

**SUICIDE PREVENTION UPDATE****REPORT of the EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH AND INTEGRATED COMMISSIONING****1. Purpose of the Report**

1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide an update on the whole systems approach to suicide prevention in Sunderland.

**2. Context**

2.1 The development of a local Suicide Prevention Action Plan is recommended by government and supports the 2023 national strategy: 'Suicide prevention in England: 5-year cross-sector strategy'<sup>1</sup>.

2.2 The responsibility for having a Suicide Prevention Action Plan and strategy sits with the local authority, through Sunderland's Health and Wellbeing Board. However, it is widely recognised that for suicide prevention to be successful, partnership working is essential. This is achieved through Sunderland's Suicide Prevention Partnership; a multi-agency group which aims to reduce the prevalence of suicides in Sunderland.

2.3 The Integrated Care Strategy for North East North Cumbria<sup>2</sup> (NENC) has also identified suicide prevention as a priority area and as such, there is a NENC action plan in place to tackle suicide prevention at scale (see appendix 2). This is a contribution to the broader efforts for suicide prevention which will include people in contact with NHS commissioned and healthcare delivery services amenable to healthcare preventative efforts.

2.4 It has been agreed that Directors of Public Health and Public Health teams will continue to provide the suicide prevention leadership, to ensure the following at place:

Public Health Responsibility	Current position
A suicide prevention multi-agency partnership led by the Director of Public Health.	<p>Sunderland's suicide prevention partnership is a well-established multi-agency group responsible for the delivery and ownership of the Suicide Prevention Action Plan.</p> <p>The suicide prevention partnership provides assurance to the Director of Public Health via Public Health Assurance Group. Regular updates will also be provided via the Living Well Delivery Board.</p>

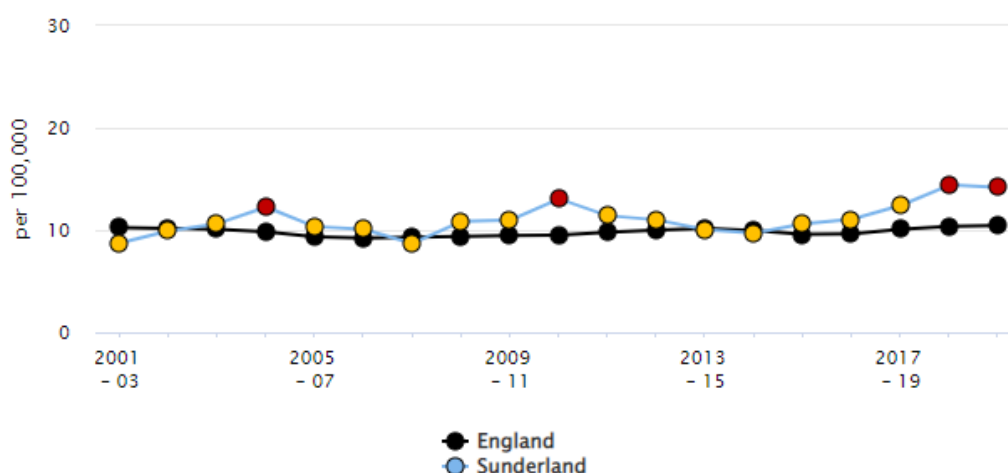
<sup>1</sup> [Suicide prevention in England: 5-year cross-sector strategy - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/118141/suicide-prevention-in-england-5-year-cross-sector-strategy.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [icp-strategy-v14.pdf \(northeastnorthcumbria.nhs.uk\)](https://www.northeastnorthcumbria.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/icp-strategy-v14.pdf)

<p>A multi-agency suicide prevention plan which reflects the collective work of the partnership, local priorities, and national suicide prevention strategy.</p>	<p>The suicide prevention partnership has led on the refreshment of the action plan for the period of 2023 – 2026; progress made against the action plan will be monitored on a quarterly basis by the partnership.</p>
<p>A cluster and increasing trends management plan agreed by members of the partnership. This will be underpinned by intelligence (for example it may include local information and soft intelligence, real time surveillance if this is available, near real time surveillance system being developed by NECS).</p>	<p>The near real surveillance system is closely monitored by the Public Health Practitioner (Mental Health) to identify potential suicide clusters and work with partners to implement preventative measures at pace.</p> <p>Sunderland’s Suicide and Cluster response plan was discussed at October’s Suicide Prevention Partnership and the plan is currently in development.</p>

### 3. Sunderland – Suicide Rates

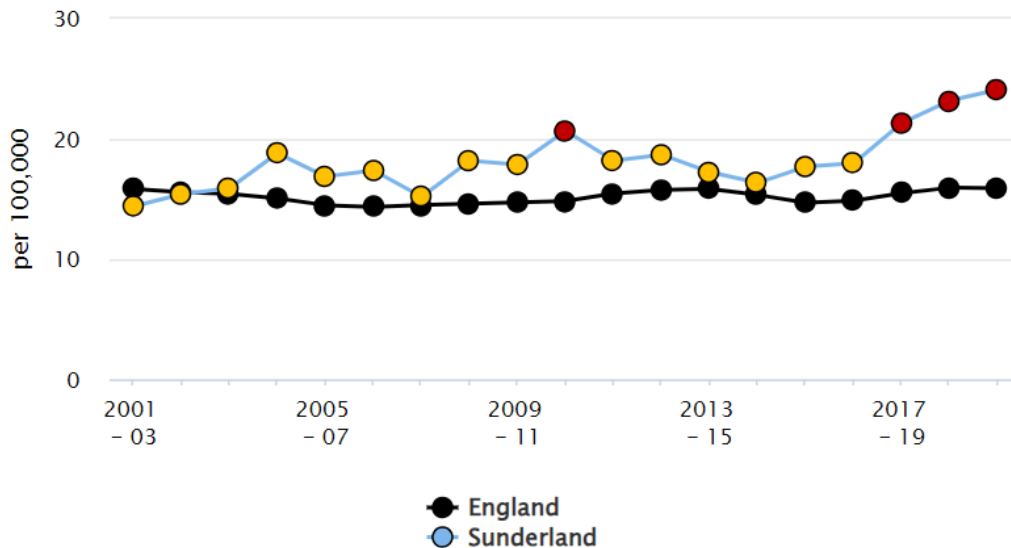
3.1 The suicide rate in Sunderland (2019 – 21) is 14.2 per 100,000, significantly worse than the England average of 10.4 and worse than the North East average of 13.0<sup>3</sup>, ranking 6<sup>th</sup> highest in the region overall. For context, the rate of 14.2 per 100,000 represents 103 suicides over the 3-year period.



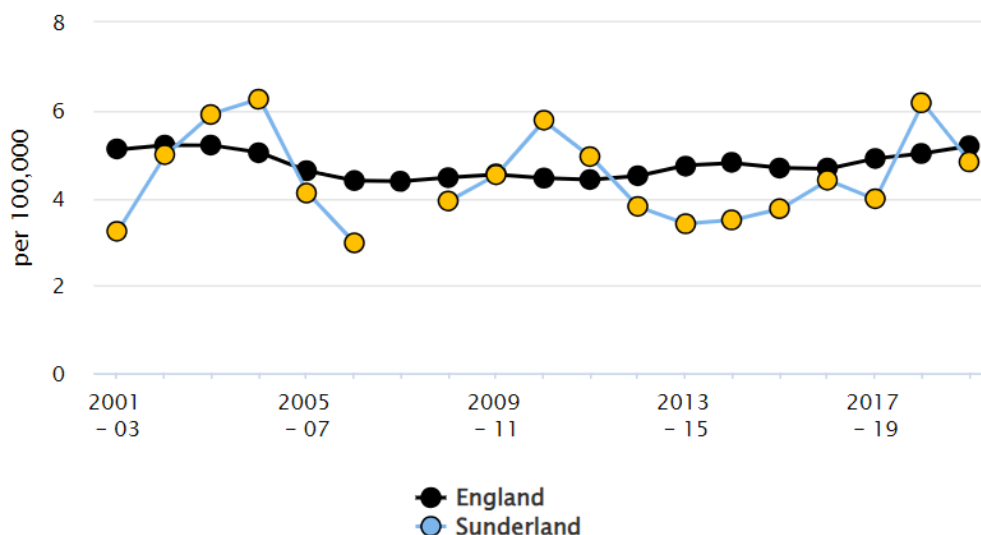
<sup>3</sup> [Suicide Prevention Profile - OHID \(phe.org.uk\)](https://www.phe.org.uk/publication/suicide-prevention-profile)

3.2 The Office for National Statistics (ONS) have recently published the suicide rates covering the period of 2020 – 22, which shows a small reduction in Sunderland’s suicide rate at 14.0 per 100,000 (2020-22)<sup>4</sup> compared to 14.2 per 100,000 (2019 – 21).

3.3 The suicide rate for males (2019 – 21) in Sunderland ranked 4<sup>th</sup> highest in the region, at 24.1 per 100,000, compared to the North East (20.8) and England average (15.9). A trend which has been increasing since 2016<sup>5</sup>.



3.4 In contrast, the suicide rate for females (2019 – 21) in Sunderland is 4.8 per 100,000, lower than both the North East (5.4) and England (5.2) average. Whilst there was an increase in the female suicide rate 2018 – 20, the rate decreased in 2019-21<sup>6</sup>.



<sup>4</sup> [Suicides in England and Wales by local authority - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk)

<sup>5</sup> [Suicide Prevention Profile - OHID \(phe.org.uk\)](https://phe.org.uk)

<sup>6</sup> [Suicide Prevention Profile - OHID \(phe.org.uk\)](https://phe.org.uk)

3.5 Refreshed suicide data, broken down by gender, has not yet been published for the 2020-22 period but will be released in due course.

3.6 A key priority within Sunderland’s Suicide Prevention Action Plan is to undertake a suicide audit which will provide a richer understanding of suicides in Sunderland; findings from the suicide audit will inform future developments of the action plan.

#### 4. Sunderland’s Suicide Prevention Action Plan (2023 – 2026)

4.1 Sunderland’s Suicide Prevention Action Plan (see appendix 1) has been developed in line with national guidance and identifies the following priority areas:

Strategic Priorities	Objectives
<p>Reduce the risk of suicide and rates of self-harm in key high-risk groups by providing both universal and targeted support.</p>	<p>Work with a range of key stakeholders to deliver universal interventions support the mental wellbeing of Sunderland residents.</p>
	<p>Work with a range of key stakeholders to deliver targeted interventions to support the mental wellbeing of high-risk groups including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children and young people</li> <li>• Men</li> <li>• Individuals who self-harm</li> <li>• Pregnant women and new mothers</li> <li>• People in contact with mental health services</li> <li>• People in higher/further education</li> <li>• Those with alcohol/substance misuse dependencies</li> </ul>
	<p>To implement a mental health offer for Sunderland Workplaces partnerships.</p>
	<p>Implement national guidance and policy to provide better outcomes for people in higher/further education.</p>
<p>Address common population level risk factors.</p>	<p>Work with a range of key stakeholders to deliver activity and services that support the financial wellbeing of Sunderland residents (including but not limited to the cost-of-living agenda, Universal Credit, digital poverty).</p>
	<p>Work with a range of key stakeholders to deliver interventions and services that reduce the harms relating to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alcohol and substance misuse</li> <li>• Gambling</li> <li>• Domestic abuse</li> </ul>

Reduce access to the means of suicide	Explore additional opportunities for preventative measures to reduce suicides at high-risk locations in the city.
Provide better information and support to those bereaved or affected by suicide.	Ensure those bereaved or affected by suicide are supported through information and services.
Support the media in delivering sensitive approaches to suicide and suicidal behaviour.	Support local press office and local media with evidence-based tools and guidance to support an approach to support suicides
Support research, data collection and monitoring.	Undertake an annual suicide audit to update information on trends and risk factors and inform local approaches to suicide prevention.
	Analyse data and real time intelligence available through the NECS dashboard to understand the correlation of different risk categories and suicide.
	Ensure local work is linked with regional partnership arrangements led by PHE and NENC ICS as well as other appropriate channels.
Providing effective crisis support.	Explore opportunities to strengthen information sharing agreements, disclosure, and consent for those presenting as high risk.
Making suicide prevention everybody's business.	Build capacity across the city through delivery of Suicide Prevention and Mental Health Awareness training.
	Use existing channels of communications and marketing to promote mental health awareness, wellbeing, and mental health support/services.
	Raise the profile of local suicide prevention activity

4.2 The Suicide Prevention Action Plan was signed off by the Living Well Delivery Board in November 2023. The Suicide Prevention Partnership will hold responsibility for delivery of the plan and progress updates will be provided on a quarterly basis. The Public Health outcomes framework<sup>7</sup> and contract management performance, will be used to monitor impact of the plan (alongside the ICB's adult mental health dashboard). The aspiration is to achieve the following outcomes:

- A reduction in Sunderland's suicide rate per 100,000 population, narrowing the gap between Sunderland and the regional/national average.

<sup>7</sup> [Public Health Outcomes Framework - OHID \(phe.org.uk\)](https://www.phe.org.uk/public-health-outcomes-framework)

- An increase in the number of participants having accessed training including Mental Health Awareness, Emotional Resilience and 'A LIFE Worth Living' suicide prevention training.
- An increase in the number of participants reporting an improved understanding of Mental Health Awareness, Emotional Resilience and Suicide Prevention, along with evidence of participants using the training to support themselves and/or others to seek support via services within Sunderland and/or self-help tools.
- A reduction in the number of 'incidents' in high frequency location(s) throughout Sunderland, for example, Wearmouth Bridge.

4.3 It has been agreed by the partnership that the plan will evolve in line with workplans and any emerging priorities; the plan will be updated as and when new priorities arise.

## 5. Key accomplishments

5.1 Since the last suicide prevention update provided at Health and Well-being Scrutiny, the following has been achieved:

- Positive progress has been made on the implementation of Sunderland's Prevention Concordat (see appendix 4), a programme of work put in place to encourage effective prevention planning arrangements, recognising that suicide prevention sits in the wider context of public mental health and well-being. An annual progress update is scheduled at Living Well Delivery Board in Feb-2024.
- Recently commissioning Washington Mind to develop and deliver a community-based mental health training offer which will encompass 'An Introduction to Mental Health Awareness' and 'Emotional Health and Resilience' training programme, aiming to build more resilient communities throughout Sunderland. Washington Mind have been commissioned to deliver the training programme for a 4-year contract period.
- Continued focus on a community-based approach to suicide prevention in Sunderland through the commissioning of 'A LIFE Worth Living' suicide prevention training, delivered by Washington Mind (re-commissioned in December 2022 for a 4-year contract period) and supporting the national objective of 'making suicide everyone's business'.
- Delivery of a LGA Behavioural Insights programme in partnership with UNPITCHED, to develop an intervention to increase access to, and use of, mental health self-help tools for children and young people aged 10-15 who may be experiencing low mood and/or anxiety for the first time<sup>8</sup>. The programme was delivered as a North East Consortium, which was led by Sunderland City Council. The findings from the insights work were used to develop and run a campaign on social media encouraging the use of self-help tools such as Kooth. There is further work ongoing to determine how this work can be built upon through the distribution of physical communication materials within education settings.

---

<sup>8</sup> [Scoping Report: Using behavioural science to increase access to and use of mental health self-help tools for young people | Local Government Association](#)

- We continue to support key national campaigns throughout the calendar year, including campaigns such as Mental Health Awareness Week and World Suicide Prevention Day.
- Significant progress has been made on the development of the North East North Cumbria (NENC) Near Real Time Surveillance System (NRTSS) for suspected suicides in Sunderland, with the live dashboard having gone live in October 2023. The dashboard enables Public Health leads to explore place-based trends concerning suspected suicides in a timely manner, including the identification of suspected suicide clusters.
- Intelligence from the NRTSS is shared with Sunderland's Suicide Prevention Partnership on a bi-monthly basis, ensuring that suicide prevention planning is aligned to local needs. The Public Health Practitioner leading on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention currently sits on the ICB led NRTSS task and finish group which is being used to monitor trends across the NENC patch, as well as being the forum to further develop the dashboard.
- The NRTSS dashboard has also enabled the recent establishment of a clinical audit process whereby further information is gathered on all suspected suicides to identify key themes and lessons learnt. Whilst this process is still in development, the aspiration is that learning will be fed into ICB prevention strategies and suicide prevention action plans at place.
- Historically, Public Health have led on the suicide audit process (different to that of the clinical audit as the focus is on cases which have undergone the coroners process). It was not possible to complete the audit during the period of Covid-19 pandemic but plans are underway for completion in 2024. Sunderland's suicide prevention action plan will be reviewed in light of the findings from the audit.
- A Substance Misuse Death Inquiry Panel has been established to identify co-existing conditions and strengthen multi agency working to reduce risk of drug related deaths, in which suspected suicides by method of overdose holds a key focus.
- A full review and update of the Samaritans signage has been undertaken on the entrance and exit of Wearmouth Bridge, and upstream routes with heavy footfall. Work is currently ongoing to install signage across the Northern Spire and Queen Alexandra bridge. In addition to this, an options appraisal has been developed reviewing the evidence-base surrounding further suicide prevention measures that could be implemented on bridges across Sunderland – this work is ongoing with no decisions having been made at the current time.

## **6. Recommendations**

6.1 Members of the Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny Committee are asked to:

- Consider the content of the report, to identify further opportunities to support suicide prevention across Sunderland.

- Accept the findings of the report and endorse the Suicide Prevention Action Group to take forward the identified actions, for the purpose of supporting a continued reduction in the rate of suicides.

---





**Contact Officers:**

Gerry Taylor  
**Executive Director of Public  
Health and Integrated  
Commissioning**

Robyn Bullock  
**Public Health Practitioner  
Public Mental Health & Suicide  
Prevention**



## Appendix

Appendix	Document title	Attachment
1	Sunderland's Suicide Prevention Action Plan	 Sunderland_Suicide_Prevention_Action_Plan
2	ICB Suicide Prevention Plan	 NENC_ICB_suicide_prevention_programme
3	Integrated Impact Assessment Tool	 IIA_SuicidePreventionPlan.docx
4	Sunderland's Prevention Concordat for Better Mental Health	 Sunderland%20City%20Council%20Prevention%20Concordat%20for%20Better%20Mental%20Health

