



SURREY

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Dear Secretary of State,

I am writing to you as Chairman of Surrey County Council's Adults and Health Select Committee to update you on the work of our Mental Health Task Group. This was chaired by my colleague Nick Darby, Vice-Chairman of the Adults and Health Select Committee, who has reviewed and supports the contents of this letter. During the summer of 2020, we heard first-hand from mental health service users, providers and commissioners as we undertook an in-depth review of mental health services in Surrey. This was an eye-opening and incredibly rewarding experience, highlighting both the positives and challenges ahead.

Early intervention

A key finding from the Task Group's work was that early intervention is vital to ensure mental ill-health is identified as early as possible. As 75% of mental illness starts before the age of 18, it is imperative that health professionals can quickly identify issues and offer help.

More also needs to be done to identify those who are suffering in silence while continuing to support those who have already come forward with mental health issues. Ensuring we support those who have fallen between the cracks is essential.

Economic costs

Increased funding will ensure training and resources for health and care professionals, and in the wider public sector, to recognise the signs of mental ill-health and offer support at the earliest opportunity. One of the Mental Health Task Group's recommendations was for training to be offered to all public sector frontline workers to help improve the identification of mental ill-health and ensure the use of appropriate instructions and terminology.

It also makes good economic sense, with mental ill-health the biggest contributor to overall population ill-health in the UK. The Centre for Mental Health estimates mental ill-health costs the UK £105 billion annually, with 72 million working days lost each year. Additionally, people with long-term mental health conditions are twice as likely to lose their jobs as those without.

A holistic approach

Of course, increasing mental health funding will not immediately solve all our problems. Just as important is to ensure that funding goes to the right services in the right ways. Mental health must form a key part of the discussion in all policy areas and projects, from infrastructure and the designing of homes to the development of neighbourhoods, while the vital role that employers and third sector organisations play must be considered. It is imperative they receive the support needed to continue and build on their excellent work.

More also needs to be done to improve recruitment and incentivise junior doctors to specialise in mental health, and I urge you to explore ways to attract the best and brightest, both from overseas and here at home. Too often it is left to chance to determine whether a patient is treated by a doctor who specialises in mental health, and increasing specialist training will help plug the gaps across the health service.

Emerging from the pandemic

The mental wellbeing of everyone in the UK needs to remain our primary focus when discussing changes to mental health services, with a financial approach that is cost effective. Mental ill-health has a devastating impact not just on the individual's suffering but also their families, friends, local communities, and society at large, with an untold amount of lost potential. The Covid-19 pandemic and associated impact on the population's mental health has been devastating, but it has also presented the UK with a chance to be a global leader in the improvement of mental health services. I urge you to use this opportunity to increase mental health funding to ensure that everyone can access the services that are right for them and their needs, and at the earliest possible stage.

Cllr Darby and I would be delighted to meet with you to discuss the findings of our Mental Health Task Group in more detail. My office is ready to work with yours to arrange a suitable time.

Yours sincerely,



Bernie Muir
Chairman of the Adults and Health Select Committee
Surrey County Council