



**Report to Healthier Communities & Adult
Social Care Scrutiny & Policy Development
Committee
19th August 2020**

Report of: Head of Policy & Partnerships

Subject: The impact of Covid-19 on Mental Health and Mental Health Services in Sheffield - Evidence from Stakeholders.

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Summary:

At its meeting on the 19th August 2020, the Healthier Communities and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee will be considering how Covid-19 has impacted Mental Health in Sheffield.

To enable the Committee to hear from a range of stakeholders, the Chair of the Committee wrote to VCF organisations in Sheffield that work with people who use mental health services, for their views on how mental health services have responded to issues that have emerged during the crisis.

This report sets out a summary analysis of the responses received.

Type of item:

Briefing paper for the Scrutiny Committee	x
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The Scrutiny Committee is being asked to:

Note the information in the report, and use it to develop lines of enquiry and inform discussion.

Category of Report: OPEN

Report of the Head of Policy & Partnerships

The impact of Covid-19 on Mental Health and Mental Health Services in Sheffield - Evidence from Stakeholders.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 At its meeting on the 19th June 2020, the Healthier Communities and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee will be considering how the Covid-19 emergency has impacted on Mental Health in Sheffield.

To enable the Committee to hear from a range of stakeholders, the Chair of the Committee wrote to VCF organisations in Sheffield that work with people who use mental health services, inviting them to give evidence on how local mental health services have responded to issues that have emerged during the crisis.

- 1.2 We asked how Covid 19 had affected mental health, and demand for mental health support from VCF organisations, what had worked well in terms of how statutory services had responded to the Covid emergency, and where things could be improved. We received responses from:

HealthWatch Sheffield - the consumer watchdog for health and social care services in the city

Sheffield Mind - a Mental Health Charity providing emotional and practical support to people in Sheffield with mental health issues.

Citizens Advice Sheffield – as lead partner of the Sheffield Advocacy Hub, providing a range of independent mental health advocacy services, and provider of specialist mental health advisory services.

The Chair of the Committee also attended a meeting of the Sheffield Black and Minority Ethnic Inequalities Communities Group (Public Health) on the 6th August, focussed on Mental Health, to listen to the views of BAME community groups.

The responses are summarised below.

2. Impact of Covid 19 on Mental Health and demand for support

- 2.1. HealthWatch Sheffield's conversations with people found a mixed picture in terms of the impact of Covid19 and lockdown on people's mental health. For some, lockdown was helping their mental health, whilst others did not cope well. Loneliness, and the loss or reduction of usual social support, organised activities and support groups was exacerbating poor mental health in some people, and some individuals can't, or don't want to access the online alternatives offered by some organisations. For some individuals, fear of becoming infected with Covid19 in health care settings led to a reluctance to access support.

- 2.2 Fear of infection was also highlighted as a concern by the BAME Inequalities Community Group, where it was reported that some people had stopped going out, and in some cases given up work for fear of infection, which was leading to increased stress and anxiety, reducing opportunities to be part of the community and increasing isolation. BAME community based groups reported that their services are now overwhelmed in terms of demand.
- 2.3 Sheffield Mind found that some service users were overwhelmed by the Covid situation, and staff were required to offer a lot of support around the presentation of the pandemic on social media and the news – which caused a lot of concern for some service users.
- 2.4 During the first 4-6 weeks of lockdown, Sheffield Mind reported a dramatic decrease in phone calls from members of the public worried about their own mental health, or that of a friend or family member, from 30 to 5/6 a week. This has since picked up and now slightly exceeds pre-lockdown levels.
- 2.5 Sheffield Mind has recently established a ‘Listening Line’ phone service for anxious and isolated callers age 50+. It has proved popular – the post lockdown period appears to be confusing and anxiety inducing for callers.
- 2.6 Sheffield Advocacy Hub saw a decrease in the number of referrals to their service in nearly all areas of advocacy since the beginning of Covid-19. This was to be expected – as many referrals come from statutory services where there have been additional Covid pressures – however the Advocacy Hub remains concerned about the decrease where government guidance has been clear that advocacy remains a statutory right during Covid-19.
- 2.7 The Mental Health Advice Team saw a 16% increase in clients post lockdown, compared with the same period last year. The Advice Service, as well as the Advocacy Service reported an upsurge in safeguarding issues, as it became clear that people who were already struggling with significant mental health issues were becoming increasingly overwhelmed by the changes in daily routine brought on by Covid-19.
- 2.8 The Sheffield Advocacy Hub anticipates that there will need to be future support for those with mental health conditions who had their regular support interrupted during Covid-19, and also that there will be an increasing need to support people who are not yet known to services.

3 What's worked well?

- 3.1 Sheffield Mind has found that many aspects of mental health services have worked well during Covid-19:
- Psychology appointments have continued over the phone
 - Care co-ordinators and enhanced support has been available over the phone and face to face in a crisis
 - Procedures for sectioning people were in place and operating during lockdown
 - Mental health teams have continued to be responsive, and referrals have been made.
- 3.2 HealthWatch Sheffield reported service users having positive experiences of welfare calls and appointments with psychiatrists, psychologists and psychotherapists over the phone. They also found that many service users are understanding of the challenges Covid19 poses to services, and are accessing community support where needed and available.
- 3.3 The Sheffield Advocacy Hub noted that some services adapted quickly in response to Covid-19 – for example the programme of online courses developed by IAPT that clients can self refer to. Some Advocacy Hub clients have expressed a preference to communicate with workers through technology and would like to see this continue to be an option post pandemic. The value of face to face services for some clients should not be underestimated however.
- 3.4 The BAME Inequalities Communities group reported that whilst mental health is taboo in BAME communities, this is starting to shift. People are increasingly asking for help with anxiety and depression, to the point where services offered by local BAME community groups are unable to meet demand.

4 What could be improved?

- 4.1 Prior to Covid, HealthWatch Sheffield had identified mental health as one of its priority areas for work this year. In an engagement exercise with 400 people at the beginning of the year, mental health was the most widely discussed issue, with a consistent set of concerns being raised:
- Access to services – long waiting lists and complicated referral pathways.
 - Provision of services – people struggling in crisis, Single Point of Access difficult to contact, concern over the effectiveness of IAPT (Increasing Access to Psychological Therapies)
 - Range of provision – need services to meet a range of different needs and life circumstances – eg children and young people, BAME communities, women, older people.
- 4.2 This last point was also raised by the BAME Inequalities Communities Group, who discussed how stigma, trust, language and cultural barriers can prevent people from BAME communities from accessing statutory and mainstream services. Trusted community groups can deliver what is valuable to their communities, but currently aren't resourced to do so.

- 4.3 Sheffield Mind found that GPs could be hard to get hold of during Covid. The call back system operated by many GPs can be problematic for people with anxiety, who prefer a fixed time appointment. They reported that some service users had avoided dealing with physical health issues for this reason.
- 4.4 HealthWatch Sheffield also identified problems for some people in moving to phone based services.
- Phone calls show up as private, so people don't know which service has called
 - Phone credit is required if calls need to be returned, or voicemails listened to
 - Some people don't like using the phone or having phone support but may not have raised this with the service provider and there is no alternative option being offered.
 - Phone support is not always timely and lack consistency in the workers users are having contact with.
 - Some users feel overwhelmed by the amount of phone calls they are having because their care involves support from multiple professionals/services/organisations, all of which are only offering phone support..
- 4.4 Sheffield Advocacy Hub have been contacted by longstanding clients who felt that their mental health needs were significantly declining due to changes in support. Some clients found the change from face to face mental health services to video/phone technology particularly challenging.
- 4.5 HealthWatch Sheffield reported that staff sickness and staff being redeployed is leading to users not having care delivered by their usual workers. In some cases users are having contact with staff who have been redeployed from another specialism rather than a different member of the mental health team involved in their care.
- 4.6 HealthWatch Sheffield reported that some people have been not been satisfied with crisis care since the Covid outbreak – one service user reported a cancelled appointment leaving them without support - and a lack of information for service users about what crisis care would involve in the current circumstances. HealthWatch Sheffield also found that better and more co-ordinated communication with VCF organisations about the service offer from statutory services in general would have been helpful in supporting people with their mental health
- 4.7 Sheffield Advocacy Hub has highlighted the challenges some advocates have had in maintaining contact with clients on some wards during Covid-19. There are often not enough phones available, and video conferencing has not been available in most cases. Advocates have pointed to good practise at Intensive Support Services at Firshill Rise, who have adapted particularly well during Covid-19, using technology, including advocates in meetings, and supporting remote access to clients.

5 Recommendations

The Committee is asked to

- Note the information in the report, and use it to develop lines of enquiry and inform discussion.