

Meeting: [Adult Social Care and Health Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Board](#)

Date: [6 November 2025](#)

Wards affected: [All](#)

Report Title: [Public Health update on suicide prevention and Baton of Hope Torbay](#)

When does the decision need to be implemented? [n/a](#)

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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report gives an overview of the work of the public health team and partners in suicide prevention and specifically reports on the success of the Baton of Hope Torbay.

2. Reason for Proposal and its benefits

- 2.1 The programmes of work described in this report will help us to deliver our vision of a healthy, happy and prosperous Torbay by helping to improve public mental health and prevent deaths by suicide.
- 2.2 Poor mental health and deaths by suicide significantly impact upon our residents and are financially detrimental to society. Torbay experiences some of the highest suicide and self-harm admission rates in England.
- 2.3 This paper outlines plans and activities designed to tackle poor mental health and suicides at local level.

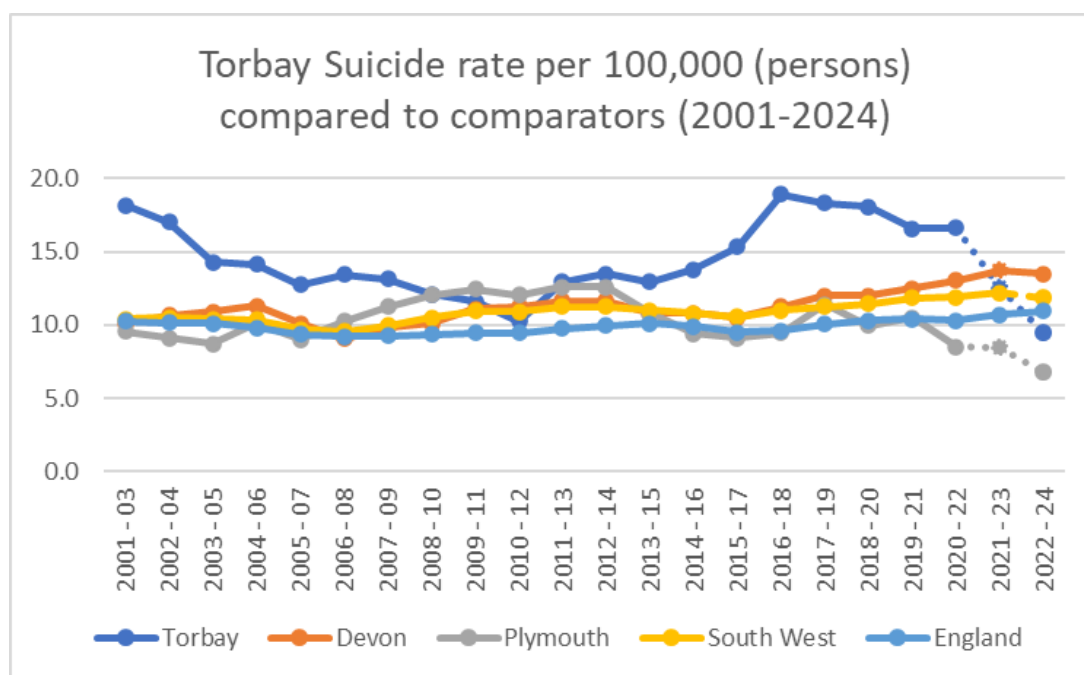
3. Recommendation(s) / Proposed Decision

- 3.1 Members are asked to note the report and to support efforts to improve public mental health and reduce the number of local deaths by suicide.

Background

Suicide is a major public health issue: it is the leading cause of death in men under 50 years, young people under 35 years and new mothers. Every death is a tragedy. Not only does it hint at the distress and pain that was felt by the person who died, it is sorely felt by the people who are closest to them. For every person who ends their life by suicide, 135 people are estimated to be affected¹. For every life lost, the estimated total cost² to the economy was 1.46 million in 2022³. Previous estimates have been higher as they did not include older people; however this is still considered to be a conservative estimate. If we apply this to the Torbay population which experiences an average of 20 deaths by suicide per year, the potential cost to the local economy is £29.2 million a year and around 2,700 residents will be affected by these deaths annually.

Torbay has experienced significantly higher suicide rates since 2014-16 (as shown in the following chart) and generally records one of the highest suicide rates in England. Despite this we have seen a small but consistent decline in rates since 2016-18 when local multi-agency suicide prevention plans came into place. Suicide rates from the most recent two-year period should be regarded with caution as Torbay is experiencing the highest delay in death registration of suicide of all upper tier local authorities in England⁴.



1 <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/sltb.12450>

2 Productivity and intangible losses (the value that society places on loss of life) account for the majority of total costs. There are, however, some immediate costs to the NHS, both for deaths by suicide and for treating non-fatal self-harm events in hospital.

3 https://media.samaritans.org/documents/The_economic_cost_of_suicide_in_the_UK_-_web.pdf

4 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/datasets/suicidesbylocalauthority>

The median delay in death registration is now 746 days – over 3.5 times the national average. This means it takes over two years from date of death to register a death by suicide. This has an impact on our statistics and for local people who have been bereaved. Real time surveillance data from the police indicates that the number of suspected deaths by suicide has not materially changed from more representative figures recorded in 2019-22. Thus, it is recommended to continue working with a rate of 16.6 per 100,000 as a baseline whilst the registration backlog is remedied. It is highly likely that our rates will increase over the next few years, and they may rise to unprecedented levels if registrations are processed at an above average rate before they return to their natural level.

Torbay Suicide Prevention Action Plan

Local suicide prevention activity is coordinated via the [Torbay Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2024-27](#) and various working groups that sit beneath this. This year multi-agency partners have delivered on the three priority areas of this plan as shown in table 1.

Priority area	Activity	Anticipated outcomes
Ensure mental health and emotional support is accessible to all	- Co-created a <u>children and young person and an adult one-page signposting document</u> for universal services across the mental health continuum - Brought mental health and emotional support organisations together in one place at the Torquay Hope Hub as part of the Baton of Hope event in September 2025 - Confirmed longer-term funding and procurement for mental health support via the Torbay Community Helpline	- Professionals and the public are more informed about what services are available for a range of mental health and wellbeing needs. - The public can engage with a range of appropriate services that already exist face-to-face. - Local mental health and wellbeing organisations have the opportunity to network with each other face-to-face - People aged 18yrs and over are supported with their basic needs as well as their mental wellbeing with minimal exclusion criteria (complementary to other provision)

Acknowledge and work with Torbay's risk factors for suicide	• Co-created support documents for people who are struggling in relationships or are no longer in a relationship. Relationship loss/break down can be a catalyst for other risk factors for suicide such as challenged finances, housing instability, poor mental health and risk-taking behaviour	• System professionals can share appropriate support materials for a common issue that impacts on everyone. • People feel supported and may engage with the information and services suggested in the leaflet. This may prevent the development of other risk factors.
Harness passion, commit to collaborate and pool resources to reduce suicides	• Co-created (at times co-produced) the Baton of Hope Torbay event. As well as the event itself, this includes two dedicated Facebook Pages (public and for baton bearers) a partnership website and email box to facilitate partnership working and collaboration.	• People are more aware of the impact of suicide locally (particularly highlighting groups who are more at risk) • People feel more comfortable to engage in conversations around suicide • People are more aware of the services and training that are available • People bereaved by suicide and/or suicide survivors are supported and engage in a positive healing process

Suicide Prevention Leads in each local authority area in Devon work in close collaboration. The following areas have been progressed by our public health teams across Devon:

- Continuing to deliver suicide bereavement support and real-time surveillance
- Bespoke suicide prevention training for GPs
- Engaging with the media to improve reporting on suicide
- Creating self-harm support training resources
- Disseminating the updated It's Ok to Talk About Suicide Z-Card

- Creating a Safety Plan Z-card to supplement the above.

One Devon Suicide Prevention Action Plan

Strategic partners across the Integrated Care System (ICS) prioritised a reduction in suicides via the Joint Forward Plan 2025-30 by including a system target to reduce suicides to England average levels within five years. In order to improve system ownership and maximise limited resource, the Devon Suicide Prevention Oversight Group (SPOG) and Health and Wellbeing Boards across Devon have agreed to create a single One Devon suicide prevention action plan. This will amalgamate and prioritise actions from current plans and add actions that are deemed appropriate for system change. Four multi-agency workshops have been held to date. A draft plan will be streamlined and circulated to partners for input by the end of this year. The requirement to maintain localism within this single action plan is recognised and acknowledged by all throughout this process.

Baton of Hope Torbay

In August 2024, Torbay successfully applied to the Baton of Hope UK to be part of their national tour in 2025. The Baton of Hope Tour is considered to be the UK's largest suicide prevention initiative with an aim of raising awareness, reducing stigma and uniting people who have been impacted by suicide. The rationale for Torbay's submission was three-fold:

- Significantly higher suicide rates than regionally and nationally
- Well established and effective partnership working in the local area
- Strong alignment with priority three of the Torbay suicide prevention action plan – Harness passion, commit to collaborate and pool resources to reduce suicides.

In January 2024, Torbay Council senior leaders confirmed project lead and budget arrangements as costs for local delivery are not funded by the national charity. A multi-agency planning committee was established to steer and contribute to its implementation. The key principles used by the planning committee were:

- Community-driven where possible, involving the three towns of Torbay
- Using existing assets and relationships to best effect
- Real people, real stories, real places (filming of partners, baton bearers and the local area)
- Being as inclusive as possible (e.g. ensuring that young people could be involved and that smaller voluntary sector organisations could participate) whilst highlighting particular populations who have an increased risk of poor mental health and suicide (e.g. men)
- Having an open conversation about suicide but focusing on hope and wellbeing.

The Baton of Hope UK charity allocated the date of the event based on a national route which included 19 other locations. The chosen date was Tuesday 30th September. Although we requested a weekend date to maximise public impact this was not possible.

The Baton of Hope Torbay was structured around a walking relay for people who have been impacted by suicide. Wellbeing events and activities, and other methods of transportation, were involved en route. The circular route – which involved the three towns of Torbay – culminated in a fundraising finale show at the Riviera International Centre. The following diagram summaries the main elements that were involved on the day. Further detail is included in Section 2 of this document.



Baton of Hope Torbay

Relay walk/transport

Over 100 local people applied to be a baton bearer with Baton of Hope UK, with many more expressing an interest. This highlights the impact of suicide, and the importance of positive mental wellbeing, for people in Torbay. Each baton bearer was allocated a What Three Word (W3W) location where they would be passed the baton. They each carried it for around 200 metres, although baton bearers were able to accompany the baton for a longer duration should they wish to. Some baton bearers chose to walk the whole 14-mile route.

The baton route was an opportunity to highlight neighbourhoods, populations affected and the assets of the Bay. The following methods of transport were also included en route – motor trike convoy to South Devon college, steam train to Churston, bus and replica Knight rider car to Brixham Rugby Club and RNLI lifeboat to Torquay. Local organisations volunteered their time and venues to be walking pit-stops such as Torquay

Rugby Club, Gaia Café, Parkfield House and The Guardhouse Café. The routes per town are shown on the Torbay Baton of Hope website for reference.

Daytime events/activities en route

A range of day-time events were scheduled along the relay route and can be found on the website for reference. An all-day wellbeing festival was held in Princess Gardens Torquay which was the start and end point of the Baton route. Other smaller events were held in each town throughout the day – some managed by the council, others managed by partners/community. Events of particular note were the senior leader event held at the Lyceum theatre (Torquay), an LGBTQIA+ focused event held in Young's Park (Paignton) and a very well attended Sound Bath held near Shoalstone pool (Brixham).

Evening finale show

After the Baton returned to Torquay with the last baton bearer, a ticketed finale fundraising event was held at the Riviera International Centre. This was a variety performance with celebrity performers, including Marcus Brigstocke, that weaved lived experience and suicide prevention throughout with speeches from the co-founder of the Baton of Hope UK and the CEO of Pete's Dragons (Devon's suicide bereavement support provider). The programme was designed to speak honestly about suicide whilst acknowledging the importance of bringing joy, lightness and hope into people's lives, particularly for those who have been impacted by suicide. Ticket sales, donations from baton bearers and donations gathered throughout the day helped to raise around £9,000. This will contribute towards a local suicide prevention legacy grant pot which will be used to contribute and grow grassroots suicide prevention initiatives in the future.

Resources

The Baton of Hope Torbay event was led by Torbay Council Public Health team with support from the Events team and partners across the community. Resource included:

- gifts in kind from partners and businesses (e.g. free or lower cost goods and services, and business sponsorship)
- support from volunteers (e.g. to support comms/design and to support the running of the event).

The event additionally generated around £9,000 in donations and ticket sales.

Evaluation

The following data will be collected, analysed and collated by December 2025.

- De-brief meetings within 6 weeks of the event with:
 - key personnel (events, public health and Torbay Communities)
 - planning committee (multi-agency)
 - volunteers
 - baton bearers

- Insights and photographic evidence of the event to gather:
 - Estimated attendance numbers
 - Participant feedback
 - Effectiveness of marketing and promotion
- Press coverage pre, on the day and post event
- Social media engagement pre, on the day and post event
- Financial records outlining expenditure and income.

Initial feedback has been extremely positive from the public, baton bearers and partners as illustrated by the quote below.

“...poignant, powerful and joyous all in one. It was perfectly organised with great representation from all the organisations who offer support. Personally, I found it a day full of mixed emotions – one-minute tearful listening to some of the stories of loss and the next minute, enjoying the music or the singing of local primary school children.” Healthwatch & Paignton Community Hub

Legacy

The Baton of Hope Torbay has always been about what happens next. The goodwill and partnerships that have been built upon and generated through the planning and execution of the event will be capitalised upon. The following will be realised within 6 months:

- Create a photo gallery, display art work created and host a thank you event
- Showcase the Baton of Hope Torbay documentary film
- Enable peer-support for local baton bearers
- Collaborate with Sound Communities, local schools and Papyrus to distribute age-appropriate suicide prevention resources and training within education settings
- Continue to scope a community art piece that speaks to people who may be struggling, inspires hope and signposts to appropriate support
- Repurpose the Baton of Hope Torbay Facebook Pages and website for general usage by the Torbay Suicide Prevention Partnership.
- Administer the suicide prevention community grant pot (scoping match funding) to extend and grow new grassroots initiatives (with input from baton bearers).

3. Financial Opportunities and Implications

3.1 None identified

4. Legal Implications

4.1 None identified

5. Engagement and Consultation

- 5.1 Programmes include communications and engagement plans with local multi-agency partners, communities and specific target groups.
- 5.2 A multi-agency brain-storming session was held in December 2024 to steer initial plans for Torbay Baton of Hope event and membership for the planning committee. Regular communication updates were scheduled from January to September via the Torbay Baton of Hope Facebook page and website, and through usual corporate and multi-agency communication channels.

6. Procurement Implications

- 6.1 None identified

7. Protecting our naturally inspiring Bay and tackling Climate Change

- 7.1 The majority of multi-agency meetings relating to this programme are held online to reduce travel. Where events are held in person, participants are encouraged to use public transport, vendors are sourced locally and single-use plastic is kept to a minimum.
- 7.2 The following actions were taken during Baton of Hope Torbay:
- Event waste management was supplied by SWISCO who provided recycling and additional bins where required at outdoor events.
 - Food and drink vendors were sourced locally and prohibited from using single use plastics, including straws
 - Eco-friendly and temporary chalk was used to mark baton bearer's positions on pavements (using the word HOPE) with appropriate permissions agreed by SWISCO and Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust
 - Stagecoach South West unveiled one of its first battery-electric Alexander Dennis Enviro400EV double-deckers for the area ahead of the operator's depot becoming fully zero-emission. This vehicle transported baton bearers from Churston to Brixham.

8. Associated Risks

- 8.1 The risks of poor mental health and suicide are outlined in this paper. The aims of these programmes are to put in place measures to address these risks.

9. Equality Impact Assessment

Protected characteristics under the Equality Act and groups with increased vulnerability	Data and insight	Equality considerations (including any adverse impacts)	Mitigation activities	Responsible department and timeframe for implementing mitigation activities
Age	18 per cent of Torbay residents are under 18 years old. 55 per cent of Torbay residents are aged between 18 to 64 years old. 27 per cent of Torbay residents are aged 65 and older.	Middle age is a risk factor for suicide.	Interventions and communications are specifically targeted to people who are most at risk. Services and providers account for this characteristic in their delivery.	Multi-agency responsibility
Carers	At the time of the 2021 census there were 14,900 unpaid carers in Torbay. 5,185 of these provided 50 hours or more of care.	Carers are a risk group for poor mental health and increased risk of suicide.	Interventions and communications are specifically targeted to people who are most at risk. Interventions and communications are specifically targeted to people who are most at risk.	Multi-agency responsibility
Disability	In the 2021 Census, 23.8% of Torbay residents answered that their day-to-day activities were limited a little or a lot by a physical or mental health condition or illness.	People with a disability/neurodiversity are at risk from poor mental health and increased risk of suicide.	Interventions and communications are specifically targeted to people who are most at risk. Services and providers account for this characteristic in their delivery.	Multi-agency responsibility

Gender reassignment	In the 2021 Census, 0.4% of Torbay's community answered that their gender identity was not the same as their sex registered at birth. This proportion is similar to the Southwest and is lower than England.	Gender identity and gender reassignment can increase the risk of poor mental health and suicide.	Interventions and communications are specifically targeted to people who are most at risk. Services and providers account for this characteristic in their delivery.	Multi-agency responsibility
Marriage and civil partnership	Of those Torbay residents aged 16 and over at the time of 2021 Census, 44.2% of people were married or in a registered civil partnership.	Marriage and civil partnerships are generally considered to be a protective factor for suicide where DASV is not present.	Interventions and communications are specifically targeted to people who are most at risk. Services and providers account for this characteristic in their delivery.	Multi-agency responsibility
Pregnancy and maternity	Over the period 2010 to 2021, the rate of live births (as a proportion of females aged 15 to 44) has been slightly but significantly higher in Torbay (average of 63.7 per 1,000) than England (60.2) and the South West (58.4). There has been a notable fall in the numbers of live births since the middle of the last decade across all geographical areas.	Pregnancy and the perinatal period is not considered to increase suicide risk however suicide is the primary cause of death in this cohort.	Interventions and communications are specifically targeted to people who are most at risk. Services and providers account for this characteristic in their delivery.	Multi-agency responsibility
Race	In the 2021 Census, 96.1% of Torbay residents described their ethnicity as white. This is a higher proportion than the South West and England. Black, Asian and minority ethnic individuals are more likely to live in areas of Torbay classified as being	Particular ethnicities can increase the risk of poor mental health and suicide.	Interventions and communications are specifically targeted to people who are most at risk. Services and providers account for this characteristic in their delivery.	Multi-agency responsibility

	amongst the 20% most deprived areas in England.			
Religion and belief	64.8% of Torbay residents who stated that they have a religion in the 2021 census.	Religion and belief are generally considered to be a protective factor for suicide.	Interventions and communications are specifically targeted to people who are most at risk. Services and providers account for this characteristic in their delivery.	Multi-agency responsibility
Sex	51.3% of Torbay's population are female and 48.7% are male	Males account for 3 in every 4 suicides. More woman are impacted by self-harm than men.	Interventions and communications are specifically targeted to people who are most at risk. Services and providers account for this characteristic in their delivery.	Multi-agency responsibility
Sexual orientation	In the 2021 Census, 3.4% of those in Torbay aged over 16 identified their sexuality as either Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or, used another term to describe their sexual orientation.	The LGBTQIA+ have poorer mental health and a higher proportion of suicides than the general population.	Interventions and communications are specifically targeted to people who are most at risk. Services and providers account for this characteristic in their delivery.	Multi-agency responsibility
Armed Forces Community	In 2021, 3.8% of residents in England reported that they had previously served in the UK armed forces. In Torbay, 5.9 per cent of the population have previously served in the UK armed forces.	The armed forces community are thought to have higher suicide risk than the general population but latest data suggests that risk is similar to the general population. Being part of a military family is considered to be protective for suicide.	Interventions and communications are specifically targeted to people who are most at risk. Services and providers account for this characteristic in their delivery.	Multi-agency responsibility

Additional considerations				
Socio-economic impacts (Including impacts on child poverty and deprivation)	Torbay is ranked as the most deprived local authority in the South West. Approximately 27% of people live in areas amongst the 20% most deprived in England. 22% of children live in a relative low income family (2022/23)	People in more challenged socio-economic circumstances are at greater risk of poor mental health and suicide.	Interventions and communications are specifically targeted to people who are most at risk. Services and providers account for this characteristic in their delivery.	Multi-agency responsibility
Public Health impacts (Including impacts on the general health of the population of Torbay)		All programmes are designed to improve population health.	All programmes are designed to improve population health.	Multi-agency responsibility
Human Rights impacts		Services and providers will remain cognisant of human rights, including the right to life, health, privacy, education and prohibition of discrimination.	Services and providers will remain cognisant of human rights, including the right to life, health, privacy, education and prohibition of discrimination.	Multi-agency responsibility
Child Friendly	Torbay Council is a Child Friendly Council and all staff and Councillors are Corporate Parents and have a responsibility towards cared for and care experienced children and young people.	Nationally the mental health of children and young people is steadily getting worse and the number of suicides are increasing over time.	Suicide prevention resources and training are age-appropriate and children and young people are considered and engaged with for prevention of suicides.	Multi-agency responsibility

10. Cumulative Council Impact

- 10.1 Suicide prevention is everybody's business therefore partnership working with all areas of the Council is required to a varying degree. Relevant teams are involved in the delivery of the Torbay Suicide Prevention Action Plan and the Baton of Hope Torbay.

11. Cumulative Community Impacts

- 11.1 All of these programmes involve close partnership working across the Integrated Care System, including voluntary, community and social enterprise (VCSE) sector, and all are intended to promote and improve health across the whole of our population.