

Overview and Scrutiny Panel Recommendations Report

REVIEW TITLE	O&S PANEL	DATE
Isolation and Loneliness	Wellbeing and Finance	7 April 2021

Foreword

“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 all residents in the borough. 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 report aims to address those issues.



Councillor Malcolm Tullett, Chair: Wellbeing and Finance Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Recommendations

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.

Key findings

The indication early in the review was that a lack of coordination in the borough could lead to the recommendation of a single coordinator. However, during further witness sessions it became apparent there were differing views on how to address the need for a more joined up response to addressing isolation and loneliness across all statutory, voluntary and community organisations.

During the review we asked witnesses if they had heard of the community map. We found a mixed response. Those that had used it said they were aware it was out of date.

Lack of accessible and affordable transport in the borough was raised in every evidence gathering session as being a barrier to enabling people to take part in activities aimed at preventing isolation and loneliness.

Residents and representatives from organisations giving evidence during this review said they were aware symptoms of isolation and loneliness, i.e. fear and stress, were having a significant impact on people's mental health, potentially leading to other health issues. It was agreed this issue would require further investigation.

Digital methods were increasing and could be positive but there were examples where the skills, access or willingness of users meant they were excluded from accessing services this way so it was important for it not to be the only way to access services and to develop digital skills as well as accessibility of information.

Background information

Community Impact Assessment (CIA) and Resident's Survey Findings

To understand the impact of COVID-19 and resilience of local Voluntary and Charity Sector groups the local authority carried an assessment across the borough with its partners. As part of this work a survey was carried out in May 2020. 32 responses were received. The key findings identified were:

- 50% of organisations reported there would be a significant negative financial impact due to reduced fundraising income.
- Organisations generating income through selling services have forecast between 40-70% reduction in their annual income.
- 10% of organisations with paid employees had furloughed staff, and 10% had made redundancies.
- Most organisations have not seen an increased need for their services, however where demand has increased, for some it has been significant.
- Many volunteers are over 70 years old, meaning the risks of COVID-19 are higher and


Community Support Workers supporting Bracknell Forest Dementia Advisory Service with welfare calls – over 110 calls made during first lockdown

9% growth in online access to local authority services during first lockdown but target people not using it


Review findings

How well do statutory and voluntary sector partners interact with each other to address social isolation and loneliness?

Suggestions included creating a single coordinator role; a One Stop Shop or a joint, local authority/health/voluntary sector role. It was also suggested representatives on the Health and Wellbeing Board pool their resources in order to achieve a collaborative, single point of coordination for initiatives and activities in the borough. After considering all points of view members' of the Panel agreed there was sufficient evidence to recommend that members of the Health and Wellbeing Board should agree to create a single point of coordination aimed at tackling social isolation and loneliness, with pooled resources to avoid duplication in the future, as that was where strategic guidance was set and filtered down to statutory and voluntary and community organisations. Representatives from organisations we spoke to highlighted examples of activities available, but all struggled to reach the 'hard to reach'.



"We need a simple channel of communication."




"It doesn't matter where the coordination function resides, they just need to work collaboratively and regularly across all organisations."

Have you heard of the community map?

Residents we spoke to were asked if they had heard of the community map. None of them were aware of it but liked the idea of a One Stop Shop informing them where fitness/knowledge/arts groups were available. Carers' welcomed a One Stop Shop and also said they would like someone to welcome them to the first meeting when they attended a group as well as more information than just contact details available, such as reviews of the group and pictures of people running them.

Professionals were aware of the community map but said there was duplication in particularly between the Help Yourself part of the Bracknell Forest website; Social Prescribers in the Public Health Team; and Community Connectors which resided in the Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust.

A further discussion took place about what measurement could be used to determine if a One Stop Shop was working or not to ensure targets were met and prevent duplication. It was agreed this should be part of the Health and Wellbeing Board's targets in the future.



"Don't want it to be just blobs on maps."

Overall, there was a consensus that residents needed an accessible, well publicized and accurate platform, bought into by all statutory, voluntary and charity sector partner organisations to avoid duplication, to reduce isolation and loneliness.

Transport

Residents, carers', professionals and representatives from the voluntary sector expressed concern about how to access support groups. Carers' said they, and the people they cared for, were reliant on lifts unless they lived on a frequent bus route. Keep Mobile and voluntary car schemes in Sandhurst and Crowthorne were cited as successful services but there were examples of voluntary car schemes unwilling to support each other to develop a wider network throughout the borough.

Cultural issues in terms of transport were explored but it was considered this was not an issue and that lack of accessible and affordable transport to allow residents to access meetings and events was the problem.

Impact of isolation and loneliness on mental health

The impact of isolation and health on people's mental health was raised during evidence gathering sessions. One option suggested to tackle the increase in mental health issues included commissioning non-targeted mental health services for all residents to access. It was agreed this area required further investigation and a recommendation be made to the Overview and Scrutiny Commission to scrutinise mental health services specifically.




Digital inclusion

Panel members wanted to investigate how technology could be used to enhance communication and coordination of services. Bobby Mulheir, Assistant Director: Customer Services, Digital and ICT gave a detailed presentation explaining how technology and existing platforms had helped with isolation and loneliness before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. It was explained there were plans to further harness intuitive and assistive technology, such as using Alexa to allow people to search for council services in the future, requiring search engine optimization and correct meta data. It was agreed a review of how technology could underpin activity and platforms to inform residents about what support was available would be useful and knowledge should be disseminated widely.

Bracknell Forest Council loans of audiobooks, e-books and other digital resources more than doubled to 6,000 loans a week.

Phil Cook, Chief Executive of INVOLVE told Panel members about someone living in the USA who joined a cancer survivor meeting in England during lockdown as they could not find a suitable group at home, which highlighted the benefits of technology.

Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust had loaned ipads to carers and people with dementia during lockdown and video consultations had risen from 3,000 to 12,000 a month.

A yellow speech bubble graphic with a black outline, containing a quote in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

"We need a digital library across the community and to stop working in organizational silos."

Skilling up residents

Many volunteers who led groups were often run by older members of society and there needed to be a recognition some of these groups had not continued during the pandemic due to the leader or members not being able to use technology. It was agreed this was an issue the Health and Wellbeing Board needed to address when looking strategically at recovery of activities and services post Covid-19.

Pinc had already recognised the need for their members to be skilled up digitally and had been successful in obtaining seed funding from Royal Mencap for this type of project. However, during the evidence gathering session with carers of people with learning disabilities it was noted some people did not want to use digital services during the Covid-19 pandemic and some people could not. An example was given of a resident with autism who had become frustrated because he could not touch people he saw on screen, so had not been able to communicate with people during lockdown.

Representatives from Bracknell Churches Together said they had received varied feedback from residents about the digital divide with some residents saying they felt really depressed and others coping admirably.

The importance of security when using technology in the home was recognised and that there was a need to teach digital skills to help people make best use of technology but there should always be another method of asking for help available.

"Lonely is not being alone, it's the feeling that no one cares." Swatantra Saxena

On behalf of the members of the panel, I would also like to express our sincere gratitude to all those individuals and organisations that contributed and a profound regret that we could not hear from more, especially those on the front line, to whom we all owe our heart-felt gratitude." Cllr Malcolm Tullett, Chair: Wellbeing & Finance Panel

Review panel

Councillor Nick Allen	Councillor Nigel Atkinson
Councillor Michael Brossard	Councillor Alvin Finch
Councillor Lizzy Gibson	Councillor Mike Gibson
Councillor Tricia Brown	Councillor Ash Merry
Councillor Mary Temperton	Councillor Isabel Mattick (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Tina McKenzie-Boyle	Councillor Malcolm Tullett (Chair)
Councillor Ray Mossom	Councillor Rob McLean
Councillor Pauline McKenzie	Councillor Moira Gaw
Councillor Tony Virgo	

Contributors to the review

Madeline Diver	Carers UK representative
Charles D'Souza	Resident
Mary Durman	Chief Executive, Pinc
Carers	Pinc
Rev Tony Varey	Bracknell Churches Together Coordinator
Rev Sarah Walker	Kerith Church
Ms Bernadette Fisher	Bracknell Catholic Church
Bobby Mulheir	Assistant Director: Customer Services, Digital and ICT
Phil Cook	Chief Executive: INVOLVE
Imam Ebrahim Walele	Bracknell Islamic Cultural Society
Basit Kukoiyii	Chairman, Bracknell Islamic Cultural Society
Yusuf	Vice Chairman, Bracknell Islamic Cultural Society
Julian Emms	Chief Executive: Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust
Debra Marsden	Locality Manager: Community Mental Health Services

Appendix A – examples of good practice gathered during the review

- Bracknell Forest Council (BFC) sent out hard copies of a booklet containing key contact information to residents who were advised to shield.
- Residents said Promise Inclusion (PINC) and AGE UK very helpful.
- Residents said library services in the Borough were very useful.
- PINC put details of other organisations on the back page of their newsletters.
- Healthwatch advertised what support was needed by local residents which allowed volunteers to choose which task to do.
- One carer reported a social worker had checked on her during the pandemic and that the crisis team had helped her also helped in an emergency.
- PINC supported carers by phoning them during the first lockdown but moved online then met face to face when allowed, responding to demand from carers.
- Bracknell Churches Together (BCT) had a team of people making regular phone calls to parishioners since the COVID-19 pandemic began.
- BCT held weekly 'life groups' allowing people to catch up and host Christian activities.
- One Church leader met one on one with 16 parishioners a week, in line with Covid regulations, and had more people requesting support.
- BCT had been in touch with three local hospitals to set up links between local Churches and Chaplains to communicate who was going into hospital/being discharged home.
- Online library services were well attended including the highest take up of story time ever.
- Audio and ebook loans increased to 6,000 a week during the first lockdown, more than double normal usage.
- The work undertaken by social prescribers and the community connectors was thought to be very useful to other professionals.
- Good provision of day centres; activities for people with learning disabilities and carers was thought to be good prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Parish websites were often referred to as a good place to go for local information.
- Bracknell Islamic Cultural Society (BICS) said they had been able to identify some vulnerable people in their community by putting out communications.
- BICS website had 2,000+ subscribers.
- BFC had supported BICS to increase the uptake of the COVID-19 vaccine in their community and completing the census.
- Staff from the Community Mental Health Team for Older Adults (CMHTOA) carried out welfare calls during lockdown periods to monitor people's wellbeing.
- Bracknell Healthcare Foundation Trust (BHFT) staff members, including Memory Clinic Nurses and Community Support Workers, adapted their roles to offer additional patient contact.
- Community Support Workers (CSWs) supported Bracknell Forest Dementia Advisory Service with welfare calls – over 110 calls made in a three month period.
- The Dementia Advisory Service Newsletter and Dementia Directory was distributed to over 350 people within the borough.
- The Dementia Directory was regularly updated with nearly 100 community resources for people with dementia and their carers'. It was also available on Bracknell Forest Council's webpages and advertised in GP Surgeries.
- Bracknell Forest Council's webpage included links to 'Help Yourself' page and the Bracknell Forest Community Map.
- BHFT had updated their carers' strategy and assessment template which was used by both Health and Social Care staff. It provided links to the Community Map and a section exploring loneliness.
- BHFT had loaned laptops and ipads to people with dementia and carers' to help with IT accessibility.
- Additional support for carers' of residents of Prospect Park had been well received.