

LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARDS: All
REPORT TITLE Community Connectedness and Friendships	
REPORT OF Executive Director Adults & Health	
FOR SUBMISSION TO Health and Wellbeing Board	DATE 18 th December 2024
<p>SUMMARY OF REPORT</p> <p>Reducing loneliness and social isolation through effective promotion of community connectedness and friendships is a strategic priority for the Camden Health and Wellbeing Board. This report provides an update on progress made in this area since the topic was last discussed by the Board in 2023 and aims to stimulate discussion on how best we can meet the needs of residents and continue to build a collaborative partnership to tackle social isolation.</p> <p>Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information</p> <p>No documents that require listing have been used in the preparation of this report.</p> <p>Contact Officer: Michael Godfrey Public Health Strategist London Borough of Camden michael.godfrey@camden.gov.uk 5 Pancras Square, London N1C 4AG</p>	
<p>RECOMMENDATIONS</p> <p>The Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to note the contents of the report.</p>	

Signed:



Jess McGregor, Executive Director Adults & Health

Date: 9th December 2024

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. Reducing loneliness and social isolation through effective promotion of community connectedness and friendships is a strategic priority for the Camden Health and Wellbeing Board and Camden Borough Partnership, and one of the three short-term priorities in Camden's Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2022-30).
- 1.2. The priority was last discussed by the Board in December 2023. This report provides an update on progress made since then and aims to stimulate discussion on how best we can meet the needs of residents and continue to build a collaborative partnership to tackle social isolation.
- 1.3. This report contains:
 - An update on the work of the Community Connectedness and Friendship Working Group (CCFWG) (see Appendix A for membership), including:
 - The development and delivery of a webinar to frontline staff and organisations
 - An update on the 'Camden, together' communications campaign, being developed by the communications team in partnership with the CCFWG
 - Community Connectedness Workshop: Befriending services
 - Next Steps

2. Strategic background and previous discussion by the Board

- 2.1. Camden's Health and Wellbeing Strategy aims to take a population health approach to a range of health issues, recognising that health and wellbeing challenges are complex, and that long-term, collaborative efforts are required to make progress. Evidence demonstrates that social isolation and loneliness have significant impacts on health and wellbeing outcomes, with particular communities experiencing these impacts disproportionately.
- 2.2. At the Board in December 2023 the findings from a needs assessment exploring social isolation, loneliness and community connectedness were discussed, as well as a multi-agency stakeholder workshop held based on the findings from the needs assessment, inviting partners from Council teams, NHS and VCS organisations, to identify potential gaps in provision and opportunities to make improvements¹. Following the workshop, the CCFWG was formed, and have met monthly to drive actions forward, including the development of a theory of change and three priority objectives have been identified:
 - Improve identification and engagement of people who are chronically lonely and isolated
 - Explore service area specific opportunities to help reduce social isolation and loneliness

¹ <https://democracy.camden.gov.uk/documents/s115828/Cover Report - Community Connectedness and Friendships.pdf>

- Undertake a borough wide communications campaign to increase awareness and reduce stigma
- 2.3. Early plans to deliver a borough-wide communications campaign were also discussed. Using case studies from Camden residents, evidence based targeting and effective testing and evaluation of impact, the campaign aims were:
- Increase awareness of the issue more widely, whilst ensuring appropriate, non-stigmatising language was used
 - Support the reduction of stigma
 - Support people to identify if they are socially isolated and/or lonely
 - Encourage a kinder, loneliness/social isolation aware population
- 2.4. The Board was asked to discuss who from their organisation or service area could join the working group to support developing the actions, and how their organisations could better support with identifying people who were experiencing loneliness. Some highlights from the resulting discussion are given here:
- Members representing NHS Trusts said that colleagues had varying levels of awareness of how to connect to communities and neighbourhoods.
 - Some of the ways in which the population health approach might effectively link in with the ongoing neighbourhoods work were discussed
 - The importance of ongoing promotion, alongside the initial campaigns was stressed, to enable information to be accessible when needed.
 - The possible role that schools could play in signposting, acknowledging that this might require training.

3. An update of the work of the CCFWG: Overview

- 3.1. To meet the objectives highlighted in sections 2.2 and 2.3, a number of actions have taken place. These actions have been informed by ongoing discussions held in the CCFWG, and with the Health and Wellbeing Board, and supported by partners involved in the working group.
- 3.2. The below items are not an exhaustive list of the work taking place across Camden, as there is a large volume of work supporting social isolation happening in Camden outside the work of the CCFWG, and it is worth noting that staff often have limited capacity to support on this issue in addition to their regular work supporting residents. Residents may also struggle with the confidence to reach out and engage with the range of services and activities available to them, highlighting a need for befriending and accompaniment services to improve access.
- 3.3. As such, much of the work in the CCFWG is oriented around identifying where we can add value, building links between other projects and highlighting and raising the profile of other work going on, while also working to reduce stigma and improve understanding around loneliness.
- 3.4. Part of the focus of the CCFWG has been on linking in with other pieces of work happening across the council, including:

- Camden's Social Prescribing Group, to support effective links between services supporting social connections
- The Reading for Pleasure strategy steering group, to build partnerships with Camden libraries and encourage libraries as spaces for community connectedness
- Camden's Culture Strategy, to ensure that culture as a vehicle for community building can be captured

3.5. Some of the key pieces of work the CCFWG has led on are described below.

4. An update of the work of the CCFWG: Social Isolation Webinar

4.1. The CCFWG has developed a social isolation and loneliness webinar, incorporating elements of the Aging Better Camden training, aimed at equipping front-line staff with the knowledge to better understand and identify loneliness, engage with residents in a non-stigmatising manner, and provide basic signposting and support.

4.2. The webinar covers a range of topics and activities, including:

- The key findings from the needs assessment, including the local picture, and risk factors
- How to identify when someone is lonely, and how to have a have a light-touch conversation to support them
- A practical example of what social isolation might look like, and opportunities for staff to reflect on how they might provide support to someone in that position
- Resources and services available in the borough to signpost residents who may need support

4.3. The webinar has been delivered to several Council teams, including social care staff during national Social Work Week, across the Council during Loneliness Awareness Week, and to the VCS forum led by Voluntary Action Camden.

4.4. Response to post-webinar survey has been positive, with a majority of attendees surveyed agreeing that the session provided them with the tools to tackle social isolation when supporting residents. Qualitative feedback indicated that staff found the resources very useful, that the topic was highly relevant to the work they were doing and that it had encouraged reflection on loneliness and how it might affect the residents they support. Some quotes that best highlight this include:

- *“Great bitesize training...got me thinking and reflecting on the clients I work with and for people/family I know personally. I'll definitely use the links and share this training at my next team meeting”*
- *“I was able to reflect that there are times I feel loneliness as I'm getting older, fewer friends, family moving away, this session has helped me with developing my communication skills for the future, knowing the correct approach to help understand when a person is feeling lonely”*

4.5. The CCFWG has developed plans to continue delivering to other teams, such as library and sports and leisure staff, and encouraging staff to take ownership of the webinar to deliver to their own teams.

5. 'Camden, together': Communications campaign

5.1. The Council's new 'Camden, together' campaign is the first step in a longer-term communications strategy to reduce loneliness and improve community connectedness. It is being co-designed with Voluntary Action Camden, with input from other VCS organisations, and overseen by the CCFWG.

5.2. The initial phase of the campaign is aimed at all Camden residents. There are two strands to 'Camden, together'. The first addresses the stigma of loneliness, explains that anyone can feel lonely and that it is a normal part of life, and signposts residents to ways to connect with others and support if feeling lonely is affecting their mental health.

5.3. The second strand targets residents who may not identify as lonely but want to increase their social networks. It signposts to ways to connect with others, from activities to volunteering and befriending, as well as showcasing initiatives to increase community connectedness in voluntary and community sector organisations across Camden.

5.4. 'Camden, together' will launch in December across Council channels, including print (bus shelters, Camden magazine, Housing News for council tenants and leaseholders, posters) and digital (e-newsletters and social media). Communications packs including assets in community languages and easy read formats will be shared with partners, including VCS organisations, libraries, pharmacies and GPs, to encourage campaign distribution via partner channels and the campaign will be launched internally to raise awareness of community connectedness among staff.

5.5. The longer-term strategy will be an iterative process, with findings from the initial phase used to develop more targeted approaches to engage residents who are at more risk of likely to feel lonely in Camden – for example, adults aged 65+, young people aged 16-24, residents from Black, Asian and other ethnic groups, and adults with learning disabilities

5.6. A key focus of the 'Camden, together' campaign is to better identify and engage residents at greater risk of loneliness and build an understanding of how to better target the support that is available.

6. Item 3: Community Connectedness Workshop: Befriending Services

6.1. A workshop held on the 6th of November, with a focus on Befriending services, which primarily work to support socially isolated older adults. Services can include regular visits to a person for conversation or to give a carer a short break, regular phone-calls from volunteers to have a chat, and various other forms.

6.2. The workshop brought together teams/organisations providing Befriending support, to discuss their services, any challenges encountered and opportunities for collaboration or cross-project support.

6.3. A range of services were discussed, including:

- Doorstep Help, a service providing home-visits to residents, to help assess their needs and match them to relevant activities, while supporting to build confidence.
- River of Hope, a community developed map of local services and projects in Camden, aimed at helping people engage with their local communities
- Camden Companion, a resource aimed at guiding local residents towards healthy living in Camden, including useful resources for socially isolated residents

6.4. The workshop concluded with a group discussion which identified barriers to effective delivery of befriending services, such as large waiting lists for services and issues with capacity. The discussion identified other related services in the borough. There is a commitment to share the befriending offer widely to raise awareness so that other services refer to them and other actions to embed befriending services where they might not be known.

7. Next steps

7.1. The CCFWG aims to continue to develop current pieces of work to improve understanding of social isolation and loneliness, to raise the profile of services and activities available to support reduction of loneliness in Camden, and to improve engagement with residents who are experiencing social isolation and loneliness.

7.2. The CCFWG will continue to deliver the Social Isolation Webinar to teams and organisations, to build understanding, reduce stigma and improve awareness of signposting options to support residents.

7.3. The 'Camden, together' campaign will be monitored closely as it is rolled out, and data collected via this campaign will be used to inform a second phase of more specific, targeted communications at communities identified as being at higher risk of loneliness and social isolation.

7.4. The CCFWG will continue to identify relevant topics and bringing partners together to join-up work, and to collaboratively identify challenges and opportunities for improvements.

8. Questions for the Board

- How can we enhance the understanding of loneliness, and the ability to offer support, within partner organisations?
- What work is currently underway within partner organisations that would benefit from being linked into the Community Connectedness & Friendships Working Group?

- What additional topics should be considered for a Community Connectedness workshop, so as to gather insight from local stakeholders?

9. Finance Comments of the Executive Director Corporate Services

The Executive Director of Corporate Services has been consulted on the contents of the report and has no comments to add to the report

10. Legal Comments of the Borough Solicitor

The Health and Wellbeing Board was set up under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 and has a duty to encourage health and social care services to work in an integrated manner to advance the health and wellbeing of the people in its area. The Board is responsible for the joint strategic needs assessment (JSNA) and joint local health and wellbeing strategies (JLHWS) under s116 and 116A of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007. The statutory guidance in relation to JSNA and JLHWS states that the ICB, NHS CB and Local Authorities plans for commissioning services should be informed by the JSNA and JLHWS and if not, the relevant bodies should explain why. Local services should be based on the JSNA and take account of the JLHWS.

The Board should consider how the plans in the report take account of the JSNA and JLHWS and encourage integrated working.

The Board should consider how the work outlined in the report contributes to improvements in health and wellbeing in the local area.

11. Environmental Implications

There are no environmental implications to the contents of this report.

12. Appendices

Appendix A: Working Group Stakeholders

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