

WAVERLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL

COMMUNITY WELLBEING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

20 NOVEMBER 2018

Title:

BRIEFING ON LONELINESS AND SOCIAL ISOLATION SEMINAR

[Portfolio Holder: Cllr Jenny Else]

[Wards Affected: All]

Summary and purpose:

This note summarises some of the discussion from the seminar held on 24 October 2018 'Tackling isolation and loneliness in the UK: improving wellbeing and social inclusion at all ages' by Public Policy Exchange attended by Cllr Wheatley, Vice Chair of this committee, and Yasmine Makin, Policy Officer for Scrutiny.

How this report relates to the Council's Corporate Priorities:

This report relates to the Council's 'People' priority as loneliness affects the health and wellbeing of Waverley residents.

Equality and Diversity Implications:

There are no direct equality and diversity implications of this report and, as explained in the document, although anyone can be affected by loneliness, there are certain demographic groups more likely to be affected than others.

Financial Implications:

No direct financial implications from this report.

Legal Implications:

There are no legal implications arising from this report.

1. Background

On Wednesday 24 October the 'Tackling isolation and loneliness in the UK: improving wellbeing and social inclusion at all ages' seminar took place and was attended by representatives from charities, local authorities and health organisations from across the UK. The speakers from the seminar are listed overleaf:

Dr Keming Yang, Durham University
Tracey Crouch, Minister for Loneliness*
Janet Morrison, Independent Age
Richard Kramer, Sense
Vinal K Karania, Age UK

Steve Robinson, The Prama Group of Charities
Annabel Collins, Ageing Better in Camden
Dr Royce Turner, University of Derby

2. A connected society: a strategy for tackling loneliness

In October 2018 the Prime Minister announced the launch of the cross-government 'Loneliness Strategy'. Citing loneliness as one of the greatest public health challenges of our time, the strategy consists of measures including loneliness as part of the curriculum for primary and secondary schools, and enabling GPs to refer patients experiencing loneliness to community activities and voluntary services by 2023 (social prescribing).

3. What is loneliness?

Loneliness is an involuntary feeling caused by a discrepancy between the quality of actual and desired contacts and relationships¹. A person may be lonely despite having lots of social contact and, conversely, a person may be socially isolated without being lonely. Being lonely has been likened to feeling hungry, with the equivalent of eating being meaningful connections².

Intensity, frequency and duration are three properties of loneliness³ that are useful when describing the type of loneliness a person is feeling and considering how it can be tackled. For example, if someone is chronically lonely they may need intense one to one support in order to feel able to make use of the social opportunities available to them. If someone is suffering from low levels of loneliness quite frequently they may feel more able to take advantage of any community or social activities available to them.

4. Who is lonely?

Loneliness does not discriminate and anyone can feel lonely. There are certain risk groups, however, with those going through life changes and transitions most likely to feel lonely. Janet Morrison lists the below life milestones during which people are most at risk of loneliness⁴.

Going to/leaving university
Becoming a mother
Long term unemployment
Onset of illness or disability
Divorce

Retirement
Moving house or into care
Becoming or stopping being a carer
Bereavement

The seminar included a presentation from the CEO of Sense, Richard Kramer, who told the group that loneliness is something that can disproportionately affect people with disabilities. According to [Sense](#), half of disabled people say they are lonely with one in four feeling lonely every day.

¹ Dr Andrea Wingfield and Dr Royce Turner, Developing a framework of meaningful interaction for understanding the nature and experience of social isolation and loneliness in later life, 24th October 2018.

² Janet Morrison, Staying connected throughout life, 24th October 2018.

³ Dr Keming Yang, Tackling Loneliness and Isolation in the UK: Improving Wellbeing and Social Inclusion at all ages, University of Durham, 24th October 2018

⁴ *Ibid*

*at time of seminar

There remains a stigma around being lonely which makes identification of those suffering difficult for organisations in a position to offer support. The above listed triggers, however, can help service providers predict those most at risk and focus resources. [Loneliness heat-maps](#) by Age UK provide a high level indication of the areas most at risk of loneliness by ward.

5. How to tackle loneliness

For those who are lonely because they lack accessible opportunities to make meaningful connections, supply of transport and other provisions aimed at increasing the quantity of contacts could be a simple way to address their loneliness. It is recognised, however, that this will not address all of the causes of loneliness and some people will need more intense support, depending on the characteristics of their loneliness.

Organisations aiming to tackle loneliness have set up various initiatives and schemes across the country including befriending/buddying programmes, classes (e.g. cooking, crafts etc) and trips. Many of the most successful initiatives to tackle loneliness can be described as community based/organised and locally run. Not only is this an effective way to ensure the initiatives meet local needs, it is also necessary given the challenging financial landscape and scarcity of resources.

6. Loneliness in Waverley

Given the demographics of Waverley's population, loneliness is something that could particularly affect our residents. There are dozens of initiatives and clubs in the borough either aimed directly at tackling loneliness or whose activities contribute to reducing any loneliness of its members/users.

The Committee received a presentation from Natalie Gordon from Surrey County Council (SCC) in [June 2018](#) during which Natalie told the Committee about the work SCC is doing around the issue of loneliness and some of the local initiatives and clubs already running or being set up.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Committee notes the information in this document as background to the presentation on loneliness following this item.

Background Papers

There are no background papers (as defined by Section 100D(5) of the Local Government Act 1972) relating to this report.

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