

NEWCASTLE-UNDER-LYME BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET REPORT

Date: DECEMBER 2014

Title: Midway multi storey car park

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Portfolios: Safer Communities / Planning and Assets

Ward(s) affected: All

Purpose of the Report

This report provides an overview of suicide attempts at the Council owned/managed Midway multi storey car park over the last four years.

The report seeks Cabinet approval for actions identified to implement further suicide prevention measures at this location.

Recommendations

- a) That officers be authorised to take all necessary actions to proceed with proposals for the installation of physical control measures on the building at the earliest opportunity.
- b) That officers be authorised to identify key non-health agency partners with a view to jointly procuring appropriate training, the details of which shall be approved by the relevant officer and Portfolio Holder.

Reason

The recommendations are made to seek to prevent further suicide attempts at the Midway multi storey car park and to encourage appropriate support to be offered to vulnerable people.

1. Background

- 1.1 This report follows two recent suicides (March/May 2014) and a marked increase in the number of attempted suicides at the Council-owned Midway multi storey car park.
- 1.2 The Council's Partnerships Team has responsibility for co-ordinating and delivering community safety and other related partnership activity for the Borough within the governance of the Newcastle Partnership and administers the role of the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) to discharge statutory obligations.
- 1.3 The team has been co-ordinating activity following recent events at this location and working closely with relevant technically qualified officers within the Council (given our ownership of the building) as well as colleagues from Staffordshire Police.

2. Issues to consider

- 2.1 Over the last four years there have been a total of 34 incidents at this location (of these in the last two years there have been 28 incidents) where a total of 24 individuals (some were repeat incidents) have attempted to jump from one of the upper floors (Level 9, 7 or 5) or have actually jumped with the intention of committing suicide.
- 2.2 In total, there have been four deaths in the last four years at the location and two of these deaths have been in 2014.
- 2.3 Of those four deaths, all individuals were male and their ages ranged from 19-58 years. Three of the individuals concerned were from the local area but one was from Essex with no apparent local connection to the area. Two of the individuals had a history of mental health issues and two had reportedly experienced a recent relationship breakdown.
- 2.4 It would appear that, because of the recent increase in incidents (28 in the past two years including two fatalities in the current calendar year), Midway would now be regarded by the National Institute for Mental Health in England (NIMHE) as a 'suicide hotspot'. The recent suicides and suicide attempts have attracted considerable local media and social media attention that pose a risk of attracting additional copycat incidents at the location which have, as the statistics suggest, already significantly increased in recent months.
- 2.5 In view of the above it has been important for the Council to engage with key partners with a view to identifying practical measures that could be considered to minimise the future risk of such incidents occurring. Clearly there are a range of health-related agencies which have a direct interest in this matter along with the Police, as well as the Council as the owner of the building.

3. Options Considered

- 3.1 In terms of the prevention of suicide through jumping from a height, Officers have given consideration to different options when co-ordinating activity at the location and preparing this report.
- 3.2 There is good evidence to suggest that lives can be saved by either impeding or deterring suicide attempts at high-risk locations. Options for consideration and or action by the Borough Council and its partners have included:
 - 3.2.1 Signs – to encourage distressed or suicidal individuals to seek help and support as well as displaying a contact number for the Samaritans. These have been put in place at a number of locations in the UK that have been identified as hotspots (e.g. Beachy Head cliffs and the Clifton Suspension Bridge). Such signage has now been installed at this location (funded by the Joint Operations Group at a cost of £750).
 - 3.2.2 Telephone hotlines – telephone hotlines have been installed in a number of locations across the country and are linked directly to the Samaritans and this has been evidenced to encourage individuals in crisis to ring and help to diffuse the situation. In order to provide a dedicated phone line on the upper floors of the Midway, the cost would be in the region of £2,000 (plus line rental etc.). On further investigation a suitable location for the telephone hotline

could not be found because of the busy nature of the location and the equipment options available did not give officers or partners confidence that it would be used because it is not practically possible to provide a sufficient level of privacy. Advice received from a number of partners suggests that the nature and design of the location does not lend itself to pursuing this option further.

- 3.2.3 Training for staff of non-health agencies working at or near hotspots - if a dedicated suicide patrol is not a realistic option, there may be other staff working at or in the vicinity of a high-risk location who can play a role in identifying individuals in distress, alerting emergency services and intervening if necessary. Samaritans provide packages of suicide awareness training tailored to the needs of individual organisations. The cost of this is in the region of £2,000 but the Combined Healthcare Trust have offered to provide the training to Council Officers and partners at no cost.
- 3.2.4 Physical barriers - the most effective form of prevention at potential 'jumping sites' is a physical barrier, which restricts access to the drop. Safety nets serve a similar purpose but rescue from a net may be difficult should a jump occur and there are physical constraints with this building that would make installation very difficult, if not impossible. In order to secure the relevant floors of Midway with barrier fencing, it is estimated that the cost would be in the region of £60,000. This estimate is based on using standard fencing 'weldmesh' type fencing panels supported at 3m centres on posts spanning vertically between the floors or free standing in the case of levels 9 & 10 (probably with a cranked top). Whilst this will prevent incidents happening on the car park alternative systems are being investigated to ensure that the appearance of the car park is not compromised. Installation of fencing panels will require planning permission, so the acceptability of the proposal from an aesthetic viewpoint will be judged by the Council in its capacity as the local planning authority.

4. Proposals and Reasons for Preferred Solutions

- 4.1 For the last six months Officers from the Borough Council have been working with a range of partners to explore solutions to the issues encountered at the Midway and also to contribute to the wider suicide prevention work being undertaken elsewhere in North Staffordshire. This partnership work has included; co-operation and more efficient partnership working, research into options for consideration to prevent further incidents at the location, research into suicide prevention activity to assist deterring future attempts or possible dispersal of the issues locally, liaison with neighbouring authorities and mental health specialists, liaison with specialist support services, training options and packages.
- 4.2 The following proposals / recommendations are made in order to seek to prevent the Midway multi storey car park being used for the purposes of further suicide attempts and to encourage partnership working to enable appropriate support to be offered to vulnerable residents;
- 4.2.1 Physical barriers – which restricts access to the drop and is the most effective form of prevention at potential 'jumping sites'. The costs of these works is estimated to be £60,000 and the planning application fee will be £195. Subject to Cabinet approval a competitive procurement process will be undertaken

which will secure the most cost effective solution. Officer time to prepare the planning application and tender for the works will also need to be prioritised within existing resources.

Contributions to the overall cost of these works have been sought from a variety of partners in order to share the costs of the proposal. It has been confirmed that Staffordshire County Council, Staffordshire Police and the Combined Healthcare NHS Trust each commit to contribute £15,000 to the overall project. A simple funding agreement may be required to satisfy financial expenditure processes of the respective partners.

4.2.2 Training for staff of non-health agencies working at or near hotspots – Combined Healthcare suicide awareness training tailored to the needs of Council and Police staff at no cost, delivered under the existing partnership arrangements.

4.2.3 Continued partnership working with health partners to initiate suicide prevention activity particularly targeting individuals already engaged with mental health services. There will also be involvement and membership of the suicide prevention group established in Stoke-on-Trent, which will be extended to cover the broader North Staffordshire area and incorporate Newcastle-under-Lyme and possibly Staffordshire Moorlands.

5. Outcomes Linked to Corporate Priorities

5.1 Delivery of the recommendations in Section 4 (above) contribute to meeting the Council's Corporate Priorities of Creating Healthy and Active Communities, Creating a Cleaner, Safer and Sustainable Borough and Delivering a Co-operative Council.

6. Legal and Statutory Implications

6.1 A planning application will need to be made in order to progress the proposed project. There may be a need to prepare a simple funding agreement in order to properly capture and account for the expenditure of all partners and to authorise the Council to manage delivery of the project.

7. Equality Impact Assessment

7.1 There are no adverse equality issues identified as arising from this report.

8. Financial and Resource Implications

8.1 The anticipated cost for the Council is £15,000 for both the physical works and training activities. Contributions have been confirmed from a number of partners to the total of £45,000 as match funding. There is no budgetary provision for these works within currently approved capital or revenue budget. It will be necessary for Members to consider the options for providing the capital funding and this will necessitate prioritisation of this investment over other planned projects or schemes. This has been incorporated within the draft 2015/16 capital programme which is included in the Cabinet agenda for consideration.

8.2 There are resource implications for Council officers who are involved in and will coordinate delivery of the recommendations, but this will be undertaken as part of their substantive duties.

8.3 There are resource implications for a range of partners in particular Staffordshire Police and relevant support agencies.

8.4 The economic impacts of suicide are profound, although comparatively few studies have sought to quantify these costs, it is estimated that the average cost per completed suicide for those of working age only in England is £1.67m (at 2009 prices). This includes intangible costs (loss of life to the individual and the pain and suffering of relatives), as well as lost output (both waged and unwaged), police time and funerals.

9. Major Risks

9.1 On the basis of the evidence gathered failure to deliver the proposed recommendations is likely to result in further suicide attempts and possibly deaths at the location. These attempts not only impact on individuals but also professionals and the wider community who may witness or intervene in such incidents.

10. Key Decision Information

10.1 This report can be considered key in the following ways: -

- It requires the Borough Council to commit existing and additional resources for the function to which the decision relates and;
- It impacts on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more electoral wards in the Borough.

Implications included	Head of Service agreed report, signed & dated	Financial Implications signed & dated	Legal & risk implications signed & dated
Financial			
Legal			
Risk			
Corporate format used			