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14 June 2021

# Tackling loneliness



## Summary

- 1 Understanding loneliness
- 2 Causes of loneliness and prevention
- 3 The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness
- 4 The UK Government's Loneliness Strategy
- 5 Evaluations & Commentary
- 6 Loneliness strategies elsewhere in the UK
- 7 Contacts and advice

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# Contents

<b>Summary</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>1 Understanding loneliness</b>	<b>8</b>
What is loneliness?	8
How prevalent is loneliness in England?	8
Who is at risk of loneliness?	12
Loneliness: International picture	15
1.1 Covid-19 and loneliness	15
UK Government response	18
1.2 The potential health impact of loneliness	20
1.3 The financial cost of loneliness	20
The cost of scams	21
<b>2 Causes of loneliness and prevention</b>	<b>25</b>
2.1 Infrastructure and services	25
Social infrastructure	25
Housing, transport and facilities	27
Transport	27
Housing	30
2.2 Loneliness prevention and intervention	31
<b>3 The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness</b>	<b>33</b>
The Commission's Report	33
Initial Government response (2018)	34
<b>4 The UK Government's Loneliness Strategy</b>	<b>36</b>
4.1 Social Prescribing	36
4.2 Community Infrastructure	39
Housing and planning	39
Community spaces	43

	Transport Infrastructure	44
	Digital inclusion	46
	Arts, libraries, and volunteering	48
4.3	Targeted support	49
	Younger people/students	49
	Armed forces community	52
	Non-English speakers	53
	Carers	54
	Young people leaving care	54
	Disabled people and those with a long-term health condition	56
4.4	Tackling the stigma of loneliness	57
4.5	Information sharing, evaluation, measurement	57
	Evaluation	59
<b>5</b>	<b>Evaluations &amp; Commentary</b>	<b>60</b>
	House of Lords Select Committee on Covid-19 (2020-21)	60
	APPG on Social Integration (May 2020)	60
	Responses to the first Annual Report (January 2020)	60
	Royal College of Psychiatrists/British Geriatrics Society, 2019	61
	TV licences for people aged over 75, 2019/21	61
	House of Lords Select Committee on the Rural Economy (2019)	62
	House of Lords Select Committee on Intergenerational unfairness (2019)	63
	Red Cross/Loneliness Action Group (September 2019)	63
	Initial responses to the Loneliness Strategy (2018)	64
<b>6</b>	<b>Loneliness strategies elsewhere in the UK</b>	<b>65</b>
6.1	Scotland	65
6.2	Wales	67
6.3	Northern Ireland	69
<b>7</b>	<b>Contacts and advice</b>	<b>72</b>



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## Summary

Around 47% of adults in England experience loneliness “occasionally or more often”, according to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport’s (DCMS) [Community Life Survey 2019/20](#).

An Office for National Statistics (ONS) analysis in 2016/17 suggests that people with a long-term disability, widowed homeowners, unmarried middle-aged people and young renters, experience [the greatest likelihood of feeling some degree of loneliness](#).

Academic research has suggested that loneliness or social isolation is linked to poorer health outcomes, including early death, higher rates of depression and cognitive decline.

Loneliness may lead to higher costs in the public and private sector due to greater service usage, absences and productivity losses. A 2017 report, by the [New Economics Foundation](#), estimated that loneliness costs UK employers between £2.2 and £3.7 billion per year.

Coronavirus-related social-distancing and lockdown measures have had a profound impact on individuals and communities. There are particular concerns about resulting increases in social isolation for many people who have been shielding, living alone or in a care home, and for those who have lost loved ones.

Research suggests the risk factors associated with loneliness during the pandemic remained the same, but those already at risk (e.g. young adults aged 18–30 years, people with low household income and adults living alone), experienced a heightened risk of experiencing loneliness.

This briefing paper covers research into the prevalence, causes and impact of loneliness and possible interventions to address the issue. It describes cross-Government measures announced to tackle loneliness in England, and briefly outlines approaches in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. The briefing covers central and local government actions, alongside the voluntary and community sector, to tackle loneliness during the pandemic.

### The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness (2017)

The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness published its report, [Combating loneliness one conversation at a time: A call to action](#), in December 2017.

Many of its recommendations were adopted by the UK Government. This included adding cross-government work on loneliness to the remit of the

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Sport and Civil Society (now the Minister for Civil Society and Department for Culture Media and Sport).

The Government also announced two funds to address loneliness: [£98 million](#) for the healthy ageing programme and [£20 million](#) to support organisations working to address loneliness (including a new £11 million Building Connections Fund).

## The UK Government's loneliness strategy (2018)

The UK Government's loneliness strategy, [A connected society](#) (2018) set out how it would provide "national leadership". This included:

- Using ONS measures as its [standard means of measuring loneliness](#).
- Initiatives to enable everyday services to connect with people at risk of loneliness, such as [social prescribing \(using 'link workers'\)](#);
- Strengthening local infrastructure, developing community spaces, and ensuring loneliness is considered in the housing and planning system;
- Reducing stigma and raising awareness of the importance of social connections; and
- Supporting community groups and digital inclusion (i.e. having the skills to use digital devices, connectivity, and appropriate assistive technology).

The first [annual progress report](#) (January 2020) said priorities for 2020 would include improving data relating to loneliness, design policies for children and young people, and address loneliness through strengthening community infrastructure and assets, and growing people's sense of belonging.

The [second annual report](#) (January 2021), focuses on loneliness during the coronavirus pandemic. The Government said it would concentrate on reducing stigma, ensuring loneliness is considered in policymaking, and improving the evidence base on loneliness.

The strategy extends to England only, but the UK Government said it intends to ensure the work is complementary with other nations. Scotland published its own strategy, [A connected Scotland](#), in December 2018, and a Welsh strategy was [published](#) in February 2020.

Northern Ireland's Departments for [Communities](#) and [Health](#) are separately preparing scoping studies on loneliness. Some separate departmental strategies are in place.

# 1 Understanding loneliness

The Library's [Loneliness: a reading list](#) provides further material on the causes and impacts of loneliness.

## What is loneliness?

Loneliness is generally held to describe an individual who has a negative perception of the quality or quantity of their social relationships. Based on the definition of academics Daniel Perlman and Letitia Anne Peplau, the UK Government Strategy defines loneliness as 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>1</sup>

Occasionally feeling lonely is normal. Public policy focuses on those who often feel lonely or experience chronic loneliness.

The subjective feeling of loneliness is distinguishable from social isolation, which is a measure of the quality and size of an individual's social network.<sup>2</sup> It is possible to be lonely when in a social network.

## How prevalent is loneliness in England?

Loneliness is often held to be the result of the growth of older and urbanised societies.

In 2011, some 16% of the population were aged 65+, compared to 5% in 1911, making the population more likely to be in retirement, live in smaller households, and experience ill health and disability.<sup>3</sup>

A higher proportion of the population also now lives in urban areas and a larger proportion of households are solitary (8-10% of households in 1911, 28% in 2016), and communities are becoming less intergenerational.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> UK Government, [A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness](#), October 2018, p19 [hereafter Connected society]

<sup>2</sup> Aparna Shankar et al., [Loneliness, social isolation, and behavioural and biological health indicators in older adults](#), *Health Psychology*, volume 30, 2011, pp377-385

<sup>3</sup> ONS, [2011 Census: Population estimates for the UK](#), March 2011

<sup>4</sup> UN Population Division, [World urbanisation prospects: Table F02](#); K.Schürer, E.M. Garrett, H. Jaadla and Alice Reid, [Households and family structure in England and Wales \(1851-1911\): continuities and change](#), *Continuity and Change*, volume 33, December 2018, pp365-411; ONS, [Living longer](#), 13 August 2018, figures 4 & 5; Centre for Population Change, [\(Un\)Affordable housing and the residential separation of age groups](#), Briefing 45, November 2018

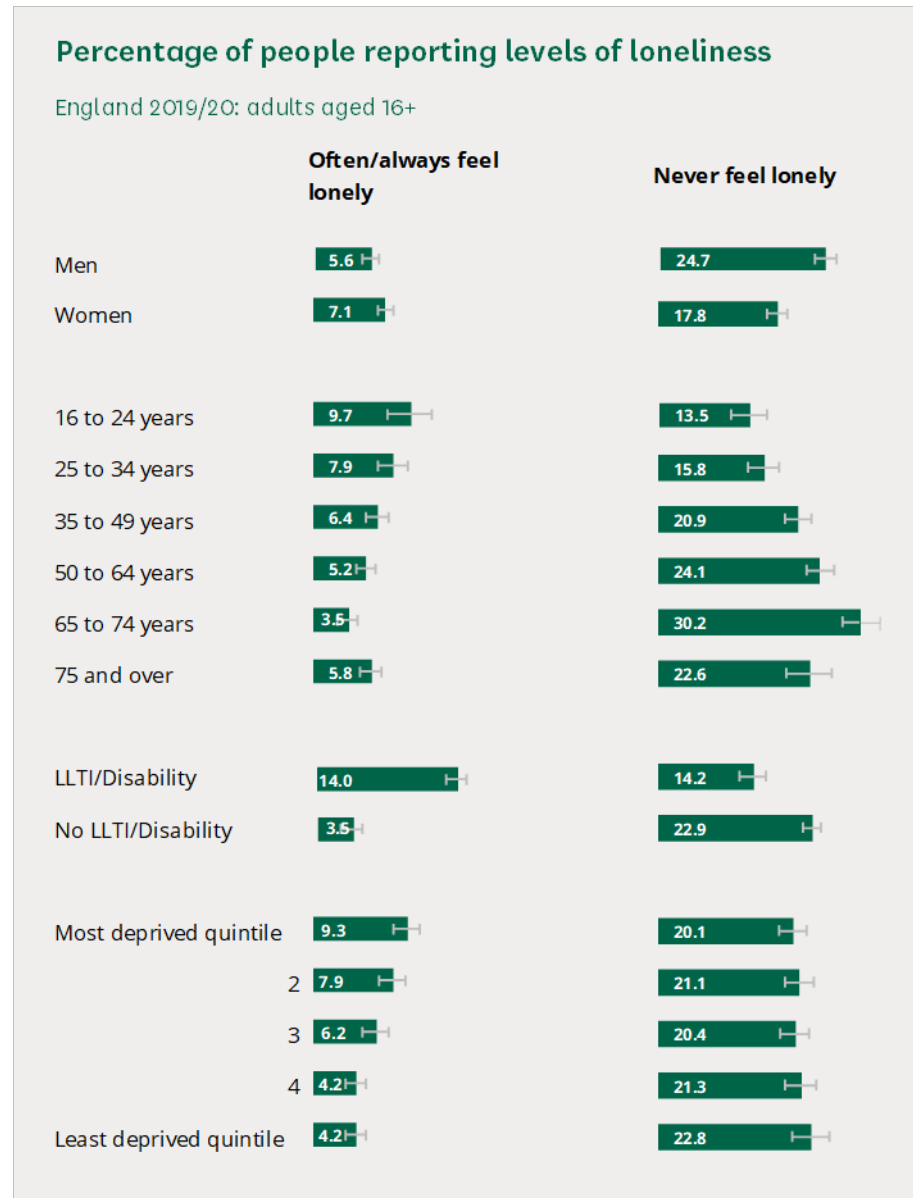


While historical and comparative data on loneliness is lacking, recent research can be limited by the lack of an agreed definition of loneliness, and reliance on self-reporting.<sup>5</sup>

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) has developed [harmonised measures](#) to ensure official surveys measure loneliness is consistent.

### England’s Community Life Survey

Results from the ONS’s [Community Life Survey 2019/20](#) for levels of loneliness in England amongst those aged 16+ are shown below.



<sup>5</sup> University of Oxford/Our World in Data, [‘Is there a loneliness epidemic?’](#), 2019

Notes: Table excludes respondents who answered “don’t know” and those with missing answers. A limiting long-term illness (LLTI) or disability is classified as someone having any physical or mental health condition or illness which are expected to last for 12 months or more and their condition and/or illness reduces their ability to carry out day to day activities. “Quintiles” represent 20% or one-fifth of all areas. Data presented with error bars for 95% confidence interval.

Source: Department for Culture, Media and Sport, [Community Life Survey 2019/20](#)

The Community Life Survey found:

- **47% of adults (16+) experience some degree of loneliness.** 21% reported that they never felt lonely; 32% hardly ever; and 47% occasionally/some of the time/often/always.
- **6% of adults reported they ‘often’ or ‘always’ feel lonely.**
- **Men were more likely to say that they never felt lonely than women** (25% compared with 18%).
- **People aged 16 to 24 were more likely to say they feel lonely often/always** (10%) than age groups of 35 years and over (4-6%).
- **People with a limiting long-term illness (LLTI) or disability were more likely to say they felt lonely often/always** than those without (14% compared with 4%).
- **Those living in the most deprived areas were more likely to feel lonely often/always** than those living in the least deprived areas (9% compared with 4%).
- No significant variability was seen between the different ethnic groups or regions

### Age and loneliness

Loneliness can affect people of all ages following, retirement, bereavement, ill health, or children moving away.<sup>6</sup>

Life events and factors identified as potentially leading to loneliness among younger people include shifts in relationships, changing educational environments, social pressures to conform or succeed, physical and emotional development, leaving home, going into employment, or starting a family. Children can be at particular risk of loneliness if they are victims of abuse or neglect or are in care or care leavers.<sup>7</sup>

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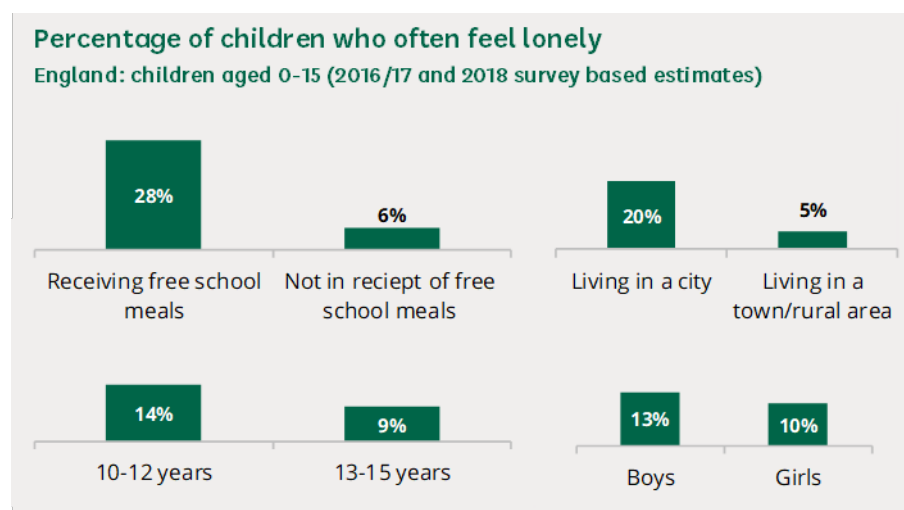
<sup>6</sup> Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness, [Combatting loneliness one conversation at a time](#), 2017, pp8, 18; Mental Health Foundation, [The lonely society](#), 2010, p16; Age UK, [All the lonely people: Loneliness in later life](#), 2018, p2

<sup>7</sup> Action for Children, [It starts with hello](#), 2017, pp7, 10-15; Co-op Foundation, [All our emotions are important: Breaking the silence about youth loneliness](#), 2018

A 2020 [survey for Wonke](#), a higher education policy unit, found that 50% of **university students** felt lonely either daily or weekly.

A further potential cause for loneliness in younger people is that support services are more likely to be available for elderly people, and older people may be more likely to know where to turn for help.<sup>8</sup>

[Further analysis of ONS's Community Life Survey](#), combined with data from the 2018 Good Childhood Index Survey, suggests relatively high feelings of loneliness among under 16s. Among children aged 10 to 15 years, around 11% said that they were “often” lonely.<sup>9</sup> A fuller breakdown for the age group is shown below.<sup>10</sup>



Source: ONS, [Children's and young people's experiences of loneliness: 2018](#)

<sup>8</sup> Red Cross and Co-Op Foundation, [Trapped in a bubble: An investigation into triggers for loneliness in the UK](#), 2016, p17

<sup>9</sup> ONS, [Children's and young people's experiences of loneliness, 2018](#)

<sup>10</sup> Surveys from [New Zealand](#), [Japan](#) and the [United States](#) also suggest that young people feel lonely more often than older adults— Oxford University/Our World in Data, [‘Is there a loneliness epidemic?’](#), 11 December 2019

## Who is at risk of loneliness?

Using data on loneliness collected for the Community Life Survey, 2016/17, the ONS published [further analysis](#) on the characteristics and circumstances associated with loneliness in England.

This data showed that [the loneliest groups were](#):

- **Younger renters with little trust and sense of belonging to their area.**

61% reported that they felt lonely “occasionally” or more frequently, compared to the 46% of the sample overall

They were characterised as single, separated, or divorced; living with others and/or as a couple; renting; in “good” or “very good” health and without long-term health conditions or disabilities; and aged 16-34.

- **Widowed older homeowners living alone with long-term health conditions.**

69% reported that they felt lonely “occasionally” or more frequently, compared to the 46% of the sample overall

The people in this group tended to be in worse general health; living alone; homeowners; aged 65 years or older; and having a long-term physical or mental health condition.

- **Unmarried, middle agers, with long-term health conditions.**

81% reported that they felt lonely “occasionally” or more frequently, compared to the 46% of the sample overall

People in this group were characterised as single (never married), separated, or divorced; living alone but more likely to be renting than owning their own home; reporting a long-term physical or mental health condition; unlikely to describe their general health as “very good” or “good” (and so have “very bad” to “fair” health); and be aged 35-64.

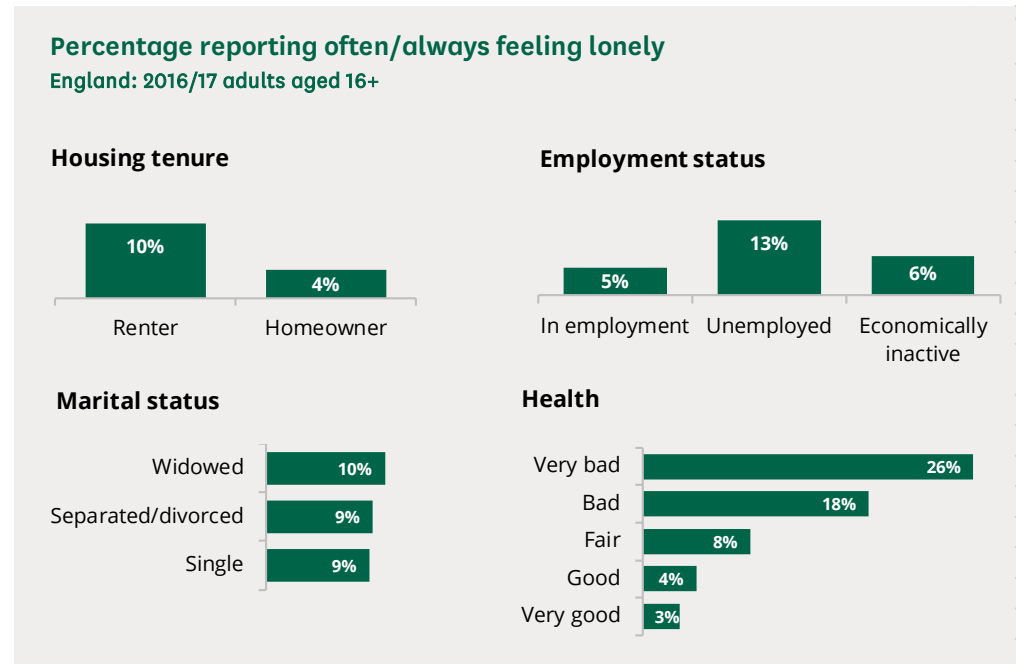
- **Married homeowners in good health were the least lonely group.**

15% reported that they felt lonely “occasionally” or more frequently, compared to the 46% of the sample overall

The [ONS analysis](#) identified married homeowners in good health living with others as a group who were the least lonely. Their characteristics were: living with a partner in a marriage or civil partnership; in better general health; own their own home; do not live alone; are aged 35 years or older (though skewed more towards 65 years and over); and have a strong sense of neighbourhood belonging.

The data below show the proportion of adults reporting often or always feeling lonely in the Community Life Survey 2016/17. This suggests that renters are more likely to feel lonely often/always compared to homeowners (10% versus 4%), and the unemployed more than those employed or economically inactive (13% versus 5% and 6%).

Reports of feeling lonely always/often were also higher amongst those not married or in a civil partnership, and those with worse health.



Source: ONS, Loneliness- [What characteristics and circumstances are associated with feeling lonely?](#), 10 April 2018

The UK Government’s [Loneliness strategy](#) notes the important role of “wider cultural attitudes”, stating: “there is some evidence that members of some marginalised groups are more likely to feel lonely.”<sup>11</sup>

In addition to the data analysed by the ONS, other research has identified further groups at greater risk of loneliness:

- **Members of the Armed Forces community:** The Royal British Legion 2018 survey suggested that 25% of the serving armed forces community (serving personnel, reservists, veterans and family members/dependents) felt lonely or socially isolated “always” or “often”.<sup>12</sup>
- **Carers:** 81% of carers felt lonely or socially isolated due to their caring responsibilities, according to a 2017 Carer’s UK survey.<sup>13</sup>
- **Ethnicity:** The Red Cross and Co-op Foundation have argued “barriers to belonging”, such as discrimination and difficulties accessing services,

<sup>11</sup> UK Government, [A connected society](#), p20

<sup>12</sup> Royal British Legion, [Loneliness and social isolation in the armed forces community](#), 2018, p17

<sup>13</sup> Carers UK, [The world shrinks: Carer loneliness](#), 2017, p3

increase risk of loneliness amongst black and ethnic minority older people.<sup>14</sup>

- **Refugees and language:** The Forum, a charity for migrant and refugee community leaders, has highlighted loneliness amongst refugee groups.<sup>15</sup> Refugee Action has argued that difficulties in accessing language classes are a major barrier to integration and tackling loneliness.<sup>16</sup>
- **Sexual orientation:** The charity Stonewall has suggested that LGBT+ persons may be at increased risk of loneliness.<sup>17</sup>
- **Homeless people:** In addition to the loss of regular contacts and community, the charity Shelter has highlighted research showing that a leading driver of homelessness is relationship breakdown.<sup>18</sup>
- **Not being part of a social organisation:** Volunteering, or being part of a community group, can reduce loneliness levels.<sup>19</sup>
- **Friendship groups:** Generally, the greater number of friendships an individual has, the less likely they are to be lonely. However, frequency and quality of contact are also important.

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<sup>14</sup> Red Cross and Co-op Foundation, [Barriers to belonging: An exploration of loneliness among people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds](#), 2019; Campaign to End Loneliness, [Alone in the crowd: Loneliness and diversity](#), 2014, pp30-3

<sup>15</sup> The Forum, [This is how it feels to be lonely](#), 2014

<sup>16</sup> Refugee Action, [Safe but alone: The role of English language in allowing refugees to overcome loneliness](#), October 2017

<sup>17</sup> Stonewall Cymru, [Submission to the Welsh Assembly Health, Social Care and Sport Committee into loneliness and isolation](#), 2017

<sup>18</sup> Shelter, [‘I was all on my own’: experiences of loneliness and isolation amongst homeless people](#), 2015, p1

<sup>19</sup> Royal Voluntary Service, [The impact of volunteering on wellbeing in later life](#), 2012

## Loneliness: International picture

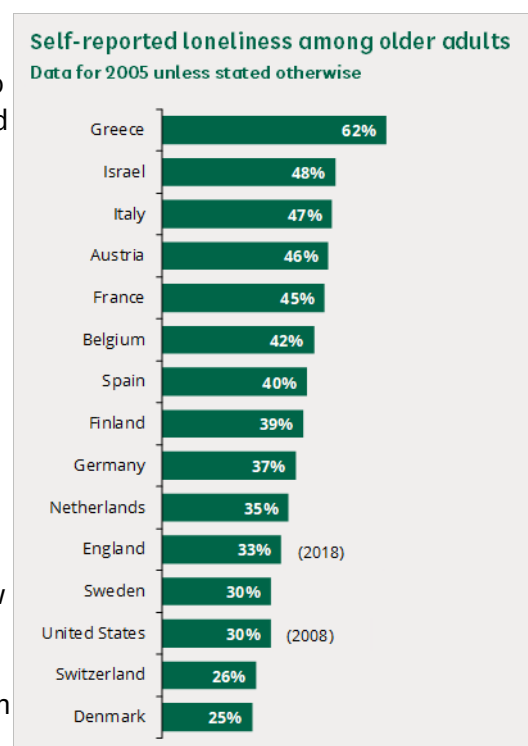
Oxford University's ['Our World in Data'](#) used data from four studies to calculate estimates on self-reported feelings of loneliness among older people (primarily aged 65+) from surveys that asked people directly whether they often experienced feelings of loneliness. Although most survey data is taken from a single year, 2005, for some nations data from other years was used in order to provide comparison.

The data suggests that the proportion of adults self-reporting loneliness varied widely, from below 30% and below in the case of Sweden, the United States, Switzerland and Denmark, to 60% in the case of Greece.

Using 2018/19 data for the UK, 33% of English adults aged 65-74 reported feeling lonely at least some of the time, suggesting that older groups in England were some of the least lonely.

As Oxford University's Our World in Data [commentary notes](#), the two societies with the lowest reported loneliness also have some of the highest proportions of [single-person households](#) (43.7% of households in Denmark in 2005, 31.2% in Switzerland in 2007, compared to the EU average of 30.7% in 2010).

Chart 1 Self-reported loneliness among older adults



Note: Share of survey respondents who report feeling lonely at least some of the time. For all countries estimates correspond to population ages 65+, except in the following cases: US (ages 72+); UK (ages 65-74); and Finland (ages 75+). Estimates correspond to people who report feeling lonely "some of the time", "most of the time", or "almost all the time".

Source: Adapted from Oxford University/Our World in Data, ['Are people more likely to be lonely in "individualistic" societies?'](#), 11 December 2019

## 1.1

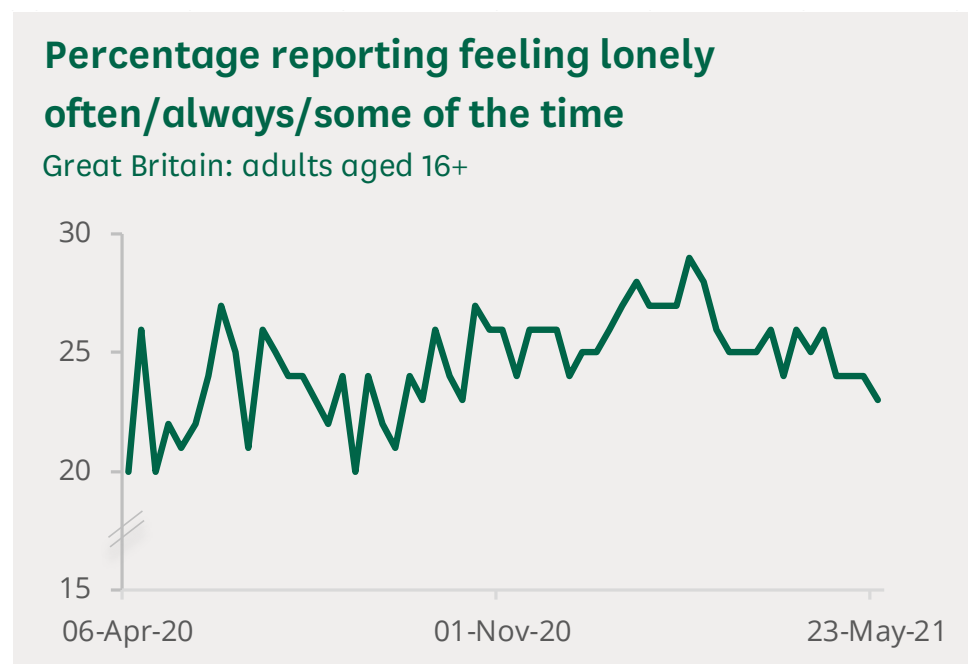
## Covid-19 and loneliness

There are concerns that the social distancing measures introduced in response to the Covid-19 pandemic have led to an increase in loneliness, particularly amongst people who live alone and those 'shielding'.

Feelings of loneliness have been associated with previous pandemics. For example, a study of 1,932 people quarantined during the [2003 SARS outbreak](#) in Canada found that 39% reported feeling lonely.

The ONS has been [monitoring the impact of Covid-19](#), in particular the effect of “lockdown”, on loneliness. Its latest estimates for between 19 to 23 May 2021 indicate that around 23% of the population in Great Britain reported feeling lonely often/always/some of the time. This represents around 12 million adults in Great Britain.

Levels of loneliness peaked at 29% in the week ending 14 February 2021 but have shown a declining trend since.



Source: [ONS Coronavirus and the social impacts on Great Britain, Table 1b](#)

More specifically, an estimated 7% (equivalent to 3.6 million adults in Great Britain) reported feeling lonely "often" or "always" between 19 and 23 May 2021. These “chronically” lonely people are about the same proportion as pre-lockdown.

Levels of anxiety during the pandemic are strongly associated with feelings of loneliness. People who reported always or often feeling lonely were likely to have higher levels of anxiety than those who never felt lonely. The odds of those who always or often felt lonely reporting high anxiety was almost five times greater than for those who never felt lonely.<sup>20</sup>

The ONS publication ‘[Mapping loneliness during the coronavirus pandemic](#)’, published in April 2021, tracks loneliness rates by local authority and shows the types of places where people reported feeling lonely “often” or “always” during the pandemic. It notes that places with a higher concentration of

<sup>20</sup> ONS [Coronavirus and anxiety, Great Britain: 3 April 2020 to 10 May 2020](#), 15 June 2020



younger people (16-24 years old) and areas with higher rates of unemployment tended to have higher rates of loneliness.<sup>21</sup>

Local authorities in countryside areas tended to have lower rates of loneliness compared with urban or industrial areas.<sup>22</sup>

Individuals who said they had nobody to talk to were more than ten times more likely to report lockdown loneliness than those who said they had somebody to talk to. Respondents who said they felt uncomfortable leaving the house were also more likely to report lockdown loneliness, according to the ONS.<sup>23</sup>

Areas with “strong local businesses and adult education tended to have lower levels of loneliness”, particularly in London. The ONS report says:

Although it is unclear how many of the normal benefits of local business and adult education have been accessible during the pandemic, these features of life in London may be important in helping people to connect with one another.<sup>24</sup>

Data from the ‘[Student Covid-19 Insights Survey](#)’ in England between 19 February and 1 March 2021 found over a quarter (26%) of students reported feeling lonely “often” or “always”, compared with 8% of the adult population in Great Britain over a similar period.<sup>25</sup> Younger students (16 to 29) were more likely to report feeling lonely (33%) than students aged 30 and over (20%).<sup>26</sup>

The Campaign to End Loneliness report ‘[Lessons from lockdown: Conversations through Covid-19](#)’ published in April 2021 highlighted the need to “support the supporters”. The report says:

As the pandemic wore on conversations started to become more difficult and people struggled to keep conversations going. Volunteers were increasingly struggling to sustain positive conversations as the physical and mental health of many members declined.<sup>27</sup>

### Children and adolescents

A YouGov survey published on 3 April 2020 found that [36% of UK children between 5 and 18-years-old had told parents they were lonely](#) after school closures, with younger children more likely to express feelings of loneliness.

Psychologists and neuroscientists have warned of potential long-term consequences of loneliness amongst children and adolescents. In ‘[The effects](#)

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<sup>21</sup> ONS, [Mapping loneliness during the coronavirus pandemic](#), 7 April 2021

<sup>22</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>23</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>24</sup> [Ibid.](#)

<sup>25</sup> ONS, [Coronavirus and higher education in England](#), 19 February to 1 March 2021, 10 March 2021

<sup>26</sup> ONS, [Coronavirus and higher education in England](#), 19 February to 1 March 2021, 10 March 2021

<sup>27</sup> Campaign to End Loneliness, [Lessons from lockdown: Conversations through Covid-19](#), April 2021, p7

[of social deprivation on adolescent development and mental health](#), published in The Lancet on 12 June 2020, the authors suggest that physical distancing may have a disproportionate effect on adolescents (10-24 years) as peer interaction is a vital aspect of development.

A [review of previous research](#) found children who experienced long periods of loneliness were three times more likely to suffer from depression in years to come, with the duration of loneliness more strongly correlated with mental health symptoms than the intensity of loneliness.

An [open letter](#) to the Education Secretary, Gavin Williamson, signed by more than 100 specialists in psychology, mental health and neuroscience was published in The Sunday Times on 14 June 2020, calling for the Government “to release children and young people from lockdown” due to the “damaging” consequences.

The [NSPCC reported in April 2020](#) that “lonely children are twice as likely to be groomed online” and that there was a “heightened risk of sexual abuse during coronavirus lockdown”.<sup>28</sup> A subsequent NSPCC report [‘Isolated and struggling’](#) says:

During lockdown, when feelings of loneliness may emerge at the same time as reduced parental supervision, some children may become more prone to risk-taking behaviours – while this is a normal behavioural response to this uncertain time, there may be adults who will take advantage of their vulnerability to exploit them.<sup>29</sup>

The Disabled Children’s Partnership report [‘The loneliest lockdown’](#) (March 2021) summarised findings from a survey of 1,200 families with disabled children across England. Between 2 March and 16 March 2021, 91% of parents indicated that their child was socially isolated, with 49% of disabled children not seeing a friend in the last month either online or in person.<sup>30</sup>

## UK Government response

- On 22 April 2020, the Government announced a [plan to tackle loneliness](#). This included the launch of the latest [Let’s Talk Loneliness](#) campaign on how individuals can support themselves and others if they feel isolated or lonely.
- The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport has said it is tackling loneliness caused by the pandemic through “providing funding for charities that bring people together; convening organisations across

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<sup>28</sup> NSPCC, [Lonely children are twice as likely to be groomed online](#), 23 April 2020

<sup>29</sup> NSPCC, [Isolated and struggling: Social isolation and the risk of child maltreatment, in lockdown and beyond](#), June 2020, p14

<sup>30</sup> Disabled Children’s Partnership, [The loneliest lockdown: The impact of the pandemic on the families of disabled children, their parents and siblings](#), March 2021, p3

society to act together on loneliness; and public communications to get people talking about loneliness.”<sup>31</sup>

- The Government announced a [£5 million grant fund](#) for loneliness charities in May 2020. The funds include targeted relief for those most at risk of loneliness during the pandemic.<sup>32</sup>
- To November 2020, the Government provided £23 million to 1,100 charities who tackle loneliness. This formed part of the [£750 million package of funding](#) for charities announced by the Treasury in April 2020.<sup>33</sup> Loneliness was also a priority category of the [£200m Coronavirus Community Support Fund](#), provided by the National Lottery Community Fund.
- A new [Tackling Loneliness Network](#) was established in April 2020. The network involves over 70 organisations, including businesses, charities and the public sector. The network has [four priority areas](#):
  - a) Youth loneliness
  - b) Loneliness in older people
  - c) Local and place-based approaches
  - d) Digital inclusion
- Loneliness charities have been supported by [NHS Volunteer Responders](#), who can make “check in and chat” calls to people who have been self-isolating. From 1 April to 29 November 2020, there were 304,193 completed “Check in and Chat tasks”, and 43,272 “Check in and Chat Plus tasks”.<sup>34</sup>
- The Prime Minister said in June 2020 that [support bubbles](#) were introduced to “support those who are particularly lonely as a result of lockdown measures”.<sup>35</sup>
- A £4 million [local connections fund](#) was announced in December 2020 to support charities and community groups that reduce isolation.
- An additional £7.5 million was [announced](#) in December 2020 to tackle loneliness over the winter, focused on the arts, libraries, charities and radio. This includes an extension to the loneliness fund announced previously.
- Public Health England [launched a nationwide ‘Better Health – Every Mind Matters’ campaign](#) in January 2021. The campaign encourages people to get a free-NHS approved [Mind Plan](#) from the [Every Mind Matters](#) website and includes “practical tips and support” including a webpage [‘What you can do if you feel lonely during the coronavirus outbreak’](#).

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<sup>31</sup> PQ 7198, [Loneliness: Coronavirus](#), 7 June 2021

<sup>32</sup> For list, see DCSM & Office for Civil Society (OCS), [Loneliness Minister: Write letters to people isolating at home](#), 15 June 2020

<sup>33</sup> PQ HL10486, [[Loneliness: Coronavirus](#)], 25 November 2020

<sup>34</sup> PQ 121883 [[Mental health: Coronavirus](#)], 9 December 2020

<sup>35</sup> 10 Downing Street, [Prime Minister’s statement on coronavirus \(Covid-19\)](#), 10 June 2020

- Further information on available mental health support can be found in the Library’s briefing, [Mental health policy in England](#).
- The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport published the ‘[Loneliness Annual Report](#)’ on 22 January 2021 which summarises the measures introduced in response to the pandemic.
- As of 7 June 2021, over £34 million of the £750 million VCSE funding package has gone “specifically towards reducing loneliness”, with an additional £50 million going to organisations supporting people with their mental health.<sup>36</sup>

## 1.2 The potential health impact of loneliness

40% of 769 surveyed GPs in December 2019 reported they “regularly” saw patients who were lonely but did not require medical attention

Academic and medical research has made links between loneliness or social isolation and poorer health outcomes. However, loneliness is not the same as social isolation, and it is difficult to establish causality.

The Government’s Loneliness Strategy outlined some of the negative impacts that being chronically lonely may have:

- **Early deaths:** Being lonely is thought to be on a par with other public health priorities like obesity or smoking.
- A greater risk of **inactivity, smoking and risk-taking**.
- An increased risk of **depression, low self-esteem, reported sleep problems and increased stress response**.
- **Cognitive decline** and an increased risk of Alzheimer’s.<sup>37</sup>

The UK Government’s 2012 [Preventing suicide strategy in England](#) also notes that higher rates of suicide amongst men aged 75 might relate to loneliness, amongst other factors.<sup>38</sup> The Commons Library briefing [Suicide prevention: policy and strategy](#) gives further detail.

## 1.3 The financial cost of loneliness

It is often argued that loneliness leads to greater pressure on public services. The Government’s [Loneliness Strategy](#) (2018) said that lonely people were more likely to be admitted to hospital or have a longer stay, visit a GP or A&E, and enter local authority funded residential care. The Strategy stated that at

<sup>36</sup> PQ 7198, [Loneliness: Coronavirus](#), 7 June 2021

<sup>37</sup> UK Government, [A connected society](#), pp18-19

<sup>38</sup> UK Government, [Preventing suicide in England](#), 2012, p13

work, higher loneliness is associated with poorer performance and reductions in productivity.<sup>39</sup>

Researchers have sought to calculate the cost of loneliness to the economy. Their estimates are primarily based on direct measurable impacts but there may be indirect effects (e.g. benefit payments) that are not costed. A [2019 literature review](#) of 12 studies (including eight in the UK) argued that estimates are likely to be conservative due to the lack of evidence regarding its impact on productivity.<sup>40</sup>

Research on the financial costs includes these reports:

- The DCMS commissioned Simetrica's [Loneliness monetisation report](#) (2020). This estimated that the wellbeing, health and work productivity cost associated with severe loneliness (feeling lonely “often” or “always”) on individuals was around £9,900 per afflicted person per year.<sup>41</sup>
- The New Economics Foundation and the Co-op Foundation published the report [Cost of loneliness to UK employers](#) (2017). This estimated that loneliness costs UK employers between £2.2 and £3.7 billion a year.<sup>42</sup>
- A [2017 LSE report](#) estimated that £1,700 per person (2015 values) could be saved over 10 years if action could be taken to reduce loneliness. 59% of these savings would be achieved due to the avoidance of unplanned hospital admissions.<sup>43</sup>
- A [2015 report](#) published by Social Finance focused on the costs of loneliness to the public sector. It estimated that an individual may cost the public sector on average £12,000 per person over 15 years, of which 40% occurs within five years and relates to GP visits, A&E visits, hospital admission, residential care and costs associated with conditions like diabetes and depression.<sup>44</sup>

## The cost of scams

The UK Government's [Loneliness Strategy](#) states that: “those who are isolated may be more likely to be victims of fraud. In turn, being a victim of fraud can be an isolating experience”.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> UK Government, [A connected society](#), pp18-19

<sup>40</sup> Cathrine Mihalopoulos et al., [The economic costs of loneliness: a review of cost-of-illness and economic evaluation studies](#), Social Psychiatry Psychiatric Epidemiology, 2019, pp1-14

<sup>41</sup> Simetrica, [Loneliness monetisation report](#), June 2020, pp1-14

<sup>42</sup> New Economics Foundation and the Co-operative Foundation, [Cost of loneliness to UK employers](#), 2017, p35

<sup>43</sup> David McDaid, A-La Park & Jose-Luis Fernandez, [Reconnections evaluation interim report](#), 2016, p30

<sup>44</sup> Social Finance, [Investing to tackle loneliness](#), 2015, pp10-12

<sup>45</sup> UK Government, [A connected society](#), 2018, p29

## Who is most at risk?

People of all ages can be the victim of a scam, but some older people are especially at risk, either because fraudsters target them or because their circumstances make them vulnerable.

Those most at risk are older people who live on their own, as they may be lonely, willing to listen and more trusting. Age UK [reports in one study](#), it found that of those older people targeted by fraudsters, over a quarter (27%) of single people responded to a scam, compared to just under a tenth (9%) of their married counterparts.<sup>46</sup> An [article by Bournemouth University](#) also details how loneliness in older people makes them more vulnerable to scams.<sup>47</sup>

## Forms of scams

Fraudsters use different tactics to take advantage of older and vulnerable people: some might be overly friendly, sympathetic, and willing to help, others might use fear tactics. There is also evidence of gangs befriending vulnerable people, only to take control of their homes (known as “cuckooing”).<sup>48</sup>

The Covid-19 pandemic has created “the perfect storm for these scams to thrive”, according to the consumer body, Which?.<sup>49</sup> [Action Fraud](#) says it has received multiple reports about coronavirus-themed phishing emails attempting to trick people into opening malicious attachments or revealing sensitive personal and financial information.<sup>50</sup>

Which? has published a [guide](#) on common scams aimed at older people and how to identify them and protect themselves.<sup>51</sup>

## Older and more vulnerable people are more likely to be scammed

Scams can be committed over the telephone, through the post, online or face-to-face, often on the doorstep.

While there are no separate statistics on scams (as opposed to fraud recorded in the [Crime Survey of England and Wales](#)), a poll for Age UK in 2017 suggests that around 43% of older people - almost 5 million people aged 65 and over - believe they have been targeted by scammers.<sup>52</sup> Of these people,

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<sup>46</sup> Age UK, [Applying the brakes: Slowing and stopping fraud against older people](#), March 2018, p6

<sup>47</sup> “[How loneliness in older people makes them more vulnerable to scams](#)”, Keith Brown, Lee-Ann Fenge, Sally Lee, Bournemouth University, 24 July 2017

<sup>48</sup> Jack Spice, [The variable and evolving nature of ‘cuckooing’ as a form of criminal exploitation in street level drug markets](#), Trends in Organised Crime, 2019, pp1-23

<sup>49</sup> “[Announcing our new scam alert service](#)” Which?, 23 April 2020

<sup>50</sup> “[Coronavirus scam costs victims over £8,000 in one month](#)”, Action Fraud, 6 March 2020

<sup>51</sup> “[Scams aimed at older people](#)”, Which?, (undated)

<sup>52</sup> Age UK, [Applying the brakes: Slowing and stopping fraud against older people](#), March 2018, p4

12% responded to the scam, which means half a million older people have become victims.<sup>53</sup>

### How do scams affect people?

Fraud can have a significant impact on the finances, health, and general well-being of an older victim.

It is hard to estimate the financial cost, but National Trading Standards (NTS) estimates it is annually between £5and £10 billion.<sup>54</sup>

In a poll by Age UK, around one in eight of those who lost money (13%) lost more than £1,000, while a quarter (23%) lost less than £100.<sup>55</sup>

A Portsmouth University study suggested that [being a victim of a scam or fraud could lead to increased loneliness](#). Polling found that 63% of people aged 65+ believed that being a victim would lead to reservations about using the internet. 68% believed it would make them more hesitant to answer the phone or door.<sup>56</sup>

Neighbourhood Watch estimate that only 5% of scams are ever reported.<sup>57</sup> Once people realise they have been tricked they are often too ashamed to report what has happened.

### Steps to prevent scams

Anyone can report fraud to the police or directly to [Action Fraud](#).

The [National Trading Standards](#) (NTS) Scam Marshal Scheme allows victims to share their experiences and help others recognise and report scams.<sup>58</sup> In October 2019, the UK Government made available up to £640,000 to the NTS to provide call blocking devices, free of charge, to vulnerable groups. Between 1,800 and 2,000 call blockers were made available, on a “first come, first served” basis.<sup>59</sup> The Home Office also worked with the NTS on a scheme to help improve the resilience of lonely or socially isolated older adults.<sup>60</sup>

The NTS continues to work with Citizens Advice to operate scam awareness campaigns (e.g. [Take 5 to Stop Fraud](#) and “[Together we can take a stand against scams](#)”). There is also the NTS “[Young friends against scams](#)” initiative designed to engage with children aged 8-16.<sup>61</sup> In addition, the

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<sup>53</sup> [Ibid](#)

<sup>54</sup> National Trading Standards (NTS), [Home Office fund expansion of scam marshals programme](#), 7 November 2018

<sup>55</sup> Age UK, [Applying the brakes: Slowing and stopping fraud against older people](#), March 2018, p6

<sup>56</sup> Mark Button, [‘Tackling the taboo’: Talking about fraud and scams to reduce the risk of becoming a victim](#), June 2018, p7

<sup>57</sup> “[Scams and older people](#)”, Neighbourhood Watch, (undated)

<sup>58</sup> “[Home Office fund expansion of Scam Marshals programme](#)”, 7 November 2018

<sup>59</sup> PQ 683 [[Pensions: Misrepresentation](#)], 21 October 2019; NTS, [Free call blockers for victims of scam and nuisance phone calls](#), 15 October 2019

<sup>60</sup> UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2020

<sup>61</sup> NTS, [New resources to educate young people on frauds and scams](#), 12 September 2019

[National Trading Standards eCrime Team](#) monitors and investigates online consumer frauds including misleading websites, subscription traps and online shopping frauds.

Which? has also launched a [free scam alert service](#), designed to send warnings directly to people. In describing why this service is needed, it said: “Fraudsters have been using callous tactics to exploit people’s fears and vulnerability, so it’s never been more important to stay one step ahead as new scams spring up daily”.<sup>62</sup> The alert service covers all kinds of scams: “from new phishing<sup>63</sup> and smishing<sup>64</sup> attempts, to dodgy pension schemes, to copycat websites and suspicious cold calls”.<sup>65</sup>

Finally, an important development has been the introduction of “No Cold Calling Zones” in various parts of the country. These zones are operating in Luton, Lincoln, Hampshire, Kent, Nottingham, Enfield, Croydon, Norfolk, and Newcastle.

A zone is a designated area where the community has decided that they will only accept traders calling at their homes by appointment. The zones are actively supported by Trading Standards.

A zone is identified by signs at the entrance and exit to the zone, and residents are supplied with information and door stickers. Residents are also given telephone numbers to ring if they are concerned about anyone knocking on doors in the neighbourhood. Trading standards officers and/or the police will usually respond to the call. Further information is in the Library briefing, [Doorstep selling](#).

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<sup>62</sup> “[Announcing our new scam alert service](#)” Which?, 23 April 2020

<sup>63</sup> **Phishing** is a method used by fraudsters to access valuable personal details (such as usernames and passwords), that has a monetary value to criminals. Phishing can also involve sending malicious attachments or website links so to infect computers or mobile devices. Criminals might send bogus communications (emails, instant messages, or text messages) that appear to come from legitimate organisations, but embedded links within the message can direct the recipient to a hoax website so to “harvest” their personal details.

<sup>64</sup> Smishing is when fraudsters obtain personal details of a victim by SMS text messages. Fraudsters can go on to use this personal information to commit fraud.

<sup>65</sup> “[Which? launches scam alerts as fraudsters exploit coronavirus crisis](#)” Which?, 23 April 2020



## 2

## Causes of loneliness and prevention

It is difficult to provide a comprehensive guide to the causes of loneliness because of its subjective nature, but there are some common themes, as set out in the UK Government's [Loneliness Strategy](#):

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. [...]

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>66</sup>

Research suggests that causes and risk factors associated with loneliness during the pandemic were similar to those beforehand. Young adults, women, people with lower education or income, the economically inactive, people living alone, and urban residents continued to have a higher risk of experiencing loneliness. However, the research also found that some people who were already at risk (e.g. young adults aged 18–30 years, people with low household income and adults living alone) experienced a heightened risk of experiencing loneliness during the pandemic. Furthermore, being a student emerged as a higher risk factor during lockdown than usual.<sup>67</sup>

## 2.1

### Infrastructure and services

#### Social infrastructure

Social infrastructure deficiencies, that are viewed as potentially increasing levels of isolation, include:

- The **absence or unsuitability of support services** (e.g. they are often aimed at older people), and lack of knowledge of their existence;<sup>68</sup>

<sup>66</sup> UK Government, [A connected society](#), p19

<sup>67</sup> For example, F. Bu, A. Steptoe, D. Fancourt, [Who is lonely during lockdown? Cross cohort analysis of predictors of loneliness before and during the COVID-19 pandemic](#), Public Health, volume 186, 2020, pp31-4 and J. Groake et al, [Loneliness in the UK during the COVID-19 pandemic: Sectional results](#), PLOS ONE, 2020

<sup>68</sup> Kantar Public, [Trapped in a bubble](#), 2016, pp35-6

- **Poorly targeted support services:** ad hoc services are missed when they end, and poor-quality interventions increase dissatisfaction;<sup>69</sup>
- **Digital isolation,** with the closure of local services such as post offices.<sup>70</sup> Social media may also be an influence (see box 1);
- **Changing family dynamics;** and
- **Not knowing, or lacking trust in neighbours or having a fear of anti-social behaviour.**<sup>71</sup> However, this association may be explained by lonely people being more likely to have negative impressions of their neighbourhood.<sup>72</sup>

### Box 1: Social media

1. The role of social media in contributing to loneliness and social isolation has been greatly contested in academic literature. The UK Government's [Loneliness Strategy](#) concludes that here are both positive and negative effects of social media.<sup>73</sup>
2. Some research has suggested that social media may displace “real” social interaction or trigger lonely feelings in people who compare their own experiences to other lives portrayed online.<sup>74</sup>
3. Other studies of older people and people with autism have argued that social media usage can complement traditional social interaction, depending on the platform used, whilst other research suggests social media can enhance and strengthen pre-existing relationships.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>69</sup> [Ibid](#), pp35-6

<sup>70</sup> Mental Health Foundation, [The lonely society](#), 2010, p10 and Dhruv Sharma et al., [Developing Radical-Digital Interventions to Tackle Loneliness Amongst the Elderly](#), International Conference on Human Aspects for the Aged Population, 2015, pp1-12

<sup>71</sup> Ade Kearns et al., [‘Lonesome town’? Is loneliness associated with the residential environment, including housing and neighbourhood factors?](#) Journal of Community Psychology, volume 43, 2015, pp849-67

<sup>72</sup> Timothy Matthews et al., [Loneliness and neighbourhood characteristics: a multi-informant, nationally representative study of young adults](#), Psychological Science, volume 30, 2019, pp1-11

<sup>73</sup> UK Government, [A connected society](#), 2018, p20

<sup>74</sup> Co-op Foundation, [All our emotions are important: Breaking the silence about youth loneliness](#), 2018 and Jenna L. Clark et al., [Social network sites and well-being: the role of social connection](#), Current Directions in Psychological Science, volume 27, 2018, pp32-7; Ariel Shensa et al., [Social media use and perceived emotional support among us young adults](#), Journal of Community Health, volume 41, 2016, pp541-49

<sup>75</sup> Rebecca Nowland et al., [Loneliness and social internet use: Pathways to reconnection in a digital world?](#) Perspectives in Psychological Science, volume 13, 2018 pp70-87; C.J. Hutto et al., [Social media gerontology: Understanding social media usage among older adults](#), Web Intelligence, volume 13, 2015, pp69-87; Gerrit I. van Schalkwyk et al., [Social media use, friendship quality, and the moderating role of anxiety in adolescents with autism spectrum disorder](#), Journal of Autism & Developments Disorder, volume 47, 2017, pp2805-13; Matthew Pittman and Brandon Reich, [Social media and loneliness: Why an Instagram picture may be worth more than a thousand Twitter words](#), Computers in Human Behaviour, volume 62, 2016, 155-67

4. Studies of young adults have found links between high social media use and self-reported social isolation and/or loneliness. However, lonely people are potentially more likely to use social media.<sup>76</sup>

## Housing, transport and facilities

A lack of, or inappropriate physical infrastructure, such as **housing**, **transport** and **community facilities**, can make it more difficult to interact with others. This is a particular issue in some rural areas where the number of over 65s is forecast to grow over the coming years.<sup>77</sup>

### Transport

**Bus services** are an important mode of transportation for preventing social isolation. Where there is no viable commercial market, **community transport** (delivered by third sector organisations) provide door-to-door services by volunteers, minibus travel for specific groups (particularly the elderly and disabled) and community bus services.<sup>78</sup>

However, evidence submitted to the Transport Select Committee has expressed concern about the dangers of over-regulation of community transport which may threaten their existence. There is a view that short-term financing and general underfunding of bus services outside London is reducing mobility for many.<sup>79</sup>

The Government said it intended to bring forward a more stable multi-year funding model for local transport under its [better deal for bus users](#).<sup>80</sup> In February 2020, the Prime Minister announced £5 billion of new funding to “overhaul bus and cycle links for every region outside London”.<sup>81</sup> The National

On the bus industry, see the House of Commons Library’s [Bus Services Act 2017 \(2018\) and Concessionary bus travel \(2020\)](#).

<sup>76</sup> Brian A. Primack et al., [Social Media Use and Perceived Social Isolation Among Young Adults in the U.S.](#), American Journal of Preventative Medicine, volume 53, 2017, pp1-8; C.T. Barry et al., [Adolescent social media use and mental health from adolescent and parent perspectives](#), Journal of Adolescence, volume 61, 2017, pp1-11; and Rebecca Nowland et al., [Loneliness and social internet use: Pathways to reconnection in a digital world?](#) Perspectives in Psychological Science, volume 13, 2018, pp70-87

<sup>77</sup> ONS, [Living longer](#), 13 August 2018, figures 4 & 5

<sup>78</sup> Local authorities primarily fund Community transport. The Government has made single year funds available, such as the £25 million [Community Minibus Fund](#). The [Bus Service Operator’s Grant](#) is also paid to community transport operators, and provides all central Government funding for bus services.

<sup>79</sup> Transport Select Committee, [Community transport and the Department for Transport’s proposed consultation](#), HC480, December 2017; Department for Transport (DfT), [Consultation Outcome: Section 19 and 22 permits](#), March 2019; Transport Select Committee, [Bus services in England outside London](#), HC 1425, May 2019, p3

<sup>80</sup> [Government response to the Transport Committee bus services in England outside London](#), HC 1425, October 2019

<sup>81</sup> [Major boost for bus services as PM outlines new vision for local transport](#), 10 Feb 2020

Bus Strategy, [Bus Back Better: national bus strategy for England](#), was published in March 2021 and sets out future funding arrangements.

The House of Commons Library has produced briefings on:

• [A quick guide to the railways \(2018\)](#)

• [Passenger rail services in England \(2018\)](#)

• [Access to transport for disabled people \(2018\)](#)

• [Concessionary bus travel \(2020\)](#)

• [Local road maintenance in England \(2019\)](#)

Access to **train services** may also help reduce loneliness and social isolation. While the Government does not directly operate these services, it provides funding, as well as setting the accessibility requirements for operators. Because rail connections are not always profitable, franchise agreements include obligations for non-profitable services.

As described in the Local Government Association's (LGA) guide to [Combating loneliness](#), **driving** is often an essential transport option for older people, particularly in rural and remote areas. Heavy traffic, poor road conditions, inadequate street lighting and poorly positioned signage are barriers to driving. Addressing the full range of environmental factors can help address social isolation. For example, parking bays being located close to buildings and increased drop-off and pick-up bays may improve accessibility.

### Accessibility

Many day-to-day travel problems for disabled people stem from confusion over the rules governing accessible transport, and their lack of enforcement or communication by those providing services.

Under [sections 29\(7\) and 20](#) of the Equality Act 2010, service providers must make "reasonable adjustments" for disabled service users.

All buses, coaches and trains were required to be accessible to disabled people by January 2020. The Government said it had issued time-limited dispensation notices for 1,200 carriages that had not met the rail accessibility requirements in December 2019.<sup>82</sup> By 2020 some 16,000 rail carriages complied with accessibility standards. In respect of those not meeting the standards, the Government granted two new targeted compliance dispensations, 17 time-limited dispensations and re-issued a further 11 targeted compliance dispensations.<sup>83</sup>

Taxis are also accessible in many parts of the country, though non-metropolitan urban areas and rural areas lag somewhat behind. As of 31 March 2019, 58% of taxis in England were wheelchair accessible.<sup>84</sup> There are some outstanding issues, such as the enforcement of wheelchair spaces and a lack of audio-visual equipment on transport.

Pavement parking restricts people's ability to leave their homes and might exacerbate and cause loneliness and social isolation. The Transport Select Committee called for pavement parking to be addressed in its Loneliness

<sup>82</sup> DfT, [Minister of State to Rail Delivery Group](#), December 2019

<sup>83</sup> [PQ 148871](#) [Rolling Stock: Disability] 9 Feb 2021

<sup>84</sup> DfT, [Taxi and private hire vehicle statistics, England: 2019](#), September 2019, p9

strategy.<sup>85</sup> From August to November 2020, the [Government consulted on proposals to ban pavement parking](#).

### Affordability

Concessionary bus fares are provided to large numbers of people affected by social isolation, including older people and benefit claimants.

In the year ending March 2019, there were 9.1 million concessionary travel passes for older and disabled people in England, costing £1.1 billion. People in urban regions were more likely to take up passes in 2018, with a rate of 79%, compared to those living in rural villages, hamlets and isolated dwellings, a 58%. The average for all areas was 71%.

Concessionary fares for young people vary widely around England.<sup>86</sup> 76 of the 89 Travel Concession Authorities outside London either offered a youth concession or had at least one commercial bus operator offering such a concession in 2018/19.<sup>87</sup>

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More details can be found on the [Railcard website](#)

Section 28(3) of the [Railways Act 1993](#) as amended, requires that all train operating companies participate in the following:

- [Young Persons \(16-25\) Railcard](#), also open to students in full time education;
- [Senior Railcard](#), for those over the age of 60;
- [Disabled Persons Railcard](#)
- [Millennial Railcard](#), for those aged between 26 and 30.
- [Veterans Railcard](#)

### Covid-19

During the pandemic, rail and bus usage has fallen, which might be exacerbating people's isolation and loneliness. The Government has supported both the rail and bus sectors through:

- [Management agreements with train operating companies](#) that will provide financial support to allow services to run for those that need to travel by train, while passenger numbers otherwise are way down.
- [Covid-19 Bus Services Support Grant](#), which has provided £700 million to bus and tram operators across England to continue services during the pandemic.

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<sup>85</sup> Transport Select Committee, [Pavement parking](#), 9 September 2019, p15

<sup>86</sup> The Transport Committee commissioned [research on concessionary fares](#) in the 2019 Parliament

<sup>87</sup> DfT, [Concessionary travel statistics: England 2018/19](#), 17 December 2019, pp1-2

## Housing

There is mixed evidence suggesting that certain types of housing, particularly high-rise flats, can lead to greater social isolation.<sup>88</sup>

For older and disabled people, there are identified benefits to moving post-retirement to more suitable housing, such as extra care or specialist retirement housing schemes which offer a ready-made community.

Erosh, a membership organisation for professionals in the sheltered and retirement housing sector, published a 2018 guide: [Addressing loneliness and social isolation in older people](#). This guide contains advice and case studies showing how these schemes can prevent and address loneliness and social isolation.

One challenge is the lack of attractive housing options for older and disabled people. In [Breaking the mould](#) (2018), the National Housing Federation identified the following features of successful developments:

1. Accessibility
2. Space and attractiveness
3. Safety and security
4. Age-friendliness
5. Offer of freedom, choice and flexibility
6. The option to have help at hand
7. Provision of flexible, personalised support
8. The ability for residents to socialise and feel included.<sup>89</sup>

There is growing interest in **community-led** and **cohousing projects** as a solution. MHCLG commissioned work in this area from the London School of Economics. Initial findings in an interim report of July 2020 record:

... strong support for the thesis that community-led housing is effective in reducing loneliness for those who take part. This includes both residents of the housing, and those who are involved in their wider community.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Ade Kearns et al., '[Lonesome town? Is loneliness associated with the residential environment, including housing and neighbourhood factors?](#)' *Journal of Community Psychology*, volume 43, 2015, pp849–67

<sup>89</sup> National Housing Federation, [Breaking the mould, 2018](#)

<sup>90</sup> UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2021

The final report is delayed due to Covid-19 but will be launched later in 2021.<sup>91</sup>

Progress on the housing related commitments in the Government's Loneliness Strategy are listed in Annex B to the [Loneliness Annual Report](#) (2021).<sup>92</sup>

## 2.2

## Loneliness prevention and intervention

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Further research can be found in the Library's [Loneliness reading list](#).

The [What Works Centre for Wellbeing](#) was asked by the UK Government to conduct a "systematic review of evidence reviews" with the aim of answering: "What is the effectiveness of interventions to alleviate loneliness in people of all ages across the life-course?"

[The Centre's report](#), published in 2018, said:

More large-scale, controlled study designs are required to draw any solid conclusions about what approaches are most effective, for which groups of people, in what settings and for how long.<sup>93</sup>

The report reviewed interventions such as leisure activities, therapies, community interventions (such as shared meals), educational approaches (such as relationship training and psychosocial help), befriending, and activities designed to change the culture of an organisation or community.<sup>94</sup>

The report stressed the importance of individualised approaches:

- There is no one-size fits all approach to alleviating loneliness in older population groups and that tailored approaches are more likely to reduce loneliness.
- It is not clear what approaches are effective in alleviating loneliness but several mechanisms were identified:
- Tailoring interventions to the needs of people for whom they are designed
- Developing approaches which avoid stigma or reinforce isolation
- Supporting meaningful relationships.

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<sup>91</sup> [Ibid](#)

<sup>92</sup> [Ibid.](#), paras 34-35

<sup>93</sup> What Works Centre for Wellbeing, [Tackling loneliness](#), 2018, p4

<sup>94</sup> [Ibid](#), pp6-7

- The evidence about the effectiveness of group-based interventions versus those delivered in one-to-one settings was inconclusive.<sup>95</sup>

In October 2020, the Centre published a [rapid impact evaluation](#) of UK projects to improve wellbeing. Eleven studies showed a statistically significant change in least one ONS measure (life satisfaction, happiness, sense of feeling worthwhile and anxiety). Impactful projects included social prescribing, volunteering, financial support and skills training.

The [Campaign to End Loneliness](#) (CtEL) has set out a framework which it intended to present “the full range of interventions needed in a local area to support older people experiencing this very individual problem.”

It is centred around four types of interventions that focus not just on interventions addressing an individual’s loneliness, but also the wider community:

[Foundation services](#) – services to reach and understand the specific needs of those experiencing loneliness.

[Direct interventions](#) – services that directly improve the number or quality of relationships older people have.

[Gateway services](#) – improving transport and technology provision to help retain connections and independence in later life.

[Structural enablers](#) – creating the right structures and conditions in a local environment to reduce those affected by, or at risk of, loneliness.<sup>96</sup>

CtEL published [Promising new approaches revisited: Effective action on loneliness](#) during the pandemic. This revisits the framework and stresses, in addition to the above, the role of “connector services” to reach, understand, and support lonely individuals.

CtEL has also published guidance on its website aimed at local authorities and other commissioners, setting out the [strategic approach](#) that it believes should be taken. CtEL has further guidance to help organisations [identify people experiencing or at risk of loneliness](#) and [measure an organisation's impact on loneliness in later life](#).

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<sup>95</sup> [Ibid.](#), pp6-7

<sup>96</sup> Campaign to End Loneliness, [Loneliness framework](#), 28 January 2020



## 3

## The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness

### The Commission's Report

The Jo Cox Foundation's report, [Combatting loneliness one conversation at a time: A call to action](#) (2017) recommended:

The Library's [Family Test](#) (2019) provides further detail.

[Refreshed guidance](#) was updated 26 May 2021.

#### National Leadership

- The Government to lead on the development of a UK-wide strategy and should report annually on progress to Parliament
- A nominated Minister to drive cross-Government action and lead development and implementation of the strategy.
- The current Family Test, which Government departments are expected to use to analyse new policies, to be developed into a Family and Relationships Test so that policies are assessed for their impact on connections between individuals and communities.<sup>97</sup>

#### Measuring progress

- A national indicator on loneliness
- Measures of loneliness included in major national studies.
- Annual reporting on loneliness by the ONS.
- Greater evidence around what works in tackling loneliness
- Easy-to-understand messages to help individuals connect and avoid loneliness.<sup>98</sup>

#### Catalysing action

- The Commission's report recommended that the Government create an innovation and spread fund to:
  - Stimulate innovation in solutions to loneliness;
  - Provide seed funding for communities to develop self-sustaining community activities
  - Scale-up and spread approaches to reaching out to lonely individuals.<sup>99</sup>

The [Jo Cox Foundation](#) continues and the British Red Cross, Co-op Partnership, [Campaign to End Loneliness](#) and [APPG on Loneliness](#) campaign on the Commission's work.<sup>100</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness, [Combatting loneliness one conversation at a time](#), 2017, p14

<sup>98</sup> [Ibid](#), pp4, 10

<sup>99</sup> [Ibid](#), p18

<sup>100</sup> [Ibid](#), p5

## Initial Government response (2018)

In January 2018, the then Prime Minister, Theresa May, said the Government had begun work on an England-wide strategy to tackle loneliness, had asked the ONS to establish a framework for measuring loneliness, and planned new funds for innovative solutions, provide seed funding for community initiatives, and scale-up existing projects.<sup>101</sup>

The remit of the [Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Sport and Civil Society](#) was expanded to include cross-government work on loneliness (now [Minister for Civil Society and DCMS](#)). The role is often dubbed the “Minister for Loneliness”. Ministers in the MHCLG, the DfT and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS), also had loneliness added to their portfolios, joining the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) Minister who already held loneliness in their portfolio.<sup>102</sup>

In August 2018, the Government published its [Civil society strategy](#), which it intended “to create a framework to support important members of civil society that will then help us with many of the initiatives to tackle loneliness.”<sup>103</sup>

Funds were announced to combat loneliness in 2018:

- **Healthy ageing programme**

This £98 million fund from BEIS aims to create “products and services which will help people to live in their homes for longer, tackle loneliness, and increase independence and wellbeing”.<sup>104</sup>

- **Building Connections Fund**

£11 million would be distributed to successful applicants that can help bring communities together. The Government contributed £5 million to the fund, with £5 million pledged from the Big Lottery Fund and £1 million allocated by the Co-op Foundation.<sup>105</sup>

In December 2018, the Government [announced the 126 organisations that would receive money](#).

More information about the Building Connections Fund can be found on the [National Lottery Community Fund website](#). Projects will be funded to March 2021.

The What Works Centre for Wellbeing and its partners are [evaluating these activities](#). The evaluation is expected in 2021.<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Prime Minister’s Office, [PM’s speech at Downing Street reception to celebrate the legacy of Jo Cox](#), 19 January 2018.

<sup>102</sup> HC Deb, [Loneliness strategy](#), 15 October 2018, vol 657, c 456.

<sup>103</sup> UK Government, [Civil society strategy: building a future that works for everyone](#), August 2018; HC Deb, [Loneliness strategy](#), 15 October 2018, vol 647, c 465.

<sup>104</sup> BEIS, [Government announces £300 million for landmark ageing society grand challenge](#), 12 March 2018; UKRI, [Healthy ageing challenge](#)

<sup>105</sup> DMCS & OCS, [£20 million investment to help tackle loneliness](#), 18 June 2018

<sup>106</sup> DCMS, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2021, commitment 55

In the same announcement, the Government said the People's Postcode Lottery had committed £5 million of players money to top up existing grants it has given to charities that combat loneliness. The Health Lottery would also provide £4 million to charities that work to improve social links in disadvantaged areas across England.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> DMCS & OCS, [£20 million investment to help tackle loneliness](#), 18 June 2018

## 4

## The UK Government's Loneliness Strategy

In October 2018 the UK Government published [A connected society: A Strategy for tackling loneliness – laying the foundations for change](#). The UK Government worked with the Loneliness Action Group, an alliance of 40 organisations, to develop the strategy.<sup>108</sup>

Describing the Strategy as a “first step; a foundation for a generation of policy work”,<sup>109</sup> the Government provided “three overarching goals”:

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.

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.

Build a national conversation on loneliness, to raise awareness of its impacts and to help tackle stigma.<sup>110</sup>

The Government also emphasised that the creation of a “socially connected society” was something to be achieved through the efforts of civil society, local government, employers and individuals, in addition to central government which it stated would “provide national leadership”. It also undertook to work with the devolved administrations to ensure the Strategy is “complementary”.<sup>111</sup>

The Strategy included specific objectives and programmes for Government Departments— these are set out below. Progress recorded in the [first](#) and [second](#) annual loneliness reports are also set out below.

## 4.1

### Social Prescribing

The Strategy committed the DHSC and the NHS to expanding social prescribing, which it defined as:

<sup>108</sup> UK Government, [A connected society](#), p14

<sup>109</sup> [Ibid.](#), p3

<sup>110</sup> [Ibid.](#), p7

<sup>111</sup> [Ibid.](#), p16

Enabl[ing] organisations to refer people to a range of services that offer support for social, emotional or practical needs.

[...]

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.<sup>101F</sup><sup>112</sup>

At the time of the Strategy's publication in 2018, some clinical commissioning groups (CCGs), with NHS England support, were already exploring the use of social prescribing schemes. NHS England estimate that around 60% of CCGs have commissioned some form of social prescribing.<sup>113</sup>

The Strategy cited a study that found that there were an average of 28% fewer GP consultations and 24% fewer attendances at A&E's where the social prescribing connector service had worked well.<sup>114</sup> In October 2019, the Government cited additional statistics, taken from the experiences of social prescribing services in Rotherham, that suggest that 47% of referred patients attended fewer outpatients appointments, 38% had fewer A&E attendances and 40% had fewer hospital admissions.<sup>115</sup>

The Loneliness Strategy committed to making social prescribing a "core element of local provision" by:

- **Having a universal national offer of social prescribing in place by 2023:** The [NHS Long Term Plan](#) (January 2019) committed to training 1,000 social prescribing link workers by the end of 2020/21, with more staff to be trained by 2023/24. The Plan aimed for over 900,000 people to be able to be referred to social prescribing schemes by then.<sup>116</sup> This would be achieved by embedding link workers and making them available in every Primary Care Network. As of January 2020, funding had been made available for 1,000 social prescribing link workers, to be in place by April 2021.<sup>117</sup>
- **Creating a database of social prescribing schemes by the end of 2018:** The Government has stated that NHS England and NHS Improvement has

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<sup>112</sup> [Ibid](#), p25

<sup>113</sup> NHS England, [Social prescribing- FAQs](#) (accessed 31 January 2020)

<sup>114</sup> UK Government, [A connected society](#), p25

<sup>115</sup> NHS England, [Use social prescribing: Rotherham social prescribing](#); UK Government, [Social prescribing: new national academy set up](#), 23 October 2019

<sup>116</sup> NHS, [The NHS Long Term Plan](#), January 2019, para. 1.40

<sup>117</sup> UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2020, commitment 2

worked with local partners in England to create a national database of local social prescribing schemes.<sup>118</sup>

- **Publishing a best practice guide to social prescribing through NHS England:** In January 2019, best practice guides were published as [Social prescribing and community-based support](#); [Universal personalised care: implementing the comprehensive model](#) and [Social prescribing link workers](#).

In March 2019, Public Health England published [Social prescribing: applying all our health](#). This guidance for health and care professionals recommends the ways in which front-line professionals and leaders can promote and adopt social prescribing practices.

Both NHS England and Public Health England collaborate with the [Social Prescribing Network](#) which provides research and evaluation, supports schemes and runs conferences:

- **Launching an online social prescribing platform for commissioners and practitioners in late 2018**  
This is currently open, and had over 1,600 members, as of January 2020.<sup>119</sup>
- **Piloting new accredited learning programmes for link workers in early 2019:** In October 2019, a level 3 certificate in social prescribing was being piloted with link workers across Northern England. One module of an online learning programme, developed by Health Education England and its partners, was also live.<sup>120</sup>
- **Creating regional social prescribing steering groups in 2018:**  
7 regional social prescribing steering groups, covering England, have been established, looking at how to “maximise the impact of social prescribing in their region.” Workshop events were held in 2018/19.<sup>121</sup>

NHS England has also published the **Common outcomes framework for social prescribing** as Appendix D of [Social prescribing and community-based report](#). This includes measurements that will be used to evaluate the impact of social subscribing, on individuals, community organisations, and the health and social care system.

In October 2019, the **National Academy for Social Prescribing** was established with £5 million of government funding. The academy will seek to standardise the quality and range of social prescribing across England, increase awareness of its benefits, develop and share best practice, train and

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<sup>118</sup> [Ibid](#), commitment 5

<sup>119</sup> Learning network, at NHS England, [Social prescribing](#), accessed 3 February 2020; UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2020, commitment 7

<sup>120</sup> PQ, 3732, [[Social prescribing: Training](#)], 30 October 2019

<sup>121</sup> UK Government, [A connected society](#), p26; [PQ, 2685, Loneliness: Social prescribing, 27 June 2019](#)

accredit practitioners, and bring together organisations working health, housing, local government, arts, culture and sport.<sup>122</sup>

DHSC, along with NHS England and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), would also, the Strategy said, **assess how organisations currently refer individuals in social prescribing schemes.**<sup>123</sup> The assessment examined the NHS, Jobcentre Plus, councils and pharmacies. It is intended that best practice will be shared in 2019/20.<sup>124</sup>

### Social prescribing beyond the NHS

Other voluntary sector organisations also run referral and connector schemes. The Loneliness Strategy noted the announcement, in July 2018, of £4.5 million of funding to 23 social prescribing projects in England,<sup>125</sup> and the social prescribing partnerships supported by the [Communities Fund](#).

Based on a Jersey-based project called ‘Call and Check’ the Government also indicated it wanted **to test a scheme in which postal workers reached out to isolated older people.** The Home Office ran the trial, called ‘Safe and Connected’, in Liverpool, Whitby and New Malden in 2018/19.<sup>126</sup> The Government in January 2020 said that the “scheme had positive results and trial partners are exploring ways to scale-up the service”.<sup>127</sup>

It is also hoped that including the new loneliness measure in a revised Public Health Outcomes Framework (see below) will better guide local Health and Wellbeing Boards to make decisions regarding social prescribing.<sup>128</sup>

Further background on social prescribing can be found in the Library briefing paper, [Social prescribing](#) (CBP 8997).

## 4.2

## Community Infrastructure

### Housing and planning

The Loneliness Strategy outlined efforts that had been made in the housing and planning system to foster better communities, including the publication of the 2018 Green Paper, [A new deal for social housing](#).<sup>129</sup> This paper referred to social landlords’ role in promoting community cohesion and supporting thriving communities:

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<sup>122</sup> DHSC, [New national academy set up](#), 23 October 2019

<sup>123</sup> UK Government, [A connected society](#), pp25-7

<sup>124</sup> UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2020, commitment 10

<sup>125</sup> DHSC, [Social prescribing schemes across England to receive £4.5 million](#), 23 July 2018

<sup>126</sup> UK Government, [A connected society](#), p27

<sup>127</sup> UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2020, commitment 11

<sup>128</sup> UK Government, [A connected society](#), p28

<sup>129</sup> [Ibid](#), p42

Many residents shared positive experiences including community activities that supported participation and community centres which acted as a hub for information and social interaction. Black, Asian and minority ethnic residents told us they particularly valued these additional services which helped to break down barriers between residents and support everyone...<sup>130</sup>

The Green Paper did not contain direct reference to loneliness, but it did reference activities, such as gardening projects, capable of tackling social isolation.<sup>131</sup> The Paper asked whether social landlords should be required to report on the social value they deliver beyond their key responsibilities.<sup>132</sup> [The Charter for Social Housing Residents: Social Housing White Paper](#) was published in November 2020. The paper has a section on tackling loneliness which observes:

Social housing residents have a similar age profile to all households but are more likely to be living alone, or to be lone parents, than those in other tenures. They may face more challenges in combating loneliness.<sup>133</sup>

The paper references the Government's Covid-19 response aimed at ensuring no one feels lonely (para 94) and actions taken by landlords to engage with vulnerable residents:

Many landlords also responded quickly to COVID-19 by setting up teams focused on communicating with and supporting their most vulnerable residents. Although the impact of COVID-19 has paused some services as landlords have focused on the immediate challenges of the pandemic, many landlords have found ways to continue engagement through a mix of virtual meetings and telephone calls. Residents too have played an important role by being open to new ways of communication to enable them to engage with their landlord and other residents. We have seen resident led initiatives spring up, offering support to other residents and helping to tackle the loneliness that some were feeling as a result of COVID-19.<sup>134</sup>

There is no reference to measuring social value in the White Paper. The Loneliness Annual Report 2021 refers to MHCLG actions to ensure social housing residents feel empowered in their local communities.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> MHCLG, [A new deal for social housing, Cm 9671, 18 August 2018, para 127](#)

<sup>131</sup> [Ibid](#), para 116

<sup>132</sup> [Ibid](#), para 129

<sup>133</sup> MHCLG, [The Charter for Social Housing Residents: Social Housing White Paper](#), November 2020, para 93

<sup>134</sup> [Ibid](#), para 95

<sup>135</sup> UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2021, commitment 34



The Loneliness Strategy included several commitments on housing, tenancies, and planning, these are summarised below.

- **Consulting on longer tenancies** which could increase the “length of time lived in a neighbourhood and the sense of belonging to it”.<sup>136</sup> Consultation on [Overcoming the barriers to longer tenancies in the private sector](#) concluded in 2018; the Government response was published in April 2019. A Renter’s Reform Bill was announced in the December 2019 Queen’s Speech to improve security for tenants and abolish “no fault” evictions.<sup>137</sup> The Bill has not been introduced. The background briefing on the 2021 Queen’s Speech said a response to the consultation on reforming private sector tenancy law would be published later in the year.<sup>138</sup>
- **Diversifying the housing market**, including growing the build-to-rent sector, where landlords build and operate dedicated private rental blocks.<sup>139</sup> In November 2019, the Government said:

We have supported the Build to Rent sector to deliver over 30,000 homes across the UK since 2012, with over 110,000 further such homes in the pipeline. The Build to Rent Fund provided over £630 million of development finance for the supply of 6,000 new privately rented homes. The Fund closed to new applications in 2015. The £3.5 billion Private Rented Sector Guarantee scheme finances new build rented properties, and as of October 2019, £1.75 billion in total has been approved for 9,050 homes.<sup>140</sup>

- **Research into community-led housing and co-housing**<sup>141</sup> - In the 2020 Report on Loneliness, the Government said MHCLG had allocated £125,000 for research into housing solutions to tackle loneliness.<sup>142</sup> This included a research pilot to assess the value for money and impact of housing interventions on loneliness; understand the impact of community-led housing and co-housing on reducing loneliness across all ages; and explore best practice in housing schemes that promote social cohesion. The final report has been delayed by Covid-19 but is expected in 2021.<sup>143</sup>
- **Promote the role of design quality and community cohesion in tackling loneliness** - The MHCLG is working with Homes England and NHS England on ways to embed health and wellbeing into planning and

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<sup>136</sup> UK Government, [A connected society](#), p42

<sup>137</sup> UK Government, [The Queen’s speech 2019](#), December 2019, p46

<sup>138</sup> [Queen’s Speech 2021 background briefing](#), May 2021

<sup>139</sup> UK Government, [A connected society](#), p42

<sup>140</sup> [MHCLG Update, HCWS101, 5 November 2019](#)

<sup>141</sup> UK Government, [A connected society](#), p11

<sup>142</sup> PQ, 3661, [[Loneliness](#)], 30 October 2019

<sup>143</sup> UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2021, commitment 33

housing design. Bids for garden communities were assessed using design criteria which included creating ‘healthy places’.<sup>144</sup> Additionally, the NHS Long Term plan cites the [Healthy New Towns Programme](#), active since 2015, through which NHS England seeks to shape how communities plan and design a healthy environment. In 2019/20, NHS England will build on this by working with Government to develop the Healthy New Towns Standard.<sup>145</sup>

- **Running industry events to share evidence** - In February and June 2019, MHCLG conferences highlighted and showcased good-practice design to encouragement engagement with communities.<sup>146</sup> It was hoped that this would support the revised [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (issued February 2019).

### Box 4: Housing, older people & planning guidance

In May 2019, the Government was questioned on the provision of accessible housing for older people. The Government responded that the White Paper, [Fixing our broken housing market](#), underlined their “commitment to do more to provide the homes we need for all in our society, including for older and disabled people.” This included examining the barriers to older people who might benefit from moving and exploring ways to “stimulate the market to deliver new homes for older people.”<sup>147</sup>

The Government emphasised the revised [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (February 2019), which “expressly requires local plans to include a detailed needs assessment for housing our older and disabled populations.”<sup>148</sup>

New guidance, [Housing for older and disabled people](#), was issued in June 2019, stating that “plan-making authorities should set clear policies to address the housing needs of groups with particular needs such as older and disabled people” and implement minimum requirements for accessible housing.

The revised [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (2019) also states that “planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places that ... promote social interaction”.<sup>149</sup>

The associated [Planning practice guidance on design](#) and [National design guide](#) (2019) observe that good public spaces “have widespread appeal, are

<sup>144</sup> [Ibid, commitment 35: MHCLG, £3.7 million to fund 5 new garden towns across the country, 25 March 2019; PQ 270355, Garden communities, 27 June 2019](#)

<sup>145</sup> NHS England, [NHS Long Term Plan](#), January 2019, Appendix: Health and the environment, paras 16-17

<sup>146</sup> UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2020, [commitment 34](#)

<sup>147</sup> PQ 251314, [[Housing: Older people](#)], 15 May 2019

<sup>148</sup> [Ibid](#)

<sup>149</sup> MHCLG, [National Planning Policy Framework](#), February 2019, p27

able to accommodate people with different needs and can help combat social isolation and loneliness” and good design uses “local resources such as schools, nurseries, community facilities, parks, other open spaces, health, and religious or cultural facilities in layouts to promote social interaction and integration, and help combat loneliness”.<sup>150</sup>

## Community spaces

The Loneliness Strategy highlighted the role of community infrastructure in tackling isolation and preventing loneliness. The Strategy sought to work through DCMS, DfE, DfT, DWP, BEIS and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to unlock access to community spaces:<sup>151</sup>

- **Community hubs** - The DCMS allocated £1.8 million to community spaces projects. This was done through an initial £1 million to support 112 short-term projects to tackle youth loneliness through co-design, and £1.6 million helped improve community spaces for all groups through the [Space to Connect Fund](#), which was funded jointly with the Co-op.<sup>152</sup> Applications for funding are closed. As of October 2019, 57 community organisations across England had received a proportion of £900,000.<sup>153</sup>
- **Schools as community spaces** - In June 2018, the DfE published [Standards for school premises](#). This is separate 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. Data is also being collected on how many schools are already used as community spaces.<sup>154</sup> The [Governance handbook](#) (2019) states that schools may accommodate community services, and can charge for their provision.<sup>155</sup>
- **Underused railway property** - The DfT, through its [Community rail strategy](#), intends to help support community groups make use of unused or underused community property. As of January 2020, the DfT was running training sessions on volunteering and social inclusion.<sup>156</sup>
- **Jobcentres to encourage connections** - As of January 2020, local initiatives were ongoing to bring together claimants from different backgrounds to build social connections.<sup>157</sup>

<sup>150</sup> MHCLG, [National design guide](#), October 2019, pp32, 36

<sup>151</sup> UK Government, [A connected society](#), p36

<sup>152</sup> UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2020, [commitment 22](#)

<sup>153</sup> PQ 314, [[Sustainable Development](#)], 14 October 2019

<sup>154</sup> UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2020, [commitments 23 and 24](#)

<sup>155</sup> DfE, [Governance handbook](#), March 2019, paras 268, 269, 272, 273

<sup>156</sup> UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2020, [commitment 25: PQ, 277714, Loneliness, 22 July 2019](#)

<sup>157</sup> UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2020, [commitment 26](#).

- **Exploring how businesses can provide community spaces outside of business hours** - Working with the Campaign to End Loneliness, British Red Cross, the Association of Convenience Stores and others, BEIS was to explore how to provide community space out of business hours or engage with the wider community in other ways. Participating organisations were expected to be announced in 2020.<sup>158</sup>
- **Loneliness in rural areas** - Working through the Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) network, a network of 38 councils in England, DEFRA spent £1.2 million on 21 projects as part of the [£3 million Village Halls Improvement Grants Scheme](#), launched in April 2019.<sup>159</sup> The [scheme](#) is currently closed to new applicants. DEFRA also held roundtables with the ACRE network, Church of England, the National Farmers Union and the Farming Community Network to address loneliness in rural areas.<sup>160</sup>

These schemes are in addition to the Government's [25 Year Environment Plan](#) (2018) that seeks to use green spaces as a "powerful tool for combatting isolation and loneliness" and would launch a three-year "Natural Environment for Health and Wellbeing" programme.<sup>161</sup> The [Integrated communities action plan](#) (2019) also included commitments on creating shared community spaces, with the [Open Doors Projects](#) piloting the bringing of empty units into local community use. The related programme, Keep it in the Community, which supports local authorities and community groups to track usage of local assets like pubs and parks, was launched as an online platform.<sup>162</sup>

## Transport Infrastructure

The Government's Loneliness Strategy outlined commitments to ensure that the transport network is rendered "inclusive and accessible, in particular for older and disabled people":<sup>163</sup>

- **Provide funding to the Community Transport Association (CTA) for training** - This was to enable the existing Community Transport specific training to be recognised as part of the qualifications for professional coach and bus drivers. As of January 2020, the DfT had funded the CTA to enable existing minibus driver awareness scheme training to be recognised as part of the qualifications for professional bus and coach drivers.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> [Ibid, commitment 27](#)

<sup>159</sup> DEFRA, [Village Halls boosted by £1.2 million to rejuvenate community hubs](#), 20 January 2020

<sup>160</sup> UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2020, [commitments 28 and 29](#)

<sup>161</sup> UK Government, [A green future: Our 25 year plan to improve the environment, 2018](#), p72

<sup>162</sup> PQ 315, [\[Community Assets\]](#), 14 October 2019

<sup>163</sup> UK Government, [A connected society](#), pp40, 41

<sup>164</sup> UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2020, [commitment 30](#); PQ 277715, [\[Loneliness\]](#), 22 July 2019

- **Partner with transport providers to develop ideas on how transport can be used to tackle loneliness** - In February 2019 the DfT announced they would work with the campaign group Greener Journeys and four bus companies to explore how buses can be used to address loneliness.<sup>165</sup> The DfT said “bus companies have been trialling a range of initiatives over this year [2019] to support social interactions”.<sup>166</sup> The [2019 ‘Catch the Bus’](#) week focused on loneliness, and a number of train and bus companies across the UK participated in schemes to encourage passengers to engage with one another, for example the ‘chatty bus’.<sup>167</sup>
- **To address disparities in access to travel through the Future of Urban Mobility Strategy** - The DfT published this [strategy](#) in March 2019, noting that “a move to connected, automated and zero emission mobility” has the potential for “widening access to mobility for disabled people and older people” and that “the benefits of innovation in mobility must be available to all parts of the UK and all segments of society”.<sup>168</sup>
- **Mobility centre pilots** - Mobility centres are hubs where disabled and elderly people can attend to gain professional information and assessment so they can gain or retain independence through driving. In May 2019, the Government provided £250,000 to enable 7 of the 13 Mobility Centres in England to trial an expansion of their services to disabled people who do not or can no longer drive, and need to access public transport.<sup>169</sup> Centre staff were trained to identify signs of loneliness. The pilot sites are listed on the [Driving mobility website](#).

Related programmes include the [Community rail strategy for England and Wales](#) (2018) and the [Inclusive transport strategy](#) (2018). On the former, **Community rail** lines are supported by a local partnership organisation with an aim to engage local people in the development and promotion of the routes, services and stations. The premise behind the Community Rail strategy, running until 2028, is to provide support for community groups by applying unused and underused railway property into spaces dedicated to social activities. The [Association of Community Rail Partnerships](#) (ACoRP) supports many of the rail partnerships.<sup>170</sup>

As of October 2019, 34 community rail partnerships had applied for accreditation status with the DfT or Welsh Government.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>165</sup> DfT, [Buses that build a better society](#), 6 February 2019; [£48 million funding to drive down bus emissions across the UK](#), 6 February 2019.

<sup>166</sup> UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report: January 2020, commitment 31](#)

<sup>167</sup> BBC News, [‘Crossing divides: Can a “chatty bus” combat loneliness?’](#), 14 June 2019

<sup>168</sup> DfT, [Future of mobility: Urban strategy](#), March 2019, pp8, 15

<sup>169</sup> PQ 27716, [[Loneliness](#)], 16 July 2019

<sup>170</sup> See Railway Technology, [Connecting communities: The role of rail in tackling loneliness](#), 10 January 2019, and ACoRP, [Community rail & social inclusion](#), 2018

<sup>171</sup> DfT, [Community rail partnerships and accreditation status](#), 31 October 2019

On the [Inclusive transport strategy](#), in July 2019 the Government said that £300 million would be available to deliver accessibility improvements at 73 railway stations between 2019 and 2024, £2 million to develop fully accessible changing place facilities at motorway services stations, and the Blue Badge eligibility criteria would be widened.<sup>172</sup>

The Government announced in February 2020 that £5 billion would be made available to “level up” transport connections over the next 5 years, £20 million [to encourage the development and trial of on-demand ride sharing services](#) in rural and suburban areas, and confirmed £30 million funding in 2020/21 for local authorities to help them improve current bus services or restore those lost. The Government’s national bus strategy for England was published in March 2021<sup>173</sup> alongside “funding for 17 successful proposals under the [rural mobility fund](#) to trial on-demand bus services in their areas.”

## Digital inclusion

The Loneliness Strategy also sought to address digital inclusion. Government initiatives to address digital inclusion include the £400,000 [Digital Inclusion Fund](#), the [Future Digital Inclusion programme](#), which had supported over 1.4 million adult learners to engage with digital technology since 2014, and a £2.6 million [fund](#) to help 99% of libraries in England offer free Wi-Fi to users.<sup>174</sup> The UK Government also invested £1 million in the Nesta Tech to Connect Challenge Prize to encourage the design of solutions to tackle social isolation.<sup>175</sup> The Government’s broader approach to supporting digital inclusion, through building digital skills, is set out in the 2017 Digital Strategy (in Section 2, “digital capability for all”).<sup>176</sup>

In the Loneliness Strategy, the UK Government said it would build on these schemes by featuring loneliness in the criteria for bidding for DCMS’s Inclusion Innovation Fund (£400,000 total).<sup>177</sup> Funding was awarded in January 2019 to three projects aiming to use digital technology to tackle loneliness. These projects were for the development of smart homes, where older homeowners become trained in digital skills; an app to allow people with Down’s Syndrome to monitor their weight and exercise levels; and the development of technologies for end of life and palliative care patients to report on their health and support their families.<sup>178</sup>

The Government’s [Loneliness Annual Report January 2021](#) reported on progress with these three projects:

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<sup>172</sup> DfT, [Inclusive transport strategy- one year on](#), 8 July 2019

<sup>173</sup> DfT, [Bus Back Better](#), 15 March 2021

<sup>174</sup> [PQ 9101](#) [on Technology: Older People], 3 February 2020

<sup>175</sup> [HC Deb, 4 July 2019, c1331](#)

<sup>176</sup> Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, [UK Digital Strategy](#), 1 March 2017

<sup>177</sup> HM Government, [A connected society A strategy for tackling loneliness](#), October 2018, p44

<sup>178</sup> [Press release: ‘Smart homes’ to help older and disabled people get digital skills and tackle loneliness in rural areas](#), Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, 6 January 2019

By March 2020 the project had eight operational Living Smart Homes set up, 1094 learners engaged and 64 digital buddies onboarded. The Down's Syndrome Association designed an app to promote good health and wellbeing, with 1273 downloads and the Weldmar Hospice also developed an app to support end of life care patients who are living in their own homes or care homes.<sup>179</sup>

A “full independent evaluation” of the Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund is due to be published by the Government “to share learnings”.<sup>180</sup>

The development of the ‘Tackling Loneliness Network’ – formed by Government to help connect groups at risk of isolation – was also highlighted in the [Loneliness Annual Report January 2021. Launched in April 2020](#) by the Culture Secretary, Oliver Dowden, the Network comprises over 70 organisations drawn from businesses, charities and public sector. The Network is working on four priority areas:

1. Youth loneliness
2. Loneliness in older people
3. Local and place-based approaches
4. Digital inclusion.<sup>181</sup>

In May 2021, the Tackling Loneliness Network published its [Action Plan](#). The four themes listed above became four 'task and finish' groups. The group specifically convened to examine digital inclusion made four recommendations / commitments:

1. Funding should be provided to help purchase technology for individuals in need, as technology can have a significant positive impact on people's wellbeing.
2. The Digital Inclusion task and finish group will host a workshop, facilitated by Red Badger, to identify a pathway to scaling a third sector and business collaboration pilot model to improve access to devices, data and help desk support. Led by Social Mobility Business Partnership (SMBP), Meggitt and Vodafone the pilot model involved Meggitt using its existing relationship with Vodafone to provide 4G enabled tablets (protected by MobileIron) and first line help desk support to students from low income backgrounds attending the SMBP 2020 virtual work experience programme.

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<sup>179</sup> Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, [Policy paper: Loneliness Annual Report January 2021](#), 22 January 2021

<sup>180</sup> [PQ HL11509](#) [on Digital Technology: Training], 23 December 2020

<sup>181</sup> Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, [Policy paper: Loneliness Annual Report January 2021](#), 22 January 2021

3. Provide support when delivering free devices, based on an assessment of individual needs, so that devices have maximum benefit for recipients and outputs can be measured. This could include training for staff and those receiving devices, or an impacts needs assessment.
4. There should be a means tested access to a minimum standard of broadband.<sup>182</sup>

## Arts, libraries, and volunteering

The Loneliness Strategy outlined initiatives aimed at increasing opportunities for people to volunteer or take part in local activities:

- **Encouraging older and “hard to reach” people to take part in voluntary and community activity** - The DCMS partnered with the [Centre for Ageing Better](#) on the [Age-Friendly and Inclusive Volunteering Fund](#). This aimed to stimulate and test approaches to age-friendly, inclusive volunteering to widen participation and sustain contributions as life circumstances change.<sup>183</sup> Ageing Better developed a [practical guide](#) to re-engage and widen participation among people over 50, during and beyond the pandemic.<sup>184</sup>
- **Cultural programmes as part of social prescribing** - The [National Academy for Social Prescribing](#) would increase the number of people able to access social prescribing and the range and availability of activities. In January 2020, the DCMS was working with DHSC to ensure that the arts, museum and library sectors could collaborate with the health sector as plans developed.<sup>185</sup> In January 2020, Arts Council England published its [Strategy for 2020-30](#). This noted that involvement “in creative activities in communities reduces loneliness, supports physical and mental health and wellbeing, sustains older people and helps to build and strengthen social ties”.<sup>186</sup> A [Thriving Communities programme](#), facilitated by the National Academy for Social Prescribing, would support local voluntary sector groups to increase community activities to reduce loneliness. The programme involves Arts Council England, Natural England, Sport England, NHS England, NHS Charities Together and the Money and Pensions Service.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport, [Emerging Together: the Tackling Loneliness Network Action Plan](#), 8 May 2021

<sup>183</sup> UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2021, commitment 45

<sup>184</sup> [Ibid](#)

<sup>185</sup> [UK Government, Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2020, commitment 47

<sup>186</sup> Arts Council England, [Strategy 2020-2030: Let's create](#), January 2020, p33

<sup>187</sup> UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2021, commitment 47



- **Libraries** - “Masterclasses” on measuring the impact of library services in reducing loneliness were held in libraries across England in August 2018 and March 2019. In January 2020, the Government said these had “led to a number of library services deciding to take these ideas away and adapt them locally”. Libraries Week 2018 included loneliness as part of its theme.<sup>188</sup> The Arts Council’s 10-year strategy noted the role of libraries in improving mental wellbeing, including tackling loneliness.<sup>189</sup> The Library’s briefing paper [Public libraries](#) gives further information.

## 4.3

### Targeted support

#### Younger people/students

The Loneliness Strategy noted that younger people aged 16 to 24 were at particular risk of loneliness, in part because of the many transitions in environment that young people experience, and due to experiences of bullying and changes in family and work circumstances.<sup>190</sup>

On Youth Loneliness, the Strategy outlined new objectives:

- **National apprenticeship scheme for young people with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND)** - The DfE worked with the National Apprenticeship Service to encourage employers to offer work placement and apprenticeships for young people with SEND.<sup>191</sup> In October 2019 the Government set out targets and progress on the scheme:

We are aiming to increase the proportion of apprenticeships started by people with a learning disability or learning difficulty (LDD) to 20% by 2020. During the first 3 quarters of 2018/19, 12.3% of starts were by apprentices who identified as having LDD, up from 11.5% reported at the same time last year.

Traineeships support young people identified as having LDD to gain work experience through work placements. In 2017/18, 21% of starts were by young people who identified as having LDD.

To support employers to offer opportunities to people with LDD, the department is funding a range of resources for employers on work experience, traineeships, apprenticeships and employment for those

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<sup>188</sup> UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2020, commitments 50 & 51

<sup>189</sup> UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2021, commitment 48

<sup>190</sup> UK Government, [A connected society](#), p57

<sup>191</sup> UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2020, [commitment 39](#)

with LDD. We are also funding the Learning and Work Institute to create an employer toolkit on widening participation.

We are also continuing to work with Mencap to take forward the recommendations from their July report to make apprenticeships more accessible.<sup>192</sup>

- **Loneliness in relationships and sex education** - Commitment 43 of the Loneliness Strategy said the DfE would publish statutory guidance for relationships education (primary), Relationships and sex education (RSE) (secondary) and health education (all phases).<sup>193</sup> Section 34 of the [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#) provides for relationships and sex education to be taught in all schools in England. In July 2018 the Government announced the introduction of statutory health education alongside statutory RSE.<sup>194</sup> [Statutory guidance on the RSE and Health Education](#) was published in June 2019. Loneliness is dealt with in the guidance under the requirements to educate children about mental wellbeing issues. The guidance sets out that primary children should learn about how “isolation and loneliness can affect children and that it is very important for children to discuss their feelings with an adult and seek support.”<sup>195</sup> The new requirements came into force from September 2020, although schools have leeway not to begin teaching until summer 2021 if they choose, owing to the coronavirus pandemic.
- **Better guidance on work placements for employers and education providers to support young people with SEND** - New [guidance](#) has been published.<sup>196</sup> The Government has also funded Mencap to help colleges arrange work experience placements for learners with SEND.<sup>197</sup>
- **Researching uniformed youth groups** - The Government in 2018 committed £5 million to a Uniformed Youth Fund to engage disadvantaged young people in areas of deprivation to improve outcomes in wellbeing, mental health and life skills. 5,500 places for disadvantaged and underrepresented young people were to be created.<sup>198</sup> In July 2019, the Government said that the uniformed youth fund had supported the Sea Cadets, Boys Brigade and Girlguiding, to expand opportunities, creating 10,000 new places as a result.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> PQ 3751, [[Special educational needs: Apprentices](#)], 28 October 2019

<sup>193</sup> UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2020, [commitment 43](#)

<sup>194</sup> DfE, [New relationships and health education in schools](#), 19 July 2018

<sup>195</sup> DfE, [Relationships education, relationships and sex education \(RSE\) and health education](#), February 2019, p33

<sup>196</sup> UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2020, [commitment 40](#)

<sup>197</sup> PQ 6071, [[Special educational needs and disability](#)], 27 January 2020

<sup>198</sup> UK Government, [A connected society](#), p53; DCMS, [Government invests £5m to increase places for disadvantaged children in youth organisations](#), 10 September 2018

<sup>199</sup> [HC Deb, Youth Services, 24 July 2019, vol 663, c 1371](#)

£100,000 was also spent on investigating how to address youth loneliness through uniformed youth groups and found that such activities improved inter-generational relationships.<sup>200</sup>

- **Support for those starting higher education courses** - The DfE launched the Education Transitions Network in March 2019. This followed work to identify areas of risk that can affect the mental health of people going to university, including independent living, learning, relationships, and wellbeing.<sup>201</sup> As of January 2020, the group was comprised of 20 organisations, who were developing a “what works” approach to tackling loneliness and risks to wellbeing.<sup>202</sup>

The [University Mental Health Charter](#), a voluntary award and improvement scheme, was also launched in December 2019.

A publication on the Wonkhe website discusses loneliness among students during the pandemic, [How to tackle student loneliness](#), 17 February 2021.

The Strategy outlined related steps that the Government was taking to tackle loneliness through pre-existing programmes:<sup>203</sup>

- Support families with multiple needs via the **Troubled Families Programme (TFP)** (see the Library’s [Briefing on the TFP](#)).
- Set up a cross-government ministerial group to “**recommend ways to improve family support during early years** (0 to 2), which are particularly crucial years for preventing loneliness amongst new parents”.<sup>204</sup> On its creation, the Group was led by Andrea Leadsom, the then-Leader of the House, and included 6 other ministers.<sup>205</sup> Although she later resigned, the group’s recommendations were submitted to Secretaries of State by July 2019,<sup>206</sup> [debated in the House](#), and in January 2020 the Government confirmed it would “take into account the work... [of the group] as the government moves forward with this agenda”.<sup>207</sup> The Government announced in June 2020 a review into early years health, focusing on the first 1,000 days in childhood.<sup>208</sup>
- DfE to support **anti-bullying organisations in schools** (see the Library briefing [Bullying in UK Schools](#)).

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<sup>200</sup> UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2020, [commitment 53](#)

<sup>201</sup> DfE, [Government creates new student mental health taskforce](#), 7 March 2019

<sup>202</sup> UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2020, [commitment 44](#)

<sup>203</sup> UK Government, [A connected society](#), pp57-8

<sup>204</sup> [Ibid](#), p57; PQ 196820, [[Children and young people](#)], 3 December 2018 and PQ 220330 [[Early years ministerial group on family support](#)], 18 February 2019

<sup>205</sup> PQ 220328, [[Early years ministerial group on family support](#)], 18 February 2019

<sup>206</sup> PQ 274531, [[Early years ministerial group on family support](#)], 8 July 2019

<sup>207</sup> PQ 26, [[Early years ministerial group on family support](#)], 7 January 2020

<sup>208</sup> DHSC, [New focus on babies’ and children’s health as review launches](#), 15 July 2020

- Build on work on **Lord Farmers 2017 review** on [The importance of strengthening prisoners' family ties](#). The review sought to examine ways to help offenders strengthen their relationships with friends and family. A new review on how to strengthen family ties for women serving sentences was published in 2019 as [The importance of strengthening female offenders' family](#). In August 2020, the Government said implementation of the Farmer review into female family ties was ongoing.<sup>209</sup>
- **To work alongside young people to develop solutions** by setting up a National Young Commissioners and Inspectors Group to involve young people directly in services affecting them.<sup>210</sup>
- The Government invested £1 million in the [Centre for Youth Impact](#). The centre supports organisations evaluate their work.<sup>211</sup>

## Armed forces community

The Library's [Support for UK Veterans paper](#) provides further information.

The Government's [Veteran's strategy](#) was published in November 2018. In its discussions of "community and relationships", the strategy noted that loneliness and social isolation are reportedly part of many veterans' experiences. By 2028, the key outcome for this theme is that veterans will be able to "build healthy relationships and integrate into their communities."

In November 2018, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) published the [Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2018](#). Within it, the MOD highlighted a report from the Royal British Legion: [Loneliness and social isolation in the armed forces community](#) (2018) and said it had met the Legion to discuss how to translate the research findings into practical, tangible interventions.<sup>210F</sup><sup>212</sup> In its report, the Legion recommended better data-gathering and research on the prevalence and causes of loneliness in the armed forces.

Questions about spousal loneliness were added to the Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitudes Survey in 2019 and 2020. The reports found similar levels; with 17% of Service spouses reported feeling lonely often/always and 61% feeling lonely occasionally/sometimes.<sup>212F</sup><sup>213</sup>

However, despite being recommended in the [2019 Covenant Annual Report](#), no such question was asked in the annual survey of regular personnel (AFCAS). The British Legion, whilst welcoming the inclusion of questions on loneliness in FAMCAS, said in its observations on the [2020 Annual Report](#) that

<sup>209</sup> PQ HL7520, [[Offenders: Females](#)], 29 July 2020

<sup>210</sup> UK Government, [A connected society](#), p57; PQ 247068, [[Young people: Public participation](#)], 3 May 2019

<sup>211</sup> DCMS and OCS, [PEOPLE: enabling a lifetime of contribution](#), 9 August 2018, Mission 3: Opportunities for young people.

<sup>212</sup> PQ 257478, [[Armed forces: Loneliness](#)], 22 May 2019

<sup>213</sup> [Tri-service families continuous attitudes survey 2019](#), July 2019, p10; [Tri-service families continuous attitudes survey 2020](#), July 2020, p11

it would like comparable data captured in the other Continuous Attitudes Surveys.

Loneliness and social isolation amongst armed forces families was also highlighted in a review commissioned by the MOD. The [Living in our Shoes](#) review, published in June 2020, observed “one of the pernicious aspects of Service life can be the loneliness felt by the non-serving partner when the serving partner is away from home.”<sup>214</sup> Loneliness among service children was also highlighted as a concern. The MOD accepted the recommendation for the chain of command and welfare staff be more pro-active in reaching out to families and be more aware of factors which increase loneliness and social isolation.

The Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Families Association (SSAFA) was given a grant of £500,000 through the Loneliness Covid-19 Fund to support veterans and their families experiencing loneliness throughout the UK.<sup>214F</sup><sup>215</sup> SSAFA said in February 2021 that it had received a total of £950,000 from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport “[to help combat loneliness and isolation amongst veterans and their families.](#)”

In 2020 and 2021 the Armed Forces Covenant Fund awarded grants of up to £70,000 to 67 projects as part of the “[tackling loneliness](#)” and “tackling social isolation” programmes, amounting to just over [£5 million in total](#).

## Non-English speakers

Language barriers may be a factor in causing loneliness. The [Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper](#) (2018) set out that the Government would support language courses. In February 2019, the MHCLG announced funding for 19,000 learner places to help improve proficiency in English.<sup>216</sup> To aid the integration of refugees, the Home Office and DfE committed £10 million from 2016 to 2020 to enable refugees resettled through the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme to access additional classes.<sup>217</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> MOD, “Living in our shoes understanding the needs of UK Armed Forces families”, June 2020

<sup>215</sup> [HL 9895](#), 12 November 2020

<sup>216</sup> MHCLG, [Thousands to benefit from new English language programmes](#), 28 February 2019

<sup>217</sup> PQ HL 82, [[English language: Education](#)], 15 October 2019

## Carers

The Campaign to End Loneliness has published a briefing paper on [The Care Act 2014 and Loneliness](#).

The Library provides more information in its [Carers](#) briefing paper.

The [Carers action plan 2018 to 2020](#) commits the Government to working with local government to help carers “balance their caring responsibilities with their own employment and to preserve their personal health and wellbeing” and to implementing duties relating to carers in the [Care Act 2014](#).<sup>218</sup>

The Carers action plan said the DSHC would launch a £5 million Carer Innovations Fund to develop support for unpaid carers.<sup>219</sup> Organisations intending to use technology or support groups to help reduce isolation were encouraged to apply.<sup>220</sup> However, in July 2020 the fund was suspended. It was reported that the Government intended to use the fund to support carers via other means.<sup>221</sup>

In June 2020, Carers Trust announced it had been awarded £500,000 from the Government’s Loneliness Covid-19 Grant Fund to support unpaid carers.<sup>222</sup>

The Loneliness Strategy included commitments aimed at tackling loneliness through sport and physical activity for people over 55. The Loneliness Annual Report January 2020 said that, as part of this, Sport England had partnered with Carers UK to “better understand the needs, attitudes, motivations and barriers faced by lonely, unpaid carers around being active.” It added that “£100,000 of funding will help them better understand how to use sport and physical activity to tackle loneliness.”<sup>223</sup> The Loneliness Annual Report January 2021 said Carers UK was now undertaking “a small pilot to help carers be more active.” It added that a physical activity online hub had been developed to “educate and inspire carers to be more active.”<sup>224</sup>

On people in care, the [Care Act statutory guidance](#) says that universal social care services may include interventions and advice that “reduce loneliness or isolation”. In addition, when local authorities seek to purchase social care services through “outcomes-based commissioning”, the guidance notes that this should “emphasise...ways of reducing loneliness and social isolation”.<sup>225</sup>

## Young people leaving care

Specific commitments in the Loneliness Strategy included:

**Support for care leavers** - The [Care leaver strategy](#) set out how local and central government would work together to improve care leavers’

<sup>218</sup> DSHC, [Carers action plan 2018-2020](#), June 2018, p5

<sup>219</sup> DHSC, [Carers Action Plan 2018-2020: Supporting carers today](#), June 2018.

<sup>220</sup> DHSC, [£5 million fund to develop support for unpaid carers](#), June 2019

<sup>221</sup> Carers UK, [Carers Innovation Fund suspended](#), 10 July 2020

<sup>222</sup> Carers Trust, [Carers Trust awarded £500,000 to tackle loneliness among unpaid carers](#), 18 June 2020; DCMS, [£5 million Loneliness Covid-19 Grant Fund](#), 28 May 2020.

<sup>223</sup> UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2020, [commitment 46](#)

<sup>224</sup> UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2021, [commitment 46](#)

<sup>225</sup> DHSC, [Care and support statutory guidance](#), October 2018, paras 2.6 and 4.16

outcomes. In October 2019, the DfE announced a further £19 million of funding in 2020/21. This would be spent on:

- £10 million to expand ‘Staying Put’, a programme under which young people in foster care can choose to remain with their foster carers until they are 21.<sup>226</sup>
- £6 million to roll out ‘Staying Close’, which supports young people leaving residential care. Pilots have been undertaken in eight sites since 2018. The Government intended to continue the pilots in 2020-21 and begin national roll out.<sup>227</sup>
- £3 million to improve support for care leavers in further education.

The DfE also announced plans to establish a cross-Government Ministerial Board to consider what can be done to further improve support for carer leavers, and a target to secure 1,000 public sector internships for care leavers by 2022.<sup>228</sup>

- **Extending personal advisor support to all care leavers to age 25** - This duty was introduced in the [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#). Statutory guidance was published in February 2018 which said its purpose was to ensure that care leavers “develop a positive social network”.<sup>229</sup>
- **Providing £5 million to test social impact bonds to deliver three payment by results contracts** - These funds were to be spent for programmes aiming to support young care leavers who are not in education, employment or training or at risk of being in this position.<sup>230</sup> The schemes were to operate in Sheffield, Lewisham and Bristol.<sup>231</sup>
- **£6 million funding for two innovation programme projects for care leavers** - These two projects were 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.<sup>232</sup>

The Loneliness Annual Report January 2021 said the Government had established a cross-government ministerial board to focus on improving support for care leavers. It also commented on support provided during the Covid-19 pandemic:

To directly combat loneliness and keep care leavers connected during COVID-19, care leavers were made a priority group for the

<sup>226</sup> HL Deb, [Children in public care: Unregistered accommodation](#), 4 November 2019, vol 800, cc1094-5

<sup>227</sup> [PQ 81846 \[Care Leavers\]](#), 13 November 2020

<sup>228</sup> UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report January 2020, commitment 52](#)

<sup>229</sup> DfE, [Extending personal adviser support to all care leavers to age 25: Statutory guidance for local authorities](#), February 2018, p6

<sup>230</sup> UK Government, [A connected society](#), p58

<sup>231</sup> DfE, [New schemes to help care leavers access education and employment](#), 28 January 2019

<sup>232</sup> UK Government, [A connected society](#), p58; DfE, [Derby City Council Local Area Coordination](#); Family Rights Group, [Lifelong links](#)

£100 million government investment in the distribution of laptops and routers to disadvantaged young people. 148,000 of these devices have already been provided specifically to children with a social worker and to care leavers. The government has also given £150,000 to three care leaver charities - Become, Drive Forward and the Care Leavers Association - to enable them to provide additional support to the young people they have been supporting, with a focus on outreach.<sup>233</sup>

## Disabled people and those with a long-term health condition

In the Loneliness Strategy 2020, the Government noted that it had introduced a range of initiatives to help reduce loneliness for disabled people and those with health conditions.<sup>234</sup> These included:

- **Improving lives: The future of work and disability** - This [programme](#) sets out the Government's aim to improve employment and volunteering opportunities for disabled people from 2017 to 2027. The Loneliness strategy said the Government would encourage employers to offer work placements and apprenticeships to young people with special educational needs or disabilities.<sup>235</sup> The Government aimed to increase the proportion of apprenticeships started by people with a learning disability or learning difficulty (LDD) to 20% by 2020. During the first 3 quarters of 2018/19, 12.3% of starts were by apprentices who identified as having LDD.<sup>236</sup>
- **Guidance for social workers to support people at risk of loneliness** - In February 2020, the DHSC published [evidence](#) on the role of social workers in preventing and reducing loneliness and isolation. This is intended to help inform resources to support practice within the sector.<sup>237</sup>

The Government's [second Annual Report on loneliness](#) (2021) also cites the digital inclusion fund and mobility centre pilots as programmes to reduce loneliness amongst disabled persons.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> DCMS, [Loneliness Annual Report January 2021](#), January 2021, commitment 52.

<sup>234</sup> UK Government, [A connected society](#), p30

<sup>235</sup> [Ibid](#), p31

<sup>236</sup> PQ 3751, [[Special educational needs: Apprentices](#)], 22 October 2019

<sup>237</sup> DHSC, [Evidence scope: Loneliness and social work](#), 4 February 2020, p3

<sup>238</sup> DCMS, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), 22 January 2021, commitments 14, 36



## 4.4

## Tackling the stigma of loneliness

The Government Loneliness Strategy 2020 said:

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.<sup>239</sup>

The strategy said several campaigns and programmes would run to reduce the stigma related to loneliness:

- **Build a national conversation to raise awareness and reduce the stigma surrounding loneliness** - The Government ran the [“Let’s talk loneliness”](#) campaign in June 2019 and [refreshed guidance during the pandemic in 2020](#). Resources were published on the [campaign website](#). In January 2020, the Government said the material had been shared with over 300 organisations.<sup>240</sup>
- **Mental Health Campaign** - Public Health England began the [“Every mind matters”](#) campaign in October 2019, and delivered 800,000 tailored mental health action plans to January 2020.<sup>241</sup> The campaign continued during the coronavirus pandemic. A total of 2.6 million “Mind Plans” have been created since October 2020.<sup>242</sup>
- **Employer Pledges** - The Employer Leadership Group was established in November 2018. It has been superseded by the Tackling Loneliness Network. This cross-sector group published [Emerging Together: The Tackling Loneliness Network Action Plan](#) in May 2021. At the time of the pledge’s retirement in June 2020, it had been signed by 1,500 organisations employing 4 million people across England.<sup>243</sup> More information can be found on the [Employer pledge website](#).

## 4.5

## Information sharing, evaluation, measurement

## Information Sharing

Under the Loneliness Strategy, the DWP was to enhance its [‘Tell us once’](#) initiative by integrating advice for those at risk of experiencing loneliness. This service allows people to report a death once rather than multiple times.

<sup>239</sup> UK Government, [A connected society](#), p47

<sup>240</sup> UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2020, [commitment 41](#)

<sup>241</sup> [Ibid](#), [commitment 42](#)

<sup>242</sup> Public Health England, [New every mind matters campaign](#), 18 January 2021

<sup>243</sup> Time to Change, [Employer pledge](#), archived 27 January 2021

The service now includes suggestions for sources of support for loneliness. It is not available in Northern Ireland.<sup>244</sup>

In addition, the Home Office (working with the Royal Mail), DHSC, the Department for Work and Pensions, and DCMS were to examine ways to share information more effectively and improve how organisations are able to identify and help people experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, loneliness.<sup>245</sup>

This includes training for Jobcentre work coaches to encourage them to ask about social connections in conversations with claimants who are struggling with work preparation activity.<sup>246</sup> Jobcentre Plus have rolled out mental health training for staff.<sup>247</sup> A pilot scheme with Royal Mail was deemed a success in January 2020, and partners were exploring ways to scale-up the service.<sup>248</sup>

In partnership with the Local Government Association (LGA) and digital partners, the DCMS and MHCLG are investigating ways to collect information about activities available locally. Pilot schemes were underway in three local authorities, and a [project report](#) was published in August 2020.<sup>249</sup> The Government says it will “revisit this work in 2021”.<sup>250</sup>

In October 2019, the LGA and the National Association of Local councils published a guide, “[Reaching out](#)”, on how councils can create structures and conditions to support those affected by, or at the risk of loneliness.<sup>251</sup> The LGA and Association of Directors of Public Health also published [practical advice on loneliness and social isolation](#) arising from coronavirus in December 2020.<sup>252</sup>

## Measurement

The Strategy included the commitment, first made in January 2018, that the Government would develop consistent measures for loneliness and improve the evidence base on what worked.<sup>253</sup>

The ONS published its [guidance for use of the national indicators on surveys](#) in December 2018. It recommends asking four questions of adults, including a single direct question of “How often do you feel lonely?”. An adapted version is recommended for children. These measures are now in place as part of the

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<sup>244</sup> Gov. UK, [Tell us once](#); UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2021, [commitment 13](#).

<sup>245</sup> UK Government, [A connected society](#), p10

<sup>246</sup> [Ibid](#), p33

<sup>247</sup> UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2020, [commitment 20](#)

<sup>248</sup> [Ibid](#), [commitment 11](#)

<sup>249</sup> [Ibid](#), [commitment 16](#)

<sup>250</sup> UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2021, [commitment 16](#)

<sup>251</sup> [Ibid](#), [commitment 17](#)

<sup>252</sup> LGA, [Loneliness, social isolation and Covid-19](#), December 2020

<sup>253</sup> UK Government, [A connected society](#), p10

Active Lives Survey, the Community Life Survey and the People and Nature Survey.<sup>254</sup>

Following consultation on [Proposed changes to the Public Health Outcomes Framework from 2019/20](#), new measures were introduced to measure loneliness from 2019/20.<sup>255</sup>

## Evaluation

Because of the complexity of loneliness as a condition, the Government did not set a single quantitative target to evaluate its strategy.<sup>256</sup>

Two Annual Reports, published in [January 2020](#) and [January 2021](#), respectively, detail progress against the 60 measures laid out in the loneliness [strategy](#).

The Government also undertook to appoint an independent evaluator to support grantees to evaluate the impact of their projects, and to collate and analyse findings.<sup>257</sup>

A separate independent evaluation of the £11.5m Building Connections Fund is underway, with final findings expected to be published in summer 2021.<sup>258</sup> The [Building Connections Fund](#) sought to give people access to befriending services, community groups, and support schemes through 126 organisations.<sup>259</sup>

The Government said individual Departments would be required to highlight progress against commitments on loneliness in their single departmental plans. This was delayed due to the pandemic.<sup>260</sup> At January 2020, 7 of the 9 partner departments had included loneliness in their plans; the remainder mentioned loneliness in their summary versions.<sup>261</sup>

The Strategy said the Prime Minister had asked the [What Works Centre for Wellbeing](#) to investigate evidence on effective loneliness interventions. The Strategy noted that most studies examined by the Centre focussed on the over-55s, suggesting that more evidence was needed for other age ranges.<sup>262</sup> The What Works Centre's publications can be found on [its webpage on Loneliness](#).

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<sup>254</sup> UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2021, commitment 1

<sup>255</sup> Public Health England and DHSC, [Public Health Outcomes Framework: Annex C](#), 2 August 2019, B19.

<sup>256</sup> PQ, 277738, [[Loneliness](#)], 23 July 2019

<sup>257</sup> UK Government, [A connected society](#), p60

<sup>258</sup> PQ 459, [[Loneliness](#)], 14 January 2020; UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2021, commitment 55

<sup>259</sup> PQ 1067, [[Loneliness](#)], 13 January 2020

<sup>260</sup> UK Government, [A connected society](#), p11; UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2021, commitment 59

<sup>261</sup> UK Government, [Loneliness Annual Report](#), January 2020, commitment 60

<sup>262</sup> UK Government, [A connected society](#), October 2018, p22

## 5

## Evaluations & Commentary

### House of Lords Select Committee on Covid-19 (2020-21)

The select committee's inquiry, [Living online: The long-term impact on wellbeing](#) is currently examining the impact of reliance on digital technology during the pandemic and beyond.

It has received [written evidence on loneliness and the pandemic](#), including from the University of Stirling's project [Covid-19 social distancing effects on social engagement, loneliness, wellbeing and physical activity in Scottish older adults](#).

### APPG on Social Integration (May 2020)

The All-Party Parliamentary Group's (APPG) report, [Social connection in the COVID-19 crisis](#) (May 2020), recognised that people experience social isolation differently and argued that "a healthy civil society sector underpins social integration".<sup>263</sup>

The Group made ten recommendations, including reducing digital exclusion, strengthening volunteering and embedding social isolation and connection as priorities for both local and national government.<sup>264</sup>

### Responses to the first Annual Report (January 2020)

The Red Cross/Loneliness Action Group response said:

We now need to see bold new policy announcements tackling loneliness, backed up by a firm and ambitious funding commitment from the Treasury in the upcoming Budget. The All Party Parliamentary Group on Loneliness will soon be launching a major inquiry, holding government to account and ensuring progress on this issue is not just maintained but built on throughout the rest of the year.<sup>265</sup>

The Jo Cox Foundation broadly welcomed the report and the Government's direction:

<sup>263</sup> APPG on Social Integration, [Social connection in the Covid-19 crisis](#), May 2020, p43

<sup>264</sup> [Ibid](#), pp10-11

<sup>265</sup> Red Cross/Loneliness Action Group, '[Statement- response to the government's "Loneliness Annual Report": The first year](#)', 20 January 2020

It is vital that this government continues to show leadership on the issue, with a focus on consolidating achievements and learnings to date and maintaining a cross-cutting approach. The government's additional £2 million fund to tackle loneliness in October 2019 was a strong signal of its positive intent, and we hope that resourcing for this issue will continue to be prioritised moving forward. We also support the Loneliness Action Group's [policy recommendations](#) [see below in this briefing paper] aimed at achieving sustainable change, and believe these recommendations should be incorporated into future work to tackle loneliness and social isolation, to fulfil Jo's vision of a nation where no-one is forgotten.<sup>266</sup>

## Royal College of Psychiatrists/British Geriatrics Society, 2019

A [report](#) published by the British Geriatrics Society and the Royal College of Psychiatrists called upon the Government and the NHS to improve the identification and treatment of conditions, such as incontinence, chronic pain, and dementia, that limit independence and contribute to loneliness. They said:

Our view is that tackling loneliness and social isolation at a society-wide level is dependent in part on the successful delivery of the NHS Long Term Plan.<sup>267</sup>

The report said any loneliness strategy should recognise that many providers of services will be small, and commissioners of services should, where possible, “enter into longer term arrangements with providers to ensure that charities have sustainable funding”.<sup>268</sup>

The report also emphasised that any strategy should recognise the diversity in experiences of loneliness in old age and produce clear pathways to provide services for those with severe mental illness and those requiring 1:1 support, in addition to those in minority groups.<sup>269</sup>

## TV licences for people aged over 75, 2019/21

Until 1 August 2020, television licences were free for people aged over 75. From that date, free licences have only been available to those who are also in receipt of Pension Credit.

In November 2020, the UK Government was asked whether it had assessed the impact of the change on its loneliness strategy. The Government [replied](#):

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<sup>266</sup> Jo Cox Foundation, [Loneliness and isolation: A new decade of action](#), 23 January 2020

<sup>267</sup> Royal College of Psychiatrists and British Geriatrics Society, [Position Statement on loneliness and social isolation](#), December 2019, p5

<sup>268</sup> [Ibid](#), p6

<sup>269</sup> [Ibid](#), p3, p6

The future of the over 75s concession is the responsibility of the BBC, not of the government. The government is disappointed with the BBC's decision to restrict the over 75 licence fee concession to only those in receipt of pension credit...

More broadly, the government remains committed to working with partners across society to tackle loneliness, including for people over 75. Earlier this year we announced new action to support social connection during the Covid-19 pandemic, including new funding for loneliness charities, guidance for the public, and the new Tackling Loneliness Network.<sup>270</sup>

Age UK have criticised the change and have pointed to, amongst other things, the isolation that those no longer eligible may face. See, for example Age UK's parliamentary briefing, [Switched Off: Save Free TV for Older People](#) (July 2020).

For further background and reaction to the change, see the Library briefing [Free TV licences for the over-75s](#).

## House of Lords Select Committee on the Rural Economy (2019)

The House of Lords Select Committee on the Rural Economy's inquiry, [Time for a strategy for the rural economy](#), welcomed the UK Government's Loneliness Strategy, but recommended it be adapted to the specific challenges of rural communities. The report said:

Government must ensure that, as it implements its strategy, it continues to pay close attention to the distinctive challenges of combatting isolation and loneliness in a rural context [...]

It is of great concern that there is no adjustment for the additional cost of providing rural mental health services in England. Government must remedy this and ensure that sufficient staff and support services are available to tackle rural mental health.<sup>271</sup>

In response, the Government said there were ongoing conversations between Government and stakeholders on the issue, and Clinical Commissioning Groups would be able to direct funding on mental health services to the areas of greatest need.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>270</sup> PQ HL9576 [[Television licences for the over-75s](#)], 5 November 2020

<sup>271</sup> House of Lords Select Committee on the Rural Economy, [Time for a strategy for the rural economy](#), HL 330, April 2019, pp158, 174-5

<sup>272</sup> [DEFRA to House of Lords Select Committee](#), July 2019, p57; [PQ 269062, Rural areas: Loneliness, 1 July 2019](#)

## House of Lords Select Committee on Intergenerational unfairness (2019)

This select committee [report](#) discussed the role of mixed-age communities in tackling loneliness and social isolation, through investing in new housing types and greater support for the high street.<sup>273</sup>

In response to evidence from several departments, the committee argued that “national leadership” on the Government’s loneliness agenda was “not a priority for the government and cross-departmental working has not been successfully achieved”.<sup>274</sup>

The UK Government said it was “committed” to enabling communities to act to support integration and recognised the role local authorities play in delivering a diverse housing stock.<sup>275</sup>

The report was [debated in the Lords](#) in February 2021.

## Red Cross/Loneliness Action Group (September 2019)

The Loneliness Action Group Report [A connected society: Tackling loneliness and isolation](#), drawing upon research, surveys and interviews with stakeholders undertaken between May and July 2019, assessed the first 7 months of the UK Government strategy. The report [concluded](#):

The Loneliness Strategy was always billed as a first step. There is a clear need to consolidate and build upon achievements, to ensure change is felt on the ground within communities and that the important progress made is not lost.

The report identified 6 priorities for future action:

- 1. Sustaining and funding action.** The government must deliver on its pledge to create a Loneliness Test for policy. Plans for sustained action and investment across government should be published alongside the first annual report [in January 2020].
- 2. Measure impact**
- 3. Move from development to delivery:** In the next phase of the Strategy, government should...[be] investing in the replication of effective schemes across the country.

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<sup>273</sup> House of Lords Committee on Intergenerational unfairness, [Tackling intergenerational unfairness](#), HL 329, 2019, paras 190-91

<sup>274</sup> [Ibid](#), para 199

<sup>275</sup> HM Treasury, [House of Lords select committee on intergenerational fairness and provision \[...\]: Government response](#), CP 125, July 2019, p5, 13

4. **Invest in the infrastructure communities need to stay connected**
5. **Ensure social prescribing delivers for loneliness**
6. **Build capacity to address loneliness among children and young people:** Continued investment will be needed to find out what works in addressing loneliness among children and young people (p.8).

The Campaign to End Loneliness, which contributed to the report, additionally said “this report shows progress has been made in the last year, especially at the top of government and in the rollout of social prescribing...the task now is to start delivering on the ground.”<sup>276</sup>

### Initial responses to the Loneliness Strategy (2018)

Stakeholders, such as the [Campaign to End Loneliness](#), [Age UK](#) and [Nesta](#), broadly welcomed the Loneliness Strategy when it was published in 2018.

[Relate](#), a UK charity concerned with relationships, was positive about many parts of the Strategy, but was “disappointed to see no mention of the potential role of counselling in supporting people to build self-esteem and in turn, find the confidence to build connections.”<sup>277</sup>

The [Royal College of Registered GPs](#) also found the Strategy “encouraging” and the schemes outlined for social prescribing as “a major step forward”.<sup>278</sup>

Digital inclusion charity the [Good Things Foundation](#) welcomed the Strategy, but described it as a “missed opportunity for digital”, saying more could be done to “harness the potential of the important and positive role digital can play” in addressing loneliness.<sup>279</sup>

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<sup>276</sup> Campaign to End Loneliness, [Our response to the new loneliness action group report](#), 19 September 2019

<sup>277</sup> Relate, [The loneliness strategy is a welcome move, but why not make it broader?](#) 16 October 2018

<sup>278</sup> Royal College of General Practitioners, [Loneliness Strategy is a ‘great result’ for GPs and patients, but we need more detail](#), 15 October 2018

<sup>279</sup> Good Things Foundation, [A missed opportunity for digital: the Government’s Loneliness Strategy](#), Roz Davies, 16 October 2018



## 6 Loneliness strategies elsewhere in the UK

### 6.1 Scotland

Scotland's People [Annual Report 2019](#) stated that around a fifth of adults had experienced loneliness in the previous week in 2018 (p13)

#### Scottish Government Strategy

In December 2018, the Scottish Government published [A connected Scotland](#), which set out the Government's four priorities:

- 1: Empower communities and build shared ownership
- 2: Promote positive attitudes and tackle stigma
- 3: Create opportunities for people to connect
- 4: Support an infrastructure that fosters connections

The initial strategy is due to run from 2018 to 2026, and the Scottish Government was to provide updates in 2020, 2022, and 2024.

In January 2019, a new group was established to advise on addressing social isolation.<sup>280</sup>

In 2018, £1 million was committed for the next two years to “help build capacity and pilot innovative approaches to tackling social isolation and loneliness”.<sup>281</sup> The National Implementation Group on the Social Isolation and Loneliness Strategy was due to meet on 6 February 2020 to discuss how to use the £1 million of allocated funding.<sup>282</sup>

On 11 December 2019, the First Minister confirmed that the Scottish Government had provided £140,000 in funding to Age Scotland's helpline and £80,000 to the Befriending Networks.<sup>283</sup> Age Scotland had received £1 million of funding at December 2020.<sup>284</sup>

<sup>280</sup> Scottish Government, [New group to tackle loneliness](#), 29 January 2019

<sup>281</sup> Scottish Government, Local Government and Communities Directorate, [A connected Scotland: our strategy for tackling social isolation and loneliness and building stronger social connections](#), December 2018

<sup>282</sup> Scottish Parliament Official Report, [Older people \(Loneliness\), S50-Q3955](#), 8 January 2020

<sup>283</sup> Campaign to End Loneliness, [Loneliness \(S5F-Q3792\)](#), 11 December 2019

<sup>284</sup> Scottish Parliament Official Report, [Older people \(Loneliness\), S50-Q4812](#), 2 December 2020

Around 5,000 older and disabled people were to be targeted by investment to tackle digital isolation (to December 2020).<sup>285</sup>

In its Coronavirus recovery plan, the Scottish Government said that it intends to consider a range of actions to support people experiencing loneliness due to the pandemic.<sup>286</sup>

In December 2020, the Scottish Government announced £6 million of funding to support wellbeing, befriending and digital inclusion.<sup>287</sup>

## Responses

The Campaign to End Loneliness called the strategy:

A good start...that recognises the need to look at life transitions which can make people vulnerable to loneliness. It has also helpfully highlighted upcoming legislation in 2019, such as in planning and housing, which can impact loneliness.

The campaign group also said extra funding was needed.<sup>288</sup>

Mental Health Foundation Scotland also welcomed the publication of the Strategy but “warned that urgent action must be taken to address mental health problems like depression and anxiety in both young people and older adults as a consequence of feeling lonely.”<sup>289</sup>

Staf, an organisation for those involved in the lives of young people leaving care, welcomed the Strategy’s attention on the myriad experiences and causes of loneliness, the importance of relationships and the inclusion of children’s rights. It argued that the Strategy could have gone further in addressing the specific experiences of young people in care and their relationships with their foster parents.<sup>290</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> Scottish Parliament Official Report, [Covid-19 \(Loneliness and social isolation\)](#), 23 December 2020, at 11:29

<sup>286</sup> Scottish Government, [Coronavirus \(Covid-19\): Mental health- transition and recovery plan](#), 8 October 2020

<sup>287</sup> Scottish Government, [Tackling social isolation and loneliness](#), 11 December 2020

<sup>288</sup> Campaign to End Loneliness, [Scottish Government’s loneliness strategy](#), 18 December 2018

<sup>289</sup> Mental Health Foundation Scotland, [Response to Scottish Government’s strategy on tackling loneliness and isolation](#), 18 December 2018

<sup>290</sup> Staf, [Our response to the Scottish Government’s social isolation and loneliness strategy](#), 11 January 2019

## 6.2

## Wales

The [National Survey for Wales for 2019/20](#) suggested that around 15% of adults reported feeling lonely.

Part 2 of the [Wellbeing of Future Generations \(Wales\) Act 2015](#) placed a requirement on public bodies in Wales to set wellbeing objectives. Under the Act, the Welsh Government was also required to set national indicators measuring wellbeing. One of these is the proportion of the population who are lonely.<sup>291</sup>

The Welsh Health, Social Care and Sport Committee published the results of its [Inquiry into loneliness and isolation](#) in December 2017, which made a number of recommendations regarding a future Welsh Government strategy.<sup>292</sup> The Wales Centre for Public Policy has also published [Loneliness in the lockdown](#) (April 2020).

Following a [2018 consultation](#), the Welsh Government [published](#) its loneliness strategy in February 2020. On its launch, the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services, Julie Morgan, announced the Strategy would be supported by a £1.4 million loneliness and social isolation fund over the next three years.<sup>293</sup> The [Strategy](#) set out four priority areas:

- **Increasing opportunities for people to connect**

Commitments include:

- increasing participation in physical activity;
- growing the evidence base on the effectiveness of sports to tackle loneliness and isolation; and
- developing the [fusion programme](#) to provide people in deprived communities to take part in culture and heritage opportunities, and improve the digital capabilities of citizens.

- **Improving community infrastructure that supports connected communities.**

Commitments include:

- introducing free rail travel for those 16 and under when travelling with a fare-paying adult;
- improve access to housing adaptations;
- support placemaking;
- build on demand-responsive transport services; and

<sup>291</sup> Welsh Government, [Well-being of Wales: National indicators](#), 26 September 2019

<sup>292</sup> National Assembly for Wales, Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, [Inquiry into loneliness and isolation](#), December 2017

<sup>293</sup> Welsh Government, [Tackling loneliness and social isolation through connected communities](#), 11 February 2020; Welsh Assembly, [Statement by the Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services](#), cc 271- 328, 11 February 2020

- build on pilot projects in the [Community hubs capital fund](#) to enable schools and colleges to widen community access to their facilities.
- **Cohesive and supportive communities**  
Commitments include:
  - expanding the [Community cohesion programme](#) to support small teams to engage with communities;
  - work with Public Health Wales to pilot the use of guidance on the ‘Principles of Community Engagement’;
  - define regional and local performance measures that demonstrate how services are supporting people to reduce feelings of loneliness and social isolation;
  - Working with Care Inspectorate Wales to consider how loneliness and social isolation can be incorporated into Inspection Frameworks;
  - A new [Single Advice Fund](#) of £8.04m for the provision of information and advice services for the most vulnerable households in 2020. The Welsh Government estimates that 60,000 people will benefit from this by 31 December 2020.<sup>294</sup>
- **Build awareness and promote positive attitudes**  
Commitments include:
  - A National Conversation on mental well-being;
  - Ensuring that the Framework for schools to assess and evaluate their own emotional and mental health landscape makes specific reference to tackling loneliness and social isolation;
  - Continued financial support for the Adverse Childhood Experiences Support Hub and the development of trauma/ACE informed services;
  - Establishing and strengthening systems to identify and support young people; and
  - Developing a guide for businesses on how to tackle employee loneliness and social isolation.<sup>295</sup>

The Welsh NHS Confederation published a [short briefing](#) on the Strategy in February 2020. The Campaign to End Loneliness described it as an “important first step”.<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> Welsh Government, [Child poverty progress report 2019](#), December 2019, p8

<sup>295</sup> Welsh Government, [Connected communities: A strategy for tackling loneliness and social isolation and building strong social connections](#), February 2020, pp5-8

<sup>296</sup> Campaign to End Loneliness, [Response to launch of Welsh Government Loneliness Strategy](#), 11 February 2020

The Welsh Government said it re-assessed the Strategy's commitments in the context of the coronavirus pandemic, and some funding was re-routed.<sup>297</sup> This included £0.4 million for befriending services and £0.8 million for digital services for care homes and hospices.<sup>298</sup>

## 6.3

## Northern Ireland

[Loneliness in Northern Ireland 2019/20 survey](#) found that around 5% of those aged 16+ reported feeling lonely “often/always”.

Data on the coronavirus pandemic has also been published by the [Northern Ireland Statistics Agency](#).

The Northern Ireland Assembly's Research Service's [Loneliness: What is it and what can be done about it?](#) (April 2020) provides further information

The Northern Ireland Executive does not currently have a single loneliness strategy. The Executive said in December 2020 that scoping strategies are underway by the Departments for Communities and Health, with the intention of informing future policy.<sup>299</sup> The first phase of this exercise was expected to be completed in early 2021.<sup>300</sup>

In December 2020, the Campaign to End Loneliness and the Action Group on Loneliness Policy in Northern Ireland published [Loneliness in Northern Ireland: A call to action](#). The charities called upon the Northern Ireland Executive to introduce a loneliness strategy.<sup>301</sup>

Separate departmental strategies involving tackling loneliness as one of their goals, are in place. These include:

- The Department for Infrastructure has supported the NI Concessionary Fares Scheme to promote access to public transport. Schemes such as Dial-a-Lift, Disability Action Transport Scheme, Shopmobility and Easibus are delivered through the Rural Transport Fund and the Transport Programme for People with Disabilities.<sup>302</sup> The Department has also said the £5 million Covid-19 Town Revitalisation programme will partly be used to support accessible and inclusive town centres.<sup>303</sup>
- The Department for Communities works with Libraries NI and National Museums NI to deliver programmes to combat loneliness and social isolation.<sup>304</sup> It also funds the “Good Morning” programme, aimed at reducing isolation, the “Supporting People” programme to help people live independently, and initiatives regarding digital inclusion.<sup>305</sup>

<sup>297</sup> Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, [Oral evidence: 20 January 2021](#), para 63

<sup>298</sup> WQ81392, [Progress on Connected Communities](#) 26 October 2020; WQ 81391, [Social prescribing workforce](#), 26 October 2020

<sup>299</sup> AQW 11232/17-22, [Address social isolation and Loneliness](#), 8 December 2020; AQW, 245/17-22, [Measures to tackle loneliness by the Minister of Health](#), 29 January 2020

<sup>300</sup> AQW, 11190/17-22, [Tackling loneliness by the Minister of Health](#), 8 December 2020

<sup>301</sup> BBC News, [Loneliness: charities call for Stormont strategy](#), 8 December 2020; NIVCA, [Loneliness in Northern Ireland: A call to action](#), December 2020

<sup>302</sup> AQW, 411/17-22, [Tackling loneliness by the Minister for Infrastructure](#), 3 February 2020

<sup>303</sup> AQW, 1189/17-22, [Tackling loneliness by the Minister for Infrastructure](#), 9 December 2020

<sup>304</sup> AQW, 246/17-22, [Tackling loneliness by the Minister for Communities](#), 29 January 2020

<sup>305</sup> AQW, 11188/17-22, [Tackling loneliness by Minister for Communities](#), 10 December 2020

- The Department of Health’s suicide-prevention strategy, [Protect life](#), acknowledges the role of loneliness as a contributor to poor mental health.<sup>306</sup>
- The Ministry of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs published the [Tackling Rural Poverty and Social Isolation \(TRPSI\) Framework](#) in 2016.<sup>307</sup> Around 1 in 3 of the Northern Ireland population live in rural areas.<sup>308</sup> One of the framework’s objectives was “to develop and implement measures which help tackle rural poverty and social isolation”.<sup>309</sup> It was to achieve this through improving transport and broadband services, promoting positive mental health and wellbeing; and increasing opportunities for social engagement and support to groups at risk of social isolation.<sup>310</sup> Initiatives were extended during the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020.<sup>311</sup> A list was published as [Initiatives to tackle rural poverty and isolation](#).
- The Department of Education provides the [iMatter](#) programme to support wellbeing in schools.<sup>312</sup>
- The Department of Justice works with [ScamwiseNI](#).<sup>313</sup>

Further policy information can be found in the Executive’s [Active ageing strategy, 2016-2022](#) (updated November 2020).

In addition to separate scoping studies being carried out by the Departments for Communities and Health, other departmental work is also being planned. This includes:

- The Department of Education’s collaboration with the Department of Health, the Public Health Agency and the Education Authority to develop a mental health and wellbeing framework for schools, to promote “a sense of connectedness and belonging for all pupils”.<sup>314</sup> At November 2020, the Department of Education had developed an initial implementation plan.<sup>315</sup>
- The Department of Health, within its reform of adult social care, will develop proposals for a neighbourhood based, preventative and citizen-focused community support model to connect people to supportive social

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<sup>306</sup> AQW, 245/17-22, [Tackling loneliness by the Minister of Health](#), 29 January 2020

<sup>307</sup> AQW, 242/17-22, [Tackling loneliness by the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs \(DAERA\)](#), 27 January 2020; DAERA, [Tackling poverty and social isolation- A new framework](#), March 2016

<sup>308</sup> DAERA, [Tackling poverty and social isolation](#), p16

<sup>309</sup> [Ibid](#), p36.

<sup>310</sup> DAERA, [Tackling rural poverty and social isolation programme action plan- 2016/17](#)

<sup>311</sup> AQW 11112/17-22, [Tackling loneliness by the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#), 28 January 2021

<sup>312</sup> AQW 11115/17-22, [Tackling loneliness by the Department of Education](#), 3 December 2020

<sup>313</sup> AQW, 244/17-22, [Tackling loneliness by Minister of Justice](#), 28 January 2020

<sup>314</sup> AQW, 414/17-22, [Measures in place to tackle loneliness by the Minister of Education](#), 27 January 2020

<sup>315</sup> AQW 10410/17-22, [Youth Emotional Health Network](#), 24 November 2020

networks.<sup>316</sup> The reform of adult social care has been delayed due to the Coronavirus outbreak.<sup>317</sup>

- The Ministry of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs was, in January 2020, developing a new rural policy framework, which includes a goal “to reduce loneliness and social exclusion in rural areas”.<sup>318</sup> The Department said in November 2020 that it was preparing a consultation on a draft rural policy framework.<sup>319</sup>

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<sup>316</sup> AQW, 245/17-22, [Tackling loneliness by the Minister of Health](#), 29 January 2020

<sup>317</sup> AQW 11738/17-22, [Consultation following the Power to People](#), 16 December 2020

<sup>318</sup> AQW, 242/17-22, [Tackling loneliness by the Minister of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs](#), 27 January 2020

<sup>319</sup> Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs, [Covid-19 update for AERA committee](#), 12 November 2020

## 7

## Contacts and advice

The Campaign to End Loneliness has a webpage on [I feel lonely. What can I do?](#) It also has a webpage of [Helpful links](#) which includes:

- [Independent Age](#), providing befriending services: **0800 319 6789**
- [Royal Voluntary Service](#) for help, advice and support: **0845 608 0122**
- [The Silver Line](#) for information, advice or just for a chat, 24 hours a day and 7 days a week: **0800 470 80 90**
- [Friends of the Elderly](#) for year-round support or call **0330 332 1110**
- [Age UK](#), support and advice for older people: **0800 169 6565**
- [Sense](#), for advice and support on deafblindness by telephone or text relay on **0300 330 9256**
- **Mind's** [How to cope with loneliness](#) or call **0300 123 3393**
- [SupportLine](#) on **01708 765 200**
- [Calm Zone](#), which is a helpline offering support to men in the UK, of any age, who are down or in crisis, **0800 58 58 58**
- [Get Connected](#) on **0808 808 4994**, if you are under 25

Independent Age also has a webpage on [If you're feeling lonely](#).

Universities and colleges provide information to help students with mental health problems and information on the UCAS website, [Feeling lonely at university is more common than you think](#), gives some advice to prospective students.

[Age UK](#) has also published a guidance note, [Avoiding scams – Smart ways to protect yourself](#) and the consumer body Which? also provides information on [how to safeguard yourself from scams](#). The [Action Fraud website](#) highlights the latest scams based on reports from the public.



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