

To: Overview and Scrutiny Commission
7 April 2020

Isolation and Loneliness Overview and Scrutiny Review Report
Cllr Malcolm Tullett, Chair Wellbeing and Finance Panel

1 Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To present to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission findings of the Wellbeing and Finance Overview & Scrutiny Panel's review into isolation and loneliness and ask them to endorse their recommendations.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 **That the findings of the panel and the recommendations as set out in the report (attached as Appendix A) and paragraph 5.2 are endorsed.**
- 2.2 **In addition, the panel are requesting the Overview and Scrutiny Commission commissions the Wellbeing and Finance Panel to undertake a separate review of mental health service provision in the borough – see paragraph 5.3.**

3 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission directed the Wellbeing and Finance Panel to conduct a review into isolation and loneliness. A review of the Community Impact Assessment and Resident's Survey 2020 highlighted residents felt isolated and lonely, particularly elderly and disabled residents, which formed the basis for this review.
- 3.2 The review aimed to understand what provision was already in place to help people who felt isolated or lonely and how well it was used. The review considered the views of residents, carers' and professionals from statutory, voluntary and the community sector. The review also looked at how COVID-19 had impacted on the provision and what gaps there might be in the future.
- 3.3 The Wellbeing & Finance Panel concluded their findings based on the evidence considered and speaking to several witnesses as part of the review.

4 Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 The Wellbeing and Finance Panel considered many options as part of this review.

5 Supporting Information

- 5.1 The Wellbeing and Finance Panel carried out the review into isolation and loneliness as part of the overview and scrutiny work programme. The review activity took place between December 2020 and March 2021, reviewing a wide range of evidence. Members of the Panel spoke to several residents and carers across the borough; representatives from a range of voluntary and community sector organisations and Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust. However, the panel were unable to interview

officers from the local authority and Public Health Team due to the third COVID-19 lockdown which required them to focus on the delivery of front-line services. The full list of interviewees; findings and recommendations of the review are set out in the attached report.

5.2 The recommendations are listed below:

1. The Executive determines that the Health and Wellbeing Board prioritises isolation and loneliness in the Health and Wellbeing Strategy being developed in 2021/22 to incorporate a holistic approach to statutory, voluntary and charity sector projects across the borough by:
 - reviewing the strategic coordination of projects led by statutory, voluntary and charity sector organisations.
 - commissioning technology to support a 'One Stop Shop' arrangement for signposting of services across all sectors.
 - developing a digital directory to underpin a single, self-sustaining signposting service 'One Stop Shop' for the whole community to ensure equality of access.
 - securing funding for a single coordination role between all commissioners and statutory and voluntary organisations to facilitate a sufficient range of community social activities in the market post Covid-19.
 - request partner organisations sign up to the national standard for volunteers.
2. The Executive finds the appropriate organisation to develop guidelines for use by employers to help employees return to the workplace.
3. The Executive highlights opportunities as well as understanding across the statutory and voluntary sector of where intuitive and assistive technology interventions work to keep people independent and build confidence to recommend and support their use alongside other interventions.
4. The Executive collaborates with its partners to build on existing work to increase residents' digital skills to enable them to access digital services.
5. The Executive works with volunteer, subsidised or commercial providers of community-based transport to increase the range of transport options, including on demand (paid for) options, available post COVID-19. Any such consideration should take account of green energy and conform to Bracknell's Climate Change Strategy.
6. The Overview and Scrutiny Commission commissions the Wellbeing and Finance Panel to undertake a review of mental health services provision in the borough.

5.3 The impact of isolation and loneliness on people's mental health was raised repeatedly during the review. The panel considered the subject of mental health to be increasingly important, particularly provision available to deal with the recovery from COVID-19, but acknowledged the issue was wider than the scope of the review. The panel are therefore requesting the Overview and Scrutiny Commission commissions the Wellbeing and Finance Panel to undertake a separate review of mental health services provision in the borough.

5.4 There are financial implications arising from recommendations in this review. These could not be quantified during the review as key officers within the local authority were unable to participate due to the impact of a third lockdown to stop the spread of COVID-19. A feasibility study will need to be undertaken to understand the exact cost.

5.5 Evidence gathered from professionals in the voluntary/community sector and representatives of Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust suggested savings could be accrued by pooling resources across organisations to create a digital library and 'One

Stop Shop'. However, there would be a cost attached to initial work to review any potential savings.

- 5.6 There are also likely to be costs attached to extending 'transport on demand' options which need to be quantified.

6 Commentary from Wellbeing and Finance Overview and Scrutiny Panel Chair, Councillor Malcolm Tullett

- 6.1 The Wellbeing and Finance Overview and Scrutiny Panel originally identified isolation and loneliness as a priority at a panel workshop in October 2019. In addition, the subsequent Bracknell Forest Community Impact Assessment and Resident's Survey both highlighted that residents felt isolated and lonely, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic. We started by focusing our review on elderly and disabled people as evidence in these documents highlighted they were disproportionately affected but it became clear as we progressed with the review that isolation and loneliness was having a severe impact on everyone in the borough.
- 6.2 We gathered numerous examples of services and groups that support people, many of which were offered virtually during the Covid-19 pandemic, and what became clear was a lack of coordination and communication between statutory and voluntary sector partners about what activities exist and informing people about what is available. This recommendations in the attached report aim to address those issues.

7 Response from Assistant Directors

7.1 Response from Interim Director of Adult Social Care Operations

- 7.1.1 This was a useful review into isolation and loneliness in the borough and will be helpful during the development of Bracknell's Health and Wellbeing Strategy. The reflection by the Panel to make the recommendations fit in with the timescales for the development of this strategy is particularly helpful. However, there are likely to be cost implications incurred by undertaking a review into the strategic coordination of projects and activities aimed at tackling isolation and loneliness which need to be understood prior to undertaking this activity. We would very much welcome the evidence gathered during this review to be shared with the Public Health Team so this can be fed into the development of the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

7.2 Response from Assistant Director: Customer Services, Digital and ICT

- 7.2.1 This review has helped to demonstrate the important contribution that digital technology makes in everyday life, and the role it can play in tackling social isolation. The recommendations in the report are welcomed, and promote the development of digital technology to support local communities and ensure access to services. A coordinated effort across the borough to improve the digital skills of residents will help to ensure that all residents are able to access the services they need, and the social interaction to keep them connected with their communities.

8 Consultation and Other Considerations

Legal Advice

- 8.1 There are no specific legal implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Financial Advice

- 8.2 Members should note and comment on the recommendations but they cannot be enacted until full costings have been carried out and the financial implications have been assessed.

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 8.3 An initial equalities screening has been completed and is attached at Appendix B.

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 8.4 The strategic risk to the Council and its partners in not accepting these recommendations is that co-ordination and communication of services aimed at helping residents who feel isolated and lonely will continue to be patchy. This will result in continued duplication of resources and a lack of continuity in service provision. These recommendations also support the Council's commitment to aligning its social care services with Primary Care Networks to allow improved integration of care and health activities.

Background Papers

None

Contact for further information

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