PS(MHISP) letter to Health & Social Care Select Committee

I am writing following my commitment earlier this year to update the Health and Social Care Select Committee (HSC) on the publication of the report into local suicide prevention plans. I am pleased to advise that this report has been published today and is accessible on the Samaritans’ website.

Assessment process
Since I last wrote to you in February, Public Health England (PHE) has confirmed that the final local authorities have now put their suicide prevention plans in place. This is hugely welcome, although, as you’re aware, I share your views on the importance of ensuring these plans are robust and effective at meeting the needs of local communities.

As you know, we have therefore been working in collaboration with national partners and the local government sector to assess the effectiveness of these plans, identifying areas of best practice, and areas for improvement. Last autumn, local authorities were invited to complete a voluntary self-assessment, and an independent researcher and the Samaritans have analysed the results of this self-assessment, alongside local plans. An expert panel has also considered the results.

Report
Following this assessment process, the independent report has been produced by the Samaritans and researcher from the University of Exeter and has been published today on the Samaritans’ website.
The report describes an encouraging picture and concludes that local authorities have made good progress in establishing their local approaches and starting to take action to prevent suicide. It also demonstrates that a wealth of activity is being planned and delivered locally, with a wide variety of actions underway. The report also concludes that the range of organisations and individuals working with local authorities and with each other is evidence of the commitment to collaborative working that is in place at the local level.

However, the report highlights that plans appear to be at very different stages of development and the actions they feature are written in varying levels of detail, from comprehensively detailed to limited. The report describes the types of actions featured in local plans and makes a series of recommendations for both local and national partners. The Department of Health and Social Care, and other national partners, will consider the recommendations that are nationally focused.

**Sector-Led Improvement (SLI)**

I am delighted that, on 17 June, the Prime Minister announced up to £600,000 for an SLI programme to support local authorities to further improve their suicide prevention plans. This programme of support will be led by the Local Government Association, in partnership with the Association of Directors of Public Health and will consist of bespoke national and regional support for local authorities. The recommendations from the report published today will feed directly into the SLI programme, which is expected to commence in the summer.

I am grateful for the continued scrutiny of the HSC on suicide prevention and the recent discussions we had with the National Suicide Prevention Strategy Advisory Group. I am pleased with the developments we have seen in relation to local suicide prevention planning and look forward to seeing the SLI programme develop over the course of the year.

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