

Report to: **Audit, Best Value and Community Services Scrutiny Committee**
Date: **15 September 2015**
By: **Acting Director of Public Health**
Title of report: **Suicide Prevention: Beachy Head Infrastructure Update**
Purpose of report: **To update the Scrutiny Committee on how the recommendations of the Beachy Head infrastructure report have been taken forward to date.**

RECOMMENDATION: The Committee is recommended to note this report.

1. Introduction

1.1 Through a business case process, public health funding was allocated to a number of one-off projects which focused on creating or supporting a step-change in addressing public health outcomes in the Public Health Outcomes Framework where East Sussex is performing significantly worse compared to England. One of these projects focused on suicide prevention.

1.2 The suicide prevention project comprises five interrelated workstreams: infrastructure assessment and developments in the Beachy Head area; staff training; counselling provision for those affected by suicide; provision of more non-statutory support to those in a state of distress following a suicide attempt; and staff secondment to the Beachy Head Chaplaincy Team. Appendix 1 contains more detail on the workstreams.

1.3 Members have previously received updates on the broader project but at the meeting on 17 March 2015 an update was provided on the workstream that focuses specifically on Beachy Head. A report on the findings of the infrastructure report commissioned for Beachy Head which outlined the report recommendations, the challenges and proposals on how this needed to be taken forward, was presented.

1.4 This report provides an update on developments since then as requested by the committee.

2. Developing a Suicide Prevention Strategy for Beachy Head

2.1 The Infrastructure report put forward a number of recommendations in terms of what should be done immediately and what should be done in the longer term.

2.2 The recommendations were used to put forward the following components to inform a draft suicide prevention strategy for Beachy Head:

Physical measures:

- One main eastern and one main western car park, with no parking anywhere else on Beachy Head Road
- A smart surveillance and early-alert system in each of the car parks, possibly extending to adjacent paths and trails and areas of downland
- A clear cliff-edge boundary, reinforced by a virtual fence with unambiguous warning signs
- Free emergency telephones connected directly to Samaritans and police
- Elsewhere, appropriate placed signage, displaying a free 24-hour helpline number

- No memorials anywhere on the site

Human measures:

- Community police patrol at site,
- A mental health worker to support BHCT
- Alert and skilled transport providers and other on-site workers
- A whole-community commitment to suicide prevention, with interventions skills training available to all, especially those working in settings used by visitors, such as hotels and B&Bs, pubs and cafes.

3. Senior Officers Meeting

3.1 The Infrastructure Report had implications for a number of agencies and agreeing a common way forward is key to developing a strategy that is agreed and owned by all.

3.2 On 3 September 2015, Senior Officers from East Sussex County Council, Eastbourne Borough Council, Natural England and South Downs National Park Authority met to discuss the recommendations of the report, the draft suicide prevention plan and to agree the next steps.

4. Next Steps

4.1 All recommendations were considered at the meeting and categorised as: already being progressed; straightforward and could be taken forward now; requiring further work before decisions could be made.

4.2 The following recommendations are already in progress:

- Training for taxi companies/taxi drivers: Whilst this had already commenced with Eastbourne taxi companies, it was noted that this would need to be extended to include Seaford taxi companies and so there should also be discussions with Lewes District Council. Eastbourne Borough Council agreed that they would help facilitate further work.
- Training for Other Key Staff: Training (to be delivered by Grassroots a nationally recognised suicide charity) is in the process of being organised for Beachy Head Chaplaincy Team volunteers, pub staff, Visitor's Centre staff and HM Coastguard.
- Working with Beachy Head Chaplaincy Team: work with the Chaplaincy on its profile is on-going. They are: collaborating with the Beachy Head Risk Management Group; have sought advice about their publicity; have worked with 3CVA in relation to improving their financial management systems, and their policies and procedure; and they are working with Grassroots on their volunteer training.
- Number Plate recognition camera: It has already been agreed that a second camera can be installed; public health have been working with the police and it is understood that a planning application has been submitted.

4.3 The following recommendations were considered to be straightforward and could be taken forward:

- Bus Drivers and 'suicide safer community' initiative: Work with Brighton and Hove Buses, Stage Coach and Eastbourne City Sight Seeing Bus Company will be

progressed as the same training as that being given to taxi drivers would be beneficial. Work around suicide safer communities will be progressed through the East Sussex suicide prevention steering group.

- Training for Dog-Walkers: It was agreed that training for dog walkers who visit Beachy Head regularly would be beneficial.
- Minor signage: Signage which indicates how to access support such as from the Samaritans can be taken forward and likely costs have been identified. South Downs National Park will take advice from planners as required.
- Freephone: Installation and on-going costs will be explored with BT.
- Mobile phone signal: A booster to improve mobile phone signal will be explored with the communications company EE.

4.4 The following recommendations require further work and subsequent discussions before a decision could be made:

- Reducing vehicle access by closing car parks, lay-bys or roads: It was agreed that further data needed to be obtained before this proposal could be considered further. For example there is a need to know more about: the mode of transport used by those considering/taking their lives at Beachy Head, where they park if they travel there by car, how many cars have been recovered and from where. Discussions will be had with the police who should be able to help with this.
- Fencing: It was decided that fencing would continue to be used where the edge of the cliff is not visible and so could result in accidents. However, further fencing would not be installed as the dynamic nature of the cliffs (due to erosion) would necessitate constant replacing and rescue services need unimpeded access to the cliffs.
- Signage warning of cliff dangers: It was agreed that the safety issues could be explored and taken forward through the Beachy Head Risk Management Group. An approach would be made to foreign language schools as their students, who tend to come in large groups, are some of those who regularly go too close to the cliff edge.
- Electronic surveillance system: It was agreed that further scoping would be required before any further decisions could be made. This will entail working with the police, seeking advice from providers of security systems and talking to the consultant who wrote the specification for Gap Park in Australia in order to consider what might be possible at Beachy Head. A range of issues including what cameras are suggested, how many and at what cost, how and where they would be installed and what the on-going maintenance costs and replacement costs would be, need to be explored further

There are also a number of questions that need to be answered concerning current police activity, for example: What are the response times for police going to Beachy Head at present? Are they able to respond to all calls? Would they have the resources to monitor and respond to any security system that is installed? Does it need to be the police themselves that monitor and respond or could it be undertaken by others? It was acknowledged that an increase in alerts would mean that consideration would need to be given to a commissioned service.

In addition there is further information required about those who take their life at Beachy Head, for example: What time of year, day of the week or time of day do people go to Beachy Head generally. Any patterns identified would inform whether monitoring was required on a 24 hour basis and whether it would require the same monitoring intensity throughout the year.

4.5 It was agreed that the Senior Officers group would meet again at the end of November to discuss progress.

4.6 Members will receive an update in six months.

5. Recommendations

5.1 The Committee is recommended to note this report.

Cynthia Lyons
Acting Director of Public Health

Contact Officer: Martina Pickin, Consultant in Public Health, Tel No. 01273 335132

Appendix 1: Suicide Prevention Project

The project is composed of five elements:

1. Infrastructure assessment and developments in the Beachy Head area.
Restricting access to the means of suicide is an established method of suicide prevention. An environmental audit of cliff areas in East Sussex is required and an assessment of the feasibility of suggestions made by Sussex Police, Sussex Partnership Foundation NHS Trust, the Coast Guard and other agencies is required.
2. Staff training
Training will be provided for primary care, A&E and community services, including the voluntary sector. The training will use established evidence-based courses of varying length depending on the target audience.
3. Staff secondment to the Chaplaincy who provide cliff patrols at Beachy Head.
4. Increased non-statutory provision for those affected by suicide
A service aimed at anyone affected by suicide or attempted suicide, their families and their carers. The psycho-social support addresses the immediate crisis and provides ongoing support to help manage mental health problems and improve wellbeing.
5. Investigation and provision of more non-statutory support to prevent admissions via A&E.
Pilot non-statutory 'place of safety' to improve the quality of care of those with mental health problems by avoiding unnecessary hospital admission via A&E.