

Salford Men's Mental Health Commission

**A report on what more the system can do to help
Salford men feel mentally well**

November 2024

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This Salford Men's Mental Health Commission was established in response to the profound challenges we have faced in recent years, including a global pandemic and ongoing cost of living crisis and pressures that have not only exposed deep inequalities in society, but which have amplified mental health struggles – particularly among men. In Salford, we decided to act. We partnered with Healthwatch Salford and brought together an inspiring group of men from diverse communities and sectors, each with valuable lived experience and insight.

At the heart of this commission has been one central goal: to listen – to the men of Salford, and to their partners, families, and communities. We set out to understand their experiences, their thoughts, and concerns – and these voices have shaped every step of the process, guiding us to the recommendations we present in this report. Many of the issues faced disproportionately affect men, and the commission has focused on these challenges, exploring ways to address them and support men's mental fitness in the future.

The men involved in this commission have shared with us a range of issues that affect their mental wellbeing, from financial pressures to the stigma surrounding mental health. The report captures a snapshot of these conversations and while it provides invaluable insight, it is only a starting point. This report must be seen as a call to action and a clear reminder that the work does not stop here. Now, we must work across the city and with partners take these recommendations and turn them into meaningful change.

Our vision for Salford is to build a city where mental fitness, wellbeing, and resilience is integrated into the very fabric of all we do: to create a future where it is a central priority; where men feel safe, respected, and valued; they have the opportunity to thrive; and where there are strong systems of support to help them build their resilience and overcome challenges.

The journey ahead will require all of us to step up and work together, as individuals, communities, services, and organisations. This report offers a blueprint and our recommendations, but it is only through collective action that we can truly make a difference.

Let's use these recommendations as a springboard to build momentum, creating a future where we all keep Men in Mind; where their mental fitness and resilience are actively nurtured and prioritised across every sector, in every community, and that this underlines all of our work as we move forward together.

Councillor Hannah Robinson Smith

Foreword

The Men in Mind Salford report represents a crucial step forward in understanding and addressing the mental health needs of men in our community. The Salford Men's Mental Health Commission, in partnership with Healthwatch Salford, has created a platform for men's voices, highlighting the pressures they face and the pathways that could lead to better mental wellbeing.

The statistics around men's mental health are deeply concerning. In the UK, men are three times more likely to die by suicide than women, with men between the ages of 40 and 49 having the highest suicide rates. This tragic reality highlights the importance of understanding and addressing the specific mental health challenges men face. The insights gathered through this initiative—from men across various backgrounds as well as their loved ones—underscore a clear and urgent call to action. The commission's recommendations provide a roadmap that can improve the lives of men in Salford.

It is imperative that we act on these findings and commit to building a supportive, responsive, and inclusive environment for men's mental health. Mental health is everyone's business and it is our responsibility to create a system in which everyone feels able to speak up and access support.

I commend the Salford Men's Mental Health Commission, Healthwatch Salford and thank everyone involved in this important work.

Councillor Mishal Saeed

Foreword	3
Salford Male-Man (poem by J Ahmed).....	6
About the commission	7
About Healthwatch Salford	8
Introduction	9
Summary and recommendations	11
Demographics of those who took part	15
The commissions findings	17
Conclusion, responses and next steps	38
Acknowledgements	48

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SALFORD MALE-MAN

letter to the city

Things have not been easy
For Salford City's men,
Recent times have been a test
Of our will and strength.

The aftermath of difficulties
Here and across the globe,
Have left us with poor mental health
Trying to take a hold.

We've always kept it simple,
Solutions which we've sought
Are ones which, through our city's culture,
We were always taught

How, we as men, should deal with sorrow,
The trials of life and stress,
And with all we've learned and know
We Salford men have done our best.

But, we know from here we'll grow.
And challenge, for ourselves,
The issues which will not take hold
If we pursue with help

A better way to wellbeing,
To strengthen and maintain
Our sense of our resilience
In our spirits, bodies, brains.

Key to we, mentally
Overcoming troubles
Is finding better ways to cope
When crumbling to rubble.

To reconstruct the hope we need
To overcome, succeed
In the fight for keeping well,
We need the city's teams

To let us know what's out there,
Wherever we may be,
No matter where we're from,
Whatever language we may speak.

A clear, easy directory for all,
Including those
Who work to help those people
Who need their help the most.

A lack of transportation
Can often be a wall
To blocking easy access
So, our mental health can fall.

Walking in the wilderness,
A way to waking minds,
In groups so we can activate
And more closely bind.

We need the Leisure services
To bring the working in,
So the city always works
Toward the work that underpins

Our City's civil motto,
It is our highest law -
The welfare of the people,
Be they rich or be they poor.

We must progress for men,
Disadvantaged in some way,
Who need the leisure services,
Though they cannot pay.

Beside many Salford men
Is their partner by their side
And often, through the struggle,
It is not an easy ride.

So, we need to find support
For those, who need the help
Because they have a partner
Who has poor mental health.

Plus, we need ensure
The third sector, serving well,
Is funded as it needs to be
To give those, living hell,

Places in communities
Where all feel comfy going,
Non-clinical, effective,
This sector's well worth growing.

We need to raise the parity
In health and mental health,
Too many men are suffering
And they need the help

For, we are often overlooked
When 'we're not ourselves',
And money mightn't alter this -
Lest attitudes be shelved.

There's lot's to do to quickly shift
This decline in our communities
Of mental health in Salford men
And foster better unity

So when our men in Salford,
Sense they need support
They can easily find it
And their troubles, be cut short.

And, a sea of wellbeing
Is all that we can see
Amongst the men of Salford
And our Salford families...

x 'J'. Ahmed x

About the commission

The Salford Men's Mental Health Commission is a unique initiative that brings together grassroots men of Salford and leaders from various community and support groups. This 11 member advisory panel, supported by Healthwatch Salford and funded by Salford City Council and NHS Greater Manchester (Salford Locality) with support from Salford CVS, is dedicated to enhancing men's mental wellbeing. The commission's primary objective is to advise the council, the NHS, and VCSE (Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise) sector on what more can be done to help men feel mentally well.

The commission comprises individuals from diverse backgrounds, including health organisations, community leaders, and local residents. The members are:

- **Chris Hyndman**
- **Graham Ashworth**
- **J Ahmed**
- **Jamie Dennis (CEO Mandem Meetup)**
- **Mike Richard (CEO Talk About It Mate)**
- **Nana Yaw Acheampong**
- **Nick James**
- **Philip Bridge**
- **Zac Wilde**

The other two members of the commission, while choosing to maintain their privacy, are wholeheartedly dedicated to the commission's objectives.

Additionally, Tammy Pike from the Jamie Horrocks Trust played a crucial role in facilitating focus groups aimed at partners of men.

Salford City Council

Salford

Integrated Care Partnership



About Healthwatch Salford

Healthwatch Salford was tasked by Salford City Council to set up and support the Salford Men's Mental Health Commission.

Healthwatch Salford serves as the local champion for health and social care. They are dedicated to listening to the experiences of those who use various support services in Salford, including GPs, hospitals, dentists, pharmacies, and care homes. As an independent entity, they have the power to ensure that feedback from the local community is heard by NHS leaders and other decision-makers, leading to improvements in care standards. They also provide assistance in finding reliable and trustworthy information and advice.

Being part of a network of over 150 local Healthwatch across the country, Healthwatch Salford contributed to helping nearly a million people voice their opinions and receive the support they needed last year. They are committed to understanding the issues that truly matter to the people of Salford and hearing about their experiences with local health and social care services. Their independence and impartiality ensure that any information shared with them remains confidential.



In a proactive move to address the mental well-being of men across the city, Salford City Council established a new commission dedicated to this critical issue. Healthwatch Salford was entrusted with the responsibility of setting up and supporting this commission to achieve its aims. The commission, with a focus on men's mental health, aimed to gain deeper insights by engaging with the experiences and perspectives of men living in Salford. It was tasked with the responsibility of formulating recommendations that would assist the council, NHS, and VCSE sector in improving

outcomes for men. This initiative, by actively involving men from Salford, sought to create a meaningful impact and enhance well-being for all.

Methodology

The project began with Healthwatch Salford creating a basic project framework. This was then discussed and agreed upon by the newly formed commission. The primary purpose of this framework was to gather evidence about the mental well-being of men in Salford to help the commission in its overall objective.

The project was divided into three main phases: Design, Engagement, and Evaluation.

1

Design Phase

In the design phase, the commission named the project 'Men in Mind Salford'. Alongside the creation of a logo, they developed well-structured survey questions. The primary survey was designed to be accessible in multiple formats: online, paper copy, and over the phone, catering to those who preferred to discuss their responses. To compliment the survey, the commission devised a toolkit for community organisations to facilitate men's focus groups and another one was created specifically for the partners of men, a demographic that could provide equally valuable insights. A secondary survey was also put together for staff and professionals to provide their feedback. In addition, the commission designed branding and marketing materials to encourage participation from men.



2

Engagement Phase

The engagement phase involved distributing posters and paper surveys to Salford GP surgeries, public libraries and other public venues (cafes, barbers etc.). Community organisations hosted focus groups, and the Jamie Horrocks Trust facilitated the focus groups for "partners of men". A social media campaign was launched to promote participation across Salford. The commission monitored the uptake of the survey and adjusted the engagement plan as needed.

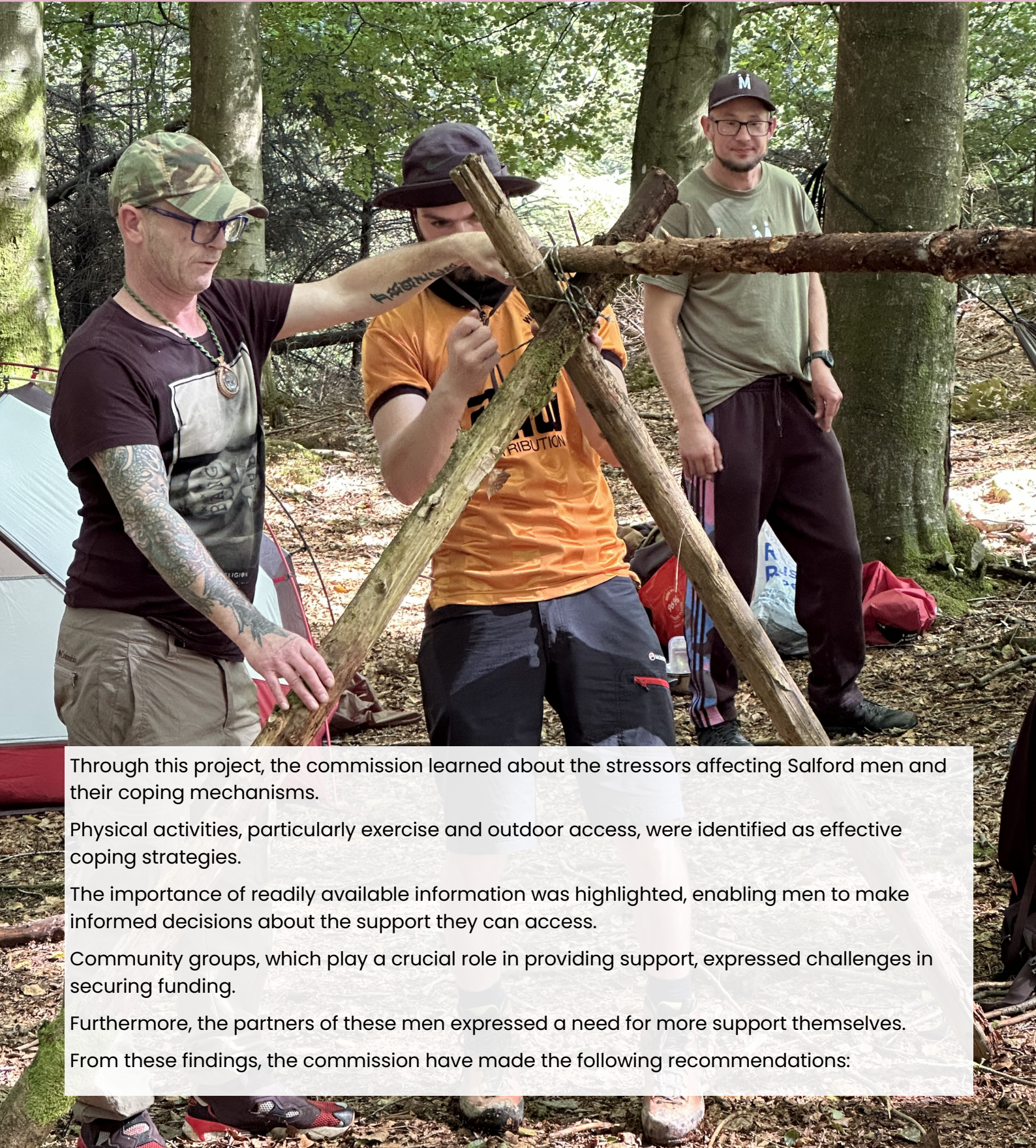
3

Evaluation Phase

During the evaluation phase, the commission met several times to analyse the results. Working collaboratively, they produced a summary of the findings. A draft report was then presented to Salford City Council, NHS Greater Manchester Integrated Care, Greater Manchester Mental Health Trust and Salford CVS for their response, following which this final report was published.

The Jamie Horrocks Trust (JHT) is a local charity dedicated to reducing the risks and impacts of suicide through funding and supporting campaigns and partnership work. They worked with the commission to host focus groups for partners of men (a cohort which included close family members). As part of their social media campaign from October to November 2023, they ran four focus groups and six one-on-one interviews. Using a semi-structured approach, they encouraged expressive and honest dialogue by incorporating art-based engagement. Participants were given a safe space to share personal stories, allowing the capture of a wide range of data. The focus groups facilitated in-depth feedback, encouraging open discussions and providing anonymity for individuals to express their thoughts and emotions. In all, JHT engaged with 48 participants. It's important to note that some participants attending these groups shared their views based on men other than their partners, namely sons and brothers.

Summary and recommendations



Through this project, the commission learned about the stressors affecting Salford men and their coping mechanisms.

Physical activities, particularly exercise and outdoor access, were identified as effective coping strategies.

The importance of readily available information was highlighted, enabling men to make informed decisions about the support they can access.

Community groups, which play a crucial role in providing support, expressed challenges in securing funding.

Furthermore, the partners of these men expressed a need for more support themselves.

From these findings, the commission have made the following recommendations:

Communication and raising awareness

1. Communication plan:

- Develop a plan to raise mental health awareness, involving community influencers, faith leaders, clinicians, and trusted leaders. This could include creating short videos in different community languages to debunk myths about mental health and helping others to recognise the signs of mental unwellness.
- Utilise community champions to promote mental health. These champions, who have personal experience with mental health challenges, can serve as relatable role models and facilitate open discussions about mental health.
- Make all communications accessible to a wide range of men, including those whose first language is not English. Use more visual images in promotional materials to overcome language barriers.
- Establish a comprehensive directory of services in Salford that can support men which is readily available with up-to-date information for men to access as well as a useful referral tool for GP's and other professionals to signpost men to. This could be potentially hosted through an existing service.

2. Alternatives to alcohol:

- Develop a campaign that promotes alternatives to alcohol consumption across Salford. The aim is to encourage healthier lifestyle choices by showcasing the variety of non-alcohol-related experiences the city has to offer.

3. Awareness Events:

- Organise awareness raising events aimed at men to help promote local community groups in Salford that would enable men to take a self-help approach in looking after their own mental wellbeing .

Accessibility

4. Marginalised Communities:

- Mental health services should encourage more participation from men in marginalised communities by forging better links with these community groups.

5. Access to Gym, Sports, green and blue spaces:

- Improve access to leisure facilities for men with low disposable income or those who face location and transport issues.
- Provide more support for physically disabled men to engage in physical activities that can improve their mental wellbeing.

6. Evening Activities:

- Create more opportunities for evening and weekend activities for men, either through the creation of new services or support the expansion of existing men's groups and events.

7. Resource Pool:

- Create a pool of resources for existing community groups to utilise and make their services more inclusive. This could include access to interpreters, web designers, and easy-read proofreaders.

Funding

8. Increased Funding for Mental Health Services:

- The council should support calls for the national government to increase funding for NHS mental health services, with the long-term aim of reducing the disparity between physical and mental health.

9. Long-Term Grant Funding:

- Discussions should take place to establish a more sustainable model for local grant funding, including the support that can be offered to VCSE groups empowering grantees to strategise and plan for long-term success more effectively

10. User-Friendly Grant Processes:

- Simplify the processes for bidding for grant funding and reporting on outcomes, making them more user-friendly and encouraging uptake.
- Create a peer support network of people who have successful grant bidding experience, and can mentor other local groups.

Improving existing services

11. Reducing the impact of Waiting Times:

- Fostering collaboration with local groups to provide pre-therapy support for men awaiting NHS interventions.
- Promote local groups that work with men, providing safe spaces for open communication about feelings and reducing mental health stigma.
- Counselling services should be adapted to be more accommodating to men. This can be achieved by increasing consultations with men's groups and ensuring the option of male therapists.

12. Accreditation Scheme for Positive Mental Wellbeing:

- Salford should consider introducing an accreditation scheme for positive Mental Wellbeing to celebrate best practices and raise awareness of mental wellbeing from local organisations in the public, private, and voluntary sectors.

Increasing opportunities

13. Nature Engagement:

- Increase opportunities for men to engage with nature, particularly through the use of existing nature spaces such as Chat Moss in Irlam and Cadishead and use local men with expertise in relevant areas to deliver sessional work.
- Introduce more niche activities like bushcraft and camping in natural environments, along with fishing and other hobby related activities

14. Increase support for partners of men:

- Enhance support service for the partners of men; providing access to the right information and support at the right time, improving outcomes for their own mental health

15. Workshops on Compassionate Conversations:

- Conduct workshops across the city on compassionate conversations and empathetic listening, creating safer spaces for men to share their feelings without the pressure of unsolicited advice or judgement.

16. Consultation with Existing Groups to create support:

- Consult and recognise leaders of existing grass roots men's groups in Salford, such as those mentioned in this report and others across Salford when looking to design or improve services.
- Provide more support for community groups to deliver a wide range of activities in Salford, aimed at improving the physical and mental well-being of men.

17. Sleep Interventions:

- Develop strategies aimed at promoting relaxation and improving sleep quality. These will be particularly beneficial for individuals with demanding schedules due to work or study.

Future proofing

18. Mental Wellness in New Developments:

- Ensure that new developments must consider mental wellness and suicide prevention. This includes access to daylight, street lighting, green and blue open spaces, and building design. High incidence suicide locations, such as railways, high buildings, and bridges, should be designed to reduce risk.

19. Council's Focus on Mental Health:

- The council should place mental health and wellbeing at the centre of its activities. As a first step, the council should consider signing up to the 'Prevention Concordant for Better Mental Health' and consider the impact of its wider policy and investment decisions on mental health and wellbeing.

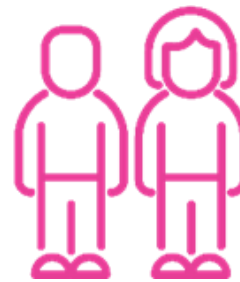
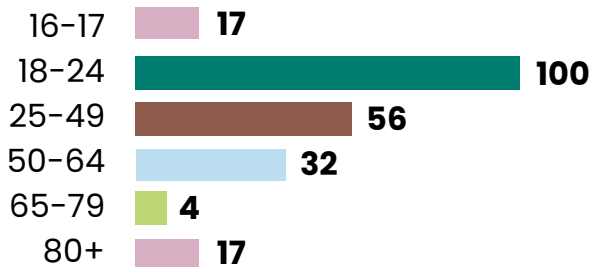
20. Use evidence from this report to enhance the efforts of the committees and collaborations focused around mental health.

- Committees and collaborations focused around mental health in Salford should take into consideration the recommendations and evidence presented in this report that directly align with their goals. In the development of their action plans, they should boldly prioritise the perspectives of local residents and the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector. This approach will ensure that their strategies are rooted in the needs and experiences of the communities they serve.

Demographics of those who took part

The project aimed to reflect the diversity of men in Salford, focusing on understanding their experiences and potential barriers due to factors such as age, health conditions, and other backgrounds. Alongside the main survey, participants were also invited to answer additional questions about their backgrounds, with 92% (209 respondents) completing this section. Here is what they told us about themselves:

Their ages



6 men told us that their gender was different to what they were assigned with at birth

5 men identified as asexual,
5 as bisexual,
31 as gay men,
159 as straight
1 as a lesbian/gay women



83 men said that they had a long term physical or mental impairment or condition

Top 5 long term health conditions

- 1 – Mental Health (**48**)
- 2 – Diabetes (**21**)
- 3 – Hypertension (**17**)
- 4 – Asthma/COPD (**16**)
- 5 – Muscular (**15**)



113 owned their home
39 rented privately
37 rented from housing association
13 lived with family or friends
4 had other arrangements

Religion and belief systems

Buddhist - 2
 Christian - 88
 Jewish - 3
 Muslim - 6
 Spiritualist - 1
 None - 83

15 men identified

themselves as being a
 carer



Their race/ethnicity

Arab	
Arab	1
Asian or Asian British	
Chinese	2
Pakistani	3
Other: Hong Kong	1
Other: Filipino	1
Black/African/Black British/Caribbean	
African	6
Mixed/Multiple ethnicity	
Black African and White	1
Black Caribbean and White	1

White	
British, English, Northern Irish, Scottish and Welsh	174
Irish	3
Any other White background	3
Other: American	1
Other: White Latino	1
Other: Polish	1
Any other ethnic or national group	
White Irish/British	1
Martian	1



Which parts of Salford they came from:

Eccles, Irlam & Cadishead **(68)**

Walkden & Little Hulton **(47)**

Ordsall, Claremont & Weaste **(46)**

Swinton & Pendlebury **(41)**

Broughton, Kersal & Irwell Riverside **(27)**

The commissions findings



The Men in Mind project involved a total of **335** participants. Here's a breakdown of their involvement:

230 men completed the survey.

42 men actively participated in focus groups.

48 partners of men also contributed to the discussions.

15 professionals who work with men provided valuable insights.

The commission spent time analysing these results, forming the basis of this report.

Throughout this report, the focus group responses are in color-coded boxes:

Mens focus group

Partners of men focus group

Staff/professionals focus group

The majority of men who told us that they were in employment felt that they did have a good work to life balance. They cited examples of caring employers who promoted wellbeing in the workplace, flexible working arrangements, working from home, working a regular 9-5 hour day job and personal discipline (setting boundaries and finishing on time) as the main reasons for feeling this.

In contrast, for those in employment where they didn't feel they had a good work to life balance, they mentioned: work commitments, deadlines, having a stressful job, commuting and pressures from family life as some of the main reasons to why they didn't feel this.

"I work long hours and commute an hour each way. When I get home I'm too tired to do anything else"

Employed survey respondent

Retired men were the next biggest cohort, again with the majority of them feeling that they did have a good work to life balance unsurprisingly for reasons that they were more in control of their daily timetables.

For those who identified as unemployed, in the main they didn't feel like they had a good work to life balance. Some of their reasons indicated that they may have answered 'no' based on the understanding that they didn't have a job to measure this against, though most explained how their physical health had prevented this and thus the balance was not good for them.

"No job, no money, no life"

Unemployed survey respondent

Whilst the numbers who identified as being a carer were low in comparison, there was an overwhelming feeling from them that they didn't have a good work to life balance or felt unsure. Understandably, their reasons for this centred around their responsibility as carer for a loved one, with some unsure of how they can balance this.



Employment status		Did they have a good work/life balance?			
		Yes	Not sure	No	No answer
Employed full time	121	64	18	38	1
Retired	42	27	7	6	2
Unemployed	25	5	2	17	1
Student	17	7	4	6	0
Employed part time	9	4	2	2	1
Self employed	6	1	3	2	0
Carer for friend/relative	4	0	2	2	0
Volunteer	3	2	1	0	0
Totals	227	111	39	75	

Numbers of men who identified with employment status and how they scored their work/ life balance

In our focus groups with men, we discovered that the majority (74%) felt they had a good balance between work and life. They attributed this balance to factors such as having supportive employers, setting personal boundaries, and practicing self-care to prevent feeling overwhelmed. However, there was a significant minority (35%) who did not feel they had a good work-life balance. They identified work pressures, the rising cost of living, personal health issues, and a lack of relaxation time as major obstacles to achieving this balance.

From our focus groups with partners of men, we found in contrast that most (84%) felt that their male partners did not have a good work-life balance. Participants described how work often consumed their partners' lives, leaving little room for other activities. For some men who were struggling mentally, work served as a routine distraction, unless the work itself was a source of stress. Some participants also noted that their partners used alcohol as a distraction. A recurring theme was the fluctuating nature of work-life balance, which seemed to depend on their partners' life circumstances at any given time. As such, their partners' work-life balance could vary, being satisfactory at times and unsatisfactory at others.

Nearly half of the students who took part in our survey felt they had a good work to life balance, but equally a large percentage of them did not. Some of their reasons for not feeling it was good, centered around those who had to take additional paid employment to get them through studies, making their long days, longer with little time left for themselves.

"I'm a full time student and work 1 day a week at weekends... My course is intense too, which usually requires studying until the evening and on my other day off at weekend"

Student survey respondent

What are the good parts of mens life at the moment

Looking into what men see as the good parts of their lives, the survey revealed several key factors. Open green spaces, regular exercise, and access to affordable activities were identified as significant contributors to their well-being. The importance of having a supportive network of family and friends was also highlighted, along with the value of effective communication, both in terms of listening to others and feeling heard. Interestingly, pets, particularly dogs, emerged as a source of joy, with dog-walking being singled out as a particularly enjoyable activity.

“I enjoy working and at the same time I am fortunate that I can give back to my community”

Survey respondent

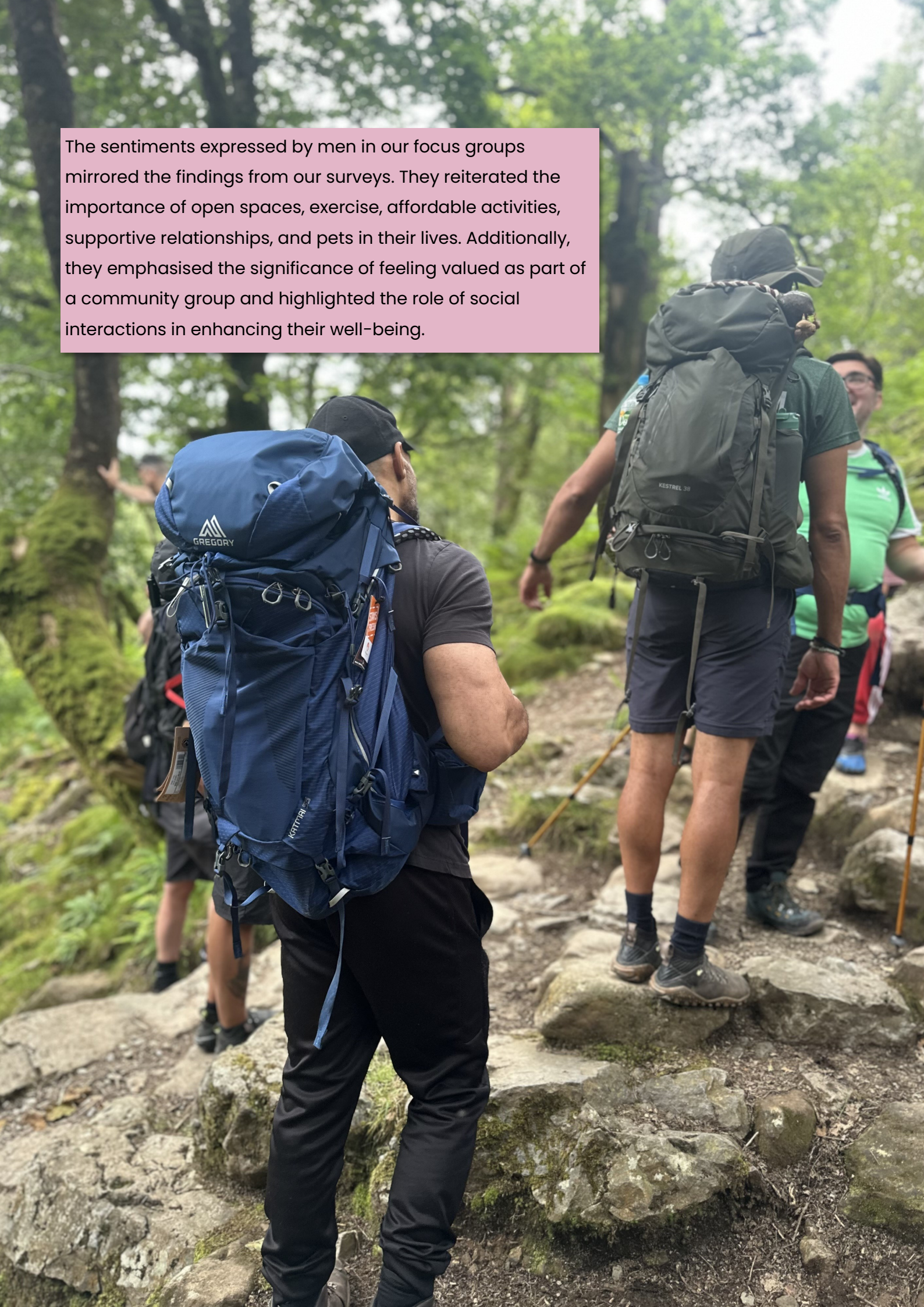
Feedback from our partners of men’s focus groups indicated that men with good mental health typically have a balanced social and work life, engaging in a variety of activities such as family outings, hobbies, exercise, nature exploration, music, watching sports, drinking, gaming, and socialising. However, it was noted that these positive behaviours could quickly turn negative when the men were in a low mood. For instance, social outings could lead to excessive drinking. Interestingly, when support was sought, there was a reported increase in the men’s participation in a wider range of activities, including increased communication with others and more physical activities like walking and exercise.



“My children. They are the reason I get up and carry on. Both in a practical sense of being a carer and emotionally.”

Survey respondent

The sentiments expressed by men in our focus groups mirrored the findings from our surveys. They reiterated the importance of open spaces, exercise, affordable activities, supportive relationships, and pets in their lives. Additionally, they emphasised the significance of feeling valued as part of a community group and highlighted the role of social interactions in enhancing their well-being.



What Salford men did to relax

In an effort to comprehend the relaxation and unwinding habits of men in Salford, our study revealed a pattern of recurring responses. The most common activities that emerged from the data included walking, dog-walking, listening to music, reading, and watching television. Interestingly, the consumption of alcohol was a frequently mentioned activity, with some men even indicating it as their exclusive method of unwinding. This insight provides a snapshot of the leisure activities preferred by men in Salford.

The responses from the partners of men focus groups revealed a diverse range of activities that they engage in for relaxation and leisure.

These activities can be broadly categorised into several themes. **Physical activities** such as walking, gym workouts, jogging, pilates, football, swimming, and other sports were popular. **Media consumption** was another common theme, with activities like listening to music, watching films or TV, YouTube, reading comics, and listening to podcasts or audiobooks. Social Activities were also prominent, including chatting with friends, social drinking, spending time with loved ones, and both indoor and outdoor social gatherings. The men also engaged in **creative and learning activities** like woodwork, design work, making music, learning new things, and genealogy. **Relaxation activities** such as taking a bath, getting a massage or physiotherapy, laughing, and going to the theatre were also mentioned. Some men reported that they felt they had to resort to unhealthy options such as **substance use**, including having a spliff, taking medication, smoking, and consuming alcohol. **Food and drink** activities mainly involved eating food and drinking beer. **Outdoor activities** like nature walks and going on holiday were also popular. Lastly, **digital entertainment**, including gaming and watching cartoons, was another common theme.

These themes provide a comprehensive overview of the various ways men choose to relax and unwind.



Stress and low moods

In our study, we sought to understand the factors that caused stress or low mood in men’s lives. Beyond housing situations, benefits, and loneliness, more than half of the participants indicated that these aspects significantly influenced their stress and low moods.

Sleep patterns emerged as a major stressor, with 65% of the men identifying it as a significant factor influencing their

stress and low mood. Notably, nearly a third of these respondents indicated that it massively affected them. The cost of living was another significant factor, affecting 64% of the survey participants.

Equally impactful were issues related to physical health, money, and personal income. These factors affected 61% of the men who participated in our survey, highlighting the multifaceted nature of stress and low mood triggers in men’s lives.

Which part of the men’s lives caused them the most stress or low mood

	Affects me massively	Affects me a bit	Not sure	Doesn't affect me much	Doesn't affect me at all	N/A
Housing	15%	30%	4%	22%	29%	2%
	33	66	8	48	64	4
Relationships	21%	32%	5%	22%	18%	2%
	47	71	12	49	40	5
Family	21%	36%	5%	20%	16%	2%
	47	80	11	46	36	5
Work	27%	32%	3%	12%	6%	20%
	59	72	6	27	14	44
Money and personal income	29%	33%	4%	16%	15%	2%
	66	74	9	37	34	5
Benefits	8%	10%	5%	9%	20%	48%
	18	22	10	20	44	107
Sleep patterns	32%	33%	2%	17%	16%	0%
	72	73	5	37	36	1
Loneliness	23%	25%	7%	18%	24%	2%
	52	56	16	41	54	5
Cost of living	27%	37%	8%	16%	13%	0%
	61	82	17	36	28	0
Physical health	24%	37%	6%	21%	11%	0%
	53	83	14	46	25	1

Table showing how surveyed men scored each topic split between overall percentage and actual numbers

When we posed the same question to professionals who work with men, they identified a variety of factors that can contribute to stress or low mood.

Financial pressures, such as economic instability or insecurity, can lead to significant stress. **Communication barriers** often exist, as many men may feel unable to openly discuss their feelings or problems. **Substance abuse**, including hidden drug or alcohol abuse, can also contribute to stress and low mood. **Work stressors**, such as high-pressure work environments or joblessness, can lead to stress, while **time constraints** can negatively impact mental health by limiting time for self-care activities like exercise. **Relationship issues** and problems in personal relationships can cause emotional distress, and **caring responsibilities**, like the pressure of caring for loved ones, can be a source of stress. Undiagnosed **PTSD** can lead to chronic stress and low mood, while Social Isolation, particularly in older men living alone, can lead to low mood. **Cultural norms**, such as societal expectations about masculinity and the stigma around discussing mental health, can prevent men from seeking help. **A lack of support**, including inadequate emotional support in friendships and relationships, can lead to feelings of isolation. **Health issues**, especially poor health, can contribute to stress and low mood. Finally, **service accessibility** issues, like difficulty accessing mental health services or long waiting lists, can exacerbate stress. It's important to note that these factors can interact and compound, potentially leading to severe stress or depression.



We followed this initial question by asking the men about the strategies they had used to overcome stress and low mood, if they had experienced such feelings before. From our survey, we discovered a variety of coping mechanisms:

Talking: Both formal and informal conversations served as a means of expressing feelings and alleviating stress.

Outdoor activities and exercise: Physical activities were found to be beneficial in managing stress and improving mood.

Prescribed medication: Some men found relief through prescribed medication.

Counselling/therapy: Professional mental health services provided a structured environment for addressing personal issues.

Sleep: Getting adequate rest was crucial for maintaining mental well-being.

Support from family and community/faith groups: Emotional support from loved ones and community groups played a significant role in overcoming stress.

Accessing support organisations: Organisations like Samaritans provided additional resources for those seeking help.

Healthy eating: A balanced diet contributed to overall well-being and mood regulation.

Socialising: Going out and interacting with others helped to alleviate feelings of isolation.

Mindfulness and meditation: These practices promoted mental clarity and stress relief.

However, some responses highlighted the challenges faced by those with physical health issues or pain. These men expressed a desire to engage in physical exercise, such as walking, but were unable to do so due to their health conditions. In some instances, this inability led to further frustrations and low mood, underscoring the complex interplay between physical and mental health.

“Mindfulness and sitting with my feelings instead of ignoring them. The gym gave me an outlet to focus on something else when work or other things in life were adding stress to my life.”

Survey respondent talking about what they do when they feel in a low mood



Through our men's focus groups, we have gained valuable insights into the techniques men use to combat stress and low moods. One of the key findings in this area was around the importance of communication. Men expressed that talking about their feelings and experiences served as a positive and effective method for managing stress and enhancing their mood. This open dialogue not only allowed them to express their emotions but also provided a platform for understanding and empathy, further contributing to their emotional well-being.

In addition to communication, physical activity emerged as a significant factor in managing stress and low moods. Our survey responses echoed this sentiment, highlighting exercise as a crucial element in maintaining mental health. Regular physical activity has been shown to reduce stress levels and improve mood, corroborating the feedback from our focus groups.

Lastly, the sense of connection that men felt through their relationships with friends and participation in community or support networks played a substantial role in their mental health. These connections provided a sense of belonging and mutual support, reinforcing their ability to manage stress and low moods. The value of these social connections cannot be overstated, as they contribute significantly to overall mental well-being.



The responses from the partners of men focus groups revealed a diverse range of activities that they engage in for relaxation and leisure.

These activities can be broadly categorized into several themes. **Physical activities** such as walking, gym workouts, jogging, pilates, football, swimming, and other sports were popular. **Media consumption** was another common theme, with activities like listening to music, watching films or TV, YouTube, reading comics, and listening to podcasts or audiobooks. Social Activities were also prominent, including chatting with friends, social drinking, spending time with loved ones, and both indoor and outdoor social gatherings. The men also engaged in **creative and learning activities** like woodwork, design work, making music, learning new things, and genealogy. **Relaxation activities** such as taking a bath, getting a massage or physiotherapy, laughing, and going to the theatre were also mentioned. Some men reported that they felt they had to resort to unhealthy options such as **substance use**, including having a spliff, taking medication, smoking, and consuming alcohol. **Food and drink** activities mainly involved eating food and drinking beer. **Outdoor activities** like nature walks and going on holiday were also popular. Lastly, **digital entertainment**, including gaming and watching cartoons, was another common theme.

Supporting themselves and providing support for others

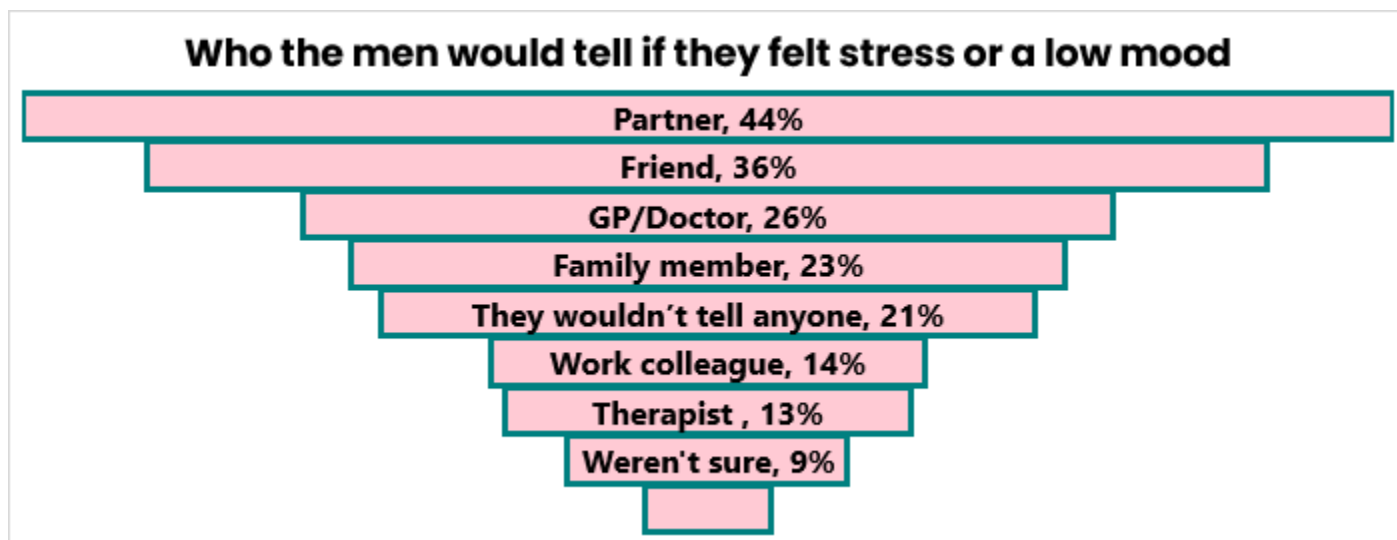
Another of our objectives was to understand men's reactions to experiencing low moods and whether they would confide in someone about their feelings. The majority of the men indicated a level of comfort in sharing their feelings. However, a significant portion, one in five, expressed reluctance to do so.

The reasons for their hesitation were multifaceted. Some men were unsure of where to seek help, while others were deterred by societal stigma or personal pride. A common perception was that talking about their feelings wouldn't provide any tangible benefits. Some preferred to navigate their feelings independently, while others cited embarrassment, fear of failure, or concerns about burdening their friends and family with their problems.

Interestingly, despite their own reservations about seeking help, 43% of these men felt confident in their ability to assist someone else experiencing similar issues. One of the primary suggestions they offered was to simply listen and provide space for the individual to express their feelings. This highlights a potential disconnect between their willingness to offer help and their reluctance to seek it for themselves and underscores the complex dynamics of personal well-being and the challenges individuals face when navigating their own emotional landscapes.

“Give that person the space to talk, without judgement or the need to rectify”

Survey respondent who keeps their feelings to themselves on how they would help someone else



Graph to show % of survey respondents and their answers

The majority of men who were open to discussing their feelings further elaborated on their preferred methods of coping. They expressed a strong inclination towards peer support mechanisms, such as listening to others, engaging in conversations, and discovering new perspectives.

However, an analysis of the responses revealed a noticeable disparity. There was a higher emphasis on peer support and directing individuals to professional services, compared to encouraging self-help strategies. The reason for this discrepancy wasn't entirely clear. It could be attributed to a lack of skills or confidence among the men to support each other in a more self-sufficient manner.



In focus groups involving the partners of men, several potential barriers to seeking mental health support were discussed. One of the primary reasons was denial. Some men found it challenging to identify or admit when they were experiencing poor mental health. This denial often served as a significant obstacle to seeking help.

Another concern was the uncertainty about where to seek help and when to do so. The process of initiating help-seeking can be daunting, and not knowing where to start often hindered men from reaching out for support.

Societal labels and stereotypes also played a role. The age-old adage "boys don't cry" and the fear of being perceived as weak often deterred men from expressing their vulnerabilities. They were also worried about the potential judgments they might face and what could be recorded in their personal records, especially work records.

Pride was another factor that could prevent men from seeking help. The desire to appear strong and self-reliant often led men to suppress their feelings and avoid seeking assistance.

Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) also posed unique challenges. Men with SEND or other communication needs might find it more difficult to express their feelings and seek help.

Lastly, the lack of access to social media was identified as a barrier, particularly for older men who might have reduced family support. In today's digital age, much of the mental health support is available online, and lack of access to these resources can limit the help-seeking options for these individuals.



In an effort to understand the support mechanisms men were currently using, we asked them to share their experiences. A total of 100 men responded to this question. Nearly a third of them highlighted the importance of family and friends in their support network. They often found open and honest conversations with their loved ones to be helpful. Socialising with them also served as a mood booster.

Statutory mental health support through the NHS was another resource that these men found beneficial. This included services such as counselling and talking therapies. Approximately 16% of the men mentioned these services as part of their support system.

Community groups and organisations also played a significant role in providing support. Just over 1 in 10 men mentioned groups such as Lads Den, Loaves and Fishes, Mandem Meetup, Salford Disability Forum, Talk About It Mate, We are Survivors, and faith groups. These organisations were seen as beneficial sources of support, offering a sense of community and shared understanding.

In the focus group involving partners of Salford men, we identified some common behaviours exhibited by men when experiencing low mood. These behaviours primarily fell into two categories: withdrawal and risky behaviour. Interestingly, partners reported that men could fluctuate between these two behavioral groups. When in a low mood, men were also reported to exhibit extreme emotions, such as obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) and anxiety, along with poor physical health, which manifested as either lack of sleep or excessive sleep.

We also found that a significant number of participants still perceived a stigma around mental health. This stigma, coupled with a lack of knowledge among men's peers, partners, and clinicians, long waiting lists, and a lack of flexible and locally based services, made accessing mental health services difficult. Participants highlighted that men's denial or lack of acknowledgement of their symptoms often hindered their ability to seek support.

Some participants reported that access to current services was heavily dependent on the type of work and social groups their partners (or they themselves) were involved in.

“My bloke works on a building site, so has no idea how to access support, but because I work in the NHS, I am aware of what is available.”

“My man's mates do talk about stuff, and one of them accessed a support group, so he'd encouraged the others to go.”

Focus group participants on access to current services

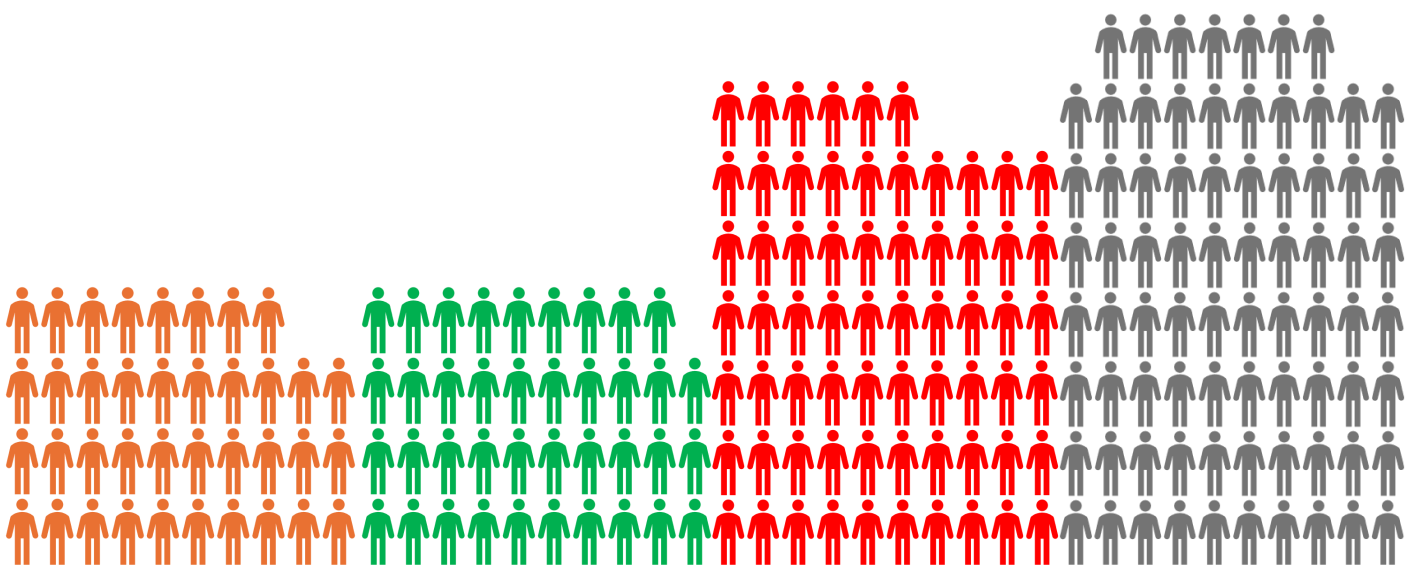
A high number of participants expressed feeling a great responsibility for the mental health of the men in their lives. As more men are encouraged to talk and seek help, they often look to their partners for guidance on this journey.



Is the system currently supportive?

While this project did not specifically measure men's experiences with existing support services, we sought to understand whether the current system was perceived as supportive. Surprisingly, around a third of the men surveyed did not feel supported at all. The reasons for this lack of support were multifaceted, with many citing barriers to accessing NHS support as a primary concern. Some participants felt that general practitioners (GPs) lacked understanding and were too quick to prescribe medications. Long waiting times for NHS mental health services as reported in the media were seen as another deterrent, and past negative experiences with engaging with NHS services further exacerbated the issue. A few men also questioned the role of the council in supporting men's mental health, as they were not aware of any such initiatives.

On the other hand, there were men who felt fully supported by the current system. These men shared examples of prompt service from the NHS, knowledgeable GPs who were aware of community services for referrals, and overall positive experiences with healthcare professionals. This dichotomy in experiences underscores the complexity of the issue and the need for a more universally supportive system.



38

Men felt some services were supportive, and some were not

39

Men felt fully supported

66

Men did not feel supported

77

Men were unsure whether they felt supported or not

How the men answered our question on whether the council, NHS and community/ voluntary groups, supported them to be mentally well

From the men's focus groups, it was found that the participants had varied experiences with support services. Half of the men had mixed sentiments with some services supportive and other services not. Just over a third felt fully supported, with one in ten feeling unsupported.

Retired individuals, despite living on a pension, find fulfillment in their daily activities and appreciate the community at groups like Salford Loaves and Fishes. They have been able to access medical services, but face challenges such as homelessness and difficulty accessing dental care, which exacerbate their health concerns and stress levels.

Their experiences with healthcare services are mixed. While they value their GP, securing a callback is challenging unless they call right at 8am. They find NHS support limited and short-term, particularly therapies like CBT. In contrast, community groups offer more consistent and continuous support.

Despite appreciating outreach efforts, they sometimes lack the confidence to engage and struggle with asking for help. They find making phone calls challenging and express a preference for face-to-face support. They express frustration at the lack of availability of other therapies, the impersonal nature of support, and the predominance of online support. They also highlight the lack of support for people trying to stop drinking.

They experience difficulties with making appointments, poor quality service, and a lack of face-to-face appointments at GP surgeries. However, they acknowledge some positive experiences, such as being referred to Bolton hospital and being signposted to different groups like Wellbeing Matters. They suggest that gateways could provide more access and that some community groups offer good support.

Insights from the focus group involving partners of men revealed that nearly half (45%) felt that the men were not adequately supported. This perception was largely dependent on whether their male partners admitted they needed help and if the partners themselves sought out available support. The consensus was that while support might be available, it's challenging to know of its existence unless one actively seeks it out.

For the majority of participants whose male partners had experienced poor mental health, they had managed to gain some knowledge of available services. This information was primarily obtained through various channels such as social media, voluntary organisations, friends, and occasionally from their general practitioners (GPs). This highlights the importance of these platforms in disseminating information about mental health support services.

“Sometimes the pressures of life can be out of our control. As a person who works full time, I can't receive help so have to muddle through on my own”

Survey respondent

What more can the system do to help men to stay mentally well?

As part of the original question posed to the commission about **‘what more can the system do to help men stay mentally well’**, we asked the men for their thoughts and ideas. 155 responses to this question provided further comments, which we grouped into the following 6 themes, summarised as follows:

Communication and raising awareness

The respondents suggested that support services should be better advertised with improved signposting procedures to ensure men understand what is available to them. They proposed promoting services through social media, local sports centres, churches, and other social outlets. They emphasised the need for more engagement with men from all backgrounds to reduce the stigma associated with mental health. They also highlighted the importance of promoting sports, games, and physical activity groups, as exercise was found to significantly contribute to mental wellness. The respondents also called for better support for individuals with learning difficulties or additional needs and stressed the importance of talking and having people listen to them. They expressed a desire for improved Mental Health Awareness training for staff and the community.

It was also suggested to ensure that communication was appropriate to the end user, making sure it was in a format and language easy to understand.

“Advertise the services they offer in a more proactive way rather than reactive, only seeming to work with you once you’ve reached a low mood and are already struggling”

Survey participant

From the mens focus group we learned that digital exclusion, particularly for older people, is a concern, with a preference for face-to-face interactions.

Participants express a need for more funding, a wider variety of therapy options, and better signposting to services.

From the staff survey we heard how the importance of creating men-specific services and fostering an environment that encourages open communication. Men often avoid asking for help, so it’s crucial to make it easier for them to access support through different channels. This can be achieved by advertising in places they frequent, such as pubs, bookies, and community libraries, and supporting small groups that assist them, like men’s sheds and allotments.

Better advertising and publicity around the services currently available can increase awareness.

Better proactive outreach programmes targeting men who avoid engaging in mental health or healthcare due to stigma can help reach those who need support.

Communication is key, and creating more groups can provide additional support. Offering more mental health sessions, such as ‘LADS only’ sessions or ‘Dad and daughter/lad’ sessions, can provide targeted support. Funding more Mental Health First Aid (MHFA) courses for people to attend outside of normal working hours can increase accessibility to mental health education, alternatively employers could also incentivise attendance during work time.

Partners of men also echoed the need to reduce mental health stigma, citing instances of dismissive attitudes like one individual being told to ‘pull himself together’ by a clinician. They noted the positive impact of public discussions of mental health by local and famous individuals. They stressed the need for GPs to have a broader understanding of available services, advocating for standardisation to ensure equal access. Lastly, they highlighted the importance of enabling men to recognise mental health issues, expressing concern about denial as a significant barrier.

Accessibility

The respondents called for increased accessibility of services, suggesting greater flexibility of services and the provision of drop-in sessions. They also advocated for shorter NHS waiting times and an emphasis on early intervention schemes to make the system more proactive. They stressed the importance of creating accessible and inclusive spaces for face-to-face interactions, social activities, and support networks.

Providers of services should be reminded that English rich resources are not only inaccessible for most users with a sensory impairment (d/Deaf, blind etc), but also for those whose first language isn't English or have a learning difference or disability.

“More drop in clinics or places people can go for free if required, to help people make the first move towards getting help”

Survey respondent

“Far too many men burn out with the pressures of life. It would be good if there was a safety net provided by a public body to help catch these men early and nip problems in the bud before they grow into bigger ones”

Survey respondent

From the staff survey they suggested making mental health services more accessible and ensuring male professionals are available to support men was crucial. Providing more access to peer support groups and funding groups already providing this kind of support, such as Talk About it Mate and Andy's Man Club, can enable them to expand.

Safe spaces for men to talk are essential, and inviting specialists to discuss issues can provide valuable insights.

“Provide more wellbeing based activities for men to attend. Provide easier access to counselling and talking therapy”

Staff survey respondent

Partners of men also emphasised the need for immediate, easy access to mental health services, and the integration of mental health discussions into daily life. They underscored the importance of visibility and accessibility of mental health resources, comparing it to the ease of seeking help for physical ailments. They also advocated for mental health education from a young age in schools and clubs, and continued support into old age, ensuring lifelong mental health support.

Funding

The respondents suggested empowering community groups to reach out to men within their communities by providing more funding. They noted that grant funding is often only provided for short periods, which doesn't allow groups to fully utilise the time to make a difference.

The feedback from men's focus groups suggests a desire for the council to invest more in community organisations rather than expensive housing. Participants believe that council tax should fund more projects that directly benefit the community.

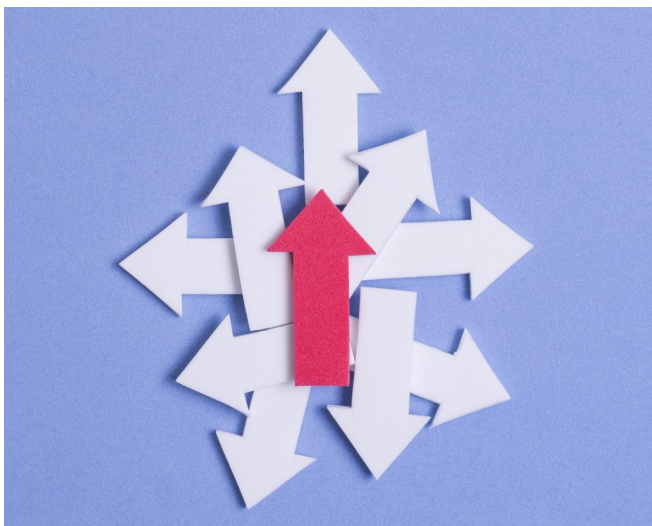
Staff told us how financial support is another critical area, especially for those struggling with the pressure to 'provide' or be a breadwinner. This pressure can take an extra toll on men's mental health. Assistance with self-care is particularly important for older men living alone who struggle with housekeeping, cleaning, feeding themselves, and overall wellbeing. This is quite common among older men who live alone, particularly widows or people who have lost someone.

Access to free exercise can also support their mental health.

“The charity and voluntary sector need more funding to allow additional support groups to start up and to flourish”

Survey respondent





Improving existing services

The respondents suggested that the NHS should address healthcare gaps, like the shortage of dentists, which can cause stress. They also called for minimizing the stress related to GP appointments, enhancing prescription processes, and avoiding sudden discharges from GP care. They expressed a desire to feel listened to and noted that services need to look for more long-term solutions rather than just quick fixes.

“The NHS could do more to refer people to support groups instead of prescribing medication for anxiety or depression.”

Survey respondent

The men in the focus group expressed a desire for several improvements in the NHS’s handling of mental health services. They called for better access to these services, more comprehensive training for receptionists, and a greater level of mental health awareness, empathy, and understanding among GPs. Additionally, they voiced a need for a simplified process for repeat prescriptions. The group also expressed concerns about the sudden discharges from GP care, indicating a need for a more patient-centred approach

Increasing opportunities

The respondents suggested exploring alternative therapeutic approaches for men who struggle with traditional talking therapies. They also called for organising diverse social events to foster community connections and ensuring equity of support at all levels by being innovative in approach. They suggested involving more male community members in the process when redesigning services.

“The council could provide more support to community organisations to deliver activities that attract male audiences to give them some respite from their problems and to engage them and encourage them to open up about their issues.”

Survey respondent

Men’s focus groups called for a more holistic approach to mental health, with some men finding interactive activities more beneficial than talking therapies. The lack of accessible dental care and the stress of securing GP appointments are seen as significant health threats.

There’s a call for more community groups and activities, including volunteering opportunities, youth clubs, sporting activities, and community spaces for conversation.

A good support service, according to participants, would offer no-pressure support in a relaxed, welcoming atmosphere. It would be accessible, provide follow-on services, and offer early support. They envision more youth clubs and organisations, and a space for younger men, like a ‘Lads Den’. They also emphasise the importance of understanding, good conversations, peer support, and sharing recovery journeys.

Staff suggested that men have previously expressed that they value people coming to them in their workplaces, with permission from employers, to carry out health and wellbeing activities. Therefore, targeting communications directly at men can increase engagement.

Encouraging men to talk to each other in safe spaces, such as Andy's Man's club or the Jamie Horrock's Trust groups, is essential.

Free counselling and therapies can provide much-needed support, and men's groups, sports, football, and social groups can offer social activities not revolving around drinking. Promoting a culture in existing groups and services that challenges the pressure to be strong and masculine and encourages an open environment where men can share their feelings is also vital.

Professionals can also be invited to encourage and support hobbies. Developing more sports programmes can provide an outlet for physical activity and camaraderie.

Providing more wellbeing-based activities for men to attend is another key point. This includes easier access to counselling and talking therapy. Encouraging more open and honest conversations, creating more support groups, and conducting presentations in the workplace can facilitate discussions and help men seek support. It's also beneficial to encourage men to take time for things they enjoy, such as hobbies, or even just relaxing for 30 minutes each day.

Partners of men expressed the need for mental health services to expand and adapt to cater to diverse needs. They advocated for an evaluation of existing services to identify effective ones for support and replication. They also highlighted the stress borne by partners and family members when a loved one is experiencing mental health issues, emphasising the importance of their access to support and knowledge about help-seeking avenues. This approach aids the individual dealing with mental health issues and provides support for their loved ones.

Other things

The survey respondents also highlighted the need to address the challenges faced by those on middle incomes and ensure they receive assistance. They also offered a range of suggestions that would require national government action, such as policy change and increased funding. These suggestions underscored the importance of financial support, awareness, accessibility, and community involvement in addressing men's mental health concerns.

Conclusion, responses and next steps



In conclusion, the project has provided valuable insights into the stressors affecting men in Salford and their coping mechanisms. It has highlighted the importance of work-life balance, physical activities, and access to information as key factors in managing stress. The project has also identified areas where improvements are needed, such as the provision of support mechanisms for those struggling with work-life balance, the funding and integration of community groups, and the referral process. Furthermore, it has underscored the need for support for the partners of these men. Based on these findings, the commission is now in a position to make informed recommendations for improving the support system for men in Salford. The next steps will involve implementing these recommendations and monitoring their impact on the wellbeing of men in Salford.

This report alongside recommendations has been shared with senior leaders and commissioners across the city and we are pleased to share their initial responses and pledges towards making Salford a better place for men to live in:

Salford City Council

This is an excellent and valuable report, not just in terms of the recommendations and outputs but in its design; the co-design has really ensured that the voice of men and their partners is clear and loud. This report provides us with rich information and ideas about how we can all work together to support men to maintain good mental health and to improve how men can get support when they are finding life difficult.

Judd Skelton
Director of Adult Commissioning

Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust

Greater Manchester Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust (GMMH) welcomes this report with regards to men's mental health, in particular the suggestions that men themselves have made in terms of things that will help improve their mental well being. This approach is in line with our trust values of co-design and co-delivery of services with local people with lived experience. As such, we pledge to commit to the following actions in line with the recommendations made.

Claire Watson
Head of Service User Carer Experience and Improvement

Salford CVS

Salford CVS welcomes this report as providing valuable insights into the mental health of men in Salford and their experience of services and wider support. In particular, the areas identified for improvement will help guide our work as we look to improve our services for Salford's VCSE sector. The high regard in which consultees hold the services and activities provided by the VCSE sector, came across very strongly. Salford CVS is in a good position to support men's mental health through VCSE grants, the Wellbeing Matters programme and promotion of volunteering opportunities.

Simon Robinson
Grants Manager

START

START welcome the report by the commission to help better understand how we can contribute to the improvement of men's mental health, and we endeavor to utilise the findings to develop more appropriate offers in the future.

Michelle Dennett
Chief Executive Officer

When reviewing our recommendations, we asked the organisations to make pledges towards addressing these indicating whether they felt they would be achievable in the **short term** (now to 6 months time), **medium term** (6 months to 2 years time) or **long term** (after 2 years).

Communication and raising awareness

1. Communication plan:

- Develop a plan to raise mental health awareness, involving community influencers, faith leaders, clinicians, and trusted leaders. This could include creating short videos in different community languages to debunk myths about mental health and helping others to recognise the signs of mental unwellness.
- Utilise community champions to promote mental health. These champions, who have personal experience with mental health challenges, can serve as relatable role models and facilitate open discussions about mental health.
- Make all communications accessible to a wide range of men, including those whose first language is not English. Use more visual images in promotional materials to overcome language barriers.
- Establish a comprehensive directory of services in Salford that can support men which is readily available with up-to-date information for men to access as well as a useful referral tool for GP's and other professionals to signpost men to. This could be potentially hosted through an existing service.

Salford City Council: Support from Council to develop a comms plan and ensure there are links to the Partners in Salford mental health web pages and the My City Directory.

Pledge goal—short term

GMMH: Target communication about the GMMH Recovery Academy offer with particular reference to resources for key themes identified i.e. suicide prevention, sleep hygiene and trauma informed/compassionate care. Working with Walkden Muslim community and Lingua to coproduce a short video to provide information about mental health and support available in different languages.

Pledge goal—medium term

Target communications about alternative activities led by our peer workforce such as well being walks across men's mental health groups.

Pledge goal—short term

Salford CVS: Work with wider partners to help implement any men's mental health communication plan.

Pledge goal—medium term

2. Alternatives to alcohol:

- Develop a campaign that promotes alternatives to alcohol consumption across Salford. The aim is to encourage healthier lifestyle choices by showcasing the variety of non-alcohol-related experiences the city has to offer.

Salford City Council: Support from Council to develop campaigns and awareness raising.

Pledge goal—short term

GMMH: Promote the Next Steps Pathfinder drop in's for people to get honest relatable advice to change people's relationship with alcohol. Also open to partners/carers/family members. Promote Breaking Free online offer amongst men's groups and well being providers. Target communications about alternative activities led by our peer workforce such as well being walks across men's mental health groups.

Pledge goal—short term

Connect the peer workers from Next Steps Salford with other men's groups to co-produce plans for alternatives to alcohol and work together with VCSE, Living Well to ensure a comprehensive offer that doesn't duplicate/create gaps.

Pledge goal—medium term

3. Awareness Events:

Organise awareness raising events aimed at men to help promote local community groups in Salford that would enable men to take a self-help approach in looking after their own mental wellbeing .

GMMH: Organize an event led by Next Steps Salford to showcase and highlight men's well being and support in Salford.

Pledge goal—medium term

Accessibility

4. Marginalised Communities:

- Mental health services should encourage more participation from men in marginalised communities by forging better links with these community groups.

Salford City Council: The transformation of Community Mental Health services will take into account the needs of reaching men from marginalized communities.

Pledge goal—medium term

GMMH: Set up Next Step Salford well being drop in's on the west side of Salford. Working with Walkden Muslim community and Lingua to coproduce a short video to provide information about mental health and support available in different languages.

Pledge goal—medium term

5. **Access to Gym, Sports, green and blue spaces:**

- Improve access to leisure facilities for men with low disposable income or those who face location and transport issues.
- Provide more support for physically disabled men to engage in physical activities that can improve their mental wellbeing.

Salford City Council: Work with Salford Community Leisure to explore opportunities to engage with men at key times of the year e.g. Men's Health Week.

Pledge goal—medium term

6. **Evening Activities:**

- Create more opportunities for evening and weekend activities for men, either through the creation of new services or support the expansion of existing men's groups and events.

Salford City Council: Create a budget for Salford CVS to award grants for VCSE organisations to improve men's mental health in line with key priorities in this report. It would be good to work with the men and organisations who contributed to the report to identify key areas/priorities that they would like to see develop through this process.

Pledge goal—short term

Salford CVS: Encourage grant applicants to consider evening and weekend activities for their beneficiaries.

Pledge goal—short to medium term

7. **Resource Pool:**

- Create a pool of resources for existing community groups to utilise and make their services more inclusive. This could include access to interpreters, web designers, and easy-read proofreaders.

Salford City Council: Create a budget for Salford CVS to award grants for VCSE organisations to improve men's mental health in line with key priorities in this report. It would be good to work with the men and organisations who contributed to the report to identify key areas/priorities that they would like to see develop through this process.

Pledge goal—short term

Funding

8. Increased Funding for Mental Health Services:

- The council should support calls for the national government to increase funding for NHS mental health services, with the long-term aim of reducing the disparity between physical and mental health.

9. Long-Term Grant Funding:

- Discussions should take place to establish a more sustainable model for local grant funding, including the support that can be offered to VCSE groups empowering grantees to strategise and plan for long-term success more effectively

Salford City Council: Create a budget for Salford CVS to award grants for VCSE organisations to improve men’s mental health in line with key priorities in this report. It would be good to work with the men and organisations who contributed to the report to identify key areas/priorities that they would like to see develop through this process.

Pledge goal—short term

Salford CVS: Strive to secure longer-term funding agreements from commissioners to provide the VCSE sector with greater certainty of the availability of grant funding from year to year.

Pledge goal—medium term

10. User-Friendly Grant Processes:

- Simplify the processes for bidding for grant funding and reporting on outcomes, making them more user-friendly and encouraging uptake.
- Create a peer support network of people who have successful grant bidding experience, and can mentor other local groups.

Salford City Council: Create a budget for Salford CVS to award grants for VCSE organisations to improve men’s mental health in line with key priorities in this report. It would be good to work with the men and organisations who contributed to the report to identify key areas/priorities that they would like to see develop through this process.

Pledge goal—short term

Salford CVS: As part of Salford CVS’ continual improvement of the grants programme, look to streamline processes to improve the ‘user-friendliness’ of applying and reporting.

Pledge goal—medium term

Improving existing services

11. Reducing the impact of Waiting Times:

- Fostering collaboration with local groups to provide pre-therapy support for men awaiting NHS interventions.
- Promote local groups that work with men, providing safe spaces for open communication about feelings and reducing mental health stigma.
- Counselling services should be adapted to be more accommodating to men. This can be achieved by increasing consultations with men's groups and ensuring the option of male therapists.

Salford City Council: Work with Talking Therapy and Living Well services to explore different approaches to meeting men's mental health needs.

Pledge goal—medium term

GMMH: Promote Breaking Free online offer amongst men's groups and well being providers.

Pledge goal—short term

12. Accreditation Scheme for Positive Mental Wellbeing:

- Salford should consider introducing an accreditation scheme for positive Mental Wellbeing to celebrate best practices and raise awareness of mental wellbeing from local organisations in the public, private, and voluntary sectors.

Salford City Council: Work with partners to explore a positive wellbeing accreditation possibly building on Start's Hear to Hear campaign.

Pledge goal—medium term

START: Accreditation Scheme for Positive Mental Wellbeing: START pledge to seek necessary funding to establish a Salford Mental Health & Wellbeing charter mark that celebrates, educates, and empowers organisations across Salford to prioritise mental health and foster a supportive community. This program will build on the foundations laid by the 'Everyday Mental Health Hero' initiative, aiming to make Salford a leader in mental wellbeing practices.

Pledge goal—medium term

Increasing opportunities

13. Nature Engagement:

- Increase opportunities for men to engage with nature, particularly through the use of existing nature spaces such as Chat Moss in Irlam and Cadishead and use local men with expertise in relevant areas to deliver sessional work.
- Introduce more niche activities like bushcraft and camping in natural environments, along with fishing and other hobby related activities

Salford City Council: Review and explore current commissioned approaches around Blue & Green nature based opportunities to improve mental wellbeing.

Pledge goal—medium term

GMMH: Target communications about alternative activities led by our peer workforce such as well being walks across men's mental health groups.

Pledge goal—short term

START: Nature Engagement: START pledge to introduce hobby related activities into our Inspiring Minds timetable.

Pledge goal—medium term

14. Increase support for partners of men:

- Enhance support service for the partners of men; providing access to the right information and support at the right time, improving outcomes for their own mental health

Salford City Council: Explore how the partners of men with mental health needs could be identified as a theme in the Salford Carers Strategy and subsequent work.

Pledge goal—medium term

GMMH: Promote the Next Steps Pathfinder drop in's for people to get honest relatable advice to change people's relationship with alcohol. Also open to partners/carers/family members.

Pledge goal—short term

15. Workshops on Compassionate Conversations:

- Conduct workshops across the city on compassionate conversations and empathetic listening, creating safer spaces for men to share their feelings without the pressure of unsolicited advice or judgement.

Salford City Council: Develop training opportunities to improve the knowledge and understanding of how to respond to men experiencing mental health difficulties, linked to the suicide prevention work.

Pledge goal—medium term

GMMH: Target communication about the GMMH Recovery Academy offer with particular reference to resources for key themes identified i.e. suicide prevention, sleep hygiene and trauma informed/compassionate care.

Pledge goal—medium term

15. Consultation with Existing Groups to create support:

- Consult and recognise leaders of existing grass roots men's groups in Salford, such as those mentioned in this report and others across Salford when looking to design or improve services.
- Provide more support for community groups to deliver a wide range of activities in Salford, aimed at improving the physical and mental well-being of men.

Salford City Council: Continue to build on the work undertaken and maintain momentum around the engagement of key groups who have contributed to this report.

Pledge goal—medium term

GMMH: Connect the peer workers from Next Steps Salford with other men's groups to co-produce plans for alternatives to alcohol and work together with VCSE, Living Well to ensure a comprehensive offer that doesn't duplicate/create gaps.

Pledge goal—medium term

17. Sleep Interventions:

- Develop strategies aimed at promoting relaxation and improving sleep quality. These will be particularly beneficial for individuals with demanding schedules due to work or study.

Salford City Council: Consider how current approaches and interventions available to help people better manage sleep (e.g the Health Improvement Service, Silvercloud etc) are being targeted at men.

Pledge goal—medium term

GMMH: Target communication about the GMMH Recovery Academy offer with particular reference to resources for key themes identified i.e. suicide prevention, sleep hygiene and trauma informed/compassionate care.

Pledge goal—short term

Future proofing

18. Mental Wellness in New Developments:

- Ensure that new developments must consider mental wellness and suicide prevention. This includes access to daylight, street lighting, green and blue open spaces, and building design. High incidence suicide locations, such as railways, high buildings, and bridges, should be designed to reduce risk.

Salford City Council: Men will be a key priority in our forthcoming Greater Manchester Suicide Prevention Strategy and in turn in our Salford Suicide Prevention action plan.

Pledge goal—medium term

19. Council's Focus on Mental Health:

- The council should place mental health and wellbeing at the centre of its activities. As a first step, the council should consider signing up to the 'Prevention Concordant for Better Mental Health' and consider the impact of its wider policy and investment decisions on mental health and wellbeing.

Salford City Council: Salford City Council is signed up to the Prevention Concordat for Better Mental Health via the Greater Manchester Health & Social Care Partnership being a signatory. We can explore the added benefit of signing up as a stand alone council.

Pledge goal—short term

20. Use evidence from this report to enhance the efforts of the committees and collaborations focused around mental health.

- Committees and collaborations focused around mental health in Salford should take into consideration the recommendations and evidence presented in this report that directly align with their goals. In the development of their action plans, they should boldly prioritise the perspectives of local residents and the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector. This approach will ensure that their strategies are rooted in the needs and experiences of the communities they serve

Salford City Council: Socialise the report amongst key strategic groups, boards and committees in Salford. The work will sit under the Salford Suicide Prevention Partnership which is a sub group the Salford All Age Mental Health Board.

Pledge goal—short term

Next steps

Moving forward, the commission will undertake a comprehensive evaluation of the progress made in implementing the recommendations over the next 12 months. This evaluation will focus on identifying and acknowledging those services that have utilised the insights from this report to enhance their support for men in Salford. The aim is to recognise excellence and encourage other services to follow suit. The findings of this evaluation will be instrumental in shaping future strategies and initiatives aimed at improving men's mental wellbeing in Salford.

The commission welcomes other organisations in Salford to contribute their own pledges to the recommendations contained within this report. In the first instance, please make contact with Mark Lupton, project lead at Healthwatch Salford: mark@healthwatchsalford.co.uk

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