

# Policy Review Select Committee

**Sandwell's approach to  
preventing loneliness  
and social isolation**

**23rd November**

[ILO: UNCLASSIFIED]

# Purpose of session

1. Understand the issues related to loneliness and isolation.
2. Build the picture of what is happening in Sandwell.
3. For the committee to identify any policy recommendations it wishes to make to cabinet.

# What leads to loneliness and isolation?

- ▶ An ageing population becoming more vulnerable - but not just a problem for the elderly but also affects working age adults
- ▶ Increasing numbers of people living alone.
- ▶ Breakdown of family networks and support.
- ▶ Increasing numbers of people whose first language isn't English.
- ▶ Poor transport services.
- ▶ Decline in institutions - trade unions, churches and day activities.
- ▶ Social media - whilst helping us to keep in touch with people, it enhances isolation by creating an environment in which everyone seems to be having a good time.

# Why is loneliness a problem?

*Loneliness is closely linked to social isolation and health implications*

Links between loneliness and poor mental or physical health have been established. Socially isolated adults are more likely to;

1. Be admitted earlier to residential or nursing care
2. Are at greater risk of emergency admission and re-admission to hospital.
3. Have an increased risk of depression, paranoia, addiction, heart disease, raised blood pressure stroke, accidents and suicide.

**‘Research shows that lacking social connections is as damaging to our health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.’**

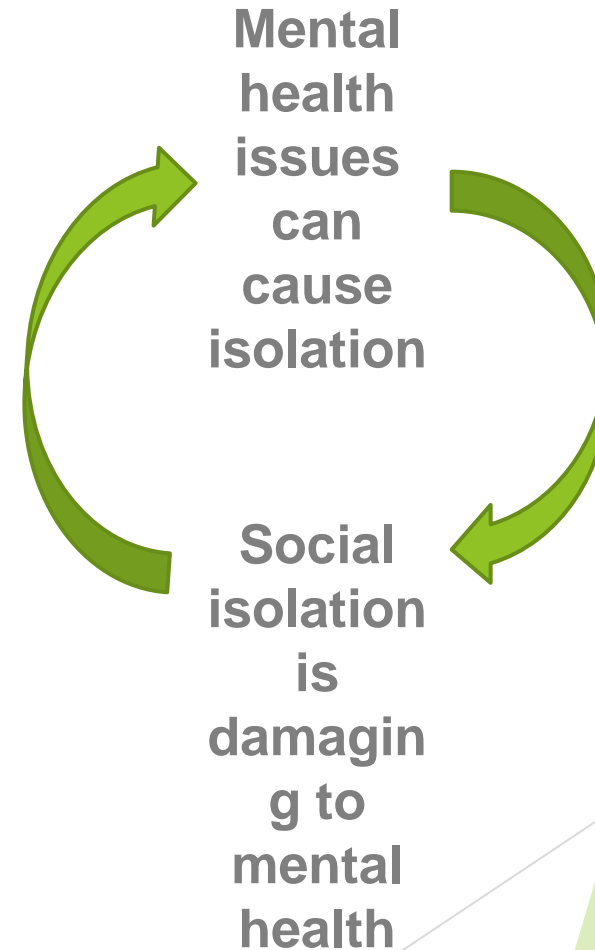
# National statistics from Age UK

- ▶ 23% of people aged 75+ who live alone do not see or speak with someone every day.
- ▶ 13% of people aged 55+ only speak to someone three or four days a week.
- ▶ 76% of family doctors report that between 1 and 5 patients a day attend their surgery primarily because they are lonely.
- ▶ Almost one million people over 75 do not know their nearest neighbours.
- ▶ In urban areas 95% of people live within 13 minutes of a regular (hourly) bus, but in rural areas this falls to 61%.
- ▶ 41% of Lesbian, Gay and Bisexual people aged 55 and over live alone (compared to 28 per cent of heterosexual people).

# Mental health and social isolation

Research shows that:

- ▶ 42% of people feel depressed because of loneliness.
- ▶ 57% of people who had experienced depression or anxiety isolated themselves from friends and family.



Source: National statistics from the Mental Health Foundation

# Tackling Loneliness and isolation in Sandwell

- ▶ Huge contribution made by voluntary, community and faith organisations
- ▶ Over 1000 organisations delivering support and activities for local people – preventing loneliness by providing opportunities for people to meet, socialise, keep active, volunteer

**Places of Welcome; events are put on weekly in churches, cafes and community centres in Sandwell to provide a social space for local residents.**

# Befriending services in Sandwell

<u>Organisation</u>	<u>Role in community</u>
BUDS	Home visiting for those with dementia
Sandwell Irish Community Association	Golden Years Luncheon Club
Yemeni Community Association	Amongst various support, lunch clubs
Brushstrokes	Mentoring Service for isolated newcomers
Age UK	Home visiting and social activities
Cape Community Day Care Centre	Day care, luncheon club and meals on wheels
Friends and Neighbours	'Living plans' to improve quality of life
Sandwell Active Independent Blind Association	Leisure and social support
Kaleidoscope Plus Group	Amongst various support, involved in community offer
Alderman James Salvation Army	Community cafe
Smethwick Churches Action Network (C.A.N)	Amongst various support, support for the vulnerable



# Community Offer

- ▶ Pilot funded by Adult Social Care as part of the Better Care fund from Sept 2014 – March 2017 to test out whether community based support reduces demand on health and social care
- ▶ Provide free advice and support for elderly people who live in Sandwell. Community Offer provides a needs assessment for every service user, connects them to the range of agencies that can best meet their needs and then brings in longer term community based support from local groups, volunteers and good neighbours.
- ▶ Delivered by voluntary sector partners: Agewell, BUDS, Murray Hall Community Trust, Friends and Neighbours, KaleidoscopePlus, Health for Living (Accord)
- ▶ Uncertain future - no further funding after March 2017

# Evaluation of the Community Offer

Findings show that the Community Offer is a nice thing to do and many individuals have benefitted from the support offered:

- ▶ reduced their isolation and loneliness and increased service users' quality of life
- ▶ may lead to a short-term increase in the use of health and social services but also reduced the number of missed healthcare appointments
- ▶ Provided support structures and safety nets so people felt more connected to their community.
- ▶ Recruited 200 volunteers and supported 3700 people

But it didn't demonstrate the benefits required to sustain future funding. It was not possible to prove that the investment in the Community Offer had reduced demand on health and social care services.

# Prevention Strategy

- ▶ Prevention strategy under development.
- ▶ Loneliness will be an element of the prevention strategy (early intervention).
- ▶ Collaborative approach across all departments of the council.
- ▶ Strategy will provide an overarching focus and direction for all council prevention services.

# Issues for Consideration

Anecdotally preventing loneliness is a good thing to do but:

- ▶ How do we measure the return on investment?
- ▶ What will be our evidence base to support future decision making?
- ▶ How will we target limited resources to achieve the most positive impact on people's lives?
- ▶ Should the new prevention offer be based on the locality working approach?
- ▶ How do we find out what is available to support health and social care across the Borough?
- ▶ How can this support policy recommendations?

# Discussion - policy recommendations