

Committee: **Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Date: **13th March 2018**

Wards: **All**

Subjects: Update on 'Tackling Loneliness in Merton'.

Lead officer: Dr Dagmar Zeuner, Director of Public Health

Lead member: Councillor Tobin Byers, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health

Contact officer: Daniel Butler, Senior Public Health Principal.

Recommendations:

- A That the Committee notes the progress made on the seven recommendations made in their report in October 2017.
 - B That the Committee notes the progress on wider work that contributes to tackling loneliness and isolation.
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A. PURPOSE AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To provide an update on progress against the recommendations made by the Committee and wider work that contributes to tackling loneliness and isolation'.

B. DETAILS

Context

- 2.1 At their meeting on 6th September 2017, the Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny panel made seven recommendations for reducing loneliness and isolation in Merton. These were subsequently agreed by Cabinet on 16th October 2017.
- 2.2 Positively, since the original recommendations were made there has been a national focus on tackling loneliness and isolation. In December 2017, the Jo Cox Commission on loneliness published its findings and in January 2018, the government outlined its commitment, including the acceptance and support for many of the Jo Cox Commission's recommendations.

Update on the recommendations

- 2.3 A progress report against each of the recommendations is provided below. It should be noted the recommendations were only approved by cabinet in October 2017, four months ago, and some are therefore in planning phase.

- 1) **To ensure loneliness is included within other strategies such as Falls Strategy, Hoarding Protocol and Volunteering Strategy**

The [Merton's Older People's Falls Prevention Strategy](#) 2015-2018 recognises living alone as one of the risk factors for falls and links our approach to falls to wider prevention activity, including Merton's befriending scheme. Falls Prevention and wider strength and balance classes for older people are provided by a range of organisations across Merton, including Voluntary and Community Sector providers such as Wimbledon Guild. These sessions also contribute to addressing social isolation amongst older people, by having weekly and regular classes where people can meet. The Falls Prevention Steering Group will be refreshing the action plan for the Falls Prevention Strategy during 2018 and we will ensure that links to isolation and befriending are included.

Merton's hoarding protocol is currently in the process of being refreshed and initial discussions have confirmed that the issue of loneliness affecting older people will be considered in the approach to tackling hoarding.

Loneliness and isolation will be considered as part of the review of the Strategic Partner funding programme. This work will consider the core priorities for our Strategic Partners, who the Council grant fund and will link to the Volunteering Strategy.

2) Merton Health and Wellbeing Strategy and the East Merton Model of health to make reference to current work connecting communities which will address loneliness.

The Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2015-2018 action plan includes a priority to 'Support older adults to reduce loneliness and isolation, and remain or regain independence' and included the delivery of a befriending pilot. This pilot, delivered by Age UK Merton and Wimbledon Guild, has supported over 200 residents to date and has recently been re-commissioned. This new service will build on the findings of the service evaluation, which showed that it is an important and valued service by older people. Although evidence is limited, a study by London School of Economics on befriending interventions and mental health found a return on investment of £3.65 for every £1 invested¹.

The development of the Wilson Campus as part of the East Merton Model of Health and Wellbeing includes a number of work-streams, of these the 'wellbeing service development' work stream which has recently been initiated will be the most appropriate mechanism to consider connectivity and addressing loneliness. In terms of the development of the Wilson site, initial proposals include space for community activity, events and a community garden, all of which will better aid connectivity and activities that promote interaction.

3) Public Health and Merton Clinical Commissioning Group (utilising existing infrastructure e.g. social prescribing and directories) develop an agreed list of voluntary and community sector groups who provide services to tackle loneliness and provide community activities for older people.

Funded by a combination of sources including Merton Partnership, Public Health and MCCG, the social prescribing pilot works alongside traditional

¹ Mental Health Promotion and Prevention: The Economic Case. Knapp M, McCain D, Parsonage M. Available from URL:

www.lse.ac.uk/businessAndConsultancy/LSEEnterprise/pdf/PSSRUfeb2011.pdf

medical interventions and allows GPs to make referrals to voluntary sector organisations to complement treatment e.g. to self-help organisations or fitness and wellbeing groups. The first year of the programme, initially piloted in two GP practices in the east of Merton (WideWay and Tamworth House), had shown good progress with an increase in self-reported health gains (shown via the outcomes star) and a reduction in GP visits. Launched in January 2017, the service has seen 206 residents for their first appointment and 129 for the follow appointment. Reasons for referral include frequent attendance at health settings, social isolation, mental health problems and wider social needs.

Following the success of the pilot project evidenced by the evaluation, Merton Clinical Commissioning Group (MCCG) is to fund an extension and expansion of the scheme for another year to allow for further detailed analysis of the benefits it brings to the health and care system. The longer-term aim is to roll the scheme out to cover the whole borough.

MCCG have developed 'A Practical Guide to Healthy Ageing' resource which provides advice and guidance to improve health and wellbeing. This includes information about a range of Merton community and voluntary sector services, including those which seek to address social isolation. The guide has now been distributed (hard copies) to a range of services/ teams/organisations across the borough including GP surgeries.

4) Merton Clinical Commissioning Group to use the Practice Manager's forum to have a session to highlight the issues around loneliness.

MCCG have agreed that a session on tackling isolation and loneliness will take place for all Practice Managers at their meeting in May 2018.

5) Public Health Team to lead discussions with partners such as the Chamber of Commerce on innovative ways to connect local communities to reduce loneliness. These discussions could draw on examples set out in this report. New approaches could use existing resources such as training material from Making Every Contact Count initiative and the Campaign to End Loneliness.

Building upon the pan London work on Making Every Contact Count (MECC) - see <https://www.healthylondon.org/resource/mecc/> - planning is underway to develop an approach to MECC that builds upon the evidence base, best practice from elsewhere and key guidance documents and resources. The plan in Merton will seek to add value to existing programmes e.g. the social prescribing service.

6) An Article in My Merton to profile the agreed list of community activities and services that lead to greater connectivity for older people with case studies from people who have benefitted from them.

We are planning for an article to go in 'My Merton' on befriending, community activities and services for the June 2018 edition.

7) Public Health to host lunchtime seminar for councillors on 'connecting communities with the aim of tackling loneliness' highlighting key issues and good practice.

As part of the programme for the well-received ‘lunch and learn’ sessions, the seminar is planned to take place in June 2018 and will be confirmed as soon as possible.

Wider work that contributes to tackling loneliness and isolation.

- 2.4 As well as the progress against the recommendations, there are other programmes in Merton that contribute to tackling loneliness and isolation. This section of the report provides a summary and updates on some of the key services available.
- 2.5 **HomeShare** The Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Committee carried out a review of Home Share schemes, where an older person shares a spare room with a younger person in exchange for around 10 hours of work (such as cleaning or shopping). The scheme can promote independence for older people and allow them to remain in their own homes for longer. They also can address isolation and loneliness faced by older people through creating daily interaction of a house sharer. A report to Cabinet on 19th February 2018 recommended Community and Housing staff look to implement a Home share service locally. Cabinet has agreed that an action plan be drafted and reviewed again at a future Cabinet meeting.
- 2.6 **Home Visiting Service – Libraries.** The library service has a home visiting service, which can address loneliness and isolation. This service takes books and other materials to a resident’s home if they cannot make it to their local library (due to either a physical or mental disability). The service has been established for a number of years and utilises trained volunteers to select and deliver stock to users. It acts as a valuable befriending service where required and for some clients it is one of the few external visitors they see regularly. The service also provides stock to care homes and a talking book postal service for blind or partially sighted residents. All of the services provided are free and special collections of stock have been developed to support people to live more independent lives such as specially designed books for people living with dementia and specially designed e-readers for those who find it difficult to read a book. Case studies on the impact that library services has on the lives of older people are available at 11- Background Papers.
- 2.7 **Fire Safe and Well Pilot.** Delivered by the London Fire Brigade, Safe and Well visits have started in Merton. Initially focussing on falls prevention, winter warmth and stopping smoking, these visits by trained staff aim to support residents’ health and wellbeing and make referrals to a number of local services, including, for isolated older people, the Merton Befriending Service (a partnership between The Wimbledon Guild and Age UK Merton).
- 2.8 Appendix A provides information on additional services for older people that support greater connectivity and help address loneliness.

C. CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

N/A

D. TIMETABLE

N/A

E. FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

N/A

F. LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

N/A

G. HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

Work addressing isolation via a number of services will have positive impacts on the age, disability and ethnicity protected characteristics e.g. targeted work with BME communities, people with a long- term condition/disability and with older people generally.

H. CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

N/A

I. RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

N/A

J. APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

Appendix A is provided at the end of this report which outlines additional services that provide greater connectivity for older people and allow them to meet others.

K. BACKGROUND PAPERS

A number of case studies from the Library Visiting service and the Befriending service (Age UK Merton and Wimbledon Guild) are outlined below.

Case Study 1 – Library Visiting Service

Mrs P lives in Merton and has been using the Home Visits Library Service since June 2014. She is unable to get to the library, so CDs (talking books) are delivered to her house each month. Her Volunteer Driver is Mr A, who makes deliveries to 4 care homes and 15 clients. Mr A has been a volunteer for the Home Visits Library Service (in partnership with Merton Voluntary Service Council) since it started in 2008.

Mrs P says

“The talking books which the Home Visits Library Service brings to me provide me with a continuous source of entertainment, which I find very stimulating. If I didn’t have it, I would need another way of finding books to entertain me, which would be very difficult and I don’t know what I would do. I thoroughly look forward to and enjoy A’s visits to me with the books. I very much appreciate it and it makes a real difference to my life.”

Case Study 2 – Library Visiting Service

Mrs F says *"I love reading books but am housebound and can't get to the Library. I really value the Home Visits Library Service and read all the books which they bring to me. The books which Mrs C selects for me now are very much the sort of books I want to read. I enjoy seeing Mr A who is always very nice when he brings the books."*

Case Study 3 - Befriending Service, Age UK Merton

Mrs D was referred to the Befriending Service by the Merton rapid intervention team at the Wilson Hospital after being treated for depression. Mrs D is in her late 80's and lives alone in her house with her cat. She reports that she only has one living family member, her brother who lives in America. He returns to the UK once every 6 weeks to visit her and he arranges anything that she needs from abroad. She reported that she has one neighbour who is a friend and looks in on her every few days. Otherwise Mrs D does not leave the house and is very isolated after having a fall two years ago which has reduced her mobility. On assessment she reported that she often feels lonely and low.

We matched her with a befriender who is retired and visits her once a week. They have similar cultural interests. Their sessions mostly involve talking about films, theatre and eating cake. Mrs D has reported that she looks forward to this every week and is feeling happier. During the last few months Mrs D has been into hospital a couple of times due to falls in the home and the befriender continued to support her by telephone. They are very fond of each other and have built a strong bond. We have referred Mrs D to the Falls Prevention Service where she has been assessed and provided some support to improve her strength and balance.

Case Study 4 – Age UK Merton

Mr C was identified by the Living Well service at Age UK Merton and referred for Befriending in July 2017. He was 65 years old and living in a first floor studio flat alone. At the time of referral he was finishing chemotherapy treatment for lymphoma and returning home to his flat. Mr C had no family in the area and reported that the only family member he was in contact with was a sister who lived several hours away. On return home, he was feeling very weak from treatment and unsteady on his feet, his condition was so weak that he had a fall down the communal stairs of his flat. He lost confidence and he stopped going out at all for fear of having another fall. He was at risk of becoming completely isolated. As a result of his fall and physical conditions he was experiencing low mood and had no energy. He was not seeing anyone except for his sister who would come by once a week to deliver food.

We prioritised Mr C and matched him with a befriender who we felt suited him. The Befriender had similar health concerns and had wanted to volunteer to build their own social connection and confidence. To begin with they did chair based exercises together, then they moved on to going for short walks as Mr C's strength improved. After a few months of building up strength and confidence they now often walk to a local coffee shop together. Most recently they caught a bus to a local cinema together to watch a film. Mr C is reporting feeling less isolated, happier and more confident to leave his flat and engage in social activities. He is feeling physically stronger and better able to manage his recovery.

Case Study 5 – Age UK Merton

Mrs C was referred to Befriending by her Dementia nurse who was concerned about the amount of time that she was spending alone at home. Mrs C is 90 and lives in her home alone since the death of her husband. She has been diagnosed with dementia which severely affects her memory. She is physically mobile but unable to go out alone due to her memory and confusion. She has a nephew who arranges her care and visits twice a week and she has carers who come to prepare her meals twice a day so she doesn't forget to eat. Other than occasional visits from friends she is home alone.

She was matched with a younger befriender who owns his own business and visits her around his work. When he visits they read books together, chat and sit in the garden in good weather. At Christmas he helped her put up her Christmas tree and she likes to tell stories about when she was young. We provided him with information and guidance about how to support people with Dementia. They have a very positive relationship which has a positive effect on Mrs C's emotional wellbeing.

Appendix A – Additional services that support older people, providing greater connectivity and opportunities to meet others. The following information provides an update on existing services or maps potentially new relevant services.

- **Merton Befriending Service.** This service commissioned by Public Health provides befriending support to older people who are either housebound, live alone, have a long-term condition and who are isolated from social networks. Volunteers work one to one and offer either 'face to face' or telephone befriending. The contract was re-commissioned in February 2018 with Age UK Merton and Wimbledon Guild winning the contract to run the service.
- **Social Prescribing Pilot.** (See 2.3 (3) for description of the service).
- **Community Activity;** 'Friendship coffee' has been launched once a week at the Sound Lounge in Wimbledon (a music venue and café / social enterprise), offering a free coffee and chance to meet people and talk for those who are socially isolated. 'Meet up Mondays' has been launched (from January 2018) at the Alexandra Public House in Wimbledon offering sandwiches, bingo and tea/coffee for those that are lonely.
- **The Ageing Well Preventative Grants Programme,** funded via Adult Social Care this programme aims to provide a person centred service that will enable older people to live happy, healthy and fulfilling lives independently in their own

homes for as long as possible and to alleviate isolation and loneliness. Workers in Voluntary organisations (such as Wimbledon Guild, AGE UK, Merton and Morden Guild, Commonsides Trust) meet with people to determine how they can support them to promote their wellbeing and independence. Outcomes include accessing outreach and activity programmes in the community, providing advice and information, support with accessing benefits advice, transport options, shopping and housework support, befriending services, community activities, small grant applications, handy person service, counselling, health and wellbeing services.

Support via this grant programme is also provided to Friends of St Helier, Asian Elderly Group, Carers Support Merton and Merton Vision which all support older people's independence.

- **Housing associations;** Central & Cecil provide a creative arts service for older residents living in their sheltered housing and care homes. Central and Cecil believe the arts are a particularly effective way of building communities and targeting social isolation since they give people a reason to meet up, try new things, share stories and make friends. Activities include regular creative writing 'Read Aloud' sessions, outings including boat trips and recently a trip to parliament, seasonal arts activities, choir groups, concerts and entertainment. They also run weekly art classes and host Tai Chi classes.

Clarion housing association carries out a number of work streams that support older people to be better connected. They commission FISH to deliver weekly sessions in Mitcham and Morden. These are aimed to support health and wellbeing and reduce isolation. They include iPad training, keep fit, word and number games, arts, crafts and outings. They also commission the Ethnic minority centre to run a creative maths project. Finally Clarion just finished a grants round for the over 50's, with up to £1000 offered to organisations supporting older people.

Thames Valley Housing provide a holistic approach to the residents they house and support. Residents can access in house support services, wellbeing services and a range of community engagement programmes. They also provide a 'hand holding' service to older people needing to downsize or affected by welfare changes. Each year Thames Valley take a group of older residents on a day trip, which is chosen by the older people themselves.

ⁱ Socially isolated people are those who are isolated from normal social networks i.e. those who are not in regular personal contact with family, friends, community organisations and activities.

Loneliness can be defined as "an emotional perception that can be experienced by individuals regardless of the breadth of their social networks".

Generally social isolation is based on the connections and relationships between people whereas loneliness is a subjective experience or feeling caused by a perceived inadequacy of social relationships.