

# **New mental health programme offers helping hand**

**A new mental health programme which offers a helping hand to people in emotional crisis has won three-year funding in West Lothian.**

The local health and social care partnership agreed a £2.4m contract after a pilot project was set up in March this year. The Distress Brief Intervention programme aims to provide help to those people in acute distress within 24 hours of first contact.

In a year which saw the number of probable suicides rise across Scotland the initiative is seen as crucial in helping people who feel they have nowhere to turn.

The number of probable suicides in West Lothian in 2023 was 24, compared to 18 in 2022 and 30 in 2021.

This increase was reflected of Scotland's figures which saw an increase from 762 in 2022 to 792 in 2023.

Health and social care professionals have been working on programmes, which look at suicide risk factors, including poverty and addictions, as well as the help available for those who are in severe emotional distress but who have not been diagnosed with mental illness.

A report to the recent meeting of the local Integration Joint Board said: "There has long been a gap in our provision for people who do not have a mental illness but present in a distressed state to unscheduled care services such as the

Acute Care and Support Team (ACAST) at St John's Hospital."

It added: "Implementing a Distress Brief Intervention Service (DBI) to meet this gap has been an aspiration for some time, with DBI providing an assertive offer of help to those people in acute distress, with an offer of contact within 24 hours."

The contract will provide staff for a Community Link Worker and Well-being Practitioner Service. This forms part of the larger West Lothian Community Well-being Hubs Service that is staffed by a multi-disciplinary team including NHS colleagues from Occupational Therapy, Community Mental Health Nurses (CMHN), and Psychology, and is a response to the increased mental health workload of GPs in the locality.

The report added that link workers will offer front line training to NHS24, Casualty department staff, Police Scotland, Primary Care and Scottish Ambulance Service which involves: "a compassionate response, signposting and offer of referral, seamlessly with confidence and clarity to a DBI Level 2 service."

DBI Level 2 is provided by commissioned and trained third sector staff who contact the person within 24-hours of referral and provide compassionate community-based problem-solving support, wellness and distress management planning, supported connections and signposting for a period of up to 14 days.

In a report to the council's Health and Social Work Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel this month, Mike Reid General Manager, HSCP Mental Health and Addictions said: "We know from the evaluation of the initial DBI pilots that one in 10 people reported that they may have attempted suicide or continued with suicidal thoughts if DBI had not been offered to them."

The introduction of the DBI programme is part of a broader strategy- the West Lothian Suicide Prevention Programme –

which is being developed for 2025-28.

This plan will build on work already under way in local communities and has objectives including workforce training; support for people affected or bereaved by suicide; prevention responses and maintaining links with national and local programmes.

The programme also hopes to build better partnerships and relationships with charities, healthcare workers, police and emergency services.

Recent workshops have included one in July on preventing suicide in public locations which was attended by representatives from Fire and Rescue, Police Scotland, Ambulance Services, Adult Protection, Mental Health Services, Third Sector, British Transport Police, Network Rail, and council services covering roads and transportation and parks and open spaces.

By Stuart Sommerville Local Democracy Reporter