

Decision Maker:	ADULT CARE AND HEALTH POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE		
Date:	29 June 2021		
Decision Type:	Non-Urgent	Non-Executive	Non-Key
Title:	Responding to Loneliness and Social Isolation		
Contact Officer:	Naheed Chaudhry, Assistant Director Strategy, Performance and Corporate Transformation		
Chief Officer:	Kim Carey, Interim Director Adult Social Care		
Ward:	N/A		

1. Summary

In 2019 the Council made a commitment to mitigate loneliness and social isolation. Recognising this as a 'whole system' issue, the Council hosted a summit for partners to reflect on the risk of 'all age' loneliness. We focused our discussions on new/first time parents, young people leaving the care system and older people. The summit facilitated a conversation to raise awareness of loneliness and reduce the stigma of social isolation. The summit celebrated considerable multi agency attendance with positive evaluations and feedback.

Building on this momentum, the Council jointly with the Bromley Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) published an 'Ageing Well in Bromley' Strategy which identified the mitigation of loneliness as its first priority.

The pandemic and subsequent lock downs have exacerbated the risk of loneliness for all residents and especially those most vulnerable. The Council has continued to focus on the loneliness agenda in partnership with the voluntary and community sector. Cllr Cuthbert, EA to the Leader, Cllr Colin Smith is the lead member on this project supporting both the Council and voluntary's sector's work to tackle loneliness. This report provides a summary of progress made to date and some of our intended next steps.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to note the progress made in responding to the loneliness and social isolation policy agenda.

Health & Wellbeing Strategy

1. Related priority: Diabetes Hypertension Obesity Anxiety and Depression Children with Complex Needs and Disabilities Children with Mental and Emotional Health Problems Children Referred to Children's Social Care Dementia Supporting Carers

Financial

1. Cost of proposal: Not Applicable:
 2. Ongoing costs: Not Applicable:
 3. Total savings: Not Applicable:
 4. Budget host organisation: Not Applicable
 5. Source of funding: Not Applicable
 6. Beneficiary/beneficiaries of any savings: Not Applicable
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Supporting Public Health Outcome Indicator(s)

Yes

3. COMMENTARY

- 3.1. What is Loneliness and Social Isolation?**
- 3.2. Loneliness is defined nationally as “*a subjective, unwelcome feeling of lack or loss of companionship. It happens when we have a mismatch between the quantity and quality of social relationships that we have, and those that we want*”. Loneliness is, therefore, a personal experience and can mean different things to different people.
- 3.3. Loneliness is often used interchangeably with isolation, but while they are linked and can often overlap, they are not the same. It is possible to be isolated without feeling lonely and conversely to feel lonely while surrounded by people.
- 3.4. Loneliness and social isolation can affect anyone at any time. During the pandemic and the national lock downs the Council has been working hard with partners to ensure that our residents especially those most vulnerable were offered support to mitigate the risk of loneliness. Activities delivered by the Council's COVID-19 Shielding, Volunteering and Assistance Programme are presented in this report alongside other activity which contributed to ensuring our residents remained connected.

3.5. Strategic priority delivery update

- 3.6. In 2019 the Council made a commitment to mitigate loneliness and social isolation. Recognising this needed a ‘whole system’ response from all local agencies, the Council hosted a summit. Reflecting on the risk of ‘all age’ loneliness and giving particular focus to the risk of loneliness for new mums, carer leavers and older people. The summit aimed to facilitate a conversation to raise awareness and reduce the stigma. The Council and partners have since the summit continued to work to mitigate loneliness for residents.
- 3.7. Building on the momentum of the summit, the Council jointly with the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) published an ‘Ageing Well in Bromley’ Strategy (September 2019). Following extensive engagement and co-production with the community this strategy identified the mitigation of loneliness as its first priority; to

“Ensure that individuals can remain connected to their community, focusing on individuals having the right information to access opportunities and make choices which impact positively on their wellbeing.”

The delivery of this priority would lead to the following outcome **“I socialise, participate and make my own choices”**.

- 3.8. As a result, the following “we will” statements were identified.
 - ✓ We will...Continue to develop opportunities that enable people to maintain a sense of purpose in the community.
 - ✓ We will... Ensure that people can access information, advice, and services, encouraging and enabling people from all walks of life to play a more active part in society.
 - ✓ We will... Enable the voluntary and community sector to offer people competitive high-quality services, promoting independence and self-management.
 - ✓ We will... Encourage social inclusion for both younger and older people providing opportunities for people to come together across the generations.

- 3.9. We recognise this as a serious issue that cannot be addressed by single agencies alone, instead this is about delivering towards this agenda in partnership with the voluntary, community, faith sector, health and education, and early years providers.
- 3.10. During the pandemic we have continued to focus on the loneliness and social isolation agenda, in 2020 Loneliness Awareness Week we hosted a ‘Tackling Loneliness’ virtual event. We invited several organisations to speak about the progress around tackling loneliness across the borough one year after our summit.
- 3.11. The following key actions have been delivered against mitigate loneliness.
- 3.12. We will...Continue to develop opportunities that enable people to maintain a sense of purpose in the community**
- 3.13. The Council established a “Covid-19 Shielding, Volunteering and Assistance Programme” as an immediate response to the pandemic and lockdown. 140+ Council employees volunteered to manage its delivery (approx. 40 FTEs). A borough wide leaflet was distributed for all residents promoting the assistance line, with an introduction from the Leader.
- 3.14. The assistance line was open for any resident wanting help to access shopping, someone to talk to, someone to collect medicines or to undertake dog walking – 3600 calls were taken. A food distribution hub was rapidly mobilised at the Civic Centre to ensure all Clinically Extremely Vulnerable residents were supported to access food –over 250 families were supported through food parcels from the hub with volunteers undertaking deliveries across the borough.
- 3.15. A press release called for volunteers to register their support to the Councils programme - 1500 applications were received in the first 24 hours and over 4600 volunteers were recruited during the pandemic. A Volunteer Hub was set up through Community Links Bromley (CLB) to match volunteers to residents. Over 1300 volunteers were matched to 1950 clients. A volunteering e-newsletter were created and published throughout the year, focusing on ‘looking out for’ lonely or isolated neighbours.
- 3.16. In June 2021 in appreciation for this strong sense of community the Leader of the Council, Deputy Mayor of Bromley and the Portfolio Holder hosted an online ‘thank you event’ for volunteers and clients. We also used as a Volunteer Recruitment Event to transition volunteers into voluntary sector befriending roles.
- 3.17. Moving forward we will work with Community Links Bromley the umbrella organisation commissioned by the Council to enable Volunteering in Bromley to follow up with these residents maximising their long-term volunteering and befriending impact beyond the pandemic. Community Links are developing a Volunteering Strategy, committing to support their members to recruit volunteers that amongst many things, will embrace the loneliness agenda.
- 3.18. During the pandemic we were also mindful that our own staff were at risk of isolation too, working from home and away for the normal office environment. We mitigated this risk for our own staff by delivering a wide-ranging programme including, ‘Telephone check in and chat’, Mindfulness workshops, online exercise classes and online lunchtime skills workshops.
- 3.19. We will... Ensure that people can access information, advice, and services, encouraging and enabling people from all walks of life to play a more active part in society**
- 3.20. During the lock down we sent letters to shielding households to outline support available through volunteers, including befrienders - 21% of assistance requests to the Council were for a befriending volunteer. A Befriending social media campaign was launched #helpingbromley. A leaflet to support mental and physical health was also distributed, primarily for shielding

residents with tips on how to stay connected to their community, this was published online and distributed alongside food parcels.

- 3.21. Moving forward we have provided training to our Customer Services operatives ensuring that a ‘triage process’ will allow them to signpost residents to befriending support, and officers are in the process of transitioning the Covid Assistance Line into our Customer Services.
- 3.22. Community Links Bromley continue to update the information, advice, and guidance they provide to organisations and residents wanting to get involved in the local community. The Council also update and publish (a paper and online) annually a [**Guide to Independent Living**](#). The guide provides essential information to help people stay as healthy, independent, and safe as possible in their own homes. The guide aims to help our residents make informed decisions about receiving the right care in the right place at the right time.
- 3.23. Since publishing the Ageing Well Strategy the Bromley Dementia Action Alliance has been working hard towards Bromley becoming a dementia friendly community by promoting awareness and the understanding of dementia. We are proud that the Council and 65 other agencies have now signed up to the National Dementia Declaration submitting an action plan setting out how they are working towards helping to make Bromley a more dementia friendly community.
- 3.24. We updated all known befriending opportunities online and promoted them through the [**Councils E-newsletters**](#). We also reviewed and expanded the [**Calendar of Resident Events**](#) on the Councils website.
- 3.25. During the autumn of 2021 we are planning to co-design a tackling loneliness strategy in partnership with the voluntary sector. The strategy will outline how the London Borough of Bromley will take the lead on tackling loneliness in partnership with the voluntary sector. The strategy will outline how we will utilise resources we already have, coupled with additional resources we may need to achieve our aims to ensure that residents who feel isolated or lonely are able to access the support they need.
- 3.26. We are planning to host a second Summit to ensure the issue to loneliness remains on the top of our agenda. We will take the opportunity to promote all the good work that has been done before, during and after the pandemic to mitigate loneliness as well as plan which will be outlined in the strategy. We want to galvanise on the strong sense of community we have been so proud to support. We will look to develop a multi-agency pledge in which all organisations and individuals will commit to further mitigating loneliness.
- 3.27. We will... Enable the voluntary and community sector to offer people competitive high-quality services, promoting independence and self-management**
- 3.28. Commissioners have begun the recommissioning of the Council and CCG’s Primary and Secondary Intervention Service know as Bromley Well. This is a specific service to help people navigate ‘the system’, essentially known as our single point of access and Bromley’s Primary and Secondary Intervention Service. Bromley Well provides help and support to older people, those with learning disabilities, long term conditions, physical disabilities and mental health conditions and carers to stay emotionally and physically well and to remain independent. Commissioners are looking to co-design an improved Bromley Well service specification, this service will include loneliness and social isolation as a common thread for example, instead of identifying specific individual loneliness activities, providers will be expected to ensure they have addressed loneliness through all activities being delivered. Associated performance metrics will be incorporated into contracts to measure the impact of services on the wellbeing of residents.

- 3.29. The existing Bromley Well Contract has continued, despite the pandemic, to deliver alternative services to alleviate isolation and loneliness. There have been health and wellbeing workshops and support groups across all the different client pathways for example, quizzes have been held via a Facebook group (learning disability pathway) and Zoom drop ins have been available (physical disability). One Bromley Well member organisation has also invested in IT Hardware to support clients to access their services remotely.
- 3.30. During the pandemic Community Links coordinated the allocation of small Covid 19 grant funds, to aid the delivery of alternative day opportunities. Other loneliness's mitigation work has also continued, one of the aims of our summit was to get groups working together different, most recently Community Links have brought together a group of sports organisations to bid to the London Sport Addressing Youth Isolation Fund, the bid submitted by the Crystal Palace Community Trust was successfully awarded £11,700 to work with young people.
- 3.31. The Council is working with local voluntary agencies on a project to rethink older people's day care services in order to broaden the offer of day activities for adults and to increase community based activities and online activities learning from the alternative services that were put in place during lockdown.
- 3.32. The new provision for Learning Disability day services for residents with less complex needs began rolling out in May 2021 with seven providers working with the Council on delivering a wide-ranging programme of day activities from vocational focused training events to tea dances.
- 3.33. In August 2021 the Council's new domiciliary care contract will begin with the new specification requiring providers to support those they care for in addressing loneliness and isolation. There are two KPIs to support this aim. Similar requirements are weaved into other new services the Council have commissioned for example the new Vibrance (Direct Payment, Payroll and Support) contract which has introduced Innovative Support Planning. Vibrance are required to demonstrate how they support people to access community, social and leisure activities. The Innovative Support Plan will identify service options for people who expressed the need for activities outside the normal day care services, which also supports the use of Direct Payments.
- 3.34. Encourage social inclusion for both younger and older people providing opportunities for people to come together across generations**
- 3.35. During Loneliness week (June 2021) we promoted how to receive support and where to volunteer to provide support. We included 'Top Tips' in an email newsletter and published a news release asking residents to 'look out for your neighbours'. A social media campaign was delivered jointly with One Bromley.
- 3.36. We also have plans afoot to deliver events to support 'Silver Sunday' the national day for older people (3rd October 2021) and events targeted at new parents, disabled people and children and young people, including care leavers. As per our approach to the Loneliness Summit in 2019, we will maximise as many 'intergenerational' opportunities as possible.
- 3.37. Our Libraries acted thoughtfully during the pandemic moving many services online including coffee mornings, training and exhibitions enabling our residents to continue to meet others albeit safely online.
- 3.38. Loneliness can sometimes wrongly be understood as an 'older persons' issue. In Bromley, we recognise it as something that can affect anyone at any time. Through our children's services Bromley has well-established and mature early help arrangements in place which make a difference to children and families.
- 3.39. We believe that our continued investment in our early intervention and family support services is critical to successfully diverting children away from statutory intervention. As we refresh our

children's early help strategy, we will include loneliness as a key priority. During the lock down we ensured that although children and families centres physically closed, all six provided support through a helpline responding to telephone and email enquiries, providing advice and guidance on parenting, housing, and signposting to a range of other services.

- 3.40. We responded proactively to the needs of our families and remained flexible, we developed new services during Covid including daily online activities, workshops utilising social media and online forums. With a view to keeping in contact with our families the Bromley Children Project launched a 'Facebook' and 'Instagram' presence during 2019/20. During the pandemic our Facebook followers grew from 252 in Sept 2019 to over 900 by July 2020, our content includes story-time, singing and craft videos. Some of these have been viewed over 4,000 times. We continue to receive positive feedback and engagement, including special requests. For example, one of our 18-month old toddlers requested a 'Baby Shark' video which we filmed and posted!
- 3.41. We opened our centres and enabled visits for pre-booked appointments with Health Visitors for families with premature babies or babies who are failing to thrive, Mental health appointments; Peri-natal nurses, Hidden Harm Worker appointments and CSC Parenting Capacity Assessments. In addition to this we have enabled sessions to run for our children looked after and those leaving care, our LinCC representatives, our children known to the Children with Disabilities team, and our children with Autistic Spectrum Conditions who are supported by CASPA a local children's charity. The Centres have also been used to support social workers and our own Family Support and Parenting Practitioners to meet safely with families so that assessments could continue in a child friendly environment, we also enabled ASYE Group Supervision sessions weekly and Learn and Play for targeted families.
- 3.42. During the pandemic we developed a range of webinar-based parenting courses and seminars in anticipation of a second wave. including 'Preparing your Child to return to School' sessions via WebEx, feedback was positive. One parent said "*it was really good, I felt confident in helping my kids returning to school, and they were reassuring, gave good tips and strategies for talking to my kids and help them return to school and they were happy to talk to me about my worries since lockdown and how I was feeling and my relationship, you know mother and child, they were reassuring and if it was a score of 1-10, it was 10+*".
- 3.43. Moving forward a Volunteer Task Force established in April 2021 has been set up to identify future approaches for utilising volunteers in Bromley after the COVID-19 Pandemic. One idea being explored is for the Council to develop a new Volunteering Policy this will allow staff to volunteer within their communities, some of our partners have already expressed their interest in adopting such a Policy within their own organisations. Another idea includes working with CLB and the Voluntary and Community Sector to expand the use of the Simply Connect online Tool for the advertising and registration of volunteers that have time and skills to commit. We will be coming back to the PDS in the autumn to discuss a co-designed 'tackling loneliness strategy' which will set out our ambitious goals to tackle loneliness across Bromley.

4. IMPACT ON VULNERABLE PEOPLE AND CHILDREN

- 4.1 Vulnerable people and children are more likely to experience worse outcomes in their physical health, wellbeing, and behaviour when they are affected by loneliness and social isolation. By raising awareness of the potential impact on individuals and enabling those to participate more fully in their community such outcomes can be reduced.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable.

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable.