



Tackling Loneliness Task Group

January 2018

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Task group members

Councillor Bilqees Mauthoor	Chair, Councillor for Leggatts Ward
Councillor Stephen Bolton	Councillor for Central Ward
Councillor Stephen Cavinder	Councillor for Woodside Ward
Councillor Kareen Hastrick	Councillor for Meriden Ward
Councillor Rabi Martins	Councillor for Central Ward

Officer support

Ishbel Morren	Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer
Sandra Hancock	Committee and Scrutiny Officer
Jodie Kloss	Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer

External organisations

Age UK	Mark Hanna and Deborah Lee
Youth Connexions, Hertfordshire	Mary Walsh
Disability Watford	Leigh Hutchings
Hertfordshire County Council	Sue Darker
Home Start	Emma Power
New Hope	Pete Belfield
The Silver Line	David Dingley
Small Acts of Kindness	Lynne Misner
Watford & Three Rivers Trust	Bob Jones

Proposed recommendations to present to Overview and Scrutiny Committee

To provide:

- signposting to appropriate organisations for those experiencing loneliness, through the use of:
 - a dedicated page on the council's website
 - leaflets and publications from relevant organisations in the customer service centre at the Town Hall and in other council owned facilities e.g., community centres, Watford Museum and the leisure centres
 - information from external organisations displayed on community noticeboards
- training for councillors to help them to recognise and assist people vulnerable to loneliness in the course of their work in the local community
- best practice guidance for councillors – to be included as a downloadable document on the council's intranet

Also to:

- ask the Mayor to write to
 - HCC underlining the importance of tackling loneliness amongst Watford residents and encouraging them to ensure the issue remains a priority and is reflected in the allocation of resources
 - the MP for Watford underlining the importance of tackling loneliness and encouraging him to take an active part in cross-party efforts to address the issue and to speak out on behalf of residents who may be affected
- encourage councillors to be mindful of local organisations and events which attempt to tackle loneliness in their ward when allocating money from their Neighbourhood Locality Funds
- the Task Group Chair to write and encourage the Portfolio Holder for Community to be mindful of local organisations and events which attempt to tackle loneliness in Watford in their consideration of the council's Small Grants Fund applications.

Background to the task group

There has been a growing focus on the potentially harmful effects of loneliness and social isolation on health and longevity, especially among older adults. This has been supported by various studies and surveys, including a major study by The Co-op and the British Red Cross (2016) which revealed that over 9 million people in the UK across all adult ages – more than the population of London – were either always or often lonely.

The impact of loneliness on health is equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day (Holt-Lunstad, 2015). It is not confined to particular groups, although is most prevalent amongst the elderly. The task group learnt that:

- 200,000 older people said they had not had a conversation with friends or family for a month, while 3.9 million older people agreed the television was their main form of company (Age UK, 2014)
- 1 in 5 GP visits were for non-clinical purposes (Citizens Advice, 2015)
- 43% of 17 – 25 year olds who used the Action for Children service had experienced problems with loneliness (Action for Children, 2009)
- 24% of parents surveyed said they were always or often lonely (Action for Children, 2015)
- 50% of disabled people were lonely on any given day (Sense, 2015)
- 58% of refugees and migrants surveyed in London described loneliness and isolation as their biggest challenge (The Forum, 2014)
- 8 out of 10 carers have felt lonely or isolated as a result of looking after a loved one (Carers UK, 2014)
- almost 10% of people with dementia leave the house once a month or less (Alzheimer's Society, 2014).

The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness was established in January 2017 to continue the work of the murdered MP, Jo Cox. It brings together a group of 13 charities and businesses to respond to the challenge of loneliness. Inspired by the late MP, their vision is to encourage people to work together to make a real difference to the lives of those affected by loneliness.

Against this background, in March 2017 Councillor Mauthoor moved a motion at Council calling for strategic ways to be found, across party lines, to help tackle loneliness in the borough. The motion was seconded by Councillor Peter Taylor. Council unanimously agreed to set up a task group to look at the prevalence of loneliness within the borough and to address ways in which Watford Borough Council might make a difference.

Councillor Mauthoor's proposed review observed that being alone or living alone or in total isolation was a public health issue and a risk that should be tackled at a local level. It further noted that feelings of loneliness and social isolation could affect people at any stage of their lives, but were most acute in older age.

In addition, the review proposed the need to consider loneliness in terms of its detrimental impact on health and well-being as well as the effects on individuals and public services.

The task group was agreed by Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2017, when its membership was approved.

Councillor Mauthoor was elected chair by the task group.

Overview of the task group's programme of work

At their first meeting on 22 September, the task group considered the issue of loneliness and social isolation in Watford. It was reflected that the issue could affect anyone at any stage and was experienced by a range of different groups within the community often at pinch points in their lives. These included, young new mums, individuals with mobility limitations, health issues or who were recently divorced or separated, those living without children at home, retired people and the recently bereaved.

Task group members considered that understanding the issue of loneliness was important both to them in their role as councillors and to council officers who, in the course of their work, might come into contact with members of the public experiencing loneliness problems.

The task group acknowledged that Watford Borough Council did not have a remit in this area. However, councillors took a keen interest in the wellbeing of their constituents and wished to understand and support their communities.

In order to understand fully the extent of the problem in the local community and ways that they might respond positively, the task group proposed a full fact finding day inviting a range of representative organisations to provide evidence against a list of defined and previously agreed questions. Additional comments were sought from other organisations playing an important role in the community to inform the task group's work.

A full list of the organisations which provided evidence to the task group for this review is listed on page 3 of this report.

The task group met formally on two occasions.

Additional research work was carried out by officers to inform the task group and to produce this report.

In addition, Councillors Mauthoor and Cavinder attended a Public Policy Exchange seminar “Tackling isolation and loneliness in the UK” on 4 October 2017, reporting back its conclusions and recommendations to the task group.

Recommendations and comments

To provide:

- **signposting to appropriate organisations for those experiencing loneliness, through the use of:**
 - **a dedicated page on the council’s website**
 - **leaflets and publications from relevant organisations in the customer service centre at the Town Hall and in other council owned facilities e.g., community centres, Watford Museum and the leisure centres**
 - **information from external organisations displayed on community noticeboards**

All of the organisations questioned sought channels to promote the help and advice they offered to lonely and socially isolated people. In addition to word of mouth, they advised that one of the most effective means of getting their message out was the use of leaflets and magazines at obvious points of contact. These included public buildings, community halls and health establishments (GP surgeries, hospitals and opticians).

The task group considered the council should commit to ensuring that relevant leaflets and publications were displayed in the customer service centre at the Town Hall and in other council owned facilities, such as community centres, Watford Museum and the leisure centres. In addition, community noticeboards around the borough should be used to display further information and organisations offering support.

It was noted that not all groups experiencing loneliness and social isolation accessed information in the same way and a wide ranging communications strategy was therefore required. This should include the internet and, where appropriate, social media. The task group proposed establishing a dedicated page on the council’s website which would signpost people to information and relevant websites.

The task group acknowledged that not all groups had access to, or the skills to use, the internet. As a consequence, despite the council's drive to use digital solutions for information, the task group proposed that the internet should not replace the availability of paper-based information over time.

- **training for councillors to help them to recognise and assist people vulnerable to loneliness in the course of their work in the local community**

The task group considered the great variety in Hertfordshire's social, cultural and racial mix. It was reported that the loneliness problem was particularly acute amongst the elderly (especially when housebound), those with learning disabilities and mental health issues.

All of the organisations which provided evidence to the task group were keen to promote a better understanding of the loneliness problem in Watford. To this end, all offered to provide practical advice and assistance in devising and running a training programme for councillors to help them to recognise and assist people vulnerable to loneliness in the course of their work in the local community.

One of the key areas of evidence provided to the task group was the indicators that councillors might look for to suggest that an individual was lonely or socially isolated. The task group learnt that there were three recognised scales to assess potential loneliness: Campaign to End Loneliness Measurement tool, the De-Jong Giervald 6-Item Loneliness Scale and the UCLA 3-Item Loneliness Scale.

Practical indicators that they might look for whilst carrying out their work included:

- people who undertook only single visits outside their houses e.g., to the shops or GP, where contact with the GP or health services was for only minor complaints
- individuals isolated in their communities, who had limited social networks and could not name friends or family with whom they were in touch, who watched TV constantly and tended to lack awareness, who said too little or too much (because they were unused to company) and who adopted strategies to stop visitors leaving
- those living in untidy, poorly maintained properties, who might be housebound or lacked mobility and the means to get out
- individuals who were deaf, or were suffering from mental health issues or who had communication difficulties.

This was by no means an exhaustive list. Generally, people did not wish to self-identify, feeling a sense of shame or inadequacy and the complete picture of loneliness in Watford was therefore unclear. All of the task group's witnesses spoke of the difficulty of developing a full picture of the loneliness problem. The task group therefore considered that training to identify and assist people vulnerable to loneliness in the course of their work was important.

Recognising the wide-reaching implications of the problem of loneliness in society, task group members suggested that the training would also be relevant to officers, particularly those who came into regular contact with members of the public.

- **best practice guidance for councillors – to be included as a downloadable document on the council's intranet**

As a part of the above training, task group members suggested that some best practice, quick reference guidance, drawing from a wide range of resources, should be produced for councillors. This should summarise what to look out for and how to help when councillors encountered lonely people whilst carrying out their work in the local community.

The best practice guidance should take the form of a downloadable document, which would be accessible on the council's intranet. A number of organisations providing evidence advised that 'real stories' provided a useful means of illustrating the issues. This might form part of any guidance material.

As noted above, the task group considered that any training and best practice advice should be available to all council officers, but particularly to front-line staff who had greater direct contact with members of the public.

Also to:

- **ask the Mayor to write to**
 - **HCC underlining the importance of tackling loneliness amongst Watford residents and encouraging them to ensure the issue remains a priority and is reflected in the allocation of resources**
 - **the MP for Watford underlining the importance of tackling loneliness and encouraging him to take an active part in cross-party efforts to address the issue and to speak out on behalf of residents who may be affected**

The task group was mindful of Watford Borough Council's limited remit in regard to policies which might impact on tackling the loneliness problem in Watford. Greater policy influence and resources were available at county level. In addition, task group members recognised the considerable focus the issue was receiving at a national political level, not least from the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness which had attracted cross party support in Parliament.

With this in mind, the task group considered that it would be appropriate for the council's elected Mayor to write to both Hertfordshire County Council and to the MP for Watford to underline the importance of tackling loneliness in Watford and to promote actions within their powers to enable solutions to the benefit of local residents.

- **encourage councillors to be mindful of local organisations and events which attempt to tackle loneliness in their ward when allocating money from their Neighbourhood Locality Funds**
- **the Task Group Chair to write and encourage the Portfolio Holder for Community to be mindful of local organisations and events which attempt to tackle loneliness in Watford in their consideration of the council's Small Grants Fund applications.**

Within each of Watford Borough Council's 12 wards, councillors have a small Neighbourhood Locality Fund of £2,500 per annum. The fund is intended to enable councillors to meet with residents, businesses and other community groups, and facilitate the enhancement of their area and the amenities of those living and working in the ward. This could include providing grants for community projects, match funding, or carrying out small projects. The protocol for any expenditure requires a focus on local organisations promoting grass roots groups and activities, rather than larger national charities with other funding streams at their disposal.

In addition, Watford Borough Council has an annual Small Grants Fund. This offers voluntary and community sector groups the opportunity to apply for a grant of up to £2,000 to help towards a project or to purchase an item of equipment. Applications are encouraged from informal groups, such as groups of neighbours, as well as from small formal community organisations, grass roots groups, charities, social enterprises and community interest companies.

The task group considered that both funds offered the opportunity for councillors and Watford Borough Council to promote activities which would assist in the efforts to tackle loneliness in Watford.

To this end, it was suggested that councillors should be mindful of local organisations and events within their wards which attempted to tackle loneliness when allocating money from their Neighbourhood Locality Funds.

In addition, whilst the assessment criteria for the Small Grants Funds sat comfortably with the aspirations of the task group, it was agreed that the task group chair should write to the Portfolio Holder for Community to remind her of the work of the task group and encourage her to be aware of the opportunities to tackle loneliness when allocating money to groups.

Bibliography/background papers

Trapped in a bubble: an investigation into triggers for loneliness in the UK, Co-op and British Red Cross, 2016

http://www.redcross.org.uk/~media/BritishRedCross/Documents/What%20we%20do/UK%20services/Co_Op_Trapped_in_a_bubble_report_AW.pdf

BBC Radio 2 Loneliness Week, 9-14 July 2017

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/articles/3gk9N7qRMcW2hhcVhmBJ5D/loneliness-week-2017>

Growing up: transition to a successful adulthood, Action for Children, 2015

https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/media/8275/growing_up_-_transition_to_a_successful_adulthood.pdf

This is how it feels to be lonely - A report on migrants and refugees' experiences with loneliness in London, The Forum, 2014

https://migrantsorganise.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Loneliness-report_The-Forum_UPDATED.pdf

Dementia 2014: Opportunity for change, Alzheimer's Society, 2014

https://www.alzheimers.org.uk/download/downloads/id/2317/dementia_2014_opportunity_for_change.pdf

A very general practice How much time do GPs spend on issues other than health? Citizens Advice, 2015

https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/Public%20services%20publications/CitizensAdvice_AVeryGeneralPractice_May2015.pdf

Alone and Caring, Carers UK, 2015

<https://www.carersuk.org/for-professionals/policy/policy-library/alone-caring>

Websites for the following organisations:

[Age UK](#)

[Youth Connexions Hertfordshire](#)

[Carers UK](#)

[Disability Watford](#)

[Hertfordshire County Council](#)

[Home Start](#)

[New Hope](#)

[The Silver Line](#)

[Small Acts of Kindness](#)

[Watford & Three Rivers Trust](#)

Suggestions for topics to be scrutinised – evaluation table

A Member, Officer or member of the public suggesting a topic for scrutiny must complete Section 1 as fully as possible. Completed tables will be presented to Overview & Scrutiny for consideration.

Section 1 – Scrutiny Suggestion	
Proposer: Councillor/Officer/Member of public	
<p>Topic recommended for scrutiny: <i>Please include as much detail as is available about the specific such as;</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>areas which should be <u>included</u></i> • <i>areas which should be <u>excluded</u></i> • <i>Whether the focus should be on past performance, future policy or both.</i> 	<i>Tackling loneliness</i>
Why have you recommended this topic for scrutiny?	I would like this council to help find strategic ways across party to help tackle loneliness. This Council notes that being or living alone in total isolation can be a public health issue and risk that must be tackled starting at a local level. Feelings of loneliness and social isolation can affect people at any stage of their life but are particularly more critical when it happens to older age. We know that loneliness has two important distinctions a) risk factors leading up to a deterioration in health and well-being b) effects this would have on individuals and public services.
What are the specific outcomes you wish to see from the review?	I would like to see that there is a clear point of contact that people can have access to either the person who is suffering or any other person who knows of someone. This could be a local councillor who comes across a vulnerable person

	<p>they could be referred.</p> <p>I would also like to see more shared partnerships between all the varies local charities that may be able to help bring about change. I am concerned that local charities are not talking to each other often enough and I would like to see a task group that also includes some of the most appropriate charities represented so we can work together.</p> <p>At present Manchester and Coventry councils have adopted and worked out a plan to fit this in the council.</p> <p>It is predicted that between 2008 and 2033 there will be large increases in the number of older people living alone particularly in the 85+ age range.</p> <p>Raising councillors’ awareness of the issue, how to identify potential lonely people and what to do.</p>
How do you think evidence might be obtained?	<p>I would like to start off by carrying out a survey and using social media to reinforce our efforts.</p> <p>From councillors during their canvassing door to door who may have identified people who are living alone.</p> <p>We would need to collect data from various sources, mosaic profiling, council services, local charities/community groups.</p> <p>Herts county council will also be a good source.</p> <p>Information from expert witnesses</p>
Does the proposed item meet the following criteria?	
It must affect a group or community of people	<p>Old aged people mainly</p> <p>Young people who have lost partners</p> <p>Single parents</p> <p>Young people</p>
It must relate to a service, event or issue in	Health and well-being and the town’s vulnerable communities

which the council has a significant stake	
It must not have been a topic of scrutiny within the last 12 months	This topic has not been covered by scrutiny
It must not be an issue, such as planning or licensing, which is dealt with by another council committee	Not applicable
Does the topic meet the council's priorities?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Identify ways to manage the borough's housing needs 2. Champion smart growth and economic prosperity 3. Provide for our vulnerable and disadvantaged communities 4. Deliver a digital Watford to empower our community 5. Secure our own financial future
Are you aware of any limitations of time, other constraints or risks which need to be taken into account?	None that I am aware of
Does the topic involve a Council partner or other outside body?	Local charities police, and herts county council.
Are there likely to be any Equality implications which will need to be considered?	
Councillor/Officer <i>Bilqees Mauthoor</i>	Date 15 May 2017