

North Somerset Health & Wellbeing Board

Date of meeting: 5th March 2020
Agenda Item: 7
Title of report: Social Isolation & Loneliness
Needs Assessment and Strategy
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1. Purpose of report

To introduce the Social Isolation & Loneliness Strategy and the associated action plan, and to provide the Health & Wellbeing Board with an opportunity to consider how this area of work may fit with its own plans and strategies for the coming year.

2. Recommendations

2.1 The Health and Wellbeing Board is recommended to:

- i. Support the publication and engagement around this strategy and associated plans both within member organisations and across North Somerset
- ii. Consider and comment on how members can adopt and support the associated action plans
- iii. Consider the inclusion of Social Isolation & Loneliness as one of the board's key areas of work when determining its priorities for the coming municipal year.

3. Details

- 3.1 In October 2018, HM Government published 'A Connected Society: Tackling Loneliness and Isolation'. This is widely regarded as a first step in recognising not only the scale of loneliness and isolation, but their potential impact on both mental and physical health and wellbeing.
- 3.2 Local and national research and need assessment has indicated that many people presenting to social care and health services are experiencing symptoms which related to their social isolation. In many cases, support in identifying means of addressing social isolation is more likely to improve the quality of life for these individuals than traditional medical or social care interventions which can serve to compound isolation.
- 3.3 While this work presents a compelling case in terms of improved health and social care outcomes, reduced demand for services and better community cohesion, it also presents a challenge to the statutory sector. Many of the

services likely to support people experiencing loneliness have been impacted by austerity and other national policies over the past decade, and our capacity to meet these needs is much reduced.

- 3.4 On that basis, coordinated work across the statutory and voluntary sectors is paramount to our local response to social isolation and loneliness. To this end, the strategy provides a range of tools and plans to facilitate joint working and to ensure that work to combat social isolation and loneliness is aligned with the related work on social prescribing taking place within the NHS.
- 3.5 It is also important to note that while this initiative has emerged from the Health and Social Care domains, the activity required to respond effectively requires coordination and joint working across the statutory sector, including areas such as transport, housing, placemaking and culture.

4. Policy and Legal Implications

- 4.1 While no specific duties arise from this work at present, it is notable that from 2019/20 HM Government expects its departments to report back on commitments made in 'A Connected Society'. It is therefore expected that in turn, these departments will consider reporting duties for Local Authorities and Clinical Commissioning Groups.

5. Risk Management

- 5.1 A local response to Social Isolation and Loneliness may result in new burdens being placed on the already taxed voluntary sector. It is imperative that we work together to ensure that the very services which support those at risk of isolation are in turn supported to respond to a potential growth in need.
- 5.2 While there is a body of evidence that suggests that a proportion of current demand for statutory services might be met by social activity and social prescribing, there is a risk that it may be regarded as a sole means of supporting individuals with underlying complex needs. It is therefore important to regard this as complementary work which may support better use of resources, rather than a strategy for reducing demand.

6. Finance and Resource Implications

- 6.1 There are no specific finance and resource implications for the Health and Wellbeing Board, though partner agencies are asked to consider their own response to this challenge.

7. Equality Implications

- 7.1 Partners are particularly asked to consider how social isolation and loneliness may disproportionately affect protected groups under the Equalities Act 2010. Given the demographic make-up of North Somerset, there are particular risks

that individuals in the BME and LGBT+ communities along with Carers will be more likely to experience social isolation, particularly in older age groups.

8. Climate Change and Environmental Implications

8.1 There are no specific climate or environmental implications.

9. Engagement Undertaken or required

9.1 The Social Isolation & Loneliness Strategy has been subject to joint development and engagement with a wide-range of partner agencies, and the links to social prescribing have been explored in some detail. Now that North Somerset Council has formally adopted the strategy, it is proposed that further work takes place to engage with the wider population.