

Mental Health Strategy Consultation Launch

Date and time	Monday 19 th February 2024 13:50 -14:30
Location and format	The Hangout, 26-28 Churchill Way, Cardiff CF10 2DY
Interviewer	Global – Redacted – Section 40 ITV Wales – Redacted – Section 40
Lead Press officer	Redacted – Section 40
Lead Official	Redacted – Section 40
Attendees	Redacted – Section 40
Background	<p>Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Strategy Consultation launch</p> <p>Launching the updated strategies for Mental Health and Wellbeing and Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention for consultation</p> <p>Hangout</p> <p>The Hangout is a wellbeing & mental health service for young people in Cardiff and the Vale aged 11-18.</p> <p>It's a place where young people can meet other people, access mental health support, find volunteering opportunities, and get involved in groups that could really help boost your wellbeing.</p> <p>The Hangout is run by Plattform, a mental health charity and is funded by the Cardiff and Vale University Health Board.</p>
Top Messages to get out	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Today I am launching the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and our new Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Strategy for consultation. • We need to reset how we talk about mental health and think more broadly and creatively about how we support people's mental health and wellbeing, • The aim is to ensure people can access the right service to respond to their needs recognising many people won't need clinical specialist NHS services. • I am at the Hangout to see first-hand how non-clinical mental health support services are helping to support young people struggling with their mental health and wellbeing.

Top Lines

- I am launching the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and our new Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Strategy for consultation.
- Our fundamental aim is for people in Wales to live in communities which promote, support, and empower them to improve their mental health and wellbeing, and be free from stigma and discrimination.
- The Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Strategy aims to deliver a reduction in the number and rates of suicide deaths that have endured over recent years and create communities which are free from the fear and stigma associated with suicide and self-harm and who are empowered and supported to both seek and offer help when it is needed.
- Despite the difficult financial position, we are in, we are working hard to support continued investment in mental health, and we continue to prioritise mental health as an area that requires this investment.
- The published strategies will be accompanied by delivery plans which over the life of the two strategies will be renewed and refreshed. This will provide the opportunity to identify new investments should the economic position change.
- We are committed to improving access to mental health services and the aim of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy is to reduce the need for more specialist services, and this is a key element of our longer-term approach to reduce demand for services.

If needed:

- These strategies, build on the work that we have done over the lifetime of the previous strategies. All health boards have plans in place to reduce waiting times and make services more accessible. We have worked to ensure easy-to-access support is available 24/7, including our NHS 111 press 2 for urgent support and our CALL helpline for people who are concerned about their mental health as well as lower level, easy-access support that doesn't need a referral from a health professional. This includes access to online Cognitive Behavioural Therapy through SilverCloud.

Why are you at Hangout today?

- Today I am launching the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and our new Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Strategy for consultation.
- I am at the Hangout to see first hand how non-clinical mental health support services are helping to support young people struggling with their mental health and wellbeing.

What is the main aim of the Mental Health Strategy?

- Our fundamental aim is for people in Wales to live in communities which promote, support and empower them to improve their mental health and wellbeing, and be free from stigma and discrimination.
- The new strategy sets out that we will take a rights-based approach to ensuring that everyone has the best mental health possible. Our aim is for

there to be a connected system of support across health, social care, third sector and wider, where people can access the right service, at the right time, and in the right place.

- We need to reset how we talk about mental health. We want to demedicalise mental health so we can better understand needs. Most people don't need specialist NHS support, and the strategy sets out the need for continued cross-Government and partnership working to prevent and support mental health – but also to ensure person-centred, trauma-informed and recovery focused services for those that need them.
- Care and support will be person-centred, compassionate, and recovery-focused, with an emphasis on improving quality, safety, and access. Care and support will be delivered by a workforce that feels supported and has the capacity, competence, and confidence to meet the diverse needs of the people of Wales.

What is the main aim of the Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Strategy?

- The Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention Strategy aims to deliver a reduction in the number and rates of suicide deaths that have endured over recent years.
- It also aims to establish a pathway to support people who self-harm and to improve support for those bereaved by suicide.
- The overarching vision for the strategy is that people in Wales will live in communities which are free from the fear and stigma associated with suicide and self-harm and are empowered and supported to both seek and offer help when it is needed.

How will this transform how mental health support is accessed in Wales?

- The aim is to ensure people can access the right service to respond to their needs and most people won't need specialist NHS services.
- The strategy aims to continue our work through programmes like our Whole System approach in Schools and our NYTH/NEST framework to better support people across a range of settings.
- For those that need NHS mental health services, we continue to build on our work to make support more accessible, for instance through 111 press 2, single points of contact and our tier 0/1 support.
- We want to reduce those inequalities that currently exist – in terms of access to services, experiences and outcomes. In so doing, the two strategies make important links to other Welsh Government priorities, including our Anti-racist Wales Action and the recently published Child Poverty Strategy.

We are still seeing increasing rates of mental health issues and enduring rates of suicide. What difference will these strategies make?

- I am proud of everything we achieved since the publication of our previous strategies.

- We have continued to develop and deliver services across Wales despite unprecedented events like COVID and a cost-of-living crisis which will of course have affected people's mental health and well-being.
- The strategies reflect our continued efforts to continue to make improvements.

Given the current financial pressures, how confident are you that you can deliver these strategies?

- The strategies have been developed in the context of the current financial pressures. They aim to provide direction to ensure value based and targeted investment as we recognise the pressures on all organisations at the moment.
- ***Third sector specific*** We recognise the difficulties that third sector organisations are facing and we will work with statutory commissioners to look at options with a view to putting the commissioning of such services on a more sustainable footing.
- Some of the key actions will be delivered and driven by investment that we have already made that will support long-term improvements. This includes our investment in the Strategic Mental Health Workforce Plan and dedicated mental health resource in the NHS Executive.
- Given the cross-Government actions, all Departments have agreed that the strategies are affordable and deliverable.

Will there be funding available to implement these strategies?

- In this period of financial constraint, we are working hard to support continued investment in mental health, and we continue to prioritise mental health as an area that requires this investment.
- We are developing these strategies with the understanding that there will need to be a way of setting priorities, ensuring best use of existing resources and an opportunity to be clear about what can realistically be delivered.
- The published strategies will be accompanied by delivery plans which over the life of the two strategies will be renewed and refreshed. This will provide the opportunity to identify new investments should the economic position change.

What else are you doing to help make it easier for people to access mental health?

- We are committed to improving access to mental health services. All health boards have plans in place to reduce waiting times and make services more accessible. Easy-to-access support is available 24/7, including our NHS 111 press 2 for urgent support and our CALL helpline for people who are concerned about their mental health.
- We have invested in lower level, easy-access support that doesn't need a referral from a health professional. This includes access to online Cognitive Behavioural Therapy through SilverCloud.
- Improving services and support are just one area of focus. We have a much wider programme of work that aims to improve emotional mental health and

well-being, for instance through our Joint-Ministerial Whole System Approach and our NEST planning framework.

Are you concerned about waiting times for people trying to access mental health support and services?

- We are making progress on reducing waiting lists – but in the context of an increase in demand for support.
- Easy-to-access support is available 24/7, including our NHS 111 press 2 for urgent support. The service has been available in some areas since November last year and data shows that it is meeting people's needs and reducing distress.
- An aim of the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy is to reduce the need for more specialist services and this is a key element of longer term approach to reduce demand for services.

What are doing to reduce waiting times for mental health services in general?

- Our long-term approach set out in the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy is to reduce the need for specialist services through prevention and supporting the wider determinants of good mental health.
- We continue to increase investment and our newly formed NHS Executive is working with health board to monitor and improve performance.
- All health boards have developed improvement trajectories, and these are monitored on a monthly basis.
- I am committed to continue to improve access to specialist services for those that need them, but improving mental health and well-being requires a multi-agency and cross-Government approach. Our Whole System Approach in schools is a good example of this; aiming to improve emotional health and well-being and to prevent escalation to needing specialist support.

Other ways we are delivering on our Programme for Government commitment to widen access, without referrals, to mental health support:

- Our C.A.L.L. listening and advice line provides help and advice for mental health issues more generally. The services are working closely together as the new '111 press 2' urgent mental health support service beds in – the aim will be to integrate the support once we have a better understand of demand and need.
- We have a dedicated helpline for Wales, called BEAT, for people who need support for an eating disorder.
- SilverCloud provides online access to a range of therapies. Through this service alone we have supported over 22,000 people in Wales through innovative support that doesn't need a referral from a health professional.
- Our whole schools approach is making counselling available to our children and young people in their place of education.
- We are also investing in programmes to support with mental health problems get back into employment and provide access to counselling and occupational therapy to staff of small businesses that cannot provide those services.

- We are also implementing a range of alternatives to hospital admission, including sanctuaries. As part of the Co-operation Agreement, the sanctuary offer has been extended piloting a number of projects which provide dedicated sanctuary spaces for children and young people who find themselves in mental health crisis.
- We have also implemented a national model of mental health conveyance known as 'Taith Dda' or 'Good Journey', which provides a safe, compassionate and responsive mode of transport to help people to access appropriate mental health support. This provides an alternative to an ambulance or a police vehicle and is a partnership between with the NHS and St John Cymru. These improvements provide the platform for truly integrated mental health support.
- We are also continuing to invest in reducing waiting times for specialist services for those that need them.

How are you engaging with people with lived experience of mental health and/or suicide and self-harm in Wales?

- We will continue to engage with those with lived experience through the Mental Health User Forum, the Regional Suicide and Self-Harm Prevention and Support Groups, and the Suicide and Self-Harm National Advisory Panel.
- We have also developed resources that those working or volunteering with people with lived experience can use to support people to respond to the consultation, and we are planning specific events to hear the voices of children and young people.
- The strategies are the result of significant, and extensive stakeholder and cross-Government engagement. Listening to people affected by the issues in each strategy has been fundamental. The pre-consultation engagement alone included over 250 responses to an on-line survey.

Have you worked with children and young people to develop these strategies?

- We have engaged with children and young people in the development of the strategies including the Welsh Youth Parliament and our Youth Stakeholder Group.
- We have developed specific resources and commissioned additional support to ensure young people can engage appropriately with the consultation.
- There are also specific events being planned which are targeted at children and young people. We will be sharing information about how to join these events in due course.

Why aren't there more detailed actions in these strategies?

- These are long-term (10-year strategies) and will be delivered through more detailed delivery plans – these will include key milestones and deliverables.
- Previous delivery plans were in 3-year cycles. Given the current financial pressures, we are considering a shorter initial delivery plan to focus early investment.

- The time frame of the initial delivery plan will be finalised during the consultation period.

When will the new strategies be implemented?

- We are planning to publish final versions of both strategies later in 2024, alongside supporting Delivery Plans. Both strategies provide the strategic direction for improving mental health and wellbeing (and the services and support available) and preventing suicide and self-harm for the next ten years (2024-2034).

What are the current challenges to implementing both strategies?

- The impacts of the pandemic on mental health and wellbeing are still being felt, alongside the impacts of the current cost of living crisis. We are seeing increasing levels of poor mental health amongst some groups; rising numbers of people seeking support from mental health services; and we are in the toughest financial situation we have faced since devolution.
- Wider challenges also exist – for example, inequalities in access to services, experiences and outcomes; the need for parity between mental and physical health; needing to build our evidence base on what works to support people in hospital and the community; and delivering a sustainable workforce.

Do you have the workforce to implement these strategies?

- The strategies have been developed in the context of text of the Strategic Mental Health Workforce Plan for health and social care.
- Building on the previous strategies, the aim to drive preventative and earlier intervention to reduce the need for more specialist services.
- A key aim is to reset the language that we use for mental health to better describe needs. Most people that are defined as have mental health issues do not need specialist services. So we want to improve the understanding and drive individuals to the most appropriate support.

The strategies set out the Welsh Government's long-term vision for mental health services and suicide and self-harm services and support in Wales. But what are you doing now to address the challenges that currently exist e.g. long waiting times for access to services?

- We know that services are under continuing pressure, and that people being referred to services for support have increasingly complex and higher levels of need. This is being seen against a backdrop of high staff vacancy levels across the health boards.
- However, mental health continues to be the highest area of spending by the NHS in Wales. Through the Strategic Mental Health Workforce Plan – which is a cornerstone of the new Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy – we are also making important progress to develop skills and capacity across health and social care to increase support for those in need.

How will you measure progress?

- Throughout the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy we have identified a number of measurable indicators that we will monitor as part of the implementation of the strategy. These, and further indicators to be identified, will also support the evaluation of both strategies when commissioned.

Are you setting a target to reduce suicides?

- Our aim is to reduce suicide. Whilst rates of suicides have remained relatively constant – and broadly in line with pre-Covid rates, rates haven't reduced.
- Our aim is to change this trend through more targeted action using information from our Real time surveillance and other sources.
- We have national and regional co-ordinators leading multi-agency groups to drive this change.
- We are also working across-Government to tackle those areas that can increase risk – for instance substance misuse, domestic violence, poverty and employment.

Background - Redacted – not in scope for relating to misinformation, public messaging strategy, or reputational risk

What is behind the increase in self-harm in young people?

- The reasons behind self-harm are complex
- Whilst admission figures appear to have gone down it is not clear how much of that can be attributed to COVID. We are also aware that many people will not present with issues of self-harm.
- However, we do have evidence to suggest that there has been an increase in prevalence amongst young people. We also know that key risk factors include bullying, child abuse and neglect, substance misuse, intimate partner violence and sexual exploitation, eating disorder, links with other mental health conditions and contact with the justice system.
- We know that we need to understand more about the numbers who self-harm, the causes and how best to support people. That is why we have introduced Objective 1 which is focussed on strengthening the evidence bases and the architecture around them.
- That work is already underway and will feed into the next iteration of the strategy and the accompanying delivery plan.
- The consultation also provides another valuable opportunity to hear from people and help us better understand the issue which is important to them.

Hot issues Youth work spending in Wales

Redacted – not in scope for relating to misinformation, public messaging strategy, or reputational risk