

From: Clair Bell- Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Public Health
Richard Smith – Corporate Director Adult Social Care and Health
David Whittle- Director of Strategy, Policy, Relationships and Corporate Assurance

To: **Scrutiny Committee- 20 January 2022**

Subject: **Review of Select Committee on Loneliness and Social Isolation Recommendations**

Summary:

Following a discussion at Scrutiny Committee in October 2021, this report is intended to review and revise the recommendations of KCC's Select Committee on Loneliness and Social Isolation (2019) and refresh the approach to tackling loneliness and social isolation. This reflects the impact of Covid 19, the positive partnerships that have developed and the opportunities this has enabled in terms of tackling loneliness and social isolation in the longer term.

Recommendation(s):

Scrutiny Committee are asked to:

1) Comment on the proposed approach to tackling social isolation and loneliness set out in the report and the closed action plan (Appendix 1).

1. Background

- 1.1 In 2019 KCC's Select Committee on Loneliness and Social Isolation made several recommendations aimed at tackling loneliness and social isolation in Kent. A subsequent action plan was developed and presented to Scrutiny Committee on 26th July 2019. In March 2020, the Select Committee was reconvened to receive an update on the progress made against each of its recommendations. This meeting was cancelled due to the lockdown measures implemented by Government in response to the Coronavirus pandemic.
- 1.2 A subsequent report was then taken to Scrutiny on the 13 October 2021 setting out progress against each of the recommendations. It was observed at that meeting that the pandemic had an undeniable impact on the authority's ability to respond to the action plan, but it was also agreed that this remained an important agenda and indeed had been heightened by the pandemic. The committee recommended a reset on the recommendations, referred the matter back to the Executive to review and to report back to Scrutiny Committee in 6 months' time.
- 1.3 Officers have reviewed the action plan and it is apparent that the recommendations agreed in 2019 are no longer fit for purpose. Many of the existing recommendations have been delivered, however the context has significantly shifted, and the recommendations now fall short in both reflecting

the fundamental impact of social isolation but also the work we have seen over the pandemic to support people within their communities. We have therefore revised the existing recommendations and set out the new proposals in full in Appendix 1, with the intention of closing the existing action plan.

2. Proposed approach

2.1 The recommendations from 2019 included a proposal to develop a social isolation and loneliness strategy however, it was agreed at the time that a standalone strategy would not be delivered and instead that **relevant** elements of this recommendation would be discharged through the development of a Civil Society Strategy (CSS). The CSS was however never intended to be a 'loneliness' strategy; the primary objective of the CSS was to set out the important role that civil society plays in supporting people and communities, the economic contribution of the social sector, underpin KCC's strategic relationship with the social sector and KCC's commitment to supporting both civil society and the social sector to flourish and be sustainable. As the [National Loneliness Strategy](#) established, civil society and the social sector are only one pillar to tackling this agenda it is not the sole solution and many aspects of that agenda sit outside of a strategy focused on civil society. However, the CSS does set out the important role of resilient and connected communities in tackling social isolation and the need to support the social infrastructure that underpins this- set out in Chapter 2.

2.2 The Interim Strategic Plan, agreed by County Council in December 2020, committed to reviewing and refreshing *the Social Isolation Select Committee action plan in light of the impact of COVID-19, including considering digital options that work to keep people connected with others*. The agenda is therefore hardwired into the Council's plans in a way that it was not in 2019. It is therefore proposed that we do not have a standalone KCC strategy but that tackling social isolation and loneliness becomes embedded as a priority within the new Five-Year Plan when developed.

2.3 Additionally, to tackle social isolation requires a partnership approach; it is not an agenda for KCC to tackle alone and the partnership work we have seen during Covid to support people who were particularly isolated is testament to that. It is therefore proposed by the Executive to work with partners to tackle social isolation and loneliness and to embed this work in the forthcoming social prescribing Strategy that will be developed by health, KCC (in particular public health) and VCSE partners across Kent and Medway. It is therefore proposed that the Corporate Director of Adult Social Care remains the Senior Responsible Officer for this work alongside the Director of Public Health.

2.4 A Social Prescribing Strategy for Kent and Medway

2.4.1 The Select Committee in 2019 fully endorsed the social prescribing model and recognised the need for a system wide approach to tackling social isolation. Since then, considerable work has been undertaken to develop a variety of social prescribing models across the County and across health and social care systems. Through the partnership work that has been undertaken to develop a single online source of information to facilitate social prescribing, there have been preliminary discussions with health colleagues about the potential to develop a Social Prescribing Strategy for Kent and Medway to address some of the issues, risks and enablers identified through that work.

Whilst this agenda focuses on other factors such as long-term conditions and mental health, social isolation is recognised as one of the key agendas within the social prescribing model. As a result, many activities and themes that would be included in any social isolation action plan or strategy would also fall within the wider remit of a social prescribing strategy, they are undoubtedly interconnected.

2.4.2 Whilst conversations regarding a Kent and Medway Strategy are still in the early stages of development, there is a risk of duplication if KCC were to create a separate document or strategy focused solely on social isolation. It is also not possible to create such a document nor discharge the relevant actions without engaging with partners, NHS, district councils and the voluntary sector. KCC officers will therefore work with NHS colleagues (as the lead) to define and develop a social prescribing strategy to ensure that it effectively addresses the wider wellbeing and social isolation agenda. The strategy will be developed between April and May with a final version hoped to be in place by June. An action plan will also be developed underneath the strategy and would offer a way of discharging responsibilities across wider partners.

2.5 Closing the existing action plan and recommendations

2.5.1 The recommendations from the Select Committee have been reviewed and most are proposed to be closed as set out in 2.5.3 and in more detail in Appendix 1.

2.5.2 There are two actions which could either be transferred to a new Social Prescribing Strategy or could be subsumed into business as usual by KCC if not appropriate within the context a partnership strategy, they are as follows:

- Explore the viability of a single point of contact, which will now consider if there are any opportunities to expand the remit of Kent Together now established.
- To look at the viability of the ONS measure being used by KCC alongside partners and providers.

2.5.3 The following actions from the existing recommendations will however be closed and we propose to close the existing action plan itself, *(full details in Appendix 1)*.

Closed recommendations	Rationale
High profile strategy launch	A strategy will not be delivered so this action will be closed and any launch of a social prescribing strategy, which will be discussed as appropriate.
Connected communities' pilot	In place and delivering
Endorsing social prescribing	Social prescribing continues to be a key priority within health and adult social care and KCC is part of the partnership that is delivering the social prescribing platform.

Single online source of information	Delivered
KCC's Public Transport team should investigate the feasibility of expanding the Kent Karrier service and should continue to offer financial support and information to those who wish to introduce or expand a community transport service.	Subsumed into the Kent Bus Service Improvement Plan- business as usual
KCC's Public Transport team should encourage organisations in Kent's transport sector to develop ways of connecting people such as the Talking Bus service – so that transport networks play the greatest role possible in tackling loneliness and social isolation.	Subsumed into the Kent Bus Service Improvement Plan- business as usual
KCC should sign up to the Government's pledge to support its employees by addressing loneliness and building social connections. KCC should also encourage local employers across all sectors to adopt the pledge to support their own employees' social wellbeing and health.	This action will be discharged through the ongoing approach to support staff in post Covid environment e.g., within the context of flexible working practice.
KCC should work with the Government to develop a Kent-focused campaign to raise awareness of the issues and loneliness and social wellbeing.	Engagement and communication will be refocused as part of the development of the partnership action plan including campaigns.
KCC should set up a panel – which should include KCC members – to monitor the effectiveness of interventions, promote best practice, and review progress against the objectives of the Loneliness and Social Isolation Strategy.	The ongoing work set out in the new partnership action plan to address social isolation and loneliness in Kent will be subsumed into business as usual to ensure it is effective and sustainable. Reporting will be through the usual governance routes.

3. Next Steps

3.1 The relevant KCC officers will work with NHS colleagues to shape and define the strategy. The delivery of the Social Prescribing Strategy will then be taken through the relevant Cabinet Committee as business as usual.

4. Recommendations:

Recommendation:

Scrutiny Committee are asked to:

1) Comment on the proposed approach to tackling social isolation and loneliness set out in the report and the closed action plan (Appendix 1).

5. Background documents:

- Appendix 1: Revised action plan on Select Committee recommendations

Author contact details:

Lydia Jackson Policy and Relationships Adviser (VCS)

Lydia.jackson@kent.gov.uk