

Item No. 26.	Classification: Open	Date: 10 March 2020	Meeting Name: Cabinet
Report title:		Draft Loneliness Strategy	
Ward(s) or groups affected:		All	
From:		Councillor Evelyn Akoto, Community Safety and Public Health	

FOREWORD - COUNCILLOR EVELYN AKOTO, CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SAFETY AND PUBLIC HEALTH

Loneliness is a public health issue that impacts upon the health and wellbeing of our local residents in Southwark, preventing them from enjoying a good quality of life. It is a basic human need to feel connected to others around you: feeling lonely can pose a huge risk to an individual's health, including both mental and physical health. We also know that loneliness impacts more on those people who are most vulnerable, consolidating health inequalities and amongst those who are most disadvantaged. Finally, we recognise the role that environment plays in facilitating social interactions: feeling safe and welcome is essential to form relationships that are meaningful and fulfilling. Everyone in Southwark should feel valued and connected with others.

Southwark Council's Plan 2018/19 – 2021/22 committed the council to developing a loneliness strategy, to help reduce health inequalities and break down the barriers that prevent people from thriving in Southwark.

This strategy sets out definitions of loneliness and social isolation; the causes and groups most at risk, as well as looking at local data and policies relating to the scale of the issue and what should be done about it. Finally, it sets out our proposed local response to loneliness including a plan for action.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That cabinet approve the draft strategy to tackle loneliness and social isolation in Southwark
2. That cabinet approve the final public consultation on the strategy. The consultation is to be published on the Council's Consultation Hub and will run for at least six weeks, starting from April 2020.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

3. Southwark Council's Plan 2018/19 – 2021/22 committed the council to developing a loneliness strategy to help reduce health inequalities and break down the barriers that prevent people from thriving in Southwark.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

4. Loneliness and social isolation are public health issues that impact upon the

health and wellbeing of our local residents in Southwark, preventing them from enjoying a good quality of life.

5. Feeling lonely can pose a huge risk to an individual's mental and physical health. Being persistently lonely or socially isolated is associated with:
 - Early death and increased mortality (more significant for social isolation than loneliness)
 - Increased risk of cardiovascular disease and stroke
 - Longer stay in hospitals and increased use of healthcare services
 - Disability
 - Increased stress response and diminished immunity
 - Increased risk of adverse behaviours such as smoking, inactivity or risk-taking
 - Depression, low self esteem, sleep disorders, suicidal behaviours, dementia, personality disorders and psychoses.
6. Research also shows that loneliness impacts more on those people who are most vulnerable and amongst those who are most disadvantaged.
7. The Survey of Londoners (2019) found that, in Southwark, 8.8% of respondents reported feeling lonely often, which was comparable to findings in South East London and London as a whole. This equates to 1 in 11 people or nearly 22,700 Southwark residents, who may be feeling lonely often. Characteristics associated with loneliness include: being aged 16-24, from BAME backgrounds, having a disability, living in social housing, deprivation and low levels of food security.
8. The strategy was informed by a public "Let's Talk Loneliness" consultation that was launched in November 2019. Overall 140 residents and 23 professionals working in Southwark responded to the consultation. Overall, people in Southwark felt that loneliness was a big issue, and over 84% gave it a priority rating of 4 or 5 out of 5.
9. In terms of the key drivers for loneliness, respondents felt there was a strong link to the environment and collective behaviours or culture –for example, fear of speaking to strangers. In particular, lack of community spaces and transport links were highlighted as significant issues, together with lack of ongoing and widely advertised community programmes. Lack of money, poor health, being time poor and lack of confidence were also identified as important barriers to connecting with other people.
10. The strategy sets an ambitious vision for Southwark:

"Southwark is a place where everyone feels safe, welcomed, connected, included and valued, and where loneliness is tackled as early as possible. In Southwark, everyone is empowered to make all the social connections that they would like to have within their community."
11. Rather than focusing on a specific age group, this strategy takes a "life-course" approach, which means that every effort will be made to tackle loneliness as early as possible, and throughout people's lives. This is because loneliness does not discriminate and can affect anyone, regardless of their age.
12. The "Let's Talk Loneliness" consultation generated a lot of suggestions and

ideas to tackle loneliness and social isolation in Southwark. Overall, there was clear support for this work and recognition that this needs to be a concerted effort. There was openness for social isolation and loneliness to be regarded as key issues for consideration in policy making, and for organisations and individuals to collaborate and be held accountable for this. At the same time, many suggestions revolved around collective and individual behaviours, that individuals themselves are best placed to challenge.

13. Taking into account the evidence on the causes of loneliness, the existing frameworks for tackling it and local residents' ideas and suggestions, this strategy aims to achieve its vision through three workstreams:
 - **People:** working with communities and individuals to empower them to make meaningful connections
 - **Place:** Building environments that foster social interaction
 - **System:** Working in partnership across systems to embed tackling loneliness and isolation in local policies and practices, including commissioning
14. Once the draft strategy is approved, this will be published for a further round of public consultation. It is envisaged that the consultation will be done online via the Council's Consultation Hub and it will run for at least six weeks. The consultation will be open to all living and working in Southwark

Policy implications

15. The proposed Loneliness Strategy has been developed in alignment with other relevant council policies including: Sport and Physical Activity Strategy, Southwark Faith Strategy, Fairer Food Southwark, Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy, Southwark Housing Strategy, New Southwark Plan, Movement Plan and Regeneration For All Framework.
16. As part of the "System" workstream, the strategy proposes to explore the feasibility of a new "loneliness test" for commissioning of services to ensure that the impact that a new service, or proposed changes to existing services, may have on loneliness and social isolation is considered.
17. The strategy also recommends including an outcome on isolation and loneliness as part of contract specifications for newly commissioned services, starting with Health and Social Care contracts.
18. Finally, the strategy suggests considering the addition of another criteria for the award of the Neighbourhood fund (and/or other funding for communities) to encourage proposals that also aim to tackle loneliness and isolation.

Community impact statement

19. An Equality and Health Impact assessment has been completed. No negative impacts have been identified: loneliness and social isolation have a significant negative impact on both physical and mental health; any action aimed at reducing them will have a positive health impact on the general population

Resource implications

20. None.

Legal implications

21. Should the draft strategy be approved, the templates of certain procurement documents (and gateway reports) may need to be amended.

Financial implications

22. None foreseen.

Consultation

23. A public online ‘Let’s Talk Loneliness’ consultation ran for six weeks until December 2019. This was published on the Council website and posted on Twitter and Facebook. VCS Partners and Tenants and Residents Association were also asked to circulate it to their networks. In January, a face-to-face consultation was carried out in local leisure centres and libraries.

24. Overall, 140 people responded to the consultation.

25. Key professionals working across the Borough were also invited to express their professional opinion. Professionals interviewed included local GPs, Practice Nurses, Council Housing Officers, Social Workers and Team Leaders and Volunteer of relevant Community and Voluntary organisations.

26. A further public consultation will be conducted after the final draft is approved. The consultation is to be published on the Council’s Consultation Hub and will run for at least six weeks, starting from April 2020.

SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

Director of Law and Democracy

27. Not applicable.

Strategic Director of Finance and Governance

28. Not applicable.

Other officers

29. Loneliness Steering Group, comprised of representatives from the following Council Departments: Community Engagements, Transport Policy, Park and Leisure, Regeneration. Southwark CCG and relevant Voluntary and Community Organisations were also involved in the steering group.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Joint Strategic Needs Assessment on Loneliness and Social Isolation	Southwark Public Health	Leidon Shapo 02075257705
Pending online publication		

APPENDICES

No.	Title
Appendix 1	Draft Loneliness Strategy
Appendix 2	Draft EQIA analysis

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Kevin Fenton, strategic director of place and wellbeing	
Report Author	Clizia Deidda, public health policy	
Version	Final	
Dated	10 March 2020	
Key Decision?	No	
CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
Officer Title	Comments Sought	Comments Included
Director of Law and Democracy	No	No
Strategic Director of Finance and Governance	No	No
Cabinet Member	Yes	Yes
Date final report sent to Constitutional Team	11 March 2020	