

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

Date: **17th June 2019**

Wards: **All**

Subjects: 'Tackling loneliness in Merton' update on the Action Plan.

Lead officer: Dr Dagmar Zeuner, Director of Public Health

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

Contact officer: Barry Causer, Head of Strategic Commissioning,
Daniel Butler, Senior Public Health Principal.

Recommendations: That members of Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

- A Note the progress on the Action Plan to tackle loneliness in Merton.
 - B Note the range of wider services that support social connection amongst older people and the priority given to tackling loneliness in the refreshed Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2019 - 2024.
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A. PURPOSE AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To provide an update on progress on the recommendations of the Action Plan to tackle loneliness, provide information on wider services that support social connection amongst older people and outline the priority given to tackling loneliness in the refreshed Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

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 as part of an Action Plan for reducing loneliness and isolation in Merton. These were subsequently agreed by Cabinet on 16th October 2017.
- 2.2 An initial update was presented to the Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 13th March 2018. The Panel noted the progress made and asked for a further update in the future.

Update on the recommendations

- 2.3 Progress on delivering against the seven recommendations is provided below.

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

Update provided in previous report. This is available [here](#) (at agenda item 6).

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.

One of the actions of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2015-2018 Action Plan was the development of a Merton Befriending pilot, which was delivered by Age UK Merton.

The pilot was successful, and after a slower initial set up period nearly 200 older people were befriended between 2015-2017. The new service currently supports around 120 older people each year with a similar number of volunteers. Lessons have also been learned and have informed the new service model that includes a number of new elements including; a greater focus on engaging BME communities; physical activity and befriending (such as chair based exercises or walking); engaging older people in care homes/sheltered housing (small numbers and where appropriate or continuing a befriending relationship) and extending the befriending offer to include weekends.

This new service model, delivered by Age UK Merton and the Wimbledon Guild is in place until the end of January 2020, with an option to extend for a further year.

As reported to this Panel in February 2019, Merton's Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2019-2024) is currently being refreshed and will go to the Health and Wellbeing Board in June 2019. The refreshed Strategy, titled 'A Healthy Place for Healthy Lives', is a tool to support the Health and Wellbeing Board as a system leader and identifies a number of areas where it can add most value.

The Strategy focuses on a small number of 'key healthy place attributes' that the Health and Wellbeing Board will focus action on and includes '*promoting good mental health and emotional wellbeing*' across the life-course.

The Strategy identifies a small number of key outcomes which it will focus on over the next five years including 'Less loneliness and better social connectedness'. Progress against these key outcomes will be reported to the Health and Wellbeing Board and as part of the regular Health and Wellbeing Board annual report to this Panel.

As mentioned in the March 2018 report, the Wilson Hospital redevelopment includes the "Wilson Wellbeing" work-stream, which will position the new facility as the hub of wellbeing activity across East Merton. A steering group of local residents and local voluntary/community groups is being established to develop plans for wellbeing activities, including exploring ideas for using empty space in the existing building and the grounds later in 2019, ahead of the building work commencing. The process for the selection of steering group members has been developed and there will be publicity led by MVSC to encourage local people to put themselves forward as potential steering group members.

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.

The March 2018 update provided information on the 'A Practical Guide to Healthy Ageing' resource that includes an agreed list of services and organisations that support older people. This was produced by Merton CCG, provides resources on Merton's community and voluntary sector, including for social isolation and has been promoted widely across Merton including within all libraries.

At their January 2018 meeting, The Merton Health and Care Together Board agreed five prevention priorities, one of which is the development of a "Wellbeing Digital Hub". This hub aims to be the single point of access for 'digital first' self-management tools and an electronic directory for residents to access digital and face-to-face self-care activities and will be used by front-line staff as part of their everyday interactions with local people. It will enable the promotion of all prevention and wellbeing services, including those related to loneliness and isolation, and will incorporate key behaviour change techniques, becoming an active rather than passive provision of information.

Initial scoping and mapping for this project is underway, with engagement with patients and residents due to take place early summer 2019. The hub is anticipated to go live in January 2020.

Social Prescribing (SP) has gone from strength to strength in Merton. In December 2016, a pilot programme (supported by the Health and Wellbeing Board) commenced in East Merton Primary Care Network (PCN) which evidenced reduced health resource utilisation (primary care, A&E) and increased self-reported health and wellbeing.

This informed the development of a networked approach covering 13 practices by June 2018 and will have complete coverage from 1st April 2019 by a team of five Social Prescribers.

Between July 2018 and early March 2019 319 residents were supported by the social prescribing service (with 620 total meetings), with the reason for 20% of referrals being social isolation.

Promoting social interaction to reduce isolation and loneliness is a key feature of the Wellbeing section of the Strategic Grants Programme (2019 – 2022). The Grants prospectus contained a number of areas to tackle loneliness including; services should encourage social interaction and build connectedness; a focus on interventions that support people who cannot get out to feel less isolated and an asset based approach that supports volunteering and recognising every person can make a contribution. The five organisations (outlined at 2.8) who have been successful in their applications to the Wellbeing section of the Strategic Grants Programme will provide support to people who are isolated and to people who are experiencing loneliness.

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

Public Health and the Age UK Befriending Coordinator attended Merton's Practice Manager's forum on 22nd August 2018 to highlight the issues surrounding loneliness and isolation and the benefits and referral routes to the Age UK Befriending Service. Information was also provided to Practice Managers on community activities and services that support greater connectivity

for older people and case studies from people who have benefitted from the service were shared.

The referral pathway into the service was explained and electronic referral forms were disseminated to all practice managers as well as being uploaded to DSX, the referral database used by GP Practices. Leaflet drops were requested by practices and have subsequently been provided for GP waiting rooms. This has helped staff in Primary Care to understand the service and increase the numbers of people benefitting from the service.

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.

As commissioners of the befriending service, provided by Age UK Merton, Public Health have promoted engagement by the service with local businesses. Work by Age UK Merton has led to an innovative partnership with Abel and Cole who are an organic fruit and vegetable home delivery service. Work has included regular recruitment drives, giving staff flexibility in how they use their volunteering allowance (such as extended lunch hours) and hosting a lunch for all befrienders and their matches at the Abel and Cole offices. There have been 8 volunteers from the company who have joined the Befriending service and several Abel and Cole volunteers have been befriending for almost 2 years. Age UK Merton are also engaging with Barclays Bank and Marks & Spencer on befriending.

To further support engagement with business and community groups articles written on the health impacts of loneliness and isolation have featured on the MVSC website and newsletters and we will also submit an article to the Chamber of Commerce e-newsletter.

Also relevant is the Active Ageing work funded by Public Health. A number of pilot projects have been commissioned, which are run by Age UK Merton. By design, much of Merton's Age UK physical activities combines elements of social connection.

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.

A full page article '*No need to go it alone*' was published in the Winter 2018 My Merton publication (Issue 76, p19). This looked at the impact of loneliness on health, services that are available such as the library visiting service and Age UK Merton's befriending service as well as the wider community/voluntary sector offer. The article also looked at support for residents with a mental health issue including the Sunshine Café and Imagine Independence peer support. Finally, the article linked to a separate article on volunteering opportunities. We will also commit to developing a future article in My Merton magazine on the Wellbeing Digital Hub, once it is up and running.

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

All councillors were invited to a bespoke evening event (22nd November 2018) as part of the training programme for new Councillors, following the 2018 local elections. The event, led by Dr Dagmar Zeuner (Director of Public Health) focused on raising awareness of loneliness and isolation in Merton’s older population and our approach to tackling this. Guest speakers from Age UK Merton sought to raise awareness of the services and activities on offer to reduce loneliness in Merton residents. A paired service user and volunteer gave further insight into their relationship stemming from the befriending service.

A Dementia Friends (DF) session for councillors was provided by an Alzheimer Society Dementia Champion. The session teaches what it is like to live with dementia, explored the important role that Councillors can play in connecting isolated residents to local activities and services and asked all councillors to take one action to improve the lives of those living with the disease.

The event was positively received and was promoted via a series of tweets on the council’s twitter page.

Further dementia friends training sessions were held for Merton Voluntary Service Council (MVSC) staff and Health and Wellbeing Board (HWBB) Members.

Update on other work that contributes to tackling loneliness and isolation.

Information and updates on services that support greater connection and address isolation in Merton are provided below.

- 2.4 **Home Visiting Service – Libraries.** Merton’s Home Visits Library Service provides books and other materials to any resident who cannot make it to their local library. The service also provides a talking book postal service for visually impaired people and delivers deposit collections of stock to care homes across the borough.

Utilising specially trained volunteers the Home Visits Library Service is a valuable service for those in receipt of it and provides a regular volunteer to a person’s home who supplies specially requested materials on behalf of the customer. Specialist stock is available including an e-book service and a dementia collection, which helps to stimulate the minds of people living with dementia. There were 3,114 visits made by Home Visits Library Service volunteers to resident’s homes during 2018/19. This is a 59% increase in visits from the previous year.

- 2.5 **Fire Safe and Well Pilot – London Fire Brigade.** Fire Safe and Well adds health and wellbeing interventions to the home fire safety visits that the London Fire Brigade conducts in people’s homes. Merton is one of five London Boroughs to pilot this approach and has visited 243 households to date, leading to 33 referrals to Merton’s befriending service. Additionally the service has referred 74 people to the falls prevention service, 53 for winter warmth advice and four for smoking cessation.

2.6 **Tuned In Project – Merton Libraries.** Tuned In is an open group session hosted at the Merton Arts Space in Wimbledon Library every Monday evening. Under the guidance of professional musicians participants are encouraged to get involved and play music regardless of their skill levels or interest with instruments provided. The group is open to all but is specifically targeted at men over the age of 50 and has been organised as a way to engage this cohort.

Since starting in January 2019 77 people have participated in sessions with 72% of participants being male and 48% of the participants being over the age of 50. As part of the project participants health and wellbeing is recorded using a range of methods and is specifically being tracked to see if participants feel less isolated and / or report any improvements in their personal health. Support services are available at each session that provide information and advice on healthy living and participants are signposted to other events that may be beneficial to their wellbeing.

The project is currently in the process of collecting the first 3 months of data to determine impact with the project running until the end of the calendar year.

2.7 **Walking Football – Age UK Merton** – as part of Public Health’s commissioned ‘active ageing’ programme Age UK Merton are delivering a new weekly walking football session in conjunction with AFC Wimbledon at Canons Leisure Centre. Aimed at men over 50 (but open to women as well) the sessions aim to increase physical activity of participants as well as social interaction.

2.8 **Strategic Grants Programme** – there are five providers of the current programme including;

- **Merton Mencap** aims to support people with Learning Disability and or Autism to develop friendships and access activities to encourage positive social interaction.
- **Imagine Independence** will support people with current and previous experience of mental health issues to develop their skills as volunteers to provide peer support and connect with other people with mental health issues.
- **Age UK Merton** supports older people to connect with their local community and navigate services through their Living Well service; providing support for people to improve community access through transport schemes, income maximisation and exploring housing options; and a comprehensive social, lunch and physical activity programme to bring older adults together around food, interests and exercise. They are also exploring additional activities for communities at risk of isolation and loneliness in later life, e.g. an LGBT+ social club.
- **MertonVision**’s outreach team and volunteers aim to support people who are newly visually impaired and people who have lived with sight loss for some time to promote independence and connectedness to assist reduction in social care dependency.
- **Wimbledon Guild** will provide an ongoing support service for people who have limited networks and help people to access activities and support with their daily living to enable a person to remain independent in their community. Wimbledon Guild will also facilitate peer support groups for older people, people who have been bereaved and people with mental health issues.

- 2.9 **Lunch club review** - Four lunch clubs have received funding for a year from Adult Social Care as part of the Lunch Club Review work stream. Outcomes include a focus on building connectedness and supporting older people to remain in touch with people they care about.
- 2.10 **Winter Pressure Funding - support for lunch clubs.** Ten lunch clubs in Merton were given additional funds over winter 2018/19 to support continued attendance and increase ongoing membership. This has had very positive outcomes, with residents also accessing other activities and support services.
- 2.11 **Warm and Well Service** – Age UK Merton and Wimbledon Guild run the ‘warm and well’ service in partnership with Merton Council. This service provides advice and information on keeping warm in winter. Activity also promotes social connectedness, such as information and advice on local lunch clubs and social activities that are available.
- 2.12 **Merton Giving** – this is a small grants programme (grants of £500-£1500 with first round total funding of £20,000) to fund projects for community, faith and voluntary organisations who provide services that benefit Merton residents. It also aims to raise awareness of key issues affecting Merton residents, recognising we can all make a contribution. One of the key themes of the Grants Fund is “*Connecting our Communities – projects that deliver services and/or activities that bring neighbourhoods and communities together and strengthen and promote community cohesion and social capital*”.
- 2.13 **Carers Hub Merton** - supports carers to continue in their caring role and connecting with others including other carers. They do this through a range of activities including assessments, wellbeing and social activities, counselling, peer support groups, information and advice. In 2018/19 the Hub carried out approximately 200 assessments. This number is expected to increase to around 300 assessments during 2019/20.
- 2.14 **Dementia Hub Merton** – people with dementia and their carers are at greater risk of social isolation. The Council and Merton CCG commission community dementia services located at the Dementia Hub in Mitcham. The Hub sees approximately 1200 service users each year and provides a range of services, education, advice and information and activities for both people with dementia and their carers – that promote social interaction and connectedness. One example of a programme delivered from the hub is the ‘Side by Side’ programme, where volunteers support a person with dementia to continue to engage in hobbies or other activities that they enjoy doing.

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

There are a number of equalities implications with regard to loneliness and activities carried out from the OSC Action Plan should have positive impact in terms of these equalities strands;

- In terms of gender women are more likely than men to report being lonely 'often /always' or 'some of the time', at 24.71% compared to 18.24%ⁱ. Men may however be reluctant to admit to feelings such as loneliness within a survey.
- People with a disability were more likely to report being lonely 'often/always' or 'some of the time' compared to those without a disability, at 30% compared to 16.94% without a disabilityⁱⁱ. People with dementia are also more likely to be lonely, through loss of social networks and support.
- Age; people over 75 are 63% less likely to report feeling lonely compared to younger people aged 16 – 24. Discussion within the ONS paper highlights; older people may develop greater resilience to feeling lonely over time; or the negative physical health impacts of loneliness may reduce the number of older lonely people populationⁱⁱⁱ. There could also be generational issues/stigma around admitting to being lonely.
- Age; whilst older people may report less loneliness we know they are more likely to be lonely or isolated (and face health impacts of loneliness) and face risk factors associated with loneliness, such as living alone, poorer health, loss of partner and ability to meet up with family and friends. The English Longitudinal Study of Ageing found that 23% of older men had contact with their family less than once a month whilst a further 31% had contact only once a month^{iv}.
- Ethnic minority residents are more likely to be lonely (excluding those from the Indian subcontinent) despite large social networks. This is because they are less likely to take part in social activities or access services for older people^v.

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

N/A

K. BACKGROUND PAPERS

N/A

ⁱ ONS, Community Life Survey 2016/17 available at <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/lonelinesswhatcharacteristicsandcircumstancesareassociatedwithfeelinglonely/2018-04-10>

ⁱⁱ Ibid, figure 6.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid, Chapter 4

^{iv} Beach B, Bamford S-M. Isolation: the emerging crisis for older men. ILC-UK 2014:60

^v Victor Cr, Burholt V, Martin W. Loneliness and ethnic minority elders in Great Britain: an exploratory study. Journal of Cross-Cultural Gerontology 2010 27:65-78

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