

Loneliness and Social Isolation Select Committee

Kent Fire & Rescue Service - Social Isolation initiatives

Briefing for Kent County Council

26 September 2018

Introduction

The Fire & Rescue Service has a strong brand and reputation which gives it access into people's homes that other agencies often struggle to reach. Over the last few years the Fire & Rescue Service has been approached nationally by Public Health England and the NHS to exploit these opportunities. This initiative has been termed as 'Fire as a Health Asset' and includes the development of 'Safe and Well Visits'.¹

On 1 October 2015 a [consensus statement](#) was signed by NHS England, Public Health England, Local Government Association, Chief Fire Officers' Association and Age UK, setting out a national commitment to improve health and wellbeing.² In February 2016 Kent & Medway Fire & Rescue Authority (KMFRA) agreed to develop Safe & Well visits to support this agenda.³ This involved increasing the size of its home safety team, providing appropriate training and developing firefighters to undertake Safe & Well visits.

In addition to Safe & Well Visits in people's homes, Kent Fire & Rescue Service (KFRS) undertakes community safety work in numerous other settings including schools, public events and via social media. It often works with the NHS and local authority partners to develop and deliver these initiatives.

The impact of social isolation on health and wellbeing is well established. Whilst there is not a direct link to KMFRA's priorities, it is well established that poor health and wellbeing increase the risk of fire and the consequences of fire. Additionally, some risk behaviours, such as hoarding, remain hidden because of social isolation. The Service is therefore keen to support any initiatives to reduce social isolation that do not significantly impact on available resources.

¹ Principles for a Safe and Well visit <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/safe-well-visit-principles.pdf>

² Working Together <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/working-together.pdf>

³ Safety and Wellbeing Plan 2016-18 http://www.kent.fire-uk.org/_resources/assets/inline/full/0/6713.pdf

Social isolation is by its nature very hard to resolve, and it is highly likely that any initiatives that have successful impact will need to be delivered in partnership with a number of agencies. This is demonstrated by the examples below. KFRS is therefore pleased to be supporting KCC's INTERREG bid for its Connected Communities Project.

Safe & Well Visits

The Service has a specialist team of twenty Home Safety Officers working across Kent & Medway. The team aims to complete 16,000 Safe & Well Visits this year. Additionally, fire crews across the county aim to complete a further 18,000 visits focusing on people aged over 70 who have been identified as a high-risk group.

A typical Safe & Well Visit takes around 45 minutes to complete. The officer spends time with the customer to understand their behaviours and motivations. They will also look around the whole of the premises, usually with the customer, to identify environmental risks as well as signs and indicators of risk behaviour. Many of the visits result from referrals from other agencies or individuals. In these cases, any information from the referring agency or individual will also be taken into account whilst assessing the risks.

The Officer will try to minimise the risks identified. This may be through providing advice and encouraging behaviour change or through changing the home environment. The Officer may identify social isolation as the underlying cause or consequence of a person's health issues. Identifying social isolation calls upon the engagement skills and experience of the individual officers.

Once social isolation is identified as an issue there is no single recognised pathway to support the individual. There are a number of services which the Officer may refer the individual to, including adult social services, local community services or charities such as Age UK.

One issue KFRS often faces is ensuring that the service it refers someone to is appropriate for them and the necessary support will be sustained. This is a particular issue with regard to social isolation, where there is no simple solution and the person is likely to need continuous support. One service KFRS has started referring people to - which seems to be able to offer support over the necessary duration of time - is Age UK's 'Call in Time' telephone befriending service.

Staying Connected in Medway

Between November 2016 and May 2017 KFRS supported a social isolation pilot in Medway. The pilot aimed to increase and improve the number of social interactions an older person may have, as well as signpost and refer them to a range of support agencies. These services were wide ranging and included befriending associations and charities such as the Royal Voluntary Service and Age UK. The initiative was cited in the Missing Millions report.⁴

KFRS helped to identify people over 55 who may be socially isolated whilst undertaking Safe and Well Visits. Those meeting the criteria were provided with a 'Staying Connected' directory which gave them a list of local groups and organisations. As a result, 44 people were referred to other agencies for support and 16 were visited by a KFRS volunteer to measure their loneliness scores and to explore the directory. People were offered up to three visits by a KFRS volunteer, but most declined additional visits.

Since the pilot, KFRS and other agencies have continued to distribute the 'Staying Connected' directory, which has subsequently been revised; the follow up visits by KFRS volunteers were resource-intensive and have not continued since the pilot ended. It is understood Medway Council is currently developing its next social isolation strategy.

Show You Care

In January 2018 KFRS launched its [Show You Care](#) campaign which aims to reduce social isolation and help to keep people safe. The initiative seeks to help make people feel valued, safer and less isolated. KFRS encourages people to visit someone they know for "a chat and a cuppa", and to consider how they can help reduce the risk of fire in their home.

The campaign also aims to increase the number of people referred to KFRS for a Safe and Well Visit. In 2017-2018 celebrity Cheryl Baker helped to promote the campaign, leading to more awareness of the campaign.

⁴ <https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/wp-content/uploads/The-Missing-Million-report-FINAL.pdf>

Between January and May 2018, over 180,000 people were reached through Facebook or Twitter, with over 14,000 people viewing two promotional videos. Over 1,700 people directly engaged with the social media campaign. The campaign was promoted again during the summer heatwave to help vulnerable people who were at greater risk.

Haircare Network

Between March and October 2016 KFRS built a network of hairdressers/barbers (both shop-based and mobile) to help promote its Safe & Well Visits to hard-to-reach groups, including older people who may be social isolated. The Royal Society for Public Health, which endorsed the campaign, has recognised that hairdressers are ideally placed to spread public health messages. The campaign generated an increase in the number of Safe & Well referrals for relevant target groups.

During the eight months of the campaign, 107 businesses registered with the Haircare Network and received promotional materials for their salons. Businesses were also provided with additional training, such as Dementia Friends awareness sessions.