated with its past. Another similar opportunity has been identified with the development of Falls Park and the City Cemetery, where there is potential to incorporate some of the physical measures identified in the PHE publication, for example improved lighting, restricting access to low level branches and creating a positive bright and well used space.</p>
3.6	<p>Other public locations have also been considered by the project team including Cavehill Country Park, however the physical measures and deterrents mentioned above are unlikely to be relevant to a park of its size and characteristics. The PHE publication refers to other measures such as increasing opportunities for help seeking by suicidal individuals; for example, by placing signs in strategic locations; it also refers to improving the public image of the site. The project team is considering these measures but given recent events it recognises that a safe and balanced approach is required. A starting point therefore will be to work with local groups such as the Belfast Hills Partnership, the Cavehill Conservation Group and local residents' groups to emphasise the positive image of the park, reminding people that it is a beautiful and interesting place, safe for children and a good place to support positive mental health. The Park's Outreach team is exploring a spring programme of activities promoting the Country Park's 'Green Flag' status and opportunities for putting into practice the Take5 steps to emotional wellbeing. The potential for signage will also be considered during consultations with local groups, residents and other stakeholders. The</p>

	PHE publication strongly advocates early public consultation and engagement before implementing any such measures.
3.7	One of the case studies mentioned in the PHE publication is Taxi Watch, a proactive approach to suicide prevention by taxi drivers. PSNI identified a similar scheme in Kilkenny and, working with the Public Health Agency, Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and the Council, organised a meeting in January to engage with local taxi drivers. A taxi driver from the Kilkenny scheme attended and following the meeting one of the large Belfast based taxi companies with over 900 drivers volunteered to pilot SafeTalk training for a group of its drivers and a group of control room operators. The training will be provided by BHSCT and if successful will be rolled out to other drivers and staff.
3.8	The Council has been asked to support a Darkness into Light event on Saturday 12 th May by facilitating the free use of Ormeau Park to start the event. This is an international event highlighting the issue of suicide awareness and the associated process of bereavement, grief and reflection. It involves a 5K walk or run starting at the same time in all venues before dawn.
3.9	Members are reminded that the Lifeline crisis response helpline number will continue to operate even though the existing contract is coming to an end. Anyone in distress or seeking help should be encouraged to contact the lifeline number, 0808 808 8000, it is open 24 hours a day, every day of the year. It is free of charge for all calls (including mobiles) and is answered by trained counsellors.
	<u>Financial & Resource Implications</u>
3.10	This work is undertaken within existing revenue budgets.
	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u>
3.11	There are no equality or good relations implications associated with this report although any future action plan will require to be equality screened.
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	None