

## **Leicester City Council Public Health – mental health response to COVID-19**

### **What issues have you identified in relation to mental health and emotional resilience due to COVID-19?**

COVID-19 has had a detrimental impact on people's sense of mental wellbeing, with individuals and communities at risk of worsening mental health, affecting for example:

- People with mental health problems whose access to services has been interrupted;
- Shielded people with mental and physical conditions, including carers;
- Older adults, susceptible to the virus and more likely than others to lose partners and friends;
- People exposed to trauma and violence at home during lockdown;
- People from minority ethnic groups where COVID-19 prevalence has been highest and outcomes worst.

For people in these groups the pandemic may intensify risk, the precariousness of maintaining good mental health, and difficulties accessing appropriate, timely support.

COVID has highlighted the link between health inequalities and outcomes. Those at risk of poor mental health often have the worst access to support and are among those most exposed to the pandemic. People in these groups are likely to be vulnerable to long term mental health difficulties linked to factors like complicated bereavement, trauma and economic repercussions.

There are several known risk-factors for people with mental health difficulties. These include unemployment, poverty, discrimination, traumatic experiences, violence or abuse, physical illness, bereavement, chronic loneliness and a lack of access to support.

As Leicester emerges from lockdown, it will be important to inform people about protective factors, such as relationships, supportive families, secure childhood experiences, good housing, economic and social opportunities, education and easy access to help. All these can boost resilience in the face of stress and hardship.

### **What are you currently doing to address these issues and support the local community?**

Public Health has a series of ongoing public mental health initiatives that have been ongoing and have been adapted to provide support and information about mental wellbeing, including self-help interventions and avenues for professional support.

The Suicide Audit and Prevention Group (chaired by Public Health in City and County) developed a series of resources at the outset of the pandemic, promoting a tiered approach to mental health during the lockdown. These were as follows:

- The first tier is for general mental wellbeing advice, for individuals who are experiencing low mood and feelings of nervousness around the future;

- The second is for more specialist support, for individuals who have persistent low mood and are having difficulties regulating their emotions;
- The third is advice for individuals experiencing mental health crisis, who need urgent mental health support.

These messages were distributed electronically, and amongst partners to display in public places such as pharmacies and general practices.

Public Health are working closely with the Domestic and Sexual Violence team in the Council, along with other colleagues across LLR to provide an emergency response for domestic abuse during coronavirus. We have been able to contribute towards the development of resources for those experiencing domestic abuse and for practitioners who are on the frontline, who may require additional support.

Through our work, we have been able to connect colleagues, so that the domestic abuse message is shared across as many avenues as possible. We are now working on developing a resource which focuses on the 'local offer' in Leicester, looking at connecting with pharmacies to share comms messages and ensuring we are promoting the services available for those experiencing extremely difficult times.

Another key strand of work that Public Health are leading on behalf of the Suicide Audit and Prevention Group is working with Primary Care settings, to ensure that individuals with mental health problems receive clear information and timely support from their GP practice. Methods we have used to support primary care have included shared communications around public mental health issues, and advice on where to seek support for a range of issues (such as finances, domestic violence, bereavement, and drug and alcohol misuse). We have also encouraged GPs to adopt a suicide risk assessment for registered patients with pre-existing mental health conditions, such as depression and anxiety.

### **What issues do you foresee arising in the future in relation to mental health and emotional resilience?**

Our work with domestic violence services has highlighted a demand in services and reports from individuals who are experiencing abuse and violence, but were unable to report it due to close proximity to their abuser in lockdown. Support services for individuals experiencing domestic violence are likely to increase in demand over the coming months.

Individuals with risk factors for developing mental health problems, such as unemployment, poverty, discrimination, traumatic experiences, violence or abuse, physical illness, bereavement, and lack of access to support services will be at the sharp end of the impacts of COVID-19. Better support around these social determinants of health will be needed to protect the mental health and wellbeing of these vulnerable groups.

## What plans do you have to tackle these issues?

A public mental health response to the impacts of COVID-19 (in draft below)

| Aim  | Goal  | Actions   | Outcomes   |
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| Promote resilience to childhood mental health problems | Improve mental wellbeing in children and young people   | <p>Work with schools and teachers to improve mental health leadership.</p> <p>Adapt public health messages to messages resonant with and co-produced by children and young people.</p>  | <p>Better understanding of mental health in schools, as well as a better understanding of ways to support emotional resilience</p>   |
| Promote parental mental wellbeing.                     | Improve parental efficacy, self-esteem, partner relationships and improve family mental health. | <p>Develop close links with Health Visiting Services and mental health services to deliver better family mental health.</p> <p>Work with schools to encourage ways of working with parents as part of the Time to Change Leicester Community Grants scheme.</p> <p>Time to Change Champions to develop a parental mental health group</p> | <p>Closer working relationships with Health Visiting and mental health services so that family mental health is considered.</p> <p>Develop small projects to promote parental mental wellbeing in schools</p> <p>Parental support group led by people with lived experience of mental health problems.</p> |
| Promote mental health in the workplace                 | Work with employers to promote employees' mental wellbeing.                                     | Develop a Time to Change Leicester Employers' Pledge, to adopt an organisation-wide approach to promoting the mental wellbeing of all employees,  | Pledged organisations will demonstrate improved understanding of mental wellbeing and reduce the potential for discrimination and  |

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|  |   | working in partnership with them.   | stigma related to mental health problems in the workplace.   |
| Support isolated older people  | Support people to have meaningful social relationships.<br><br>Encourage engagement in the wider community.   | Engagement sessions and friendship tables in neighbourhood centres<br><br>Tailored mental health resources with messages that resonate with and are co-produced by older people.<br><br>Working with Leicester Ageing Together and other voluntary sector partners to provide support | Easier, more accessible methods of combatting social isolation for older people  |
| Support victims of violence and abuse  | Work with specialist services to promote mental wellbeing in circumstances for victims of violence and abuse. | Public Health to act as a conduit to link together domestic violence services and mental health services where individuals may require support from both.   | Closer working relationships between domestic violence services and mental health services.  |
| Promote self-help to people with low level mental wellbeing problems<br><br>Promote support for specific issues, such as debt, relationships | Short term resilience to the impact of mental health problems   | Highlight Five Ways To wellbeing in public mental health messaging<br><br>Highlight information around the social determinants of health, such as links to debt advice, employment support, housing support, etc.   | Supporting individuals at an earlier stage with their mental health and wellbeing – supporting individuals with the practicalities of the social determinants of health will have a beneficial impact on their mental wellbeing. |
| Work with substance misuse   | Better understanding of how to support  | The prevention of alcohol-related   | Joined up support for individuals with   |

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| services | individuals with dual diagnosis | problems and other addictions is an important component of promoting population health and wellbeing. | substance misuse problems |
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