

LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARDS: All
REPORT TITLE Community Connectedness and Friendships	
REPORT OF Director of Health and Wellbeing	
FOR SUBMISSION TO Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee	DATE 1 st December 2025
SUMMARY OF REPORT The report updates on progress and next steps for the implementation of the community connectedness and friendships short-term priority within the Camden Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-30. It outlines progress against the three activity areas of the Community Connectedness and Friendships Working Group: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve identification and engagement of people who are chronically lonely and isolated. • Explore service area specific opportunities to help reduce social isolation and loneliness. • Undertake a borough wide communications campaign to increase awareness and reduce stigma. <p>It also highlights other related work on reducing social isolation in Camden.</p> <p>Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information No documents that require listing have been used in the preparation of this report.</p> <p>Contact Officer: Eve Wilson Public Health Strategist London Borough of Camden 5 Pancras Square, London N1C 4AG Eve.wilson1@camden.gov.uk</p>	
RECOMMENDATIONS The Committee is asked to note and comment on the report, addressing the following discussion areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • any further opportunities for delivering the social isolation and loneliness webinar (see section 4) • any other activities related to reducing social isolation and connecting communities to ensure work is joined up where necessary (see section 7) 	

Signed:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K. Watters', with a horizontal line drawn through the middle of the signature.

Kirsten Watters, Director of Health and Wellbeing

Date: 19/11/2025

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. Reducing loneliness and social isolation through the promotion of community connectedness and friendships was one of the three short-term priorities in Camden's Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2022-2030)¹, and a We Make Camden challenge². Although the priorities within the Health and Wellbeing Strategy were updated in Summer 2025, the work to reduce loneliness and isolation continues. This recognises loneliness as a key determinant of poor health outcomes in Camden and calls for a coordinated response from partners.
- 1.2. The Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee last received an update on this priority in January 2024, and the Health and Wellbeing Board in December 2024. The purpose of this report is to provide an update of the work of the Community Connectedness and Friendships Working Group (CCFWG).
- 1.3. This report will also refer to work outside of the CCFWG to further inform the Committee.

2. Background

- 2.1. Following loneliness being identified as a priority, a population health approach was implemented. In Camden, this means understanding health in the round and taking collective action to reduce inequalities and improve population health. Further details on this approach and how it has been applied to this priority were detailed in the January 2024 report to the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee.
- 2.2. The approach included the development of a Social Isolation, Loneliness and Community Connectedness Health Needs Assessment³, published in 2022 (see appendix A for key recommendations of the needs assessment). Findings were subsequently presented at a multi-disciplinary stakeholder workshop, where attendees identified gaps in provision and opportunities for intervention.
- 2.3. Following the workshop, the CCFWG was formed. The group is made up of representatives from across and outside of the Council, extending beyond those who work within traditional health and care services. Membership includes representatives from Council teams including Adult Social Care, Health and Wellbeing, Recreation and Leisure, Housing as well as Voluntary Action Camden, NHS and Voluntary Community Sector (VCS) organisations (see appendix B for full list of organisation membership). It is jointly chaired by Health and Wellbeing and Voluntary Action Camden colleagues.

¹ Camden Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2030. Available:

<https://business.camden.gov.uk/documents/20142/0/Camden+HWB+Strategy+%28Feb+22%29+v6.pdf/6084f08a-9dde-db2b-6f37-fa5c766cd4e8?t=1647945138445>

² We Make Camden. Available: wemakecamden.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/We-Make-Camden-Vision.pdf

³ Social Isolation, Loneliness and Community Connectedness Health Needs Assessment. Available: https://jsna.camden.gov.uk/reports/social_isolation/

- 2.4. After in-depth discussions, the Working Group refined recommendations made in the needs assessment and agreed to focus partnership action on the following priorities:
- Improve identification and engagement of people who are chronically lonely and isolated.
 - Explore service area specific opportunities to help reduce social isolation and loneliness.
 - Undertake a borough wide communications campaign to increase awareness and reduce stigma.

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

- 3.1. To meet the priorities outlined above, several actions have taken place in the last year. These actions have been informed by ongoing discussions held in the CCFWG and supported by partners.
- 3.2. Outside of the work of the CCFWG, there is a wealth of activity happening in Camden to support social connection and alleviate loneliness and isolation. This includes the work of our social prescribers, existing activities through VCS organisations, volunteering opportunities, in our community centres, libraries and recreation facilities⁴. Therefore, the work in the CCFWG is oriented around identifying where we can add value, building links between our work and other projects. Further details of other pieces of work can be found in section 7 of this report.
- 3.3. The key pieces of work the CCFWG have achieved are described below, mapped to the key priorities. The information below does not include achievements previously reported to the Committee.

4. Update on CCFWG priority 1: Improve identification and engagement of people who are chronically lonely and isolated.

- 4.1. The CCFWG developed a social isolation and loneliness webinar, using the work of Aging Better Camden, aimed at equipping frontline staff with the knowledge to better understand and identify loneliness, engage with residents in a non-stigmatising manner, and to feel confident in providing basic signposting and support. The training is available to all staff working with Camden residents.
- 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 <https://www.camden.gov.uk/connect-with-your-community-in-camden>

- 4.3. The webinar has been delivered in sessions open to all council staff as well as tailored to several service specific teams, including Camden Community Mental Health Team and Social Care Teams. The training has been well received, with participants valuing practical ideas for non-stigmatising light touch conversations.
- 4.4. The CCFWG have been actively promoting the webinar. This has included highlighting the offer to VCS organisations at the Equalities and Community Strength Forum, as well as attending the Recreation Services and Public Safety Senior Management Team meeting, the Participation and Partnerships Team meeting and identifying opportunities within Drug and Alcohol service providers and partners. Training for Camden library staff is planned for November 2025.
- 5. Update on CCFWG priority 2: Explore service area specific opportunities to help reduce social isolation and loneliness.**
- 5.1. Partnership workshops bring together the CCFWG and a range of partners to engage in broad, collaborative discussions on key issues around loneliness, social isolation and connectedness. These sessions provide a platform to explore challenges, identify opportunities, share best practice, and highlight current work across organisations to support residents to connect. In March 2025, a workshop was held on accompaniment services, examining how individuals can be supported to take their first steps in accessing services.
- 5.2. The next workshop is scheduled for January 2026 and will focus on supporting young people experiencing social isolation. The session aims to facilitate sharing of best practice on engaging youth in group activities, consider social prescribing as a tool to build long-term resilience, and highlight how voluntary and community-led approaches can complement clinical services to create holistic, accessible support systems.
- 6. Update on CCFWG priority 3: Undertake a borough wide communications campaign to increase awareness and reduce stigma.**
- 6.1. The *Camden, together*⁵ campaign is the first step in a longer-term communications strategy to reduce loneliness and improve community connectedness. Developed by Health and Wellbeing's communication leads, the campaign was co-designed with Voluntary Action Camden and shaped by input from a range of Council and VCS colleagues. The campaign was overseen by the CCFWG.
- 6.2. The initial phase of the campaign, launched in December 2024, targeted all Camden residents and comprised of two strands. The first focused on reducing the stigma around loneliness, emphasising that it is a common and normal part of life, and signposted residents to opportunities for connection and support.

⁵ *Camden, together* campaign webpages available: <https://www.camden.gov.uk/connect-with-your-community-in-camden> and <https://www.camden.gov.uk/support-if-you-feel-lonely>

- 6.3. The second strand reached out to residents who may not identify as lonely but were interested in increasing their social networks. It promoted ways to connect with others through activities, volunteering, and befriending, while showcasing initiatives led by VCS organisations to foster community connectedness.
- 6.4. The campaign was delivered across Council channels, including print (bus shelters, Camden magazine, Housing News, posters) and digital platforms (e-newsletters and social media). Communications packs featuring assets in community languages and easy-read formats were distributed to partners such as VCS organisations, libraries, pharmacies, and GPs. The campaign was also launched internally to raise awareness among staff of the importance of community connectedness.
- 6.5. Feedback from a range of partners and residents has been very positive. Visits to the campaign webpages exceeded the target of 1,000 initial visits with closer to 3,000 visits since the campaign began.
- 6.6. Insights from the initial phase are now informing the development of the second all-resident communications campaign, running from December 2025 to February 2026, which will include refreshed assets and resident stories.
- 6.7. A complementary sub-campaign is running from September to December 2025, developed in partnership with the University of London to support students who are at higher risk of loneliness and isolation. Adapted materials from the all-resident campaign are being used, alongside a creative, in person wellbeing session to challenge stigma, foster connection and encourage peer support. Following this targeted activity, the campaign will expand to reach non-University of London students and other young people across the borough.

7. Other work in Camden

- 7.1. As mentioned in section 3.2, there is a wealth of activity happening across Camden to support social connection and alleviate loneliness and isolation. This work sits outside the CCFWG, but members the Group support some areas, and ensure that links are made to limit duplication of effort and highlight the offers. Outlined here are some examples of this activity and is not exhaustive.
- 7.2. *Adult Social Care Workshops:* In June 2025, Adult Social Care colleagues hosted two co-production workshops that brought together residents, Camden staff, and partner organisations to explore lived experiences and identify practical ways to strengthen the social connections of residents in receipt of Adult Social Care. Using the *Working Together for Change* approach⁶, participants developed four action plans focused on timely repairs, reducing the need to retell personal stories through a council 'passport', improving accessibility across services, and increasing continuity of care by reducing reliance on agency staff. These sessions created space for honest conversations and generated ideas that reflect what matters most to people who draw on care

⁶ <http://www.helensandersonassociates.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Working-together-for-Change.pdf>

and support. Over the summer, detailed scoping work has been carried out to turn these ideas into realistic next steps - mapping existing services, identifying gaps, and refining objectives. In September, a follow-up meeting brought everyone back together to review progress and agree priorities. Key developments include improved internal systems for repairs with ongoing opportunities for consultation and plans for Easy Read materials, early work on accessibility through interpreting service reviews and website improvements, and the proposal to form working groups for both the council passport and accessibility.

- 7.3. *Camden Carers*: Unpaid carers are disproportionately affected by isolation. Camden's Carers Action Plan⁷ sets out how colleagues are working together to improve recognition and support for carers, including developing peer support structures and activities that boost social connection and friendships.
- 7.4. *Community Champions*⁸ is a resident-driven initiative aimed at strengthening health and wellbeing across housing estates in Highgate, Kentish Town, Kilburn, King's Cross, and Regents Park. Each area is led by a local VCS, where a coordinator works with resident volunteers (Community Champions) to identify priorities that address local needs. A key focus has been tackling social isolation and loneliness by creating activities that foster community cohesion and a sense of belonging.
- 7.5. *Camden Libraries* released their Reading Together Strategy 2025-2030 in June 2025⁹. The strategy is focused on instilling a love of reading for Camden residents, with several key objectives linked to community connectedness and opportunities for reading to improve health and wellbeing outcomes. Camden Libraries have also recently recruited a Health and Wellbeing Librarian, who will work alongside Adult Social Care and Health and Wellbeing colleagues to develop pieces of work relating to this strategy.
- 7.6. *Camden Cultural Strategy 2025-2030*¹⁰ positions culture as a tool for connection and wellbeing, committing to embed creative activities, particularly in areas with high levels of loneliness and isolation. It includes actions such as artist-led neighbourhood programmes and social buddying networks to help residents connect through arts and culture.
- 7.7. *Kentish Town Connects*, formed in mid-2024, is a community initiative which brings together local community organisations, residents and partners. It is focused on collaborating and community organising for the better of residents. Activities have included establishing a Loneliness Action Group, aimed at responding to loneliness as an emerging theme.

⁷ <https://camdencarechoices.camden.gov.uk/support-and-advice-for-carers/the-carers-action-plan/>

⁸ <https://www.communitychampionscamden.co.uk/>

⁹ Camden Reading Together 2025-2030 (2025). Available: <https://www.camden.gov.uk/camden-reading-together-strategy>

¹⁰ Camden Cultural Strategy 2025-2030 (2025). Available: <https://newculturalstrategycamden.commonplace.is/en-GB/>

- 7.8. *We Make Camden Estates and Neighbourhoods Mission*¹¹ focuses on social isolation and broader social determinants linked to estates, with a specific focus on belonging and connection.

8. Next steps

- 8.1. Next steps for each of the three priority areas of the CCFWG are detailed throughout this report. These actions aim to develop current pieces of work to improve understanding of social isolation and loneliness, raise the profile of services and activities to support reduction of loneliness in Camden and to improve engagement with residents who are experiencing social isolation and loneliness.
- 8.2. The findings of the needs assessment will continue to guide the work of the CCWFG, and the group will continue to explore opportunities to support local organisations and residents to connect.

9. Comments of the Director of Finance

- 9.1. The Director of Finance 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

- 10.1. The Borough Solicitor has been consulted on the contents of this report and has no comment to make at this time.

11. Environmental Implications

- 11.1. This report has no environmental implications.

12. Appendices

Appendix A: Key recommendations from the Loneliness, Social Isolation and Community Connectedness Needs Assessment

Appendix B: Membership of the Community Connectedness and Friendship Working Group

REPORT ENDS

¹¹ We Make Camden. Available: wemakecamden.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/We-Make-Camden-Vision.pdf

Appendix A: Key recommendations from the Loneliness, Social Isolation and Community Connectedness Needs Assessment

The following recommendations were jointly developed among participants at a workshop held in July 2022, with participants asked to prioritise key opportunities to be taken forward as recommendations, using the following prioritisation framework:

- Reflective of local need
- Potential to reduce inequality and disproportionality
- Feasibility of implementation
- Potential to shift the dial

The priority actions were grouped into eight key areas:

1. Sharing current knowledge and best practice.
2. Improving identification of and engagement with those who are chronically lonely and isolated. This needs to include those not ready to engage in formal activities.
3. Digital inclusion is essential for promoting social connection and 'Digital' is one of the 6 challenges in We Make Camden ('Everyone in Camden can access and be part of a digital society').
4. The corporate Neighbourhoods work is an important vehicle to take work forward to tackle loneliness and social isolation. It was felt neighbourhoods is an appropriate 'geographical level' to take action.
5. Undertaking a borough-wide communications campaign to support the reduction of stigma, increase awareness of the issue more widely whilst ensuring appropriate, non-stigmatising language is being used, encourage a kinder, loneliness / social isolation aware population and to support people to identify if they are socially isolated and/or lonely.
6. Explore service area specific opportunities to help reduce social isolation and loneliness.
7. Consider different ways of commissioning to re-direct health system money away from costly acute forms of care to preventative community services. This would support the development of more sustainable programmes and a more resilient VCS e.g. through a Community Chest, Camden small grants programme, or other coproduction / citizen ownership schemes (including criteria to address loneliness through social connections).
8. Work with the VCS to identify and implement ways to: Improve support for people at key life transitions / following important life events that place them at high risk of loneliness and social isolation, address practical barriers that stop people from accessing existing services / socialising and to plug the gap for people with mobility issues.

Appendix B: Membership of the Community Connectedness and Friendship Working Group

Membership of the Community Connectedness and Friendship Working Group:

- Voluntary Action Camden (Co-chair)
- Health and Wellbeing (Co-chair) (Camden Council)
- Adult Social Care Strategy & Commissioning (Camden Council)
- Insight, Quality and Financial Services (Camden Council)
- Prevention and Wellbeing (Camden Council)
- Strategy, Design and Insight (Camden Council)
- Community Partnerships (Camden Council)
- Community Sport and Physical Activity (Camden Council)
- Neighbourhoods (Camden Council)
- Digital Inclusion (Camden Council)
- Social Prescribing, Caversham Group Practice
- Ageing Better in Camden
- Camden Federation of Private Tenants (CFPT)
- Adult Social Care communications (Camden Council)
- Health and Wellbeing communications (Camden Council)