



HM Government

# A connected society

## A strategy for tackling loneliness –

### laying the foundations for change



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# Foreword from the Prime Minister



On Christmas Day, in my constituency of Maidenhead, the Churches Together project holds a community lunch so that no-one need be on their own at such a special time of year. It is a wonderful initiative that I have been proud to support for many years. But it is also a stark reminder of the loneliness that is a reality for too many people in our society today.

Loneliness can affect anyone of any age and background - from an older person mourning the loss of a life partner to a young person who simply feels different and isolated from their friends. Furthermore, as our society continues to evolve, so otherwise welcome advances can also increase the risk of loneliness. From working more flexibly but also often more remotely, to doing our shopping online, the warmth of human contact risks receding from our lives.

Across our communities there are people who can go for days, weeks or even a month without seeing a friend or family member. There are people who miss the camaraderie of some company, the support of a friendly voice, or just someone who can make them smile or laugh to lift their spirits.

That loss of social contact is incredibly damaging to our humanity and to the health and wellbeing of everyone affected. Indeed, research now shows that loneliness is as damaging to our physical health as smoking.

So Jo Cox was absolutely right to highlight the critical importance of this growing social injustice which sits alongside childhood obesity and mental wellbeing as one of the greatest public health challenges of our time.

As Prime Minister I was pleased to be able to support the Loneliness Commission set up in Jo's name and I am determined to do everything possible to take forward its recommendations.

That is why in January I commissioned this strategy and appointed Tracey Crouch as the first ever government Ministerial lead on loneliness.

Part of the work we have to do is to change the way we think about public services. For example, the expansion of social prescribing across the country will change the way that patients experiencing loneliness are treated. Recognising that medical prescriptions alone cannot address the root causes of loneliness, it will invest millions of pounds in ways of connecting people with community support that can restore social contact in their lives. As such, it will also play a critical role in the prevention of ill-health which I have made a key priority for our long-term plan for the NHS.

The strategy also enables all parts of society to play their role. It includes supporting the development of business champions who will tackle loneliness in the workplace and tech companies who are addressing the challenges of isolation and bullying in cyberspace. It will help create new community spaces, for example by creating new community cafes, gardens and art spaces. It will also continue to grow the vital work of voluntary and charitable organisations. For one of the best ways of tackling loneliness is through simple acts of kindness, from taking a moment to talk to a friend to helping someone in need.

This strategy is only the beginning of delivering a long and far reaching social change in our country - but it is a vital first step in a national mission to end loneliness in our lifetimes.

# Ministerial foreword



**The Rt Hon Jeremy Wright MP, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport.**

**Tracey Crouch MP, Ministerial lead on loneliness and Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Sport and Civil Society.**

The relationships we have with our friends, family, neighbours and colleagues are, for many of us, the most important things in our lives. Increasingly, we understand the link between having strong and meaningful social connections and living a healthy and successful life. And we see that having more connected communities means a more thriving, productive society, in which we can all contribute and live fulfilling lives.

Government recognises this, which is why the Prime Minister appointed Tracey as the lead minister to take forward a cross-government approach to tackling loneliness, building on the pioneering work started by Jo Cox and carried on in her name by the Commission on Loneliness.

Of course, loneliness isn't new, but the way our society works is changing rapidly. This brings great opportunities – including new ways of connecting and communicating with others. But it also means it's now possible to spend a day working, shopping, travelling, interacting with business and with public services, without speaking to another human being. And for some people that can be repeated day after day. So as we continue to make the most of new technologies, ways of working and delivering services, we need to plan for connection and design in moments of human contact.

Government can't make our friends for us, and ultimately the challenge of creating a more connected society lies with each of us in our families, neighbourhoods and workplaces. But what government can do is help strengthen the foundations of society so that it becomes more natural and easy to chat, to share and to trust each other.

It can amplify the voices highlighting loneliness as a problem and support the solutions we can put in place. It can create a positive framework for the organisations that we all interact with every day. Charities, businesses, health bodies and local government at the frontline are made up of people who, with the right framework of support, can turn a transactional conversation into a friendly moment that makes someone's day, or can recognise someone's loneliness and put them on the path to solving it.

Government can also work with communities and other sectors on the way our neighbourhoods, public services, businesses and working environments are designed and run so they consider social relationships, not just efficient transactions.

We know that loneliness can affect anyone – from teenagers and young adults to new parents, carers and the recently bereaved, from students starting at university to older people and those with disabilities, from those moving to a new area of the country to refugees. As Jo Cox said, loneliness doesn't discriminate. And that's why it's so important that we all take time to keep our social relationships strong, so we are better protected at vulnerable points in our lives when we can be at a particular risk of experiencing loneliness.

This strategy is a first step; a foundation for a generation of policy work. It sets out a powerful and positive vision of how government can support people to build stronger relationships. It calls for everyone in society to play their part in making England a more friendly and supportive place, where we can all flourish.



## People's experiences of loneliness

### Dan\*, 46 years old, Yorkshire and the Humber

Dan is a professional who has autism. He was feeling very isolated and depressed before being referred to the Rotherham Social Prescribing Service by a mental health practitioner. He says, "I did not leave my home for six months previously due to my illness and now feel happy and welcome with people here and intend to invest in my artistic self again, which has been missing for many years due to illness. My family are less worried about me as they know where I am going and I am really happy there. They have seen a real difference and improvement in my mood and it has helped me deal with things in daily life that I would have struggled with before. I am really grateful and cannot wait for next week."

\*Dan's real name has been changed

### Stephen, 86 years old, Greater London

Stephen has two sons whom he sees infrequently because they do not live close by. He misses male camaraderie, especially because of his loss of independence through ill health. Phillip is 35, and his father lives abroad. Linking Lives UK, which works with churches to set up befriending projects, brought them together. A close bond has developed between them. Stephen refers to it as a 'confessional'! They exchange close problems and discuss shared interests, such as music and sport. Phillip is expecting his first child shortly and hopes Stephen will become the surrogate grandfather, as his own father lives so far away. Stephen says, "Phillip's visits have made a huge difference to my life and outlook and mood and I always so look forward to him visiting."

### Courtney, 28 years old, South East England



Courtney was a nurse and was surprised how lonely she felt after having a baby. She says, "I mean I'd go to Sainsbury's every day, all the time, just to get out of the house. Now [I've found friends] we go out so much more, do so much more, because we are going through it together." After realising that going to the supermarket every day was not a long-term option to find adult conversation, she discovered Mush. She used the app to create a local, supportive community of mums for her and her baby to hang out with.





Executive  
summary

# Executive summary

## Our vision

Society is changing rapidly. The ways we live, work and relate to each other are shifting as we move towards a more digital society, as employment practices change and people participate in society in different ways. People are living longer, but not necessarily experiencing increased quality of life to match those increased years. Many jobs are becoming more solitary. We can work, shop, travel and interact with businesses and public services online rather than through talking to each other.

Alongside these changes, we understand now more than ever before about the negative impacts of loneliness. Loneliness is not new but we do increasingly recognise it as one of our most pressing public health issues. Feeling lonely often is linked to early deaths – on a par with smoking or obesity.<sup>1</sup> It's also linked to increased risk of coronary heart disease and stroke;<sup>2</sup> depression, cognitive decline and an increased risk of Alzheimer's.<sup>3</sup> It's estimated that between 5% and 18% of UK adults feel lonely often or always.<sup>4,5</sup> And when we feel socially rejected, it triggers a response in our brain similar to one from experiencing physical pain.<sup>6</sup> Jo Cox, and the Commission on Loneliness that carried forward her work, highlighted these stark realities.

In January 2018 the Prime Minister welcomed the work of the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness, and committed government to implementing many of its recommendations, including to publish this strategy. In June 2018, the Prime Minister announced £20 million of funding, including the £11.5 million Building Connections Fund, to support voluntary, community and charitable organisations to tackle loneliness, building on the fantastic work they are already doing. This complements the wider ambitions of the Civil Society Strategy to enable civil society to thrive.

Since then, the Prime Minister has also announced the Ageing Society Grand Challenge,<sup>7</sup> as part of government's Industrial Strategy, and renewed the focus on the prevention of ill health as a priority for the NHS long-term plan. Government's work on loneliness will contribute significantly to both these agendas.

This strategy doesn't attempt to resist how society is changing or try to turn back time. Rather, it looks at what can be done to design in support for social relationships in this changing context. It builds on the strengths we have as a nation – including our strong public, private and voluntary sector institutions, as well as the great everyday contributions that people make to their communities. It looks, in turn, at the changes we can make to our organisations, our infrastructure and our culture.

Government's vision is for this country to be a place where we can all have strong social relationships. Where families, friends and communities support each other, especially at vulnerable points where people are at greater risk of loneliness. Where institutions value the human element in their interactions with people. And where loneliness is recognised and acted on without stigma or shame, so that we all look out for one another.

To get there requires society-wide change. This strategy is for everyone. It recognises that government can't make that change alone, and sets out a powerful vision of how we can all play a role in building a more socially connected society. There is no quick fix to achieving this vision and the strategy is intended as government's first, rather than final, say.



## The focus of government's work

Loneliness and social connections are deeply personal. Government recognises that everyone feels lonely from time to time. But when people are always lonely they are likely to suffer significant ill health and other negative consequences. This strategy focuses on preventing people from feeling lonely all or most of the time.

Three overarching goals guide government's work on loneliness. The first is a commitment to play our part in improving the evidence base so we better understand what causes loneliness, its impacts and what works to tackle it. This strategy provides an assessment of the existing evidence. It also provides an update on government's plans to introduce a consistent measure and on the review led by the What Works Centre for Wellbeing of interventions that tackle loneliness.

The second goal is to embed loneliness as a consideration across government policy, recognising the wide range of factors that can exacerbate feelings of loneliness and support people's social wellbeing and resilience. The strategy includes a number of cross-cutting policies to benefit all of society, alongside more tailored interventions that can support people when they are at greater risk due to specific trigger points in their life. It also looks at how government can ensure social relationships are considered across its wider policy-making.

The third goal is to build a national conversation on loneliness, to raise awareness of its impacts and to help tackle stigma. Just as we understand the importance of looking after our physical health and increasingly our mental health, so too must we look after our social connections, and understand that they are key to our wellbeing. This strategy also sets out how government will work with others to inspire societal change, building on the important work carried out by the Jo Cox Commission.

### The importance of social wellbeing

This strategy highlights the importance of social relationships to people's health and wellbeing. By social wellbeing, we mean our personal relationships and social support networks and the way these can bring happiness, comfort and resilience, adding to our overall wellbeing.<sup>8</sup>

This builds on the World Health Organization's definition of health as "a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity".<sup>9</sup> The Office for National Statistics has highlighted the importance of social support, connections and relationships in its work on measuring national and personal wellbeing.<sup>10</sup> The Care Act also outlines the importance of protecting and promoting wellbeing.<sup>11</sup>

Government's vision is that all sectors of society will recognise the importance of social wellbeing and take action to promote and improve people's social relationships. The commitments outlined within this strategy therefore seek to provide a foundation for people to have greater opportunities for meaningful social contact. They also aim to reduce the stigma attached to loneliness so that people feel better equipped to talk about their social wellbeing.

By encouraging this national conversation we can help both individuals and organisations to develop greater awareness of the value of good relationships. This will help to improve people's resilience by ensuring they have the necessary social support, including at key vulnerable moments in their lives.

CERTAIN LIFE EVENTS CAN MAKE US MORE LIKELY TO FEEL LONELY

- HERE ARE SOME...

"Loneliness  
discrimination"  
- JO





# is doesn't minate" COX

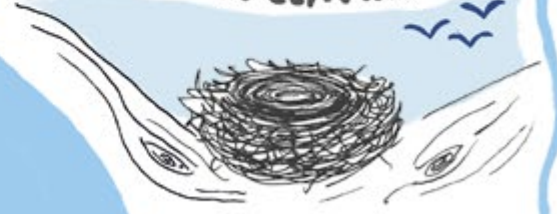
## BEREAVEMENT



## ENTERING A PERIOD OF POOR HEALTH



## CHILDREN LEAVING HOME



## RETIREMENT

## MOVING INTO CARE



## DIVORCE & RELATIONSHIP BREAKDOWN



## LIVING WITH DISABILITY



## MAKING CONNECTIONS





This strategy largely concentrates on the role that government can play and how it can set the framework to enable local authorities, businesses, health and the voluntary sector, as well as communities and individuals, to support people's social connections. But it also describes the important role that we all have as individuals, working with our family, friends and communities, and gives some examples of the great work already underway across the country to create strong and connected communities.

Finally, government recognises that this is just the start of tackling this challenge. This strategy describes government's commitment to working with others to take forward its long-term ambitions in reducing loneliness and supporting a more connected society. It recognises that while increasingly we understand the impact of loneliness, there is less certainty about its drivers and what works to tackle it. As a result, this strategy does not set a quantitative target for change. Rather it sets out government's commitment to establishing a clearer picture of the prevalence of loneliness, through a new national measure and by developing the evidence base on what works. It commits government to publishing annual progress reports that provide an update on the implementation of the policies set out in this strategy, as well as the development of additional policies. As government reviews its approach, and further learning is generated, government will explore the possibility – and suitability – of setting a quantitative target for change.

## The structure of this strategy and government's key policy proposals

**Chapter one** provides a summary of the existing evidence base on loneliness, including its impacts and causes. It also provides an update on the commitments that government made in January 2018 to:

- Develop consistent measurement for loneliness.
- Improve the evidence base around effective interventions.

While everyone is different, we know that certain life events or transitions can trigger problematic loneliness for many people. This is explored further in chapter one, but examples of loneliness at various trigger points are also interspersed throughout the document.

**Chapters two, three and four** set out existing and new government commitments and partnerships in three areas that we see as crucial to building a strong, connected society. Chapter two focuses

on organisations and services; Chapter three looks at community infrastructure such as buildings and transport; and Chapter four shows how we can build a culture that encourages strong social relationships.

**Chapter two** sets out how government – working with local authorities, health bodies, businesses and the voluntary sector – will introduce a range of new initiatives that enable the everyday services we use to connect those at risk of loneliness to support. Key new commitments include:

- The Department of Health and Social Care and NHS England are committed to improving and expanding social prescribing services. Social prescribing connects people to community groups and services through connector schemes where 'link workers' introduce people to support based on their individual needs. This will include an expansion of social prescribing services. By 2023, government will support all local health and care systems to implement social prescribing connector schemes across the whole country, supporting government's aim to have a universal national offer available in GP practices. This means that more people will be connected with the care and support they need when they are experiencing loneliness, no matter where they live.
- The Department of Health and Social Care, NHS England and the Department for Work and Pensions will test methods that will improve how a range of organisations (such as community pharmacies, social workers, community nurses and jobcentres) refer into existing social prescribing services and provision in 2019/20.
- The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport will work in collaboration with local bodies, the Local Government Association and others to run up to four data pilots with four local authorities to identify ways of ensuring that information and data can be made more accessible. The goal is to find ways to make sharing information more efficient, accurate and sustainable to help people find relevant local activities, services and support.
- The Home Office will pilot a scheme working with Royal Mail, private enterprise, local authorities and the local voluntary sector to help identify and support older people experiencing loneliness.

**Chapter three** sets out how community infrastructure can play a key role in supporting people to come together in rural and urban areas, from accessing

community space, to inclusive transport and well designed housing, and through digital technology. Key new commitments include:

- The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government will fund research into innovative community-led housing projects to understand how these can help to tackle loneliness and support social connections.
- Further to the announcement in the Civil Society Strategy<sup>12</sup> that government will create more sustainable community hubs and spaces, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport will devote up to £1.8 million<sup>13</sup> to helping local communities build social connections through unlocking the potential of underutilised community spaces.
- The Department for Education will publish guidance to help schools open up as accessible spaces in the centre of their communities.
- The Department for Transport will build partnerships with transport providers and community groups to develop how transport can be used as a means to help tackle loneliness, and use industry-wide forums to promote these.

**Chapter four** describes how government will work with others to build the national conversation, tackle stigma surrounding loneliness and support community groups to thrive. This builds on the aims of the £11.5 million Building Connections Fund, which provides funding to community and voluntary organisations tackling loneliness, as well as government's wider ambitions set out in the Civil Society Strategy. Key new commitments include:

- Through a campaign, government will explore how best to reduce stigma and raise awareness of the importance of social connections and how we can encourage people to take action through easy-to-understand messages and information.
- Public Health England's mental health campaign will highlight loneliness as a potential risk factor for poor mental health, and emphasise the importance of strong social connections.<sup>14</sup>
- The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy will encourage more employers to recognise loneliness and support their employees' social wellbeing through an Employers Pledge. This builds on the 21 organisations who have already signed up: The UK Government Civil Service, Transport for London, National Grid, Co-op, Sainsbury's, British Red Cross, Nationwide Building Society, the Big Lottery Fund, Aviva, Zurich UK, Transport for Greater

Manchester, British Chambers of Commerce, Age UK, Royal Voluntary Service, Cisco, Association of Convenience Stores, Financial Ombudsman Service, Golin, Merseytravel, South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive and Nexus. The department will continue to work with the Campaign to End Loneliness to expand this network of signatories in order to capture and share best practice on tackling loneliness among employees.

- The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport will work with Arts Council England to address loneliness through its programmes, as well as utilising the loneliness measure in its work. Alongside this, the department will raise awareness of the role that libraries can play, including through Libraries Week.
- Sport England will make new grant awards totalling £1 million from its Active Ageing Fund to two programmes which specifically tackle loneliness through sport and physical activity for people over 55.<sup>15</sup>

This strategy is a first step in tackling a long-term challenge and government is committed to continuing this vital work. **Chapter five** sets out how government will take this agenda forward:

- The Minister for Sport and Civil Society will continue to lead cross-government work on tackling loneliness.
- Ministers from all the departments involved will continue to meet formally as a group, to take forward government's work on loneliness and to oversee the delivery of the commitments in this strategy.
- The Ministerial Group will publish an annual progress report on the loneliness agenda, recognising that this is just the start of government's work on this issue.
- Ministers at key government departments (the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, and the Department for Transport) will have their portfolios extended to include loneliness. The Minister for Sport and Civil Society and the Minister of State for Care already have loneliness in their portfolios. This marks a commitment to a truly cross-governmental approach.
- From 2019/20 individual government departments will be required to highlight in their Single Departmental Plans the progress they are making on their commitments to this agenda and how they are addressing loneliness proactively. Alongside this, government will continue to explore additional options to ensure social relationships are considered across its wider policy-making.

Chapter five also sets out a commitment from the Loneliness Action Group to continue its work until at least the end of 2019, working hand in hand with government to ensure effective implementation of this strategy and to progress wider work on loneliness.

This document concentrates on government's commitments, which are designed to enable others in business, local government, civil society, communities and individuals to seize the initiative. Examples of what other bodies can do to support people's relationships are shown throughout the chapters.

### The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness

Jo Cox was elected to Parliament as Labour MP for Batley and Spen in West Yorkshire in 2015. She quickly set to work campaigning to raise the profile of the hidden crisis of loneliness. Jo believed we all have a part to play in tackling loneliness, from individuals and communities to businesses, charities and government.

Jo set up a cross-party Commission on Loneliness with her colleague, the Conservative MP Seema Kennedy. Jo's vision was that the Commission would run for one year and work with charities, businesses and government to turbo-charge the public's understanding and policy response to the loneliness crisis.

After Jo's murder in 2016, this work was taken forward by Seema Kennedy MP and Rachel Reeves MP. Under Seema and Rachel's leadership, the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness saw 13 organisations come together to highlight the scale of loneliness throughout the lifecycle and across all areas of society.

The Commission's work culminated in the publication of the report 'Combating loneliness one conversation at a time' at the end of 2017. The Prime Minister accepted many of this report's recommendations in January 2018 and it has informed government's work in developing this strategy.





About this  
strategy

# About this strategy

## Purpose of this strategy

This strategy marks a turning point in how we see and act on loneliness, both within government and in society more broadly. It builds on years of work by many organisations and individuals, brought together by the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness in 2017. This strategy is government's first major contribution to a national conversation on loneliness and the importance of social connections. It sets out government's long-term ambitions to work with others to build a more cohesive and connected society. Alongside this, it includes a number of initial commitments that benefit both wider society and people at specific trigger points when they are at greater risk of loneliness.

The UK is at the forefront of the loneliness agenda, appointing the world's first Ministerial lead on loneliness in 2018. The appointment has gained global attention, demonstrating that loneliness does not just affect people across the life course but also across different nations.

## The development of the strategy

The strategy builds on the work of the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness. A wide range of partner organisations have helped to shape it. The call for evidence government ran from 22 June to 20 July 2018 received over 400 responses; Annex A summarises the key themes.

Government worked closely with the Loneliness Action Group, an alliance of over 40 organisations including charities, businesses and public sector leaders. We thank them for running a number of workshops to help inform the strategy, and welcome the Group's commitment to continuing to work on loneliness throughout 2019, working hand in hand with government to ensure effective implementation.

Government is also grateful to the huge range of other organisations, including charities, think tanks, local authorities, health organisations, businesses and faith groups, as well as members of the public, who shared their views by attending roundtables, meetings and events, or engaging through social media and correspondence. Their expertise and insights have been integral to the development of the strategy.

## Guiding principles

A number of principles have guided the development of this strategy:

- **working in partnership** with businesses, the health sector, local government, the voluntary sector and wider civil society, recognising that government can act as an important catalyst but that we must all take action to reduce loneliness effectively.
- **a willingness to test, iterate and learn** as government takes forward its approach, recognising the limitations of the existing evidence base.
- **ensuring a truly cross-cutting and cross-departmental approach**, recognising that this is crucial to tackling loneliness effectively.
- **focusing on the key trigger points** that push people in and out of feeling lonely frequently, alongside preventative action that can benefit wider society. The trigger points are informed by the Office for National Statistics' analysis of Community Life Survey data,<sup>15</sup> which identifies where people are at risk of feeling lonely more often.
- **recognising the importance of personalised approaches and local solutions** to tackle loneliness. This is vital given the complex and subjective nature of loneliness.

## Scope of the strategy

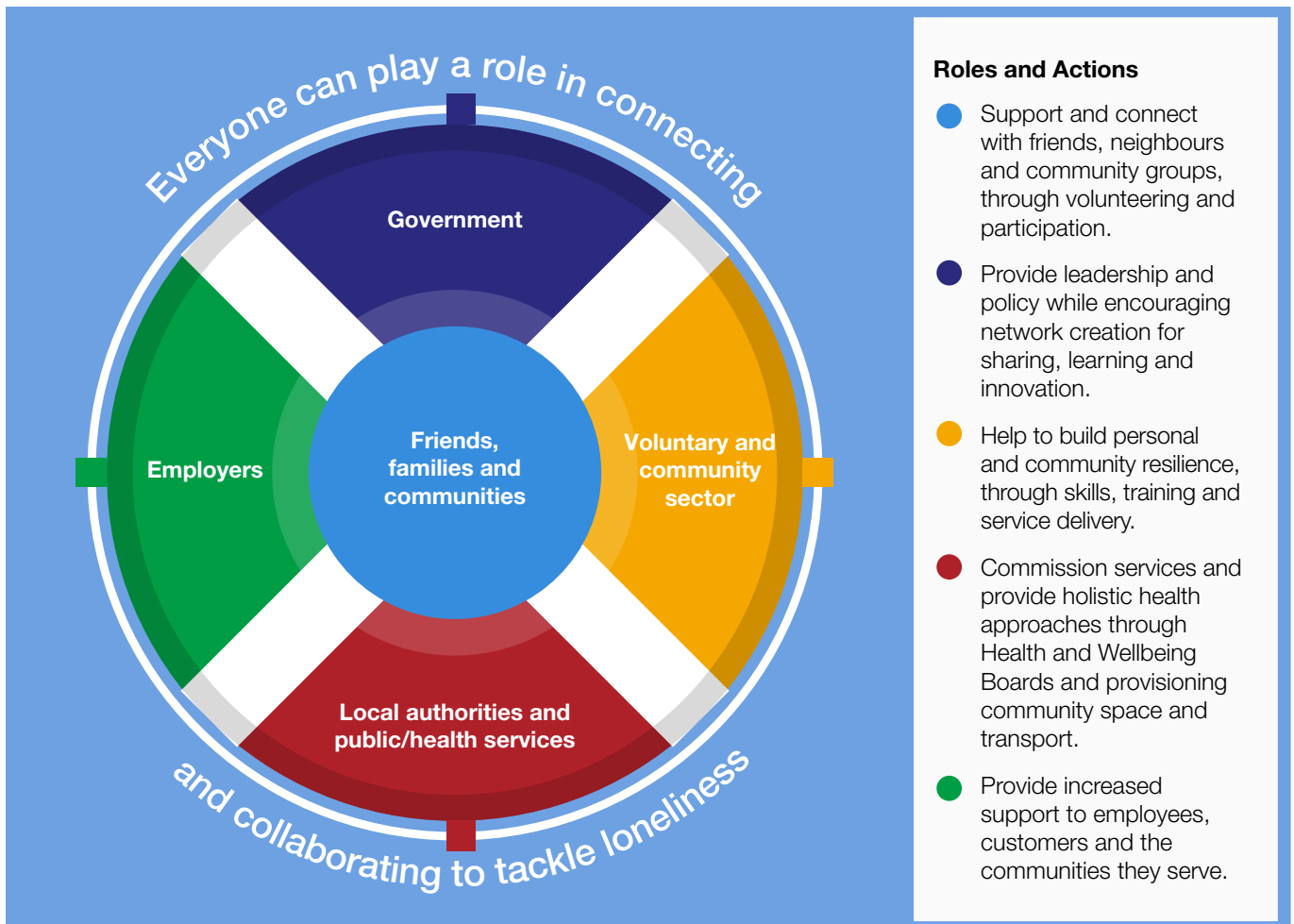
This strategy extends to England only. We are working with colleagues in the Devolved Administrations to ensure our work is complementary and to share insights and learn from one another. The strategy references some policies which extend beyond England. In these cases the extent of the policy is highlighted in the text or a footnote.

## The role of government, communities and the individual

To tackle loneliness and support people’s social connections, we all need to take action. This includes government, local authorities, businesses and the voluntary sector, where there is an opportunity to embed loneliness as a consideration across their work. Alongside this, it is also the responsibility of communities, families and the individual. By working together, we can help to create a more socially connected society.

This strategy recognises that there are leading bodies in each sector already acting to fight loneliness and bring people together, and this document celebrates some examples of their fantastic work. Throughout this strategy, government calls on them to continue their efforts, and for others to follow their lead. As part of this, collaborating with one another will be essential to achieving truly personal and localised approaches to tackling loneliness.

**Central government** will provide national leadership on this agenda, for example through the introduction of a measure to be used consistently for loneliness. Government will develop easy-to-understand messages and information through a campaign about the importance of maintaining good social wellbeing. It will also ensure the effective implementation of this strategy, working closely with the Loneliness Action Group and its members to implement the policies it contains, and to capture and act on relevant learning and insights. Its work will continue to put the framework in place to enable everyone in society to play their part in tackling loneliness, through policy-making, convening groups and sharing learning to accelerate change.





This strategy calls on **local authorities** to consider how tackling loneliness can be embedded in their strategic planning and decision-making on the wellbeing of their communities. Many are already taking a lead in reducing loneliness in their communities, for example through recognising the issue through Health and Wellbeing and other boards, working with local communities and civil society bodies, and addressing practical issues around community space and transport.

**Health and other public services** can recognise the importance of people's social wellbeing, and explore how they can identify, refer and better support those at risk of feeling lonely often. They can also share knowledge and best practice for tackling loneliness and improve connections across sectors and the country.

**All employers, including businesses**, can support their employees to look after their social wellbeing, by helping them develop relationships within the workplace as well as outside. The pledge announced in this strategy suggests practical ways to do this. They can also support their customers and the wider community to build social connections, for example, by providing community space out-of-hours.

**The voluntary sector** already plays a vital role in tackling loneliness and bringing people together. It can create strong, integrated communities and challenge obstacles that isolate people or groups. In its delivery of services and projects, it can equip people and communities with the knowledge and skills to recognise loneliness and tackle it.


The most effective answer to the challenge of loneliness is the simple decision of **families, friends, faith groups and communities** to include each other and to be open to new social connections. Individuals can get more involved with their community, for example by volunteering. They can look out for and keep in touch with friends, family and neighbours. Communities can play an active role in connecting people and building resilience by creating opportunities to bring people together, taking active steps to include the most isolated and vulnerable members of the community, as well as those from different backgrounds.

## What good looks like: measuring success

This strategy is government's first step to tackle loneliness. In the long term, the success of government's approach on loneliness ultimately will be assessed by government's loneliness measure, and achieving a reduction in the prevalence of loneliness. But in the short term, we need to gather more data about the causes of loneliness for different ages and groups, and effective ways to address and prevent it, before we can set an informed quantitative target.

Given this, three overarching goals guide this strategy: to build the evidence base on loneliness, to drive a lasting shift in the way government operates so that relationships and loneliness are considered as a matter of course in policy-making, and to catalyse the national conversation on loneliness (building on the work of the Jo Cox Commission and others).

Government has identified measures for each of these goals (set out in Annex B) and will report annually on its progress. Alongside this, government departments will develop measures for each of the policies set out in this strategy to monitor delivery and measure success.



# Chapter 1: Evidence and insights

# Chapter 1: Evidence and insights

Loneliness isn't a new research area, and it is closely related to other bodies of work on social capital, social network theory, isolation and wellbeing. It is, however, a rather patchy literature, with some areas better evidenced than others. Much research to date has focused on older people. And although we have ideas about what causes it and what might help to reduce it, we don't yet understand how these combine and play out over time.

This chapter does not attempt to summarise all of these debates. Instead, it gives an overview of the evidence that has shaped this strategy. It sets out how government understands loneliness, its effects and causes, and what works to prevent and reduce it.

## What do we mean by loneliness?

Loneliness is a personal experience and can mean different things to different people. But establishing a definition is important to ensure that this strategy has a clear scope and to guide an effective response.

Following advice from our expert advisory group of academics and practitioners, this strategy applies the widely used framework suggested by Perlman and Peplau and used by the Campaign to End Loneliness and the Jo Cox Commission. They define loneliness as:

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**'a subjective, unwelcome feeling of lack or loss of companionship. It happens when we have a mismatch between the quantity and quality of social relationships that we have, and those that we want.'**<sup>16</sup>

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We feel lonely when we deem our relationships and social networks to be lacking in some way – perhaps because we would like more of them, or because we would like them to be higher quality.

Some have identified that there might be different types of loneliness: for example, Weiss distinguishes between the loneliness we feel when we lack an intimate friend or confidant, and the loneliness that is focused on relationships with family or friends.<sup>17</sup> This nuance is helpful when designing and targeting effective interventions, and this strategy considers both types of loneliness.

Loneliness is often used interchangeably with isolation, but while they are linked and can often overlap, they are not the same. It is possible to be isolated without feeling lonely and conversely to feel lonely while surrounded by people. Isolation is observable: for example, we may look at how many relationships someone has or how often they speak to other people to help us understand whether someone is isolated. We cannot measure loneliness in this way. Similarly, loneliness is not the same as solitude – which some people enjoy – as loneliness is an unwelcome feeling.

## What impact can loneliness have?

Everyone feels lonely from time to time, and this is part of being human.<sup>18</sup> But when people feel lonely most or all of the time, it can cause serious harm. Because of this, government is focusing its efforts on reducing the number of people who feel lonely frequently.

Feeling lonely frequently is linked to early deaths. Its health impact is thought to be on a par with other public health priorities like obesity or smoking.<sup>19</sup> Research shows that loneliness is associated with a greater risk of inactivity, smoking and risk-taking behaviour;<sup>20</sup> increased risk of coronary heart disease and stroke;<sup>21</sup> an increased risk of depression, low self-esteem, reported sleep problems and increased stress response;<sup>22</sup> and with cognitive decline and an increased risk of Alzheimer's.<sup>23</sup> What's more, feeling lonely can make a person more likely to perceive, expect and remember others' behaviour to be unfriendly. This can increase social anxiety and cause them to withdraw further, creating a vicious cycle.<sup>24</sup>



As well as helping others to enjoy their lives more fully, it's in all our interests to reduce loneliness. Feeling lonely frequently has a direct impact on individuals and can also have wider effects for society. For example, lonely people are more likely to be readmitted to hospital or have a longer stay.<sup>25</sup> There is also evidence that lonely people are more likely to visit a GP or A&E and more likely to enter local authority funded residential care.<sup>26</sup> At work, higher loneliness among employees is associated with poorer performance on tasks and in a team,<sup>27</sup> while social interaction at work has been linked to increased productivity.<sup>28</sup> A study by the Co-op and New Economics Foundation attempted to calculate the cost of this, estimating that loneliness could be costing private sector employers up to £2.5 billion a year due to absence and productivity losses.<sup>29</sup>

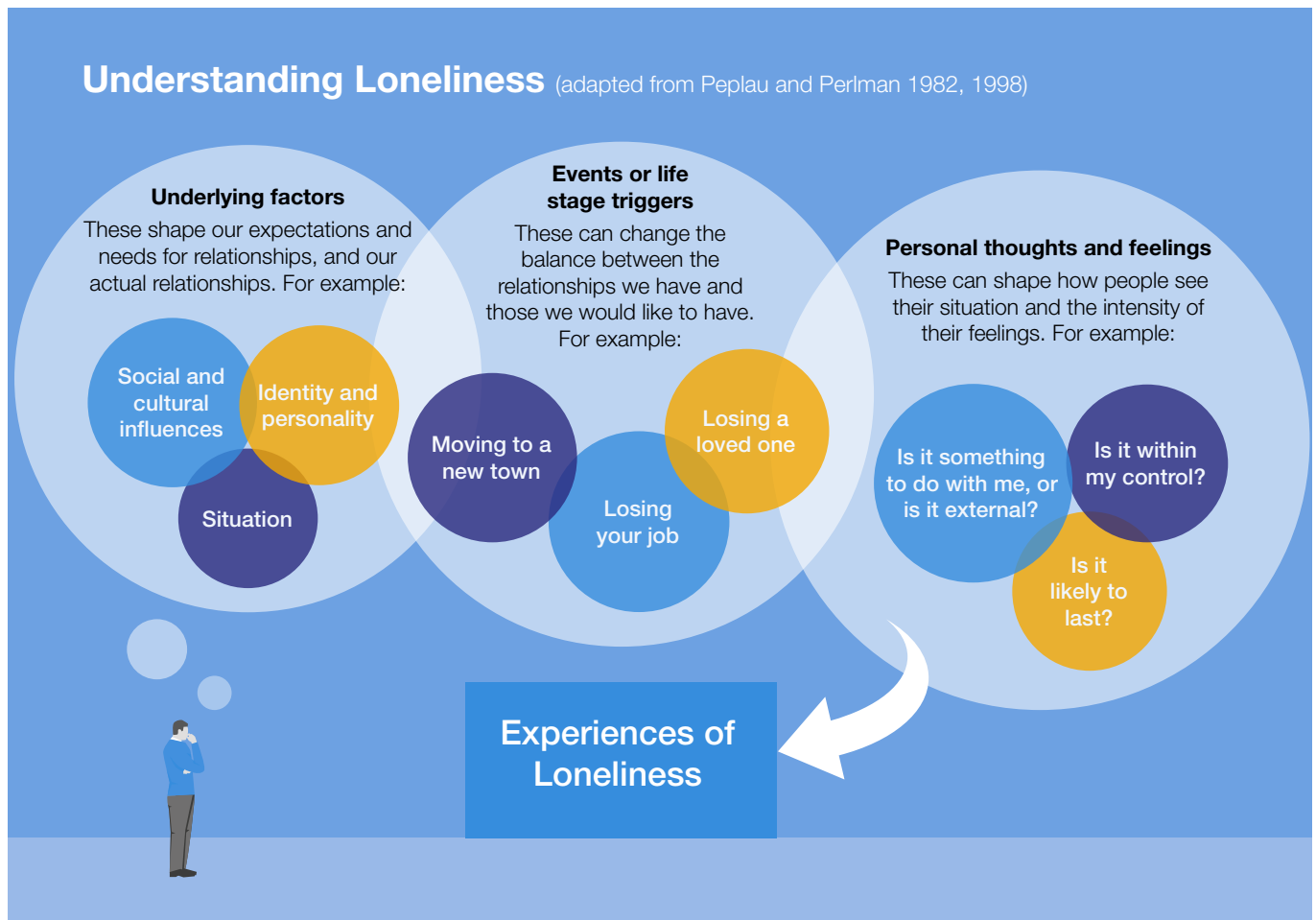
More research is needed in this area. But current evidence suggests that frequent loneliness and its wider impacts are costly for society as a whole as well as for individuals. Supporting people in this situation to become more connected to their families, friends and wider community also links to government's aim to promote a more integrated and productive society.

## What causes loneliness?

Loneliness seems to fluctuate over the life course, with different causes and needs at different ages.<sup>31,32</sup> It's not just about a decline in contact or change in relationships, but about a person's identity and sense of belonging,<sup>31</sup> and whether they feel their social network is 'normal' for their life stage.<sup>33</sup>

The causes of loneliness will vary from person to person and we don't always know exactly what it is about an experience like unemployment that makes us lonely, or how these different factors might interact and build up over time. But there are some common themes. Previous experiences and conditions are thought to be important, combined with 'trigger' events that push a person into loneliness.<sup>34</sup>

Some factors are likely to be specific to the individual – for example, a person's personality or level of resilience at a particular time.<sup>35</sup>



People differ in their innate need for social connection and their ability to manage feelings of exclusion. This can then affect how we interact with others and what we expect of them, compounding a sense of loneliness.<sup>36</sup>

Circumstances are also influential. To help policy makers and service providers support those who are at risk, the Office for National Statistics recently analysed how various factors affect the likelihood of feeling lonely. People who reported being lonely more often were likely to have at least one of several specific characteristics. This included being aged 16 to 24, being widowed, having poor health, having a long-term illness or disability,<sup>37</sup> having caring responsibilities and being unemployed.<sup>38</sup>

These findings are broadly consistent with those identified elsewhere. While there are some caveats to the analysis,<sup>39</sup> these underline the need to collect more data on loneliness and to do so in a consistent way. The Office for National Statistics is interested in exploring this area further and has already begun research to deepen understanding of how children and young people experience loneliness. It will publish its findings by the end of 2018.

Wider environmental conditions, such as cultural attitudes, also play an important role. For example, there is some evidence that members of some marginalised groups are more likely to feel lonely.<sup>40</sup> There is also a stigma with loneliness itself.<sup>41,42,43</sup> 30% of Britons surveyed said they would be embarrassed to say they felt lonely,<sup>44</sup> making it more difficult for people to seek support.

Infrastructure in the local area can support vibrant social networks. Good transport links, community facilities and design that considers real people and how they live and interact, are all important to help people to access work, stay healthy and remain linked into their communities.<sup>45,46,47,48,49</sup> But when lacking, they can become obstacles to making and maintaining connections.

Social media is often highlighted as a cause of loneliness, particularly among young people, but research implies that the picture is more nuanced. The extent to which it increases or reduces loneliness could depend on which platform is used,<sup>50,51</sup> and whether it is used as a substitute for real life interaction or as a complement to it.<sup>52</sup>

The way we live and work is also important. Technology has allowed us to work more flexibly, but it can also limit opportunities for interaction.<sup>53</sup> Even for those working in the same place as colleagues, workloads and pressure can prevent socialising and affect our work-life balance. This means we may be missing the chance to forge meaningful relationships at work and to nurture our wider networks outside.

Finally, certain life events (sometimes called trigger points) seem to increase the risk of feeling lonely more often. They change a person's relationships or their need for them, creating a mismatch between the two. Some of the trigger events highlighted in the literature include migration, becoming a carer, moving home or job, a bereavement, a new baby or children leaving home.<sup>54,55,56</sup> In our call for evidence, people told us that starting university, getting divorced and moving to a new area can also be triggers for loneliness.

This strategy includes some policies that reduce the risk of loneliness across all groups in society, and some that focus on reducing the risk at specific trigger points. It uses the Office for National Statistics' analysis as a guide as this is the best evidence currently available. Government and others will learn from the impact that these policy changes have and use this to inform future action, both across society and for specific groups.

## How Carers UK is helping to tackle loneliness



Carers UK is a charity set up to help the 6.5 million people who care for family or friends, with around 18,500 members and 400 volunteers. It provides information and advice about caring, alongside practical and emotional support for carers.

The Carers UK online forum is a supportive online community of current and former unpaid family carers who understand the ups and downs of caring.

Carers UK's research with the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness found that 32% of employees currently juggling

work and care have felt lonely or isolated in the workplace because of their caring role<sup>57</sup>. Its business forum, Employers for Carers (EfC), helps over 130 employers to establish carer-friendly policies, helping to support the one in nine employees in the workplace caring for a family member.

Jacqui is a carer who reluctantly gave up work when she realised she could no longer continue to work and care for her son, who has Down's Syndrome, autism and who is unable to speak. She says: "I went days without speaking to anyone and the winter months were the worst. Eventually I was told by my GP that I had to go out every day for a loaf of bread but I didn't understand why when a loaf would last us a week. Once I understood what the GP meant I began changing. I went out every day (well almost) so that I could speak to people. I became involved in parent/carer groups, forums and joined Carers UK. I am now happier than I have ever been as I have various carers I can talk to or ask for support without feeling that I have to explain anything and everything to them."

## Consistent measurement of loneliness and the evidence on effective interventions

To tackle loneliness successfully, we need a deeper understanding of who is at highest risk and what is effective in preventing and reducing it. Part of the solution to this is to collect more data on loneliness and measure it more consistently.

In January 2018 the Prime Minister announced that government would work to develop indicators on loneliness that could be used in research studies with people of all ages. Government has consulted specialists from academia, service providers and its own internal experts, all with expertise in measurement or the study of loneliness.

The Office for National Statistics has collected evidence on what measures are currently available, how they are being used and their advantages and drawbacks.

The Office for National Statistics has recommended a package of measures: a single, direct question of 'How often do you feel lonely?', and three questions known as the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) 3-item scale for adults: 'How often do you feel that you lack companionship? How often do you feel left out? How often do you feel isolated from others?'. These are established indicators that are already in use in the UK and more widely, and will help to build most effectively on what we currently know.



The Office for National Statistics is testing the questions with adults and is working collaboratively with the Children's Society to test and recommend alternative wording for use with children. It will provide further guidance on how to use this package by the end of 2018, along with a technical report detailing its methodology.

**Government is now committing to using this package as its standard way of measuring loneliness.** Details of this, including where the measure will be rolled out, will be published by the end of 2018. The single question 'How often do you feel lonely?' will allow us to determine the national prevalence of loneliness and in some surveys it will be appropriate to use only this. For others, the full four question set will be more suitable, adding further nuance while retaining the link with the national benchmark.


**To improve data comparability, government encourages charities and service providers who collect data on loneliness to adopt this package.** Government will continue to explore how the measure can be adopted more widely, and how this package could be aligned with outcome measures for charities and service providers.

Government appreciates that more evidence is needed on how to reduce loneliness at different stages of the life course. As part of the Prime Minister's commission, government asked the What Works Centre for Wellbeing to do a rapid review of the evidence on effective interventions for loneliness.

The Centre searched the academic literature and launched a call for unpublished evidence, analysing loneliness-focused interventions in the UK and abroad. The vast majority of these studies focused on loneliness among the over 55s, underlining a need for robust evidence on what works at different ages.

The Centre has published its findings alongside this strategy. Government will consider these as it develops further the detail of the policies set out in this strategy – not just in terms of policy design, but also in developing an effective evaluation strategy.

Government sees learning as a crucial part of its loneliness work. Evaluating the policies in this strategy, the projects supported by the Building Connections Fund and loneliness data from government surveys will be a core part of our approach, and can add to collective knowledge on what is effective in tackling loneliness. Government will continue to explore how it can contribute to evidence building and sharing, and will hold roundtables to discuss this with our Technical Advisory Group and other key stakeholders over the coming months.



## Chapter 2: Organisations that support and enable people's relationships

# Chapter 2: Organisations that support and enable people's relationships

## Our ambition

The everyday services and organisations people engage with play a vital role in our lives. They work hard to ensure that everyone has access to the services and support they need. The increasing digitisation and automation of services has unlocked crucial efficiencies across both public services and businesses. But there is a risk that this means we overlook the importance of allowing people to build and form relationships.

People working in public services, the voluntary sector and other organisations often see firsthand the impact of loneliness. This is because loneliness is interlinked with a range of other issues from managing a health condition to securing employment. It can be both a symptom and a cause. People also turn to these frontline services and organisations because they are unsure of where else they can go.

Many of the staff working for these organisations already go above and beyond to ensure people are supported, but it can be difficult for them to know how best to help. Individuals might need a little extra support to find community activities that they would like to participate in, or practical help on issues such as dealing with debt or housing problems. This places extra demands on services – for example, 76% of GPs report that 1 to 5 patients a day come to their surgery because they are lonely.<sup>58</sup> But it also means that people feeling lonely may not be getting the appropriate support that's needed.

Our ambition is that over time all public services and organisations will seize opportunities to promote social connections, and connect those who are experiencing loneliness to the support or services they require. By doing so, we can improve the social relationships of people across the country, and help people to lead healthier and happier lives.

This chapter marks a turning point in the way public services and organisations will promote social connections as a core part of their everyday role. They will develop the expertise necessary to confront loneliness and put in place mechanisms to connect people to the support they need. Government, working with local authorities, business and civil society, will:

- **improve how organisations and services connect people at risk of experiencing loneliness** to support, by ensuring all GP practices can offer social prescribing services and exploring how other frontline staff can also direct people to support.
- **make it easier to access information about local community groups, activities and support** services for loneliness by launching data pilots in collaboration with partners including the LGA, local authorities and others, to explore and identify potential solutions.
- **catalyse the sharing of knowledge and good practice on tackling loneliness** through the establishment of a network of champions who are committed to supporting their employees' social wellbeing and with government departments providing additional training and assistance to support people's social needs.



## Improving how organisations and services connect people at risk of experiencing loneliness to support

Public services and organisations have a vital role to play in helping people to secure the support they need. This extends beyond a person's clinical or practical needs. There are opportunities for services and organisations to connect people to help to improve their social wellbeing.

NHS England is supporting social prescribing services to help address a range of social, economic and environmental factors that can have an impact on people's health. Many Clinical Commissioning Groups and local authorities are already investing in social prescribing schemes, which are run mainly by the voluntary sector. NHS England estimates that 60% of Clinical Commissioning Groups have commissioned some form of social prescribing scheme. Alongside this, a number of voluntary sector organisations, such as the British Red Cross and its Connecting Communities initiative, run referral or connector schemes to support and services. In July 2018, the Department of Health and Social Care announced that 23 social prescribing projects in England would receive a share of £4.5 million to extend existing schemes or establish new ones through its Health and Wellbeing Fund. Through the £3.3 million Communities Fund, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has also funded partnerships to deliver social prescribing interventions to help tackle loneliness amongst the elderly and young people.

Across the country, a core model of social prescribing connector schemes have emerged that involves individuals (often called link workers) who connect people to community groups and activities based on personal needs. These schemes are commissioned by Clinical Commissioning Groups and local authorities, and take referrals from a range of agencies. The link worker and individual create a plan together, based on what matters to the person, to introduce people to community groups, services and support within their local area. Social prescribing is more than a method of signposting, but rather a way in which people can be helped to take active steps to seek out support and engage with their communities. Further work is required to develop the evidence base on the impact of social prescribing. However, existing evidence from individual schemes suggests that social prescribing may improve outcomes for people and reduce pressure on the NHS. For example, research found an average of 28% fewer GP consultations and 24% fewer attendances at A&E in instances where the social prescribing connector service was working well.<sup>59</sup>

### What is social prescribing?

Social prescribing enables organisations to refer people to a range of services that offer support for social, emotional or practical needs. This could include feelings of loneliness, as well as for debt, employment or housing problems, or difficulties with their relationships.

Social prescribing connects people to community groups and services, often through the support of a link worker. These connector schemes employ individuals (link workers) who take referrals from local agencies (including GPs), and work with people to produce a tailored plan to meet the person's wellbeing needs. They help people to overcome feelings of loneliness by connecting people to activities and support within their local area. This can include a range of activities from arts participation, befriending and sport or exercise, as well as debt, housing or employment advice.

### South Yorkshire Housing Association – Social Prescribing in Doncaster and Barnsley

The Doncaster and Barnsley social prescribing service advisors, in partnership with GPs, Community Nurses and other primary care professionals, refer patients to a range of local, non-clinical services. They carry out a home visit and have a positive conversation, empowering people to build resilience and find solutions which will improve their health and wellbeing. They connect people with their community by helping them to find local and personal solutions to non-medical needs, like making connections and emotional wellbeing. This also reduces pressure on the health and social care systems.

“I think a lot of patients end up being diagnosed with anxiety ... when in actual fact what they have is a fairly normal response to a fairly grotty social situation. So address the social situation and then I think it has a knock-on effect into their physical and mental health as well.” (GP Interview: Evaluation of Doncaster Social Prescribing Service, Sheffield Hallam University, September 2016)

“We have another part of the jigsaw that we can offer to patients. So the benefits are like M, who instead of visiting or calling 38 times in three months, now doesn't call. That's freed up our time to do something else and concentrate on the patients that need our medical expertise a bit more.” Dr NB (Barnsley GP)

An independent evaluation of the Doncaster social prescribing service, conducted by Sheffield Hallam University in 2016 found: 68% of customers reduced their GP visits, there was a significant (25% points) positive impact on anxiety and depression and 88% reported increased awareness of community services and support. There was a significant 10% increase in wellbeing in areas such as supporting customers to deal with problems, and feeling closer to other people, which helps to prevent isolation and loneliness.

There are opportunities, however, to go further to improve support for those experiencing loneliness. Government's ambition is to ensure that social prescribing is a core element of local provision, enabling more agencies and organisations to make referrals to existing social prescribing schemes. This marks a fundamental shift in the role of public services, recognising the importance of social wellbeing and people's connections.

In our call for evidence, one of the key things people told us that they wanted to see was more and improved social prescribing services. The Royal College of General Practitioners published its 'Tackling Loneliness: A Community Action Plan' earlier this year, which also asked for all GP surgeries to have access to a 'social prescriber'.<sup>60</sup> Government is committed to building on the work of social prescribing and other similar programmes. Working in partnership with local authorities, voluntary and community organisations, and businesses, government will launch a series of initiatives to help connect individuals at risk of experiencing loneliness, as well as those with other social, emotional or practical needs.

- **By 2023, government will support all local health and care systems to implement social prescribing connector schemes across the whole country, supporting government's aim to have a universal national offer available in GP practices.** This will be achieved by embedding link workers, who guide the individual to appropriate services or support. This support will be available within every Primary Care Network across the country. This commitment recognises that people's social wellbeing and connections are integral to their physical health.

NHS England, working with local government and civil society, will also undertake work to support and improve social prescribing services across the country. It will strengthen knowledge and share best practice on effective social prescribing by:

- **Mapping all social prescribing connector schemes across England to create a national database of local social prescribing schemes this year.** This database will include contact details for local schemes, the level of service they provide and key data about which local agencies are supported to make referrals into the scheme.
- **Publishing a best practice guide to social prescribing later this year.** This will outline a replicable model for social prescribing within local areas that describes the key features of good quality social prescribing.

- **Launching an online social prescribing platform for commissioners and practitioners later this year**, which includes templates and resources, and facilitates regional communities of practice.
- **Piloting new accredited learning programmes for social prescribing link workers** in early 2019.
- **Establishing regional social prescribing steering groups later this year** to bring together key stakeholders to promote collaborative commissioning and best practice in social prescribing. In addition, they will also facilitate a cross-government social prescribing workshop to encourage a joint approach and co-host six regional social prescribing workshops in 2019 to promote best practice in social prescribing.

NHS England will also take steps to improve the evidence base on social prescribing. It will do this by:

**Publishing a Common Outcomes Framework for social prescribing** in 2018/19. This will provide consistency for measuring the impact of social prescribing on the person, the health and care system, and local community groups receiving referrals. This will be co-produced with a wide range of stakeholders and will enable a consistent evidence base to be built across England.

### Caroline Dinenage MP Minister of State for Care



We know that loneliness can have a serious impact on people's health – both mentally and physically. The effect of loneliness on health has been compared to that of smoking. It can also have substantial costs for public services, as older people

experiencing loneliness are more likely to visit the doctor and have higher use of medication and the emergency services. This is independent of the fact that these individuals develop chronic illness more frequently. We also know carers can be left feeling trapped, lonely and isolated and unable to take part in social activities or relationships, or look after their own health and wellbeing. I am therefore delighted that the Department of Health and Social Care is playing a key part in this work, with health professionals increasingly working with people, communities and other partners to help people stay in good health and avoid loneliness. I am keen to ensure that our society moves towards mental health having parity with physical health and create more carer-friendly communities. But now we need to start talking about our social wellbeing too, with social connections being an important part of that.

It is not only GPs who people turn to when they are experiencing loneliness. Beyond the health service, other organisations can also join efforts to reduce loneliness, so government will support other services to connect people to the support they require:

- **The Department of Health and Social Care, NHS England and the Department for Work and Pensions will undertake work to assess how a variety of organisations and services currently refer individuals into social prescribing schemes and local provision.** From this, organisations will be able to understand the challenges and benefits, and recommend ways to improve how we connect people to social prescribing services and local provision. Building on the findings, **these departments will commit to testing methods that will improve how a range of organisations (such as community pharmacies, social workers, community nurses and jobcentres) refer into existing social prescribing services and provision in 2019/20.** The aim of this work will be to improve the identification of those at risk of loneliness, regardless of the services or organisation that they come into contact with. The future ambition is that frontline staff, across professions and organisations, are able to direct people easily to the necessary support.
- **The Home Office will trial an innovative digital solution 'Safe and Connected' to support lonely older people who live in the community, based on the successful Jersey-based project 'Call and Check'.** Working in conjunction with Royal Mail, private enterprise, local authorities and the local voluntary sector, the scheme will see postal workers calling on lonely older people who sign up to participate, as part of their usual delivery rounds. Postal workers will ask a standard set of questions to assess individual need, with responses captured via their standard hand-held work devices. A professional from either the local authority or the local voluntary sector will analyse the results and direct the individual as necessary to friends, family, neighbours or local voluntary sector services. This helps to reduce the risk of loneliness, as well as addressing other needs and issues. The trial will take place in Liverpool, Whitby in North Yorkshire and New Malden in the London Borough of Kingston-upon-Thames in 2018/19, with an independent evaluation anticipated to report in June 2019. The insights from this trial will inform our wider thinking on the identification and referral of lonely individuals, including how we work with partners.



Improving how services and organisations connect people to support is just one way that organisations can embed a consideration for people's social wellbeing into the way we deliver services. There are already many examples of how public services ensure awareness of people's broader needs in daily interaction. For instance, the NHS ensures that organisations and public service staff adopt a 'Make Every Contact Count' approach to promote healthy lifestyles within their interactions with people.<sup>61</sup>

To build on this, government is seeking to provide the tools to enable those who commission, plan and deliver programmes in local areas to consider loneliness and social connections in their approach. This will start with:

- **Public Health England including government-approved loneliness measure within its consultation on revising the Public Health Outcomes Framework.** The Framework sets out a vision for public health, desired outcomes and the indicators that help us understand how well public health is being improved and protected. The information is used by local Health and Wellbeing Boards to guide strategic decision-making on the types of health, social care and support services required in local communities, and help service providers and commissioners make more informed decisions. Data would be published on the Public Health Outcomes Framework website, where we would be able to see how the nation is performing on reducing loneliness.

Beyond this, there are a number of future government publications that have broader objectives that will have an impact on the lives of those experiencing loneliness. The forthcoming public consultation on social care will set out plans for how government proposes to improve care and support for older people and tackle the challenge of an ageing population. In addition, the NHS 10 year plan, which is due to be published later in 2018, will outline the priorities and budgetary plans for the NHS.

### Sarah Newton MP, Minister of State for Disabled People, Health and Work



We know that there is a correlation between loneliness and unemployment, and that certain groups who report high levels of loneliness, such as disabled people, people with health conditions and carers, can also face difficulties in

finding work. I'm pleased that this strategy sets out how we will spread the current good practice of leading jobcentres more widely, so that social connectedness is considered and supported across the country. It's also significant that we will work with the Department of Health and Social Care and the NHS to test how we might improve the way people are connected to social prescribing services and local provision of support services.

## Improve how organisations and services connect people experiencing loneliness to support at certain trigger points

As set out in chapter one, certain life events or transition points can trigger loneliness. This strategy sets out initial commitments to identify and support people at some of these points. Government will learn from the implementation of these in order to consider future action that can be taken to support different groups at other recognised trigger points:

- **The Department for Work and Pensions will enhance its Tell us Once initiative later this year by integrating advice for those at risk of experiencing loneliness.** This service allows people to report a death once rather than multiple times, sharing the notification with the necessary government departments. Bereavement can trigger loneliness, and this will ensure those who need support are directed to useful services.<sup>62</sup>
- **As an expansion of the new pilot announced in the Inclusive Transport Strategy,<sup>63</sup> by 2020 the Department for Transport will explore with seven mobility centres in England how they can help to identify signs of loneliness or lack of social connections.** Mobility centres are vital hubs for

helping people to remain driving. However, for those people who for health reasons are no longer able to or do not want to drive, government is exploring with mobility centres what information can be provided on alternative transport options to keep them travelling. The Department for Transport will expand this pilot and explore how staff can help raise awareness of the loneliness agenda and work with others, such as charities, to address this issue for those no longer able or wanting to drive.

- **With the support of the Home Office, the National Trading Standards Scam Marshal scheme will be expanded to improve the resilience of lonely or socially isolated older adults to fraud, scams and financial abuse.**<sup>64</sup> We know that those who are isolated may be more likely to be victims of fraud, and likewise, being a victim of fraud itself can be an isolating experience. By expanding this scheme, there is a better opportunity to guard against vulnerability to this type of criminality.

### Victoria Atkins MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Crime, Safeguarding and Vulnerability



Loneliness can cause people to feel detached from their neighbours and neighbourhoods, which may increase their vulnerability to becoming victims of crime. By enabling people to build and

maintain strong social networks, and increasing their awareness of fraudulent activity in particular, we can help them to protect themselves from this risk. This strategy sets out how the Home Office will support innovative ways to tackle loneliness and reduce the risk of crime amongst older people.

There are other groups within society and trigger points across the life course that may increase the risk of experiencing loneliness. Government will publish a Veterans Strategy later this year,<sup>65</sup> which will seek to support the evolving needs of former service personnel. This cross-government strategy will set out the vision and principles upon which the UK supports its veterans, and one theme will look at social isolation, relationships and community integration.

Loneliness can also affect those in society who take on the invaluable role of providing care, many of whom are women and are older.<sup>66,67,68</sup> More than 8 in 10 unpaid carers described themselves as lonely or socially isolated due to their caring responsibilities.<sup>69</sup> There are a range of circumstances that may lead to carers experiencing loneliness, and many of these are out of their control. Carers need to be recognised and valued. They should be provided with support to help them to offer the best care they can, whilst maintaining their own health and wellbeing. Earlier this year, the Department of Health and Social Care published the Carers Action Plan, which outlined a programme of cross-government work to help support carers across the country over the next two years.<sup>70</sup> Through this, the Department of Health and Social Care committed to working with local government on the implementation of the duties relating to carers as outlined in the Care Act (2014).<sup>71</sup> The Carers Action Plan included an investment of £500,000 to launch the Carer Innovations Fund during 2018/19, which aims to build carer-friendly communities and public services and to provide evidence on effective interventions to support carers.

In addition, the Department for Work and Pensions, the Department of Health and Social Care and the Government Equalities Office committed to work together to explore how to improve online information and signposting to wider support for carers at the start of their caring journey.<sup>72</sup> The Carers Employment Digital Discovery Project is mapping the information needs of working carers in order to identify opportunities for government and others to improve the available information. The aim is to help carers who want to remain in employment to do so, by enabling them to make better informed decisions about balancing work and care, and thereby supporting them to maintain their social networks.

Young carers experience higher levels of loneliness and social isolation, and they can miss out on opportunities in education and employment as a result of their caring responsibilities.<sup>73</sup> The Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Education are conducting a review of best practice to find young carers and improve their access to necessary support.

## Tackling loneliness among disabled people and those with a long-term health condition

Disability takes many forms – from hearing impairments to chronic pain, prolonged or severe asthma to developmental disabilities, anxiety or neurological conditions. And temporary impairments – even a broken leg – can significantly impact someone's life and weaken their connection to society. Those living with a disability or with a long-term health condition often report prolonged periods of loneliness.

The disability charity Scope UK uncovered the high level of loneliness experienced by working age disabled people, particularly young adults. From a survey of 1,004 disabled people, 45% of working age disabled people say they always or often feel lonely and 85% of young disabled adults (aged 18 to 34 years old) feel lonely.<sup>74</sup>

The causes of loneliness among people with a health condition or disability are complex. The link between poor health or disability and loneliness is both multi-layered and reinforcing. The challenges that face those with health conditions may contribute to feelings of loneliness, or an increased sense of stigma or isolation from society at large.

## What government is doing

Government has already introduced a range of initiatives which can help reduce loneliness for disabled people and those with health conditions.

Each department has a responsibility to create a society that works for everyone, where those with disabilities can participate fully, and government will continue to progress the implementation of The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Disabled People.<sup>75</sup>

Government is taking action to transform employment prospects for disabled people and those with long-term health conditions through 'Improving Lives: the Future of Work and Disability'<sup>76</sup> which sets out an ambitious vision for a society in which all disabled people and people with long-term health conditions are able to go as far as their talents will take them, and government's commitment to see one million more disabled people in work by 2027.

The Department of Health and Social Care's Chief Social Worker has supported and published several guidance documents on social work best practice which can help social workers better support people at risk of loneliness. These include the sensory impairment guide for people whose senses may have changed due to injury or having a long-term disability<sup>77</sup>, which can often result in the loss of their social life, friends and ability to make new ones, eventually leading to social isolation and loneliness. Guidance for social workers working with older people, carers, people with dementia, and autism has also been published.

Government has already committed to providing concessionary travel to nearly 10 million older adults and disabled people.<sup>78</sup> The Department for Transport's Inclusive Transport Strategy<sup>79</sup> sets out how government will make the transport network more inclusive and accessible, in particular for older adults and disabled people, exploring how this can tackle loneliness. The revised National Planning Policy Framework published in July 2018 also supports this, setting out an expectation that development should address the needs of disabled people and reduced mobility in relation to all modes of transport.

## But government is committed to going further to break the link between poor health, disability and loneliness

Poor health and disability can increase people's risk of experiencing loneliness which in turn can lead to their health worsening and exacerbate feelings of loneliness. This strategy outlines a number of new commitments that will help improve how health professionals respond to this link between health and loneliness:

- Government will support all local health and care systems to implement social prescribing connector schemes across the whole country, supporting the aim to have a universal national offer available in GP practices. It will also take steps to improve and share knowledge on effective social prescribing services. In addition, the Department of Health and Social Care, NHS England and the Department for Work and Pensions will commit to testing methods that will improve how a range of other organisations (such as community pharmacies, social workers, community nurses and jobcentres) refer into existing social prescribing services.
- The Chief Social Worker for Adults, through sector networks, will improve knowledge sharing among social workers.

Employment can be a vital lifeline for social contact. Yet less than half of disabled adults are in employment,<sup>80</sup> and those disabled young people (age 16 to 24) in employment are among the lowest earners. Very few take up apprenticeships specifically geared towards this age group.<sup>81</sup>

To address this:

- **The Department for Education will work with the National Apprenticeship Service to encourage employers to offer work placements and apprenticeships to young people with special educational needs or disabilities.** Their work will help to remove barriers and raise awareness of opportunities available, so that this group feels less isolated and excluded from society.
- **The Department for Education will publish best practice guidance on work placements for young people with special educational needs or disabilities.** Gaining useful work experience will help to prevent future exclusion from the workplace.

Other organisations can also play a vital role in ensuring that disabled people or those with a health condition have access to inclusive opportunities. In recognition of this:

- The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport will launch up to five pilots by March 2019 to test and develop flexible and inclusive volunteering opportunities to enable social connections and respond to people's life circumstances, including for those with long-term health conditions.



### Action on Hearing Loss' 'Hear to Meet' service

Action on Hearing Loss, formerly RNID, is the largest national charity supporting people with deafness, tinnitus and hearing loss. Unaddressed hearing loss can increase the risk of loneliness across all age groups. Without appropriate support, people with hearing loss may become isolated from friends, family and work colleagues. Hearing aids reduce these risks, but people will often need support to get the most out of them.

Action on Hearing Loss' 'Hear to Meet' service gives people with hearing loss the opportunity to meet up for tea and coffee, share experiences and get information about how to use their hearing aids and local services that can help them. Befriending support is also available for people who find it difficult to travel and for people living in care homes.

People who use the service say they value the opportunity to speak with other people and share experiences, as this reduces feelings of loneliness and social isolation associated with hearing loss. 85% of people who attended a 'Hear to Meet' group said they felt happier because they could talk to people who understand their hearing loss. A service user says, "It's an essential component to my lifestyle. It makes a huge difference to have this monthly social contact."

## Making it easier to access information about local community groups, activities and support services for loneliness

Across the country, there are excellent services and initiatives being delivered by civil society, the public sector and local community groups that help to address loneliness and improve people's relationships. But people can often find it difficult to know and identify what activities and support are available in their area. Public services and local organisations can similarly find it hard to direct people to relevant services and support in their area, as it can be challenging to maintain knowledge on local provision.

Knowledge of community groups, activities and services sits best at a local level. A number of local authorities and voluntary organisations, such as Well Aware in Bristol and South Gloucestershire and LiON in Nottingham, have already created directories of services and activities to inform their citizens. But government is committed to working with local authorities and the voluntary sector to build on existing projects and make it easier to access this information wherever you live. By doing so, more people will be able to access the services, activities and support that could help to reduce their risk of feeling lonely.

- **The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, in collaboration with the LGA, digital experts, local authorities, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and the voluntary sector, will launch pilots to explore how better use of data can help make it easier for people to find local activities, services and support.** This could also help local commissioners to better map local provision of services that help to tackle loneliness. There will be up to four pilots that will take place in four local authority areas in England by March 2020, which will involve work to identify possible solutions. This will build on existing work with Bristol City Council to collect and publish online information about local services consistently, with the potential to help people connect to what is going on in their area through the creation of apps and other tools. A similar example includes Sport England and the Open Data Institute who have a project called OpenActive, which promotes using data to share opportunities to help people get active. The goal is to make data on what, where and when physical activity sessions happen openly available through the use of a common standard, creating efficiencies for those organisations who want to use it.<sup>82</sup>

## Spreading good practice and encouraging knowledge-sharing on tackling loneliness

Great work is already happening across the country that helps to tackle loneliness and improve people's relationships. As chapter one described, the What Works Centre for Wellbeing will publish a review of evidence on effective interventions and programmes. To build on this, government will work with local authorities, the health sector, businesses and the voluntary sector to celebrate this work and ensure that examples of best practice are shared across the country. Services and organisations can draw learnings from each other and continue to improve their approach to tackling loneliness and supporting social connections. Government's Ageing Society Grand Challenge<sup>83</sup> will also engage with business to harness the power of innovation to help meet the diverse needs of an ageing society, including around loneliness.

Local authorities are in a unique position to consider loneliness in the context of local priorities and needs. Fantastic work is already taking place across the country and we are committed to helping to share this in order to inspire others. There are established frameworks available to local authorities and public bodies looking to address loneliness including Promising Approaches, published by the Campaign to End Loneliness and Age UK.

In our call for evidence, respondents asked us to help build on this by improving knowledge and information sharing across organisations and services to strengthen their approach to tackling loneliness and promoting social connections. Government will help to address this by:

- **The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government will work with the LGA and the National Association of Local Councils to explore an effective means of sharing learning and good practice.** This will build on the LGA's forward-thinking guidance on combating loneliness.
- **The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy will continue to work with the Campaign to End Loneliness to establish and grow a network of champions to encourage employers to adopt a pledge to support their employees' social wellbeing.** 21 organisations have already committed to this. **Alongside this, government will work with the Campaign to End Loneliness and businesses to capture and share the work they are doing to help tackle loneliness**

**in the wider community and to promote this work and develop it further.**<sup>84</sup>

- **The Department for Work and Pensions, through its jobcentres, has an important role in directing people who are preparing to return or are in progress of returning to the labour market to suitable support,** including for issues around wellbeing, self-esteem and confidence. There is already good practice across the country. For example, the jobcentre in Chatham has included loneliness within the digital tools it has for directing people to support. In Somerset, jobcentres run health and wellbeing events on their premises to ensure people in this rural area have an awareness of the available support. **To improve and build on current practice, jobcentres will develop better approaches for sharing information on effective programmes for supporting those who face these challenges, including those at risk of experiencing loneliness.**<sup>85</sup> **This will include training for work coaches to ensure that they are encouraged to ask about social connections** in conversations with claimants who are struggling with work preparation activity. Loneliness could also be added to the online tools used by work coaches to assess the needs of their users.
- **The Department of Health and Social Care will improve knowledge sharing among social workers through the Chief Social Worker for Adults and their sector networks.** The aim will be to further develop social workers' ability to recognise those who may be experiencing loneliness and their knowledge of services or support to refer people on to. This will build on a commitment within the Carers Action Plan to improve support for carers through the Adult Principal Social Workers (PSW) Network. The PSW Network provides professional leadership and quality assurance for social work practice and supports local and regional integration, by explaining the critical contribution that social workers make.

These commitments will help to build, improve and develop the way in which services and organisations support social connections. By building on this, frontline staff and society at large will be equipped with better information on how to identify and help people who experience loneliness and ensure that everyone can receive the support they need.

## The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care



Government has made great progress in helping people to live longer lives by improvements in public health. We are closing the gap in the traditional big killers, like cancer and cardiovascular diseases, but challenges remain around long-term conditions across mental and physical health. Some of these can be avoided through lifestyle and other choices, whilst others cannot. The objective, of course, is to live well in the community, and to enjoy a good quality of life.

Tackling loneliness is an important part of this agenda. The problem can strike at any time and without warning to anyone. Addressing loneliness in our society requires everyone to play a part. We all want to live long, healthier, more independent lives

– for ourselves and our loved ones. The strategy highlights the practical measures that can be taken to make a difference to health outcomes for those at risk of loneliness.

We recognise that there is no off-the-shelf blueprint for tackling loneliness. Loneliness and social isolation cannot be treated with medicines or referral for hospital treatment, so this strategy unveils bold new plans, including increasing access to social prescribing, which enables GPs and other frontline healthcare professionals to refer people to activities in their community. It is not intended to replace the high quality medical care GPs can and do provide, but rather to offer a way to connect, involve and engage people who are socially isolated.

A healthy population is fundamental to prosperity, security and stability. This strategy is a first step towards addressing loneliness through public and private services and community activity. We all have a part to play.

Chapter 3:  
Community  
infrastructure that  
empowers social  
connections





# Chapter 3: Community infrastructure that empowers social connections

## Our ambition

While isolation and loneliness are not the same thing, practical measures to reduce isolation can also help to tackle loneliness. Good community infrastructure is vital to this. The importance of having access to community space – both buildings and outdoor space – was a frequent theme in responses to government’s call for evidence on loneliness. Respondents also highlighted transport, as well as the impact of good neighbourhood planning and housing design.

People need access to places where they can get together. They need transport that enables them to get to places where they can connect with others. Thoughtful planning and housing can also make a difference, making it natural and easy for people to see each other, chat in passing or spend time together, building friendships over time.

And, in the 21st century, digital infrastructure is also a key tool to bring us together, even when we can’t be physically in the same place. This can be especially important to people with mobility problems, or families and friends separated by distance.

This chapter sets out how government will work with local authorities, the voluntary sector, transport providers, and digital and social media companies to:

- **unlock the potential of underutilised community space**, by encouraging schools to open up, and also by providing funding for communities to use space in creative ways.
- **create a transport network that supports people’s social connections and helps people be connected to their community**, by working with the sector to highlight the importance of accessible and inclusive transport.
- **place community at the heart of the design of housing developments and planning, by embedding it in planning** and design frameworks and by researching how community-led housing could reduce loneliness.
- **maximise the power of digital tools to connect people**, particularly concentrating on digital inclusion for older and disabled adults, and addressing loneliness in the forthcoming white paper on internet safety.<sup>86</sup>

This chapter also sets out government’s plans to test and learn from innovations around community space, transport and digital technology, to encourage social cohesion and connection.

## Unlocking the potential of underutilised community space

Government is already taking action on these issues. It recognised the importance of having access to community space in its Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper.<sup>87</sup> The recently-published Civil Society Strategy<sup>88</sup> announced that guidance will be revised to help community groups who want to take local assets into community ownership. It also announced that the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, in partnership with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, is designing a programme of work to look at how to improve the sustainability of community hubs and spaces.

Green spaces in rural and urban areas have been shown to be highly beneficial to health and wellbeing and provide space for people to meet.<sup>89</sup> Government's 25 Year Environment Plan<sup>90</sup> sets out a long-term approach to protecting and enhancing the natural environment and its commitments include creating more green infrastructure, in recognition of the important benefits this will provide to health, wellbeing and social connection. A cross-government project has been established, led by Natural England, to draw up a national framework of green infrastructure standards in 2019, ensuring that new developments include accessible green spaces and that any area with little or no green space can be improved for the benefit of the community. The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is working with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to see how commitments on green infrastructure can be incorporated into national planning guidance and policy.

Additionally, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, with Public Health England, is launching a three-year 'Natural Environment for Health and Wellbeing' programme. This is focused on supporting local authorities, health organisations, health professionals, teachers and planners to promote the natural environment as a pathway to good health with encouraging the use of green spaces to support mental health, including building social connections.

The #iwill campaign, run by Step Up to Serve, and supported by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, aims to engage 10 to 20 year-olds to take part in meaningful social action. For the year of the environment in 2019, the #iwill campaign has partnered with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to support groups of young people to come together to maintain and enhance local green spaces

and other wildlife habitats. As part of this the #iwill Fund (funded by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and Big Lottery Fund) has partnered with the Pears Foundation to fund a project where young people will come together to design, plant and maintain woodland, building social connections along the way.

All of these policies will empower local people and groups to use the natural environment to help tackle mental ill health and loneliness and foster community participation and cohesion.

Government is working closely with partners across the park sector through the Parks Action Group to promote the value of public parks and green spaces, helping them bring together communities now and in the future. This was kick-started with £500,000 of new funding allocated by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to identify and share effective and deliverable models of service delivery. This will secure the future of our green spaces and promote them as places easily accessible to all members of the community, including older people and those with a disability.

## The Rural Coffee Caravan



The Rural Coffee Caravan delivers information and friendship across Suffolk. The caravan gets out and about to provide a friendly drop-in space for over 5,000 people a year to reconnect over a coffee and a piece of cake. In addition, the organisation has set up Meetup Mondays, bringing people together at 35 regular free coffee mornings in cafes and pubs across Suffolk.

People using the caravan can have a wide range of needs but the predominant one is the need to be with other people and just connect with conversation. The portable meeting space enables people to find out what is going on in their community,

what services they can access and to develop what they think their community needs.

Ann Osbourn, Director of Rural Coffee Caravan says, “Through visiting the caravan, people have gained access to benefits, services and information they need. They have set up community groups and made new friends. They have left their house and spoken with someone and felt valued and appreciated. They have been able to give back to others by volunteering their time and developing a sense of belonging through their volunteering and/or reconnecting with neighbours.”

A resident says, “The Rural Coffee Caravan was a godsend to our small Suffolk community with no village hall or other amenities. We meet up and are able to gauge whether other members of our village are in need of help or advice or just a listening ear. Those we do not see around often because of age or mobility problems are encouraged to come with help from more agile members! In all honesty I feel that the presence of the Coffee Caravan and its amazing and dedicated volunteers has been a lifesaver to us personally and an addition to the village that has given us all hope for the future of our rural community”.

But there are opportunities to go further. This strategy seeks to build on these existing commitments by identifying additional ways for communities to unlock access to their local spaces:

- Further to the announcement in the Civil Society Strategy<sup>91</sup> that government will enable the creation of more sustainable community hubs and spaces, **the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport will devote up to £1.8 million in funding to help local people maximise the potential of underutilised community spaces in innovative and creative ways.** Government will devote this money to building social connections by working with the social sector and community groups to develop and pilot innovative approaches to better use community spaces. This could include bringing existing space that is not currently available into use and piloting extended opening hours. The learning from these loneliness interventions will inform wider policy-making in the future, both in the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and across
- **By the end of 2018, the Department for Education will publish guidance for schools on maximising the use of their premises, as well as other forms of income generation that can be beneficial to the community.** This guidance will cover barriers such as insurance and safeguarding issues. Government believes schools should support maximum use of their premises and facilities by the local community for meetings and events in the evenings, at weekends and during the school holidays. This has three benefits: extra facilities are available to the community; publicly funded assets are used for a greater proportion of the week and year; and the school has an additional income stream that can be fed back into improving education.

government. There will be a particular focus on improving access to community space for youth. The insights will also be shared with local authorities through our network of good practice.

- **The Department for Education will also collect data on which schools already allow use of their premises, in order to understand how best to support other schools to do so.** Some schools already make best use of these opportunities and many could do more for the benefit of pupils, parents and the local community. The great majority of schools can allow use of their premises outside school hours, and will be expected to do this where it is not already happening.
- **The Department for Transport's forthcoming Community Rail Strategy<sup>92,93</sup> will help support community groups wishing to make use of unused or underused railway property.** This will provide access to new local community spaces by encouraging the rail industry to adopt a flexible approach to lease conditions and maintain a consistent, communicative approach based on respect and trust when engaging with community groups.<sup>94</sup>
- **The Department for Work and Pensions will share good practice and encourage all jobcentres that can open up their space to do so.<sup>95</sup>** This follows the example of a number of jobcentres which already provide access to local community groups for claimants. For example, the jobcentre in Wakefield has introduced a conversation club for Syrian refugees to support them with their language training but also to forge links with relevant community groups to facilitate integration for them and their families. These groups can help build social connections among the unemployed.
- **In partnership with the Campaign to End Loneliness, British Red Cross, the Association of Convenience Stores and others, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy will work with businesses to explore how they can provide community space out of business hours or engage with the wider community in other ways.** This is building on the great work of businesses including the Costa and Chatty Café partnership which is now in 300 branches,<sup>96</sup> as well as Marks & Spencer's working with Frazzled Cafés and other partners. **Alongside this strategy, Sainsbury's is launching its 'Talking Tables', with pilots in 20 stores, including staff and volunteer hosted tables, as well as 'Talking Tables' in the staff canteens.**
- **The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will support community infrastructure and community action to tackle loneliness in local areas.** The ACRE network of Rural Community Councils has already begun prioritising work with local partners on tackling loneliness in rural areas, using the department's contribution to its funding. **Alongside this, the Department for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will convene a rural stakeholder group this autumn to advise and support the work of government departments and help with the local communication of initiatives and good practice.** The group will meet regularly to explore issues specific to rural areas.

**Lord Gardiner of Kimble, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Rural Affairs and Biosecurity**



Green spaces are vital for our wellbeing, and getting together outdoors can offer opportunities to create and nurture friendships. Through its 25 year environment plan, government has made commitments to green our towns and cities and help people improve their health and wellbeing by using green spaces. We know that people living in rural areas can face particular challenges to social connection in terms of transport, services and simply feeling there's 'someone like me' living locally. At the same time, rural areas often have a strong community culture and people living in the countryside are no more likely to report feeling lonely than those in our cities. This strategy recognises the importance of our rural communities and the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will ensure that government's work on tackling loneliness continues to do so.



### Anchor's pet policy and how it can help reduce loneliness

Anchor, England's largest not-for-profit provider of housing and care for older people, allows residents to bring their pets with them when they move into their properties. Pets can feel like members of the family, so separating them when someone moves into a care home or retirement scheme can be very stressful and upsetting for their owner.

Andy Seal, Anchor's Service Delivery Consultant, says "Interacting with pets can improve residents' sense of wellbeing. As well as reducing stress, having pets is also a good way for carers to initiate conversations with residents, particularly those living with dementia who find it difficult to communicate. This can help reduce feelings of loneliness."

Anchor's research supports this. It shows that:

- 51% of people aged over 65 "worry about a future without their beloved animals".
- 62% of over 65s say "having a pet makes them less lonely".
- a third thought "pets reduce anxiety" while 28% believe "they increase happiness".

This highlights the benefits of pet ownership and the role animals can play in supporting people's social wellbeing.

### Jackie's story



Jackie Wilson, from Birchlands care home in Englefield Green, says, "We enjoy feeding the animals, we enjoy playing with the

animals three times a week, although sometimes it's hard to come down because of my leg. My favourite is the duck."

"I love animals because we used to have a Yorkshire terrier dog. They are good company. We feed the chicken, the rabbit and the duck here, and pet owners are allowed to bring in their dogs when they visit us which is nice."

## Creating a transport network that enables people's social connections and helps people be connected to their community

Transport is vital for our social connections. We all depend on our transport networks for journeys to meet people, get to work or school, do our shopping, look after our families and see our friends. Respondents to the call for evidence highlighted the importance of access to inclusive and affordable transport as vital to tackling loneliness.

Government recognises how important good transport is to our social connections and is already taking action in a number of ways. Government is investing billions in the upkeep and enhancement of our infrastructure, the biggest investment in a generation. By maintaining and upgrading our transport infrastructure, this investment is one of the most important things government can do to help people remain connected.

Access to public and local transport services, including local buses, community transport and community rail, also plays a key role, especially for those living in rural areas or those on lower incomes. Government provides £250 million support every year for bus services, and through the Bus Services Act 2017 has given local authorities greater powers to take over the running of local bus services and enter into partnership with bus operators to improve local bus services.

Over the past few years, government has provided support to the community transport sector, including buying over 400 new minibuses for community transport groups. Earlier in 2018 the Department for Transport consulted on the licensing rules that apply to such operators. Government's response will be published by the Department for Transport later in 2018, and the impact on the Community Transport sector will be considered as part of this process. Government remains committed to the Community Transport sector and will continue to consider ways to support it.

Government's forthcoming Community Rail Strategy<sup>97</sup> sets out how, through community rail partnerships, local communities can have a voice in improving local transport provision that helps connect their community, including in more isolated areas.

In order to make the most of transport networks to help tackle loneliness, people need to be able to feel

comfortable using the transport system – safely and without extra cost. Government’s recently published Inclusive Transport Strategy<sup>98</sup> sets out how it will make the transport network inclusive and accessible, in particular for disabled and older people, enabling them to be more mobile and establish and maintain their own social connections. As an example, government has also already committed to providing concessionary travel to nearly 10 million older adults and disabled people.

Building on the commitments outlined above, the Department for Transport will:

- **Provide funding to the Community Transport Association in 2019 to enable the existing Community Transport specific training to be recognised as part of the qualification for professional coach and bus drivers.**<sup>99</sup> This should increase the number of drivers trained to support elderly and disabled passengers, giving them the confidence to use these services. Over 6,000 organisations currently use the programme to train their drivers and this funding will increase the number of drivers with passenger focused qualifications.
- **Create new partnerships with transport providers and community organisations who are developing ideas and initiatives for how transport can be used as a means to help tackle loneliness, and use industry-wide forums to promote these.** Most local transport services are provided by organisations outside government and in many instances the ability to make a real difference will be in their hands. Government is keen to encourage organisations across the transport sector to develop new initiatives to tackle loneliness, so that our transport networks play the greatest possible role in connecting people and reducing loneliness. This builds on some great work already taking place. For example, Go South Coast is piloting buses having an innovative social seating layout, so that people can talk to each other in comfort, offering a place for people to meet and talk. Living Streets has established a number of community programmes based on walking clubs that can help to tackle loneliness.
- **Put the need for inclusive transport at the heart of its approach to the Future of Mobility Grand Challenge, making sure that our future transport system works to overcome problems like loneliness and social exclusion,** rather than exacerbate them. The Future of Urban Mobility Strategy<sup>100</sup>, to be published later this year, will provide further details and set a clear direction for industry on the importance of inclusive design.

### Nusrat Ghani MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport



Transport is vital for our social relationships. Whether it’s looking after our families, seeing friends, going to work or school, transport brings people

together. But we recognise that for some people, a lack of suitable transport can act as a barrier to having the social connections that they want. In this strategy we set out some of our steps for addressing this, and signal a new longstanding commitment, working with the transport sector, to highlight this issue and take action.

### Community rail and overcoming mobility barriers



Community rail is a grassroots movement, made up of hundreds of community groups and partnerships that help communities to access and benefit from their local

railways. The mission of the Association of Community Rail Partnerships (ACoRP) is to empower, support and champion the community rail movement. A big part of community rail is helping people who are vulnerable, marginalised, or face barriers to travel, to use local railways. ACoRP’s and its members’ work ranges from advising rail industry partners on station accessibility, to workshops on making rail journeys, to promoting low-cost tickets and discount cards. This can have life-changing implications: broadening people’s horizons, helping them to be more active in society and bringing people together.

For example, Community Rail Lancashire’s Railway Confidence Programme engages young people, including those with special educational needs and disabilities. They help four to 18 year-olds to become confident in all aspects of rail travel, and also provide young people with employment experiences to assist them in considering career options, including in the rail industry. By giving participants the opportunity to access rail, the team encourages the idea of all young people, including those with special educational needs and disabilities, using rail to access greater opportunities in life, helping to build a more inclusive society.

## Supporting communities to come together through good planning and housing

The Office for National Statistics found that on loneliness, home and neighbourhood matters. People who rent are more likely to feel lonely. But when people feel satisfied with their neighbourhood, they are less likely to feel lonely.<sup>101</sup> Given this, housing and planning can play a key role in bringing people together by placing social interactions at their heart.

Government's recent Green Paper, A New Deal for Social Housing,<sup>102</sup> highlights the role that some social housing landlords play in community centres and community activities that support participation and social interaction. Government is also committed to improving the experience of private renters. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is introducing a range of policies to deliver a high-quality, fairer, more secure and more affordable private rented sector, including recently consulting on longer tenancies. The length of time lived in a neighbourhood and the sense of belonging to it also influences the risk of feeling lonely,<sup>103</sup> so this could support people's sense of belonging and satisfaction with where they live. Government is committed to diversifying the housing market, including growing the build to rent sector, where landlords build and operate dedicated private rental blocks – such as the work of The Collective and Quintain.

These projects incorporate communal space, such as workspace or social areas, to encourage social interaction amongst residents.

More broadly, thoughtful urban design has an important part to play. Thoughtful planning can create places that balance public and private space and encourage people to interact near to their homes. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's revised National Planning Policy Framework sets out how planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places that promote social interaction, including between people who might not otherwise come into contact with each other.<sup>104</sup> This national policy includes a chapter on 'Promoting Healthy and Safe Communities' with specific reference to promoting social interaction. Additionally, the chapter on 'Achieving Well-Designed Places' also emphasises planning for community cohesion and resilience.

People also care about their local high streets because they are the centres of their community. Government wants high streets to thrive now and in the future, and be places where communities can come together and build social relationships and strengthen social ties. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has appointed an expert panel to diagnose the issues currently affecting high streets and advise on the best practical measures to help them thrive.

### Costa Coffee launches Chatty Café



On 3 August 2018, Costa Coffee launched the Chatty Café Scheme, an initiative designed to encourage conversations between customers at designated 'Chatter and Natter' tables, in over 300 stores nationwide. It accompanied this launch with new research, showing that 75%<sup>105</sup> of people would like more face-to-face conversations, 63% would hesitate to talk to a stranger, 34% feared rejection, and 28% were too nervous to approach someone. Chatty Café is designed to break down these perceived barriers, and encourage people to interact in a safe, welcoming environment.

The scheme builds upon Costa's existing Community Programme, and on successful regional pilots that have been running for the last year. Victoria Moorhouse, Head of Sustainability at Costa Coffee, says, "Our coffee shops have always played an important role within communities. With loneliness and social isolation on the rise, feeling part of a community is more important than ever. And that's exactly what the Chatty Café scheme is all about – helping our customers to open up and have a friendly chat."

Chatty Café and Costa store teams have strengthened relationships with their customers and communities. Chatty Café was founded in Manchester by Alexandra Hoskyn, inspired by a visit to a supermarket café with her four-month-old son. "He wasn't great company and I was feeling fed up. Looking around the café I saw an elderly lady, and a young man and his support worker who looked down. I thought about the positive impact we could have on each other if we could all have a chat".

There are opportunities to go further. To support our understanding of how housing can bring people together:

- **The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government will fund research into the impact of community-led housing and cohousing solutions on loneliness.**<sup>106</sup> The community-led approach is driven by the commitment of the very individuals and communities that it will benefit, and typically delivers high quality in design and construction. Cohousing developments in particular aim to build in a sense of community by combining private homes and shared communal space – Older Women’s Co-Housing in Barnet is one such example. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government will commission a research partner to evaluate four community-led housing schemes and an overarching evaluation to build the evidence base on how these innovative housing models can reduce loneliness. Over the next year, it will also work with external stakeholders such as the UK Cohousing Network to build a database of case studies of innovative housing developments that promote social cohesion.

To encourage developers to place social interaction at the heart of housing, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government will also:

- **Encourage loneliness to be considered in measures of design quality**, starting with Homes England and other government programmes. Loneliness can be a challenge within newly formed communities and this is why government will ensure that community cohesion is considered in the assessment process for prospective Garden Communities. This assessment will consider how applicants seek to encourage strong social

connections through vibrant spaces with mixed community use and healthy places that take a holistic approach to tackling wellbeing priorities. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government will work with Homes England to incorporate community cohesion as part of the support they offer existing and future garden communities through emerging design quality measures and industry events.

- **The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government will also run a series of industry events, conferences and seminars to promote the role of design in wellbeing, including tackling loneliness. It will publish case studies and evidence by the end of spring 2019.** To launch this, they will hold a roundtable with key representatives from the housing sector who are addressing loneliness, and present initial research findings on the effectiveness of housing interventions on loneliness. The outcome of these discussions will be used to inform the development of Planning Practice Guidance which will be published to support the recently revised National Planning Policy Framework. More broadly, **tackling loneliness will be incorporated as a theme in regional and national design quality events attended by people from across the sector, including local authorities.** Case study examples of developments which have had a positive impact on loneliness will be exhibited to highlight how the sector is considering social connections through design. The Ageing Society Grand Challenge will build on this, working with local partners, in taking forward broader work on how to develop inclusive homes and communities that support people to remain healthy and independent for longer.

### Rishi Sunak MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Minister for Local Government)



Loneliness is tackled and social relationships are made where people live, work and socialise. The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has a vital role to play on this agenda, working with local authorities, communities, housing providers and other partners to make local places that support integrated communities, friendships and social connections. This strategy sets out some significant first steps on that journey, including some exciting research into the impact of innovative housing approaches. It also recognises the crucial role of local authority leaders and councillors in bringing together the public, private and social sectors to support their communities in tackling loneliness.



## Partnering with local government

Government is committed to working with local authorities as well as parish councils through the Local Government Association and National Association of Local Councils to explore how best practice in combating loneliness locally can be shared effectively to support commissioners and service providers.

Local government plays a vital role at the heart of communities, providing the strategic leadership that is pivotal to connecting people to prevent loneliness:

- **Public health:** many areas recognise loneliness as a public health priority, supporting Health and Wellbeing Boards to reflect and tackle loneliness needs in strategies and joint commissioning plans.
- **Planning:** local planning authorities play an important role, recognising the need for new developments to be accessible and for communal space, including green space, where people can come together.
- **Transport:** in many cases local authorities work proactively with transport providers and charities to ensure communities remain connected and affordably accessible to residents.
- **Working with communities:** councils are collaborating and co-producing with communities to help them make best use of local spaces and develop local solutions to the issues they face. This includes working with and supporting a strong voluntary and community sector.
- **Safeguarding:** local authorities have a range of statutory duties in relation to mental health and safeguarding, but also undertake non-statutory duties to protect lonely and isolated residents from harm and supporting them to build connections.

We have sought to ensure that this strategy does not impose any new burdens on local government. The policies and commitments relevant to the sector either relate to self-contained pilots with dedicated funding, or are providing additional tools and/or support to local authorities for use at their discretion should they decide loneliness is a local priority. As part of this strategy, we will be working with the sector to continue a dialogue about how loneliness can be tackled locally, including learning from the policies and pilots going forward.

## Maximising the power of digital tools to connect people

Digital infrastructure is also vital, and government recognises the power of digital inclusion in bringing groups of people together as a tool to create meaningful connections.

Over £9.5 million has been spent to support almost 800,000 people to gain basic digital skills, through the Future Digital Inclusion<sup>107</sup> and Widening Digital Participation programme.<sup>108</sup> The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has recently delivered free wifi across all libraries in England through Arts Council England. The GovTech Fund includes a competition, launched in July 2018, which makes funding available to start-ups to explore how digital technologies can help tackle rural loneliness.

Government will build on this by:

- **Featuring loneliness in criteria for bidding for the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's new £400,000 Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund (launched in September 2018).** The fund is aimed at increasing the digital inclusion of older and disabled people, two groups at greater risk of both digital exclusion and experiencing loneliness. Increased digital skills can help tackle the risk of loneliness and winning pilot projects could explore this.

In addition, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport will continue to champion technology as a real force for social good. It will explore what more can be done to harness the power of technology to tackle loneliness and build community integration.

While digital technology can provide a powerful way to tackle loneliness, government also recognises that it can also exacerbate some people's experience of loneliness. Over the past 10 years, the UK Council for Child Internet Safety (UKCCIS) has brought together government and key stakeholders to help keep children and young people safe online. Government recently expanded the scope of UKCCIS to ensure a safer online experience for all users, particularly the groups suffering disproportionate harms.

To further this:

- **The Home Office and Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's forthcoming white paper on internet safety** will ensure that all individuals feel empowered to manage online risks and participate online, **including people who are experiencing loneliness**. Additionally, the Minister for Digital and the Creative Industries will run a roundtable with tech companies to explore their impact on loneliness and how they can help to prevent it.

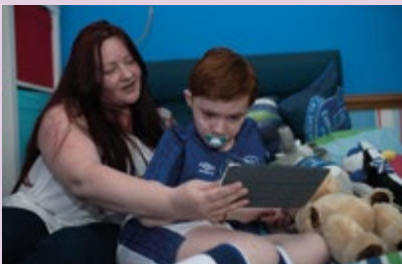
## No Isolation and the role technology can play in reducing loneliness

No Isolation's mission is to put an end to loneliness amongst vulnerable groups by creating tailored communication tools.

Children and young adults with a long-term illness face an increased risk of experiencing loneliness.

To help reduce this, No Isolation created a telepresence robot. The robot is the first of its kind and gives children and young adults with a long-term illness the chance to remain socially connected while in hospital or at home. The robot acts as the child's eyes, ears and voice, allowing the child to connect and disconnect when they choose. It is already helping children across Europe to stay connected to their everyday lives, as they are able to follow classes, and take part in events on the weekend.

### Jack's story



Credit: No isolation


Jack is 15 years old. Due to his disability, Jack has been in and out of hospital care his entire life. Jack has multiple conditions – he is oxygen-dependent and a wheelchair user. When he was 14 years old, as a result of his health, he had been homebound for several months, unable to go outside.

Jack is a passionate Everton fan, and he has attempted to attend matches throughout his life. Some trips were successful, but others had to be cancelled due to weather or Jack's day-to-day health. Jack's lifelong dream had been to walk out on the pitch as a team mascot alongside his heroes, but the size of his wheelchair and his unstable condition made this impossible.



Credit: Everton FC

Jack's telepresence robot changed this. As Everton faced Newcastle, Jack entered the grass of Goodison Park in the arms of Everton captain Phil Jagielka, accompanied by the 40,000 cheers of the Blues. Jack, however, was safe and comfortable at home and attended the match through his robot. At half-time, the robot was placed at the centre of the field, giving Jack a feel of the Goodison Park atmosphere and his favourite song was played in his honour.



Chapter 4:  
Building a culture  
that supports  
connected  
communities

# Chapter 4: Building a culture that supports connected communities

## Our ambition

To tackle loneliness effectively, we need to encourage a societal shift. Loneliness is stigmatised. It can feel insurmountable to admit to it. There are psychological barriers created by the stigma of loneliness that leave people feeling isolated. And the more isolated a person feels, the harder it can become to talk about it or feel sociable. Together as individuals, communities and government, we need to challenge this stigma by helping people to feel resilient and encouraging them to invest in and care for their own social wellbeing ahead of more vulnerable points in their lives.

Opportunities to socialise and build connections are vital to an inclusive culture and necessary to building strong, integrated communities. People need local clubs, groups and events, as well as communities of shared interests that cut across geography or background. This strategy recognises the fantastic role that community groups, faith groups, pubs, sports clubs and others already play in creating stronger communities.

But there are opportunities to go further. While there is no quick fix to achieving this societal change, there are important steps we can all take to look after our social wellbeing and that of others. This chapter sets out how government will work with others to:

- Build a national conversation to raise awareness and reduce the stigma surrounding loneliness.** Drawing upon the knowledge of public campaigns on the issue, including those run by the Campaign to End Loneliness, Mind and others, government will drive awareness of the importance of social connections and how we can encourage people to take action through easy-to-understand messages and information. Public Health England's mental health campaign will also highlight the importance of social connections to our wider wellbeing. Loneliness will also be embedded into the relationships education curriculum in schools, and government will work with a number of employer champions to raise awareness of the social wellbeing of employees and the wider community.
- Support grassroots opportunities to strengthen local social relationships and community ties** through funding for the sport and volunteering sectors and threading awareness of social connections through existing programmes such as the work of uniformed youth groups, and through partnership working with libraries, museums and the arts. This builds on the funding already announced in June 2018 through the Building Connections Fund.

Cultural shifts don't happen immediately. We can't expect loneliness to simply disappear. But we can support an increasing focus on loneliness, actions to tackle it, and reflection on what works best. This strategy represents a call to support local and national initiatives which are consciously and determinedly bringing people back together.



## Government will work with employers to recognise and support their employees' and customers' social wellbeing

Many of us spend a significant amount of time in the workplace. As a result, employers can play a crucial role supporting the social wellbeing of the people that work for them. This builds on employers' duty of care – but it also makes good business sense.

Research by the Co-op estimates that loneliness costs employers in the UK £2.5 billion every year.<sup>109</sup> This is through ill health associated with loneliness, the impacts on carers, lower productivity and increased staff turnover. A 2014 study found that 42% of people surveyed didn't have any colleagues they would see as a close friend.<sup>110</sup> By tackling loneliness and supporting employees to build social connections, employers can ensure a more productive and resilient workforce.

Government is working with a range of employers to understand the impact of loneliness on the workforce and action being taken to support the social wellbeing of staff.

Alongside this, government is working in partnership with a number of employer champions and the Campaign to End Loneliness and has developed a pledge. The pledge is a statement from employers that social connections and addressing loneliness are important to them. It suggests action in three areas:

- Leadership – for example, appointing a loneliness champion, mentoring, reverse mentoring and sponsorship, and communicating the importance of the issue
- Employee confidence – for example, establishing peer support groups, extra support for employees during key life transition points (e.g. bereavement, parenthood or retirement), and publishing informative articles on the intranet
- Supporting line managers – for example, buddying and peer-to-peer support programmes, providing training on supporting lonely employees or those at key transition points and tackling unconscious bias

Organisations can adopt the pledge in a way that suits them, delivering all three elements in the most effective way for their operations.

The Campaign to End Loneliness will convene a wider range of organisations to sign up to the pledge, supported by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and other government departments. By convening businesses and employers the Campaign to End Loneliness and BEIS will gather and share good practice and learning on how employers can support their employees.

In addition, government will work with the Campaign to End Loneliness and businesses to capture and share the work they are doing to help tackle loneliness in the wider community and to promote this work and develop it further.

### List of employers signed up to the pledge

The UK Government Civil Service is a signatory to the pledge and will work through government departments to build the pledge into their existing Health and Wellbeing strategies, as well as the strategies of their Arms Length Bodies.

The following organisations have also signed up and more are expected: Transport for London, National Grid, Co-op, Sainsbury's, British Red Cross, Nationwide Building Society, the Big Lottery Fund, Aviva, Zurich UK, Transport for Greater Manchester, British Chambers of Commerce, Age UK, Royal Voluntary Service, Cisco, Association of Convenience Stores, Financial Ombudsman Service, Golin, Merseytravel, South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive and Nexus.

### Kelly Tolhurst MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Minister for Small Business, Consumers and Corporate Responsibility



People who are struggling with loneliness often can't play their full part in society or in their working lives. This means not just that they miss out, but their employers miss out on the full contribution they could make. The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy is building an economy that works for everyone, with great places to work and opportunities for businesses to invest and grow. Many leading employers are already taking steps to support employee wellbeing, including thinking about their social relationships, and this strategy sets out how the department will support them to continue to improve and to expand this good practice to others.

## Building a national conversation to raise awareness and reduce the stigma around loneliness

Raising awareness of loneliness and its impacts is key to achieving the cultural shift we need. Recognition of loneliness is the first step to addressing it. Government will work with health organisations, the voluntary sector, local government, employers and businesses to amplify a national conversation around loneliness and social wellbeing. The aim is to encourage individuals and communities to look after their own social needs, as well as the needs of others.

To improve people's understanding of loneliness and how to build healthy relationships from a young age, the Department for Education has announced that it is launching the new subjects of relationships education at primary level and relationships and sex education at secondary level, which will emphasise the value of social relationships. **Loneliness will feature in the guidance content to ensure teaching about the impact of loneliness, particularly on mental health.** All primary and secondary schools will be encouraged to teach relationships education by 2019, and required to do so from September 2020.

As well as preventative action from a young age, government also wants to educate adults about social resilience:

- **Public Health England's forthcoming mental health campaign will highlight loneliness as a potential risk factor for mental health problems, and emphasise the importance of strong social connections for mental wellbeing.** Aiming to reach one million members of the public, the campaign will highlight social isolation and loneliness as key risk factors for poor mental health, and equip members of the public to take action through personalised suggestions.
- **Through a campaign, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport will explore how best to drive awareness of the importance of social wellbeing and how we can encourage people to take action through easy-to-understand messages and information.** Government is keen to work with partners to develop the focus of this work and understand how best to take it forward to build a national conversation on loneliness. The media, including local news and radio, can also play a role in raising awareness of loneliness and connecting listeners to their communities. For example, Radio 4's Anatomy of Loneliness programme and BBC York's Cake and a Cuppa.

### Nick Gibb MP, Minister of State for School Standards



One of the less welcome features of modern life is that communities and social connections have become less intergenerational. Education can and should play an important role in helping young people understand the importance of healthy social relationships and the value of community obligations that extend beyond fulfilling one's own direct needs. The new Relationships Education curriculum (which is to become compulsory in primary and secondary schools) provides an opportunity for schools to help young people to become well-rounded individuals who have a clear understanding of their wider role in society and the importance of their relationships with others, their contemporaries and those of other generations and communities. The curriculum will also help to teach young people about the realities and joys of relationships beyond the confines of the internet.

## Mental health and loneliness

The specific determinants of mental health are complex and varied but research shows that feeling lonely and having a mental health problem are strongly linked. Having a mental health problem increases the risk of feeling lonely and feeling lonely can have a negative impact on your mental health.<sup>111</sup>

## What government is doing

The Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision Green Paper and government response to the consultation on the Green Paper set out new initiatives to support children and young people with their mental health, in and near schools and colleges. The core proposals comprise incentivising schools and colleges to train a Designated Senior Lead for Mental Health, the creation of a brand new workforce of Mental Health Support Teams, which will provide services directly to children and young people, and piloting a four week waiting time for access to specialist mental health services. These actions, which will start to be implemented in 2019, mean that children and young people who need support will be more easily identified. This will make it easier for children and young people suffering loneliness to access mental health support when they need it. Government and the NHS are committed to improve access to treatment for common mental health disorders, as was set out within the Five Year Forward View for Mental Health.<sup>112</sup> This should also help to prevent people with these conditions from falling into a cycle of loneliness and isolation.

Government also published Improving Lives: The Future of Work, Health and Disability, which included a response to Thriving at Work, the Stevenson/Farmer review of mental health and employers. It sets out how the review's recommendations will be taken forward, both in the Civil Service as an employer in its own right, and in further actions and advice government can provide to employers.

In addition, the Department for Work and Pensions JOBS II trial aims to prevent the negative mental health effects of unemployment and to support people to get back into work by looking at ways to help them enhance their self-efficacy, self-esteem and assertiveness in their efforts to find work. The evaluation will include an analysis of social isolation.<sup>113</sup>

## Government is committed to going further to break the link between poor mental health and loneliness

This strategy sets out the following commitments:

- Students and those in higher education can be at risk of loneliness, especially when starting their course, and this can lead to greater feelings of anxiety, stress, depression and poor mental health. **The Department for Education will improve mental health support for these groups and will also set up a working group with the sector to review the support needed for students in the transition into university, particularly in the critical first year.**
- **A new Public Health England mental health campaign will highlight the importance of strong social connections as a key way of looking after one's mental health.**



## Co-op Bereavement Groups

Co-op has been tackling loneliness in communities across the UK since 2015, when its colleagues and members voted for it to champion the issue with the British Red Cross. Since then it has raised money to fund new services to connect thousands back to their communities; funded new research showing loneliness affects all ages; and looked at how it can respond as a business to support its members and customers.

Co-op Bereavement Groups are social groups, where anyone who has suffered the loss of a loved one and experienced loneliness as a result can come together, form new friendships and relationships. There have even been five weddings as a result, which is a completely unexpected outcome. There are approximately 90 Co-op Funeralcare bereavement groups across the UK.

One of Co-op's long-established bereavement groups is held in Co-op's funeral home in Plymstock and is run by a local colleague, Sophie, who is helping to make a huge difference to people's lives.

Beryl attends the group in Plymstock. She says, "We were all in the same boat. We all comforted each other. I do find it helps and I've made some good friends. We've done holidays together, we just get on so well." Jeanette also attends the group. She says: "From the day I walked in everyone made me feel welcome, they are brilliant, if you need them, they're there."

## Supporting grassroots opportunities to strengthen local social relationships and community ties

Playing a role in the local community should become the new normal. Government will support communities to come together and get involved in their neighbourhoods, as set out in the recently published Civil Society Strategy, and through the Building Connections Fund.<sup>114</sup>

England has a great record of people helping others. Almost a quarter of the population formally volunteer at least once a month, and many more do so informally. Almost two thirds of the adult population give their time to a social cause at least once a year.<sup>115</sup> Among young people, 40% take part in meaningful community action.<sup>116</sup>

Taking action on the issues people care about has enormous benefits for individuals and for society. There is evidence that being involved is good for your health and that it can lead to increased life satisfaction, wellbeing and self-esteem.<sup>117</sup> It helps develop empathy, problem solving, cooperation and community involvement.<sup>118,119</sup>

These benefits can build healthier, more connected communities and are increasingly necessary in the world of work.<sup>120</sup> Supporting community organisations will also be key to meeting increased demand from social prescribing and other signposting or referrals.

Government is continuing to build an evidence base for what works by testing and enabling the development of initiatives that have an impact, based on work with Nesta through the Centre for Social Action, the Enabling Social Action programme and the #iwill campaign and fund.

For young people specifically, government and Big Lottery Fund's #iwill Fund will support approximately 650,000 places for young people to take action on issues such as environmental action, education, health, loneliness and sport. Additionally, the National Citizen Service is expected to reach its 500,000th participant this year. The programme aims to create a more cohesive and more engaged society, bringing young people together from different backgrounds to build long-lasting social connections.

Other examples include the Community Organisers programme. Community organising builds relationships and inspires local communities to deliver positive social and political change led by residents. Government has trained 6,500 individual community organisers, including 900 young people, who between 2010 and 2014 listened to over 150,000 residents, worked in over 400 neighbourhoods, and supported over 2,000 community projects which mobilised people to take grassroots action on the issues that they care about. Between 2017 and 2020 another 3,500 people will be trained in community organising through a national network of Social Action Hubs and partnerships with public and social sector organisations.

Government's Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper<sup>121</sup> presents a call to local authorities, businesses, voluntary and community organisations to consider their role in bringing people from different backgrounds together. Additionally, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is developing a Guide to Community Action that showcases how communities can take action locally, including helping to tackle loneliness in their areas.

To support this agenda further, government secured an additional £20 million for projects tackling loneliness earlier this year. In June 2018, the Prime Minister and Minister for Sport and Civil Society announced an £11.5 million Building Connections Fund. Seven government departments, the Big Lottery Fund and the Co-op Foundation have all contributed to the fund. Grant awards of £30,000 to £100,000 will be made to up to 300 community and voluntary organisations in England by the end of 2018.

The fund will support a wide range of existing projects for individuals and communities, with the aim of:

- reducing and/or preventing loneliness by helping people feel more connected
- supporting organisations to increase their impact by scaling up or joining with other local provisions to reach more people and improve the system-wide offer and
- improving the evidence base and consolidating learning to inform longer-term policy and funding decisions.

Over 2,500 bids were received for the fund, showing the widespread commitment to tackling loneliness in communities.

This collaboration to fund projects tackling loneliness extends beyond the Building Connections Fund. In addition, People's Postcode Lottery has committed £5 million of players' money to top up existing grants it has given to charities that combat loneliness. The Health Lottery will give out £4 million to charities that work to improve social links in disadvantaged areas across England. Learning from these funds will also help add to the evidence base on loneliness.

Alongside this, government will support people to volunteer and build community connections, across different life phases and for people from different backgrounds.

- For young people, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport is expanding uniformed youth programmes (such as the Scouts, Guides or Sea Cadets) to create more places for disadvantaged young people, with a new £5 million Uniformed Youth Fund. **Government will use £100,000 of this funding for research to improve understanding of how to address youth loneliness through uniformed youth.** 5,500 new places in uniformed youth groups will be for disadvantaged and under-represented young people in order to improve outcomes in wellbeing, mental health and life skills.
- People should be supported and enabled to volunteer throughout their lives. In recognition of this, **the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport will launch up to five pilots by March 2019. These pilots will test and develop new models of flexible and inclusive volunteering opportunities, supporting people who might otherwise miss out due to their life circumstances.** They will focus on creating lifelong contribution pathways, and offer flexibility around key life events and changes. The work will be match funded by the Centre for Ageing Better, and each pilot will be designed and coordinated with the voluntary sector and others.

## Men's Sheds

Men's Sheds are similar to garden sheds – a place to pursue practical interests at leisure, to practice skills and enjoy making and mending. The difference is that garden sheds and their activities are often solitary in nature while Men's Sheds are the opposite. They're about social connections and friendship building, sharing skills and knowledge. The recent Men's Sheds impact survey showed a 24% decrease in loneliness in members and further data will be released in coming months.

Sheds are whatever the members (or Sheddors as they are called) want them to be. Some Sheds are purpose-built workshops, but they rarely start out that way. Many don't have premises at all in the beginning and instead form a group that meets regularly for the social connection, company and camaraderie until they can find somewhere to kit out with tools. Many Sheds get involved in community projects too – restoring village features, helping maintain parks and green spaces, and building things for schools, libraries and individuals in need.

There is some anecdotal evidence that men typically find it more difficult to build social connections than women, and older men often lack networks of friends and rarely share concerns about health and personal worries. It is not the case for all men but for some, when retirement comes, it can feel like personal identity and purpose is lost. Men's Sheds can change all of that.

Charlie Bethel, Chief Officer, UK Men's Sheds Association, says "Sheds are about meeting like-minded people and having someone to share your worries with. They are about having fun, sharing skills and knowledge with like-minded people and gaining a renewed sense of purpose and belonging. As a by-product of all of that they reduce isolation and feelings of loneliness, they allow men to deal with mental health challenges more easily and remain independent, they rebuild communities and in many cases, they save men's lives."

As set out recently in the Civil Society Strategy, government recognises the importance of local activities and projects that bring people together. For example taking part in sport and physical activity can be effective at helping to combat loneliness,<sup>122</sup> and in creating community links between individuals who would otherwise not have met. Government's Sporting Future strategy<sup>123</sup> places individual and social development at its heart as two of the five key outcomes it aims to achieve through investment in sport and physical activity. Research shows that involvement in sports clubs are effective activities to reduce loneliness in older people.

To build on work already being done in this area, **Sport England will make new grant awards totalling £1 million from its Active Ageing Fund to two programmes which specifically tackle loneliness through sport and physical activity for people over 55.** Sport England is already supporting 20 local projects through its Active Ageing Fund, which aims to help older adults get more physically active. Four of these projects are focussing on using sport and physical activity to reduce loneliness over the next four years. These are being led by the Devon Local Nature Partnership, the English Football League Trust, Age UK Milton Keynes and the Cotman Housing Association.

Engagement with the arts museums, and creative practice can help people become more connected. The Baring Foundation and Campaign to End Loneliness make a specific call for recognition and support for the role that arts can play in reducing loneliness.<sup>124</sup> In recognition of this:

- **The Arts Council, supported by the organisations it funds, will work with public health providers to provide arts and cultural programmes as part of the planned expansion of social prescribing. Arts Council England has strong partnerships, sector support organisations and regional networks to achieve this.** For example, Arts Council England funds the Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance to support and develop cultural practitioners wishing to engage with health and wellbeing. This also raises the profile of the work within the wider cultural community.

- **Government will work with the Arts Council to promote the role that arts and culture can play in addressing loneliness through its programmes.**

The Arts Council will identify and promote examples of best practice in reducing social isolation through using existing arts and cultural assets to create easily accessible spaces.

- **The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport will work with Arts Council England to utilise the new loneliness measure across relevant projects and programmes,** improving our understanding of how the arts and culture build social connections and protect against loneliness. This will apply to programmes already underway and will have an impact on programmes that will be funded in the future.

In recognition of the role that libraries can play:

- **The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport will run masterclasses on evaluation and measuring the impact of library services in reducing loneliness, with reference to the new loneliness measure,** to improve our understanding of the important role that libraries play in preventing individuals from feeling lonely.

- **The 2018 Libraries Week will include loneliness as part of its wellbeing theme** to help raise awareness.

But we also need to consider barriers which may prevent someone from taking part in their local community or building social connections. The Department for Digital, Media, Culture and Sport's volunteering pilots will help people to overcome barriers that may have prevented them from being able to engage with their local communities. Government's Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper<sup>125</sup> highlighted that not being able to speak English well or at all may exacerbate feelings of loneliness and isolation. Language barriers prevent people, often women and those from particular ethnic backgrounds, from being able to participate.<sup>126,127,128</sup>

Government funds course costs for people who are unemployed and looking for work so they can gain the English language skills they need to find employment. Conversation clubs can complement this formal learning, bringing learners and volunteers from different backgrounds together in a supportive, friendly environment. As set out in the Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper,<sup>129</sup> the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government will introduce a new England-wide scheme to strengthen existing volunteer-led support and encourage more volunteers to participate in setting up and running new conversation clubs.



## British Red Cross and how it supports refugees and asylum seekers at risk of loneliness

British Red Cross has a long history of providing practical and emotional support to refugees and asylum seekers, helping them to integrate into UK society. It is the largest independent provider of refugee and asylum support in the UK, helping over 32,000 people a year across 58 different cities and towns.

Refugees and asylum seekers are particularly at risk of loneliness in the immediate aftermath of arrival and the years to follow. The British Red Cross supports refugees to settle into life in a new country and form new friendships and connections.

It also occasionally supports refugees and asylum seekers through Community Connecting services, funded through its partnership with the Co-op. Community connectors spend time understanding people's individual practical and emotional needs and support them to access what they need to feel connected.

In some parts of the UK, the British Red Cross runs ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes specifically for women, bringing refugees and asylum seekers together to improve their English and also help build social networks. Crucially, crèche facilities are provided alongside these classes, removing a common barrier for women being able to learn English.

Suk Yin\* attends one such scheme. She says: "When I came here I was single and very lonely. I became pregnant in 2015 and this made things more difficult. I applied for asylum when I was eight months pregnant and was given my own place to live with my son, but my partner could not stay with me. I had no-one to help me. Looking after two children on my own was very difficult especially when they were ill. Now I have friends, our family lives together, and I can go to Red Cross English classes. We love life here and my son enjoys his school."

\*Suk Yin is not her real name

Asylum seekers and refugees can face various risk factors for loneliness.<sup>130,131</sup> There is much that central and local government and civil society is already doing to help refugees feel part of their new communities. For example, the Community Sponsorship scheme, launched two years ago, enables community groups to directly support the integration of vulnerable refugees into their communities. In partnership with central and local government, community sponsors commit to providing financial, emotional and integration support to help newly arrived refugees as they adapt to life in a new country. Community groups help refugees access the right services and support them into work, making the families feel part of the community. In the process, it is not just the refugees' lives that are transformed – community groups consistently report how much it has changed them and brought their local community together.

In addition, through the Controlling Migration Fund, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government has committed £21 million of funding to support the social integration of migrants through English language and social cohesion projects. It has committed a further £8.9 million to local authority bids to support unaccompanied asylum seeking children, including projects to support their mental health and relationships with carers and the broader community. The learning from these projects will be fed into future work to counter loneliness among these groups.

The Integrated Communities Strategy includes a commitment to work with civil society and others to increase the integration support for refugees. In doing this, government will draw on learning and partnership working from the UK's refugee resettlement programmes.

## Tackling youth loneliness

Loneliness affects people of all ages. Younger adults aged 16 to 24 years old are at particular risk of feeling lonely more often.<sup>132</sup> This is likely due to both psychological development, and the many transitions in environment that young people experience.

## What government is doing

40% of young people were bullied in the last 12 months.<sup>133</sup> In recognition of this, the Department for Education is providing £1.75 million over two years to support four anti-bullying organisations. The Department for Education also supports the Anti-bullying Alliance (National Children's Bureau), which aims to reduce bullying of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. In addition, the Government Equalities Office has allocated £3 million, from 2016 to 2019, to help prevent and respond to homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying across schools.

Family wellbeing is crucial for preventing loneliness. Research shows that parental loneliness is a predictor of their children's loneliness during school years.<sup>134</sup> Over 40% of mums under 30 are lonely often or always.<sup>135</sup> A new cross-government ministerial group will recommend ways to improve family support during early years (0 to 2), which are particularly crucial years for preventing loneliness among new parents.

The new ministerial group will build on existing wider support for families, such as the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government's Troubled Families programme, which aims to support 400,000 disadvantaged families by 2020. As well as providing better support for families facing multiple challenges, the programme is designed to be a catalyst for local services to transform and work together in a more cost efficient and integrated way. This is alongside a £39 million investment in reducing parental conflict through evidence-based intervention provided by the Department for Work and Pensions.

The new cross-government group will also build on work by the Ministry of Justice, following Lord Farmer's review in August 2017,<sup>136</sup> to help offenders strengthen their relationships with friends and family to help turn their lives around. Government has additionally commissioned Lord Farmer to undertake a new review on how to strengthen family ties for women serving sentences in the community, after release and in custody. Findings are expected by the end of the year with a report to follow.

Government is keen to co-produce solutions to youth loneliness with young people. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport is setting up a national Young Commissioners and Inspectors Group to involve young people directly in national services affecting young people. The Department has set up and invested £1 million in the Centre for Youth Impact which reviews and builds the evidence base for the effectiveness of youth services.

### Building on this, the Department for Education will tackle youth loneliness through:

- Schools will be required to teach new relationships education, with guidance including loneliness, from September 2020.
- New online guidance to support schools to make their facilities accessible to the wider public.
- Support for apprenticeships for young people with special educational needs or disabilities.
- Best practice guidance on work placements for young people with special educational needs or disabilities.
- Mental health support and a new working group for students transitioning into university, particularly in the first year.
- Continued improvements on support for care leavers at risk of loneliness, following the Care Leaver Strategy.<sup>137</sup>
- Extending Personal Advisor support to all care leavers to age 25.
- Continuing the Staying Close pilot programme in eight local areas, with a view to rolling out the programme nationally.
- Providing £5 million to test social impact bonds to deliver three payment by results contracts, for programmes aiming to support young care leavers who are Not in Education, Employment or Training or at risk of becoming NEET.
- £6 million funding for two Innovation Programme projects for care leavers – the Family Rights Group’s Lifelong Links project and Derby’s Local Area Coordinator project – both focusing on reducing isolation and loneliness among care leavers.

### The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport will tackle youth loneliness through:

- £100,000 for research to improve understanding of how to address youth loneliness through uniformed youth groups.
- 2019 #iwill campaign and the Department for Environment and Rural Affairs partnership supporting young people to look after local green spaces and wildlife habitats, while building social connections.

## Chapter 5: Next steps – building on this strategy





# Chapter 5: Next steps

## – building on this strategy

This strategy is an important first step but government is committed to long-lasting action to tackle the problem of loneliness. This chapter sets out how it intends to build on this strategy and the good work already taking place.

### Building the evidence base

As the responses to government's call for evidence and conversations with stakeholders have reaffirmed, a stronger evidence base on loneliness is an essential foundation for longer-term success. Government is committed to learning from the policies in this strategy and from the loneliness data collected in government surveys.

Evaluation and learning are also part of the design of the Building Connections Fund. Government sees the Fund as a valuable opportunity to contribute to the evidence base on loneliness and to build the evaluation capability of voluntary and community organisations, as well as supporting projects that will directly reduce loneliness. **Government will appoint an independent evaluator to support grantees to evaluate the impact of their projects, and to collate and analyse the findings.**

Dissemination and sharing of ideas is equally important, to ensure that we deepen our understanding of loneliness and focus on the most effective interventions. Government will explore how best to facilitate this over

### Norfolk County Council's In Good Company campaign



as Little Visitors where parents take their babies and toddlers into care homes, as well as local pubs which are working to become new community hubs.

The Council's Library and Information Service has embraced the campaign, doubling the number of its activities to more than 150 each week, while the Trading Standards team is working to help reduce the number of lonely people who are affected by fraud and scams.

In Adult Social Care, a team of Development Workers engage directly with communities to help signpost people to local services and develop more community initiatives, directly supporting the expansion of Men's Sheds across the county, for example.

The council is also investing £1.7 million a year to develop more local prevention initiatives. Planned and delivered through partnerships between local health, district councils and voluntary and community organisations, these include social prescribing, as well as establishing a new network of life connectors and peer supporters who will work one-to-one with people who need a bit of help to overcome challenges of loneliness through building personal confidence and resilience.

The In Good Company campaign aims to combat loneliness in Norfolk. It promotes the message that no-one in Norfolk should have a lonely day unless they choose to, and that everyone can do their bit to tackle the problem.

The campaign is designed to galvanise more action at local level and recognise great work being done locally to tackle the problem, particularly through its In Good Company Quality Mark. Over 40 organisations have received In Good Company approval. This includes social enterprises like Friend In Deed, which runs intergenerational events such

the coming months, seeking advice from the experts from academia, charities and the wider public sector.

## Taking forward the cross-government approach

Government is committed to developing and improving its approach as we better understand the issue.

To do this:

- **The Minister for Sport and Civil Society will continue to lead cross-government work on tackling loneliness.**
- **The cross-government ministerial group will take forward government's work on loneliness and oversee the delivery of the commitments in the strategy.** Alongside this, government will work closely with the Loneliness Action Group and its members to share learning and ensure effective implementation.
- **The group will publish an annual progress report on the loneliness agenda.** As government reviews its approach, and further learning is generated, it will explore the possibility and suitability of setting a quantitative target for change.
- **Ministers at key government departments (the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, and the Department for Transport) will have their portfolios extended to include loneliness, to demonstrate the importance of this agenda across a wide range of policy areas.** The Minister for Sport and Civil Society and the Minister of State for Care's portfolios already include loneliness.

Tackling loneliness is a multi-generational challenge and touches on a wide range of policy areas that government is responsible for. To ensure ongoing consideration of this issue, government will explore ways to embed loneliness as a factor when making new policies:

- **From 2019/20 individual government departments will highlight the progress they are making on addressing loneliness, including the commitments in this strategy,** through their annual Single Departmental Plans.
- **Government's intention is to embed consideration of loneliness and relationships throughout the policy-making process.** Government will explore various mechanisms for doing this and will, for example, **include it in guidance for the Family Test.**

### Loneliness Action Group

The Loneliness Action Group, led by the British Red Cross and Co-op partnership, was set up in early 2018. It is a group of senior representatives from over 40 national organisations committed to playing their part in tackling loneliness.

It was tasked by the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness partners to secure a lasting legacy for the Commission's policy and advocacy work, by driving forward action to hold government (and others, as appropriate) to account for delivering on the agenda set out in the Commission's final report. It also works to build on these recommendations, ensuring they are as meaningful as possible.

The Loneliness Action Group has played a key role in informing this strategy. It has been an important vehicle in 2018 to ensure the Jo Cox Commission's recommendations for government are taken forward, by convening its members to share expertise.

The Loneliness Action Group welcomes government strategy as a significant step in the right direction.

**Recognising the importance of partnership working across sectors, the Loneliness Action Group will continue to work hand in hand with government until at least the end of 2019,** with a focus on:

- Acting as a critical friend and source of expert advice, holding government to account for effective implementation of the strategy, while encouraging and informing further government action;
- Hosting regular discussions on implementation of the strategy, taking reports from government and feeding back civil society views;
- Overseeing the implementation of specific aspects of the strategy; and
- Continuing to convene organisations working on loneliness.

British Red Cross and Co-op will continue to lead the Loneliness Action Group and provide its secretariat for this period.

## **Next steps – how we can all take action to build a more socially connected society**

Building a more socially connected society requires sustained action. There is no quick fix. Government recognises this and is committed to continuing to play its part in this social change.

Overall, this strategy describes government's current understanding of the issues and sets out a powerful vision of its ambitions for change. It commits to some practical actions that government will now take to improve how organisations, community infrastructure and our wider culture support people's social relationships. It also explains that government will learn from these policy changes, and will use that learning to inform future work. This is the approach we need to take long term to make this major social change.

But just as all of us can be affected by loneliness, so all of us can take action to help defeat it. This strategy also highlights a wider set of ambitions around the role of local authorities, the voluntary sector and businesses, as well as families, communities, friends and the individual. To achieve long-lasting change and improve social connections across society we must all play our role and work together across sectors.

We thank everyone who has contributed to, and engaged with, this strategy. We urge you to continue the good work you are already doing and to build on this by continuing to test new approaches, innovate and learn.

We look forward to working with you to build a more connected, friendlier and stronger society.





Annex A:  
Summary of  
insights from the  
call for evidence



# Annex A: Summary of insights from the call for evidence

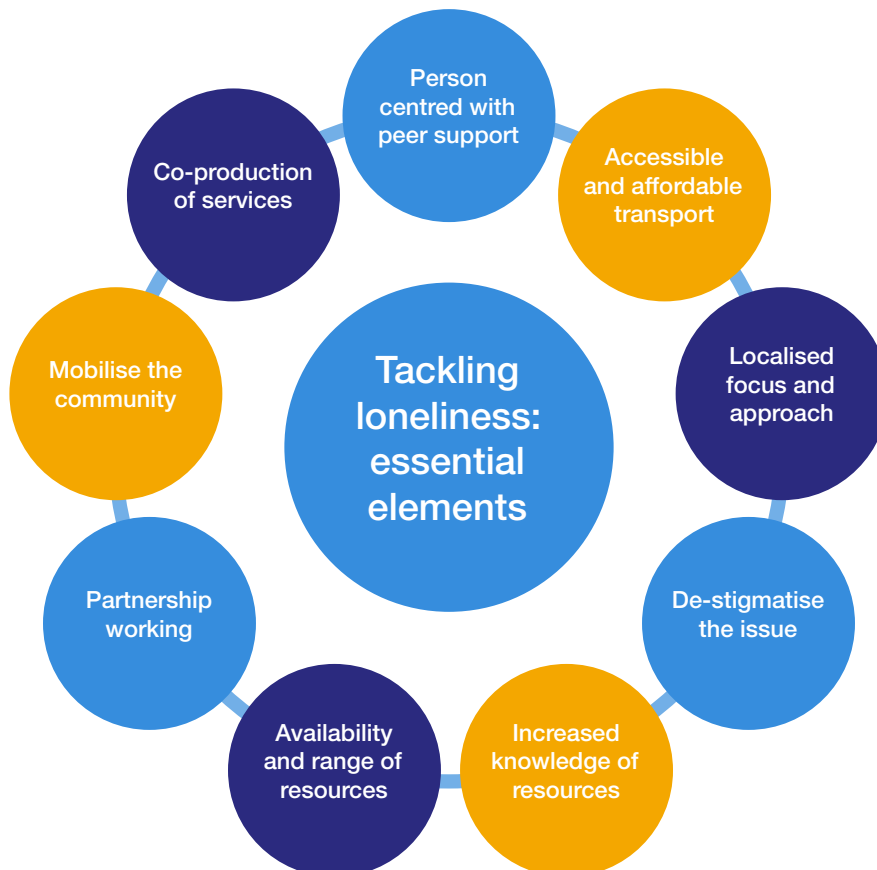
This strategy has been informed by responses to the call for evidence on loneliness which government launched in June 2018. The call asked respondents to share their experience and knowledge of effective approaches and initiatives, as well as what has not worked. It also asked about the challenges respondents faced when assessing impact, and for any comments or suggestions on government’s proposed approach.

There were over 400 responses to the call. Local councils, charitable organisations, professional associations and both national and local voluntary organisations shared their expertise. There were also responses from those who had experienced loneliness themselves, or had supported someone who had (for example, occupational therapists, youth workers and project volunteers).

Most prominently, there was a wealth of responses from local voluntary organisations, who provided valuable insights concerning key barriers, best practice, future priorities and case study examples of their work.

Overall, the responses supported government’s proposed approach. They called for continued cross-governmental working, better communication between local and national bodies, de-stigmatisation of loneliness, and for government to encourage knowledge sharing across the public and voluntary sectors.

The diagram below summarises the key themes that emerged.



The elements in the diagram represent common themes that shone through as essential parts of an effective response. Overall, the responses emphasised that loneliness is best tackled by building a sense of connectedness and belonging. There are no quick fixes to this and no one organisation, sector, industry or individual can resolve it alone. It will require a societal response and a united effort for many years to come.

To do this, the responses emphasised the need to tackle the stigma of loneliness and how this prevents people seeking help. There was a call for government to lead on a communications campaign that focuses on de-stigmatising the issue while creating awareness of how loneliness can be triggered and evolve through life course events.

Respondents recommended ways to increase the sense of agency and ownership among communities, for example by getting to know your neighbours and neighbourhoods and encouraging everyday conversations among strangers. Within these conversations, volunteering should be encouraged and normalised as an enriching, healthy practice that brings benefits for wellbeing.

The responses flagged the importance of prevention and proposed that government and local authorities must ensure local community facilities, infrastructure and access are sufficiently protected and funded. Respondents also saw a combination of social prescribing and community enablers as a positive step to reach those most in need. For this to work, better communication and sharing of data and best practice across sectors/organisations was stressed. Some suggested that tackling loneliness should be woven into the focus of Health and Wellbeing Boards, Joint Strategic Needs Assessments, the Better Care Fund<sup>138</sup> and Sustainable Transformation Partnerships.<sup>139</sup> Responses suggested that, at a very local level, efforts need to focus on collectively communicating routes to existing support available from formal services and the voluntary sector, so local areas are well equipped to deal with the issue.

Lastly, some key tensions and barriers emerged that will continue to be a focus in future cross-government and cross-sector collaborative work and learning on loneliness:

- **stigma and loneliness** – stigma is prominent at all ages, and loneliness is very subjective and personal. This makes it complex to resolve even with person-centred approaches.
- **systematic measurement of loneliness** – formal surveys can be considered too intrusive in some contexts and have their flaws, such as individuals reporting as lonelier than when they started a project, due to the stigma and reluctance to recognise their loneliness initially.
- **assessing and measuring impact** – systematic evidence aids a definitive picture of progress, which then supports funding and project sustainability. However, small organisations often have limited resources, which restricts their ability to design, implement and assess impact systematically. Many organisations indicated they would like support with this, while others shared best practice that could be harnessed.
- **availability and structure of funding** – funding needs to reach those proven small and local innovations and run over longer time scales to allow for follow-up impact assessments.



Annex B:  
Measures for  
success

# Annex B: Measures for success

In the longer term, the success of government's approach on loneliness will ultimately be measured by government's loneliness measure, and achieving a reduction in the prevalence of loneliness. But in the short term, before we can set an informed quantitative target, we need to gather more data and learn more about the causes and effective interventions. We might even see a short-term increase in reported loneliness as the stigma around loneliness weakens and people feel more able to say they feel this way.

Government has three overarching goals for this strategy: to catalyse a national conversation on loneliness, to build the evidence base on loneliness, and to drive a lasting shift in government so that relationships and loneliness are considered as a matter of course in policy-making.

Government has identified the following preliminary measurement areas for each of these goals, and will continue to refine these over the coming months.

## Catalysing a national conversation on loneliness

- In the short term, there may be an increase in reporting of loneliness as people are less embarrassed to report it.
- Fewer people feel embarrassed to say they feel lonely.
- Stakeholders outside government are active and engaged. New partners in business, the wider public and charity sectors make tangible commitments to supporting relationships and connectedness.
- There is a sustained media profile on the importance of social relationships.
- The tone of reporting is not stigmatising about loneliness.

## Building the evidence base on loneliness

- The loneliness measure is rolled out across government and reported annually.
- The loneliness measure is adopted by external survey owners and incorporated in their analysis and reporting.
- There is an increase in academic research and grey literature investigating loneliness and effective interventions.
- Insights from the Building Connections Fund and this strategy contribute to collective knowledge of what works to reduce loneliness.

## Driving a lasting shift in policy-making

- Departments allocate money to supporting relationships and connectedness and include it in their planning for future years.
- Policies become embedded in departmental thinking, and are scaled up or iterated.
- Departments' Single Departmental Plans demonstrate commitment and progress on supporting people's relationships.
- Departments have clear plans for evaluation and, where needed, for evidence gathering.





Thank you

# Thank you

A huge range of individuals, voluntary groups and organisations have helped shape this strategy. Whilst the list below is not exhaustive, we want to thank the organisations below who so generously shared their time and insights

Action for Children  
 Action on Hearing Loss  
 Action with Communities in Rural England: ACRE  
 Ageing Better in Camden  
 Age UK  
 Age UK Camden  
 Age UK Herefordshire and Worcestershire  
 Age UK Milton Keynes  
 Age UK Plymouth  
 Air BnB  
 All-Party Parliamentary Group on Loneliness  
 Alzheimer's Society  
 Amazon  
 Apples and Honey Nightingale Nursery and Care Home  
 Art Fund  
 Arthritis Research UK  
 Arts Council England  
 Avast Software  
 Aviva  
 Barnardo's  
 Barrow Cadbury Trust  
 BBC  
 Become Charity  
 Befriending Networks  
 Big Lottery Fund  
 Blind Veterans UK  
 Brigham Young University  
 Bright Blue  
 Brightlife Cheshire  
 Brighton & Hove City Council  
 Bristol Ageing Better  
 Bristol University  
 British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy  
 British Chambers of Commerce  
 British Geriatrics Society  
 British Library  
 British Red Cross  
 Bronze Labs  
 Brunel University  
 BT  
 Buddyhub  
 Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation  
 Cambridge University  
 Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority  
 Campaign to End Loneliness  
 Carers Information Service  
 Carers Trust  
 Carers UK  
 Cats Protection  
 Centre for Ageing Better  
 Centrica  
 Chartered Institute of Housing  
 Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals  
 Chatty Café  
 Childline  
 Children North East  
 Children's Society  
 Church of England  
 Cisco  
 City of London Corporation  
 City of Westminster Council  
 City Year UK  
 Co-op Foundation  
 Co-op Funeralcare  
 Co-operative College CIO  
 Co-operative Group  
 Community Christmas  
 Community Lincs  
 Confederation of British Industry  
 Connect  
 Contact the Elderly

Coram Voice	Living Streets
Costa	Lloyds Bank Foundation
Cotman Housing Association	Local Government Association
Coventry City Council	Local History Cafe
Cruse Bereavement Care	London School of Economics
Culture, Health and Wellbeing Alliance	Macmillian Cancer Support
Daniel's Den	Magic Me
Dementia Friendly Swimming	Majestic Bingo
Natural Devon – Devon Local Nature Partnership	Manchester Metropolitan University
Dimensions	Marks & Spencer
Durham County Council	MarsPetcare UK Limited
E.ON	Meet Up
Elmbridge Borough Council	Memory Tracks
English Football League Trust	Mencap
Equality and Human Rights Commission	Mental Health Foundation
Esmee Fairbairn Foundation	Merseytravel
Family Action	Methodist Homes for the Aged
FareShare	MIND
Financial Ombudsman Service	More in Common
Frazzled Café	MS Society
Gedling Borough Council	MUSH
Give the Dog a Bone	National Archives
Global Dialogue	National Association of Care Catering
Golin	National Association of Local Councils
Groundwork UK	National Autistic Society
Groundwork Nottingham	National Citizen Service
Hammersmith and Fulham London Borough Council	National Council for Voluntary Organisations
NHS Health Scotland	National Development Team for Inclusion
Healthwatch Devon	National Farmers' Union
HF Trust Ltd	National Grid
Historic England	National Hearing Community Association
Home-Start UK	National Housing Federation
Humanists UK	National Museums Directors' Council
Independent Age	National Museums Liverpool
Jigsaw Homes	National Pharmacy Association
Jo Cox Foundation	National Voices
Jopling Consulting	National Youth Agency
Joseph Rowntree Foundation	Nationwide Building Society
King's College London	Natural England
L'Oréal	Nesta
Leeds Beckett University	Network of Wellbeing
Leonard Cheshire	New Economics Foundation
Linking Lives UK	Newcastle University
Liverpool City Council	Newham London Borough Council

Nexus  
 NHS England  
 No Isolation  
 Norfolk County Council  
 North Somerset Council  
 Nottingham City Council  
 Nottinghamshire County Council  
 NSPCC  
 Octavia Housing  
 Office for National Statistics  
 Oxford City Council  
 Parish Nursing Ministries UK  
 People's Health Trust  
 People's Postcode Lottery  
 Plunkett Foundation  
 Plymouth U3A  
 Power to Change  
 Premier Foods  
 Prince's Countryside Fund  
 Pub is the Hub  
 Public Health England  
 Reconnections  
 Refugee Action  
 Relate  
 Rethink Mental Illness  
 Rhythmix  
 Richmond Upon Thames London Borough Council  
 Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council  
 Rotherham Social Prescribing Service  
 Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution  
 Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew  
 Royal British Legion  
 Royal College of General Practitioners  
 Royal College of Music  
 Royal College of Occupational Therapists  
 Royal College of Physicians  
 Royal Mail  
 Royal Society for Blind Children  
 Royal Voluntary Service  
 Rural Coffee Caravan  
 Rural Services Network  
 Sainsbury's  
 The Salvation Army  
 Samaritans  
 School of Childhood, Youth and Education Studies  
 Scope  
 Sefton Council  
 Sense  
 Sheffield City Council  
 Social Care Institute for Excellence  
 Social Finance  
 Society for Companion Animal Studies  
 Society of Local Authority Chief Executives  
 South Gloucestershire Council  
 South Norfolk Council  
 South Yorkshire Housing Association Limited  
 South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive  
 Spinal Injuries Association  
 Sport and Recreation Alliance  
 Sport England  
 Starbucks Coffee  
 Stockton Council  
 Stroke Association  
 Student Minds  
 Suffolk County Council  
 Surrey County Council  
 Tameside Metropolitan Borough Council  
 Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust  
 The Active Wellbeing Society  
 The Association of Community Rail Partnerships  
 The Association of Convenience Stores  
 The Association of Directors of Adult Social Services  
 The Association of Directors of Children's Services  
 The Association of Directors of Public Health  
 The Bristol Bike Project  
 The Campaign for Real Ale  
 The Cares Family  
 The Centre for Social Justice  
 The Challenge  
 The Community Transport Association  
 The Conservation Volunteers  
 The Farming Community Network  
 The Gift of Years  
 The Health Lottery  
 The Heritage Alliance  
 The Prince's Trust  
 The Ramblers  
 The Reader



The Reading Agency  
The Silver Line  
The University of Manchester  
Torbay Community Development Trust  
Transport for Greater Manchester  
Transport for London  
UK Men's Sheds Association  
University College London  
University of Bath  
University of Sheffield  
University of York  
UnLtd – The Foundation of Social Entrepreneurs  
Urban Transport Group  
VASL  
Vision Redbridge, Culture and Leisure  
Volunteering Matters  
Wandsworth London Borough Council  
Warrington Borough Council  
WaveLength  
West Ham United Football Club  
West Midlands Combined Authority  
Westminster City Council  
What Works Centre for Wellbeing  
Whizz-Kidz  
Wildlife Trust  
Women's Institute  
Y?Not  
YoungMinds  
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Zurich UK



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60. Royal College of General Practitioners (May 04, 2018) *RCGP calls on government to facilitate 'social prescribing' for all practices*
61. Health Education England (2018) [www.makingeverycontactcount.co.uk](http://www.makingeverycontactcount.co.uk)
62. This is a Great Britain wide commitment
63. Department for Transport (2018) *The Inclusive Transport Strategy: Achieving Equal Access for Disabled People*
64. This scheme will launch in autumn 2018 and will run across the UK in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland
65. In April 2018 the government announced the first ever Veterans Strategy, it will explore the wide range of social and practical issues veterans can face
66. Office for National Statistics (2018) *What characteristics and circumstances are associated with feeling lonely?*
67. Carers UK (2017) *The world shrinks: Carer loneliness*
68. *Women are more likely to be carers than men and the likelihood of being a carer increases significantly with age.* (Census (2011) cited in Department for Work and Pensions, (2017). *Fuller Working Lives Evidence Base*
69. Carers UK (August 16, 2017) *8 in 10 people caring for loved ones "have felt lonely or socially isolated*

70. Department of Health and Social Care (2018) Carers Action Plan 2018-2020 – Supporting carers today
71. Legislation.gov.uk. (2014) Care Act 2014
72. This is a Great Britain wide commitment
73. Carers UK (2017) The world shrinks: carer loneliness. A research report
74. Scope UK (November 20, 2017) Nearly half of disabled people chronically lonely
75. Department for Work and Pensions (September 06, 2018) Disabled people's rights: information following the UK's first periodic review
76. Department for Work and Pensions and Department of Health (2017) Improving Lives: The Future of Work, Health and Disability
77. British Association of Social Work (2018) Good Practice Guide for Social Workers in England and Wales Working with Adults with Acquired Hearing Loss
78. Department for Transport press release (April 10, 2018) Free bus passes for older and disabled people protected for the future
79. Department for Transport (2018) The Inclusive Transport Strategy: Achieving Equal Access for Disabled People
80. Papworth Trust (2016) Facts and figures 2016, disability in the United Kingdom
81. Equality and Human Rights Commission (2017) Being Disabled in Britain: A Journey Less Equal
82. Sport England (2018) Making sport and activity data more accessible can play a key part in helping to build a more active nation
83. The Ageing Society Grand Challenge is supported by innovation funding through the Industrial Strategy Challenge Fund (ISCF), which has set aside £98 million for a healthy ageing competition.
84. This will potentially affect organisations UK wide
85. This will be a Great Britain wide initiative

### Chapter 3: Community infrastructure that empowers social connections

86. Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (2018) Government response to the Internet Safety Strategy Green Paper
87. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2018) Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper Building stronger, more united communities
88. Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (2018) Civil Society Strategy: building a future that works for everyone
89. Hartig T., Mitchell R., De Vries S. and Frumkin H. (2014) Nature and health. Annual Review of Public Health 35, 207-228
90. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (2018) A Green Future: Our 25 Year Plan to Improve the Environment
91. Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (2018) Civil Society Strategy: building a future that works for everyone
92. In England and Wales, a community rail line is a railway supported by a local partnership organisation with an aim to engage local people in the development and promotion of the routes, services and stations
93. Department for Transport (2017) Community Rail Consultation Moving Britain Ahead
94. This will be a England and Wales only initiative
95. This will be a Great Britain wide initiative
96. Costa Coffee (August 08, 2018) Costa Coffee rolls out 'Chatty Café' nationwide to get the nation talking
97. Department for Transport (2017) Community Rail Consultation Moving Britain Ahead

98. Department for Transport (2018) The Inclusive Transport Strategy: Achieving Equal Access for Disabled People
99. This is funding for a UK wide organisation
100. The Future of Urban Mobility strategy is to be published by the end of 2018. The strategy will be a short document setting out the principles that will guide government's approach to emerging mobility technologies and services in cities
101. Office for National Statistics (2018) What characteristics and circumstances are associated with feeling lonely?
102. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2018) A new deal for social housing
103. Office for National Statistics (2018) What characteristics and circumstances are associated with feeling lonely?
104. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2018) National Planning Policy Framework
105. Costa polled 2,500 UK adults aged 16+, carried out by Censuswide from 23rd-24th July
106. This scheme will be launched UK wide and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government will engage with the Devolved Administrations where appropriate
107. Good Things Foundation and Department for Health (May 04, 2017) Future Digital Inclusion – Programme Evaluation Findings 2016 -17
108. NHS England (2016) Health and Digital: Reducing inequalities, improving Society. An evaluation of the Widening Digital Participation programme

#### Chapter 4: Building a culture that supports connected communities

109. Co-Op and New Economics Foundation (2017) The Cost of Loneliness to UK Employers
110. Relate (2014) The way we are now 2014
111. Mind (August 30, 2018) How to cope with loneliness
112. NHS England (2016) The five year forward view for mental health
113. The JOBS II programme is England-based, but findings from the evaluation will be shared UK-wide
114. Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (2018) Civil Society Strategy: building a future that works for everyone
115. Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (2018) Community Life Survey 2017-18
116. Ipsos MORI (2018) National Youth Social Action Survey 2017
117. Public Health England/ NHS England, (2015) Health and wellbeing: a guide to community-centred approaches
118. The Behavioural Insights team (2016) Evaluating Youth Social Action
119. Centre for Ageing Better, (2016) The benefits of making a contribution to your community in later life
120. UK Commission for Employment and Skills (2014) The future of work: jobs and skills in 2030
121. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2018) Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper Building stronger, more united communities
122. SHARE (2013) Survey of Health, Ageing and Retirement in Europe
123. Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (2015) Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation
124. The Baring Foundation and Campaign to End Loneliness (2012) Tackling Loneliness in Older Age: The Role of the Arts
125. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2018) Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper Building stronger, more united communities
126. The Forum (2014) This is how it feels to be lonely: A report on migrants and refugees' experiences with loneliness in London
127. Morrice, L. (2017) English language for resettled refugees

128. In the latest Census (2011) 464,100 women stated that they were unable to speak English well or at all compared to 303,600 men. Of those women who could not speak English at all 21% were Pakistani and 18% were Indian
129. Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2018) Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper Building stronger, more united communities
130. Strang, A and Quinn, N. (2014) Integration or Isolation?: Mapping Social Connections and Well -Being amongst Refugees in Glasgow
131. The Forum (2014) This is how it feels to be lonely: A report on migrants and refugees' experiences with loneliness in London
132. Office for National Statistics (2018) What characteristics and circumstances are associated with feeling lonely?
133. Department for Education (2018) Longitudinal study of young people in England: cohort 2, wave 2
134. Juntilla et al. (2013) cited from: Action for Children and Jo Cox Loneliness report 'It Starts with Hello' A report looking into the impact of loneliness in children, young people and families
135. Smith, A. (May 02, 2018) Shocking extent of loneliness faced by young mothers revealed
136. Lord Farmer and The Ministry of Justice (2017) The Importance of Strengthening Prisoners' Family Ties to Prevent Reoffending and Reduce Intergenerational Crime
137. Department for Education (2013) Care Leaver Strategy

#### Annex A – Call for evidence: Insights summary

138. The Better Care Fund is a unique collaboration between NHS England, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and Department of Health and Social Care. They work together to help local areas plan and implement integrated health and social care services in line with the vision outlined in the NHS Five Year Forward View
139. Sustainability and Transformation Plans aim to produce place-based (rather than organisation-based) plans for everyone using health and care services in 44 areas across England. They work in partnership with local councils, using the expertise of frontline NHS staff and conversations about priorities with the communities they serve







