A connected society?

Assessing progress in tackling loneliness

A shadow report for the Loneliness Action Group

September 2019

Acknowledgements

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Foreword

It is now almost a year since the publication of the government's loneliness strategy for England, 'A Connected Society: A Strategy for Tackling Loneliness', in October 2018. This was a landmark moment and the first time any country has taken a comprehensive approach to acknowledging and addressing loneliness. Earlier that year, the UK had achieved another world-first with the appointment of a Minister for Loneliness.

Both were bold statements, indicating that loneliness is an issue the government both takes seriously and recognises as requiring dedicated resources and expertise. It was also a major milestone in achieving some of the objectives that the Loneliness Action Group had taken on as a legacy from the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness.

We are now looking back at progress in tackling an issue that affects one in five of us in the UK, having major impacts on health and wellbeing – and identifying a path for the future.

The Loneliness Action Group – made up of more than 50 organisations working to tackle loneliness at a national level – has been acting as a 'critical friend' to government throughout its journey to tackle loneliness since 2017.

During that time, we have witnessed good ministerial commitment and cross-departmental collaboration, despite a wider context of unprecedented political upheaval. Those leading the agenda in Westminster have remained united by the common purpose to tackle loneliness and we are pleased to report that good progress has been made.

We've seen a government campaign launched on the issue and pilot initiatives emerging in communities across the country. The roll-out of social prescribing is firmly on track and considerable funds were committed to help people forge new social connections through community spaces.

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We are now at a critical point in our journey to tackle loneliness. With a solid foundation in place, government needs to reaffirm its commitment to the issue if widespread, tangible change is to be felt in people's lives. We must not lose the momentum built up in recent years.

Our own work highlights how loneliness can affect every area of our everyday lives: whether that's becoming a parent, experiencing divorce or bereavement, moving to a new neighbourhood, or entering a period of illness or poor health. It is these commonplace but personally challenging life transitions that can often leave people disconnected and isolated.

This is why it is so important that the impact of public policy on loneliness is considered right across government. The incorporation of loneliness into the Family Test – a means of assessing the effect of government policies on stable families – is a great start, but we need to do more to ensure that consideration is given to how new policies and funding for services can affect people's 'connectedness' across both national and local government. A wider context of political change, economic uncertainty and increasing demand on public services must also be considered.

It is now more important than ever that we see a clear commitment to continuing the work begun through the Loneliness Strategy, backed by significant and sustained investment.

We are also highlighting the need for further research into the causes and consequences of loneliness, as well as further evaluation of initiatives to help ensure the intelligent allocation of funding. This needs to focus on the communities and individuals with greatest need, and supporting the services, organisations and community groups tackling loneliness most effectively.

This report highlights the important progress made – but that there is still much to be done to ensure those experiencing loneliness get the support they need. The government has made a solid start and we hope the recommendations in this report set out a clear path to allow them to continue on this journey.

Executive summary

In October 2018, the government published its first national loneliness strategy, 'A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness – laying the foundations for change'. The strategy was published as part of a wider response to the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness, including the appointment of the world's first Minister for Loneliness.

'The Strategy' contained 58 pledges or commitments, across nine government departments, to lay the foundations for long-term work on loneliness. The government committed to reporting on progress after a year and mandated the Loneliness Action Group – a network of over 50 national public, private and voluntary sector organisations working together to advance the issue of tackling loneliness and social isolation, convened by the British Red Cross and Co-op partnership – to act as a critical friend in this work.

Nearly one year on from the publication of the government's Loneliness Strategy, this shadow progress report examines how it is being implemented. It draws on desk research, written parliamentary questions, surveys and interviews with key stakeholders, undertaken between May and July during 2019. It assesses action taken in the first seven months of the Strategy, highlights activity planned for the rest of the first year, and sets out areas for further work and development in subsequent years.

Progress to date

Across the entire Loneliness Strategy, we can see indications of good progress. While it is still early days, the overall picture is positive. Many pledges have already been delivered and most are on track. The loneliness agenda has been well received across government and is galvanising cross-departmental cooperation. This is a great achievement.

- The loneliness agenda has enjoyed **strong engagement**, with Ministers across government committed to their portfolios and working well together. Action on loneliness has united politicians who are committed to honouring the legacy of Jo Cox MP in this work.

- There has been significant activity within the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) Loneliness Strategy team to set up **structures to drive action on loneliness**.

- Government departments and arm's-length bodies have worked to **deliver pledges** and support Ministers with responsibility for this agenda. Organisations outside government have also been involved in delivering pledges.

- There has been strong progress on developing **new measures** on loneliness, rolling out social prescribing and establishing mechanisms to support **action across government** on loneliness, including incorporating loneliness into the Family Test for future policy development.

However, while progress is on track in many areas, this has often been a product of the relative modesty of the original pledges.

- Much of the work done in the first year of the Loneliness Strategy has involved drawing together good practice, convening experts and developing pilot programmes. However, it is **not clear how good practice will be brought to scale** across communities.

- While there has been good progress in setting up the policy structures to drive action on loneliness, this has **not yet led to tangible changes in key areas such as transport and housing policy**. For example, in future government departments will be required

to assess the impact of proposed policy changes on loneliness as part of the Family Test; but further work is still needed to ensure that the impact of policy on social relationships is also considered, and action will be required to ensure that this has a meaningful effect on decision-making.

- In key areas, there is a risk that the **focus on loneliness may be lost over time**. For example, the lack of monitoring of loneliness specifically may mean that overtime the emphasis on loneliness within social prescribing schemes may be lost. Similarly, it is not yet clear how the impact of changes to the curriculum to educate children and young people about loneliness will be measured.

- While some departments have easily integrated work on loneliness into wider work on wellbeing, others have less experience of work in this area, and have found it **harder to align** with core departmental priorities. These departments will need to continue to work hard to develop networks and build interest in the agenda.

- While it is positive that a new Minister for Loneliness has been appointed following the recent reshuffle, **changes in government pose a risk** to the positive cross-governmental working that has sustained the Strategy to date.

- Despite guidance highlighting the need to consider loneliness, only the DCMS and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) included references to loneliness in published Single Departmental Plans. This suggests that **wider momentum on loneliness across government may be lacking**.

Priorities for future action

The challenges for the next phase of activity will be to:

- sustain and fund action on loneliness across all sectors
- consolidate progress to date
- build on this to achieve real change.

In this report, we make a series of recommendations for action to build upon the solid foundations of the first year of the Loneliness Strategy. There are six key priorities:

1. **Sustain and fund action across government:** We need a renewed commitment to tackling loneliness across government departments. 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.

2. **Measure impact:** Government must measure the impact of its activity on loneliness, including through the Public Health Outcomes Framework (PHOF) and ensuring that where public money is spent on tackling loneliness, the impact is evaluated using recommended measures.

3. **Move from development to delivery:** In the next phase of the Strategy, government should build on the learning from pilots and identification of good practice, making plans to embed successful interventions in policy and investing in the replication of effective schemes across the country.

4. **Invest in the infrastructure communities need to stay connected:** Social connection depends on local community infrastructure. Government should invest in the provision of community space, and support activities to enable connection. We also need to ensure that transport policy and investment are loneliness-proofed, and that housing policy supports social connection and participation.

5. **Ensure social prescribing delivers for loneliness:** Government must continue to deliver on its commitment to tackling loneliness through social prescribing. It can do this by ensuring staff are trained in understanding and addressing loneliness, assessing the impact of schemes using recommended loneliness measures, and funding the services and support that communities need to enable people to reconnect. Primary Care Networks (PCNs) should be encouraged to draw on learning from existing schemes, including the Connecting Communities programme delivered by the British Red Cross and Co-op partnership.

6. **Build capacity to address loneliness among children and young people:** The pledge to teach children about loneliness in schools must be backed with a robust support offer to teachers. Continued investment will be needed to find out what works in addressing loneliness among children and young people, and to roll out effective approaches across the country.

The Loneliness Action Group has been proud to work alongside government through the first year of implementation of this world-leading Loneliness Strategy. Much has been achieved. A wide range of stakeholders across business and civil society, along with the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Loneliness, are committed to providing continued support and challenge to government as it takes forward this vital and ambitious agenda.

As we move into the second year of implementation, we need to translate the Strategy's ambitions into tangible differences for individuals and communities up and down the country. This will mean stepping up the pace and scale of action on loneliness throughout the life course across government.

Introduction

A national strategy for tackling loneliness

Loneliness is 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 we have and those we want.[1] Over recent years, the increasing evidence that loneliness is linked to poor mental and physical health and is therefore costly to the public purse has led to growing attention to loneliness as a public health issue.[2]

In October 2018, the government published the first ever national Loneliness Strategy, 'A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness – laying the foundations for change'.[3] This was part of a wider response to the call to action from the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness, which included the appointment of the world's first Minister for Loneliness.[4]

The strategy contained 58 pledges or commitments to tackle loneliness by nine government departments, to lay the foundations for long-term work on loneliness across government and beyond. The Strategy committed the government to reporting on progress after a year.

About the Loneliness Action Group

The Loneliness Action Group is a network of over 50 national organisations working together to advance the issue of tackling loneliness and social isolation. Currently led by the British Red Cross and Co-op partnership, the group was tasked by the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness partners with securing a legacy for the Commission's work.

Today, the Group brings together leaders from the public, private and voluntary sectors working nationally on loneliness. It has played a role in driving forward crucial developments, including contributing to the development of the Loneliness Strategy.

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[1] HM Government (2018), *A connected society: A Strategy for tackling loneliness – laying the foundations for change*, HM Government p.18, after Perlman D & Peplau LA (1984) 'Loneliness research: a survey of empirical findings', in Peplau LA & Goldston SE (eds.) *Preventing the harmful consequences of severe and persistent loneliness* (pp. 13-46), Washington DC: US Government Printing Office.

[2] McDaid, D, Bauer, A, Park, A (2017) *Making the economic case for investing in actions to prevent and/or tackle loneliness: a systematic review, LSE*

[3] HM Government (2018), A connected society: *A Strategy for tackling loneliness - laying the foundations for change*, HM Government

[4] Jopling, K (2017), *Combatting Loneliness One Conversation at a Time: A call to action*, Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness

About this report

The Loneliness Strategy mandated the Loneliness Action Group with acting as a critical friend to government, supporting effective implementation of the Strategy and holding government to account.[5] This shadow progress report has been developed under this remit and has been informed by evidence gathered by independent researchers (Kate Jopling, Dan Jones and Brighter Together Consulting) working on behalf of the Loneliness Action Group

Our analysis has been informed by:
- Desk research
- Interviews with government departments, arm's-length bodies and other organisations involved in delivering the strategy
- Surveys of the Loneliness Action Group and the Campaign to End Loneliness supporter network
- Responses to 29 written parliamentary questions.

The work was conducted between May and July 2019. As such, this report assesses progress on the first seven months of strategy implementation and offers comments on further activity planned within the first year of operation.

In the next sections, we examine progress made against the pledges from each chapter of the Loneliness Strategy. We focus particularly on three areas selected by the Loneliness Action Group as priorities for support and challenge during the first year. These were:
- Ensuring social prescribing delivers for loneliness
- Securing meaningful change through the development of a policy test for loneliness
- Addressing gaps in action on children and young people, including through the inclusion of teaching on loneliness in the national curriculum.

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5 HM Government (2018), A connected society: *A Strategy for tackling loneliness – laying the foundations for change*, HM Government, p.61

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Progress in developing the evidence base

Chapter one of the Loneliness Strategy sets out pledges around building and developing the evidence base around loneliness, its causes, its impacts and what works to tackle it.

Areas of progress

Measuring loneliness

Improving the measurement of levels of loneliness within the population, and in the evaluation of specific interventions, was a key plank of the Loneliness Strategy. Work to develop national measures was led by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) and these were announced in October 2018 along with the Strategy.

The loneliness measures

The recommended package of measures includes:

- A single, direct question: 'How often do you feel lonely?'
- Three questions known as the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) 3-item scale for adults:
  - 'How often do you feel that you lack companionship?'
  - 'How often do you feel left out?'
  - 'How often do you feel isolated from others?'

Tailored versions of the UCLA questions were developed for use with children.

We refer to these as 'recommended measures' throughout this report.

Since the launch of the strategy, the DCMS has been working to encourage the incorporation of these measures in key national surveys, including the Understanding Society and Community Life Surveys. Following consultation, Public Health England (PHE) has now committed to including the recommended measures in the Public Health Outcomes Framework (PHOF).

At the same time, work has been under way to encourage the use of the recommended measures to evaluate loneliness initiatives – primarily through their inclusion in the framework for evaluation of the Building Connections Fund and through the development of a guide for the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector by the What Works Centre for Wellbeing.[6]

Building and sharing evidence

Improving the evidence around the experience of loneliness and what works in tackling it, particularly among younger adults and children, was identified as a key priority in the Strategy. Some progress has been made in this area. In particular:

- The What Works Centre for Wellbeing has published a number of reports on loneliness, including a review of gaps in evidence, and a conceptual review of loneliness.[7]
- In December 2018, the ONS released an analysis of children's and young people's views, experiences and suggestions to overcome loneliness, using in-depth interviews, the Community Life Survey 2016 to 2017 and the Good Childhood Index Survey, 2018. In April 2019, a further report was published examining factors underlying children's and young people's loneliness.[8]
- Evidence on what works in tackling loneliness is being gathered through the evaluation of the Building Connections Fund, led by New Philanthropy Capital (NPC).

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[6] What Works Wellbeing (2019) *A brief guide to measuring loneliness, for charities and social enterprises* What Works Wellbeing / National Lottery Community Fund

[7] See: whatworkswellbeing.org/loneliness

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

The Building Connections Fund

The Building Connections Fund, funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, the Co-op Foundation and government, was launched in advance of the Strategy, both to stimulate and support activity on loneliness in communities, and to develop the evidence base around what works in tackling loneliness.

There are two strands of work – a main fund distributed by The National Lottery Community Fund and designed for organisations working with adults of all age groups, and a separate strand for projects with young people distributed by the Co-op Foundation. Projects under both strands are well under way and are making good progress.

Both funders are encouraging projects to use recommended measures where appropriate to assess the impact of their work on loneliness. However there is a recognised gap around how to measure the impact of preventative interventions. It is already clear, therefore, that not all schemes will use the recommended measures. Some flexibility has been built into the programmes and funders continue to work with grantholders to consider how best to evaluate impact. Furthermore, while all projects are monitoring progress, only a small number of schemes will be studied in depth as part of the evaluation. As a result, the contribution of the Building Connections Fund evaluation to the overall picture of what works is, as yet, unclear.

Other efforts to build evidence

Work has also been under way across a number of departments to encourage measurement of impact on loneliness using government's recommended measures. Pledges in relation to evidence appeared throughout the Loneliness strategy and most appear to be in progress or completed. For example:

- The Arts Council has been in close contact with DCMS/OCS through the development of the loneliness strategy, including the development of the new loneliness measure; and has incorporated the measure into current thinking for the evaluation of relevant future programmes.
- The Libraries Taskforce ran masterclasses on measuring impact in August 2018 and on conducting evaluations in March 2019. These focused on ways of measuring the impact of library services on its users including in reducing loneliness.

In addition, the DCMS team have been leading efforts to consider how government can contribute to wider work to build and share the evidence around loneliness. A wide range of evidence, including qualitative as well as quantitative data, is needed to support future work. Roundtables with the (now disbanded) Technical Advisory Group and other key stakeholders took place in early 2019 to consider what role government might play in bringing together evidence on loneliness. However, next steps have yet to be clarified.

Areas for future focus

Continued work to incorporate the loneliness measures into relevant surveys is crucial to assess how the Strategy is affecting overall levels of loneliness. Ensuring that levels of loneliness can be measured at a local level will be vital for local authorities to target their efforts on loneliness effectively. It will therefore be important to ensure that loneliness measures are incorporated in large-scale surveys so that results can be broken down to a local level.

In relation to the evidence around what works, continued efforts must be made to measure the impact of initiatives on loneliness specifically. This requires consistent use of the validated recommended measures across funded schemes so that results can be compared and used to build a wider national evidence base around what works, for whom and in what circumstances. Loneliness is an individual experience, and so there are no 'one size fits all' solutions. A wide-ranging evidence base is therefore required, encompassing both qualitative and quantitative data. There may also be a need to support further work to develop appropriate measures for use in preventative interventions where before and after measures of levels of loneliness may not be appropriate.

It will also be important to ensure that evidence emerging from both government-funded and other initiatives to reduce loneliness is brought together to create a more consistent evidence base. There are a number of bodies already involved in gathering and sharing evidence on loneliness – including the Campaign to End Loneliness' research and policy hub and the What Works Centre for Wellbeing evidence and conceptual reviews.[9] Coordinating and reinforcing this work will be vital if gaps in evidence are to be addressed.

Recommendations

We recommend that:

- Recommended measures of loneliness are included in the large-scale surveys which allow assessment of levels of loneliness at local as well as national levels.

- Government should invest in the further development of the evidence around loneliness across the life course, funding further research and evaluation of what works.

- Work on loneliness that has been supported by public funds should be evaluated using recommended loneliness measures.

- Government should build on existing efforts to draw together the evidence, encouraging the use of recommended measures, and enabling organisations working to address loneliness to share the results of their own evaluations and learn from the experiences of others in the field.

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9 See: whatworkswellbeing.org/loneliness

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Progress in supporting and enabling relationships

Chapter two of the strategy focused on ensuring that organisations across the public and private sectors were effective in promoting social connections and tackling loneliness. It included a range of commitments around ensuring public services were equipped to connect people at risk of loneliness to information about local community groups, activities and support services, as well as a pledge to support and encourage action by businesses.

Areas of progress

Focus on: social prescribing

The commitment to roll out social prescribing nationally was a major part of the loneliness strategy. There were eight pledges relating to social prescribing in the strategy, and there has been positive progress against all of these, with work ahead of schedule in many areas.

What is social prescribing?

Social prescribing is a means of enabling GPs, nurses and other health and care professionals to encourage and support people to access a range of local, non-clinical services by referring people to a 'link worker' (known variously as navigators, connectors etc.). It is a means to an end, with emerging evidence showing that social prescribing can lead to a range of positive health and wellbeing outcomes including, but not limited to, reducing loneliness.[10]

The roll-out of social prescribing is being led by NHS England and now sits under the wider commitment to Universal Personalised Care within the NHS Long Term Plan (LTP), which was published in January 2019.[11] The LTP included funding for social prescribing link workers in all of the approximately 1,250 Primary Care Networks (PCNs) across England. This commitment and the linked funding have enabled progress against the key pledges in the Loneliness Strategy at a faster pace than was originally envisage, in particular:

- NHS England report that the roll-out of social prescribing is now on track to achieve a universal offer in English PCNs by 2023, with 1,000 link workers in post by 2020/21, rising to 4,000+ by 2023.
- The Common Outcomes Framework for social prescribing has now been published.

- Mapping of social prescribing schemes is being undertaken, with Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) leading on developing plans for social prescribing in their localities.
- Guidance on social prescribing best practice has now been published and a social prescribing platform has been launched to share learning and good practice, attracting over 1,000 registered members.[12]
- A learning programme has now been developed for link workers with fortnightly webinars planned from September 2019. An online certificated learning programme for all link workers is being developed and will form part of core training. NHS England has recruited a network of regional learning coordinators to facilitate learning events, webinars and peer support for link workers.
- Regional social prescribing facilitators are also supporting regional social prescribing steering groups.

In addition to the work pledged in the Strategy, there has been further progress in a number of areas including:

- The establishment of a cross-departmental social prescribing group bringing together government departments and arm's-length bodies to enable coordination of learning and practice.
- NHS England are also working with partners to establish a new Social Prescribing Academy, to promote social prescribing across the public, and voluntary and community sectors.

Social prescribing is being led from within the NHS and is linked to a range of wider objectives related to health system reform, not just loneliness. Officials within NHS England and Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) emphasised their commitment to making sure social prescribing is effective in tackling loneliness and this has been reflected in its publications and public statements. However, for this aspiration to be realised we need to ensure that:

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[10] The King's Fund (2017). *What is social prescribing?* Available at: www.kingsfund.org.uk publications/social-prescribing

[11] See: www.longtermplan.nhs.uk

[12] NHS England (2019) *Social prescribing and community-based support: Summary guide*. Available at: www.england.nhs.uk/publication/social-prescribing-and-community-based-support-summary-guide

- **Social prescribing schemes are designed to meet the specific needs of people experiencing loneliness:** Link workers and referrers may need specific training to ensure that they are able to identify people who are lonely, and there is likely to be a need for specialist support in the community into which people can be referred, for example to address issues such as lack of social skills and confidence.

- **Data on loneliness is collected:** The Common Outcomes Framework for social prescribing does not include measures of loneliness, but this data will be vital if the effectiveness of social prescribing in tackling loneliness is to be assessed.

- **There is a wide range of referral routes into social prescribing:** Not all of those who are lonely will be in touch with primary care services, so other referral routes are important. Under current plans all schemes will accept wider referrals in year two, but individual PCNs can choose to allow wider referrals from the outset.

- **Funding for community support and activity is made available:** Guidance for social prescribing highlights the need for PCNs to consider how to ensure support is available in the community, and the Common Outcomes Framework includes a requirement to monitor impact on the local VCSE sector. However, all partners at local system level need to ensure that there is adequate funding to support community activity, for example through the development of shared VCSE investment strategies at Integrated Care System and local level. Concerns over the potential impact of increased demand on community services was a key issue highlighted by the Loneliness Action Group in their responses to our survey, and was reflected in British Red Cross and Co-op's recent publication 'Fulfilling the Promise' which drew on insights from schemes already working in this field.[13]

- **Schemes are built on the foundations of existing good practice:** Loneliness is a complex issue and there is already considerable expertise in delivering effective connector services to reduce loneliness in communities – it will be vital that this is drawn upon if social prescribing is to be effective in reducing loneliness[14]. However, the fast pace of roll out and the fact that funding for link workers is only available for new posts, creates a risk that existing providers of connector schemes may lose out in favour of new schemes. It is positive that NHS England is already encouraging local areas to map existing provision and to work with the local VCSE sector to develop shared local social prescribing plans. This work will need to continue throughout the roll out phase and beyond to avoid duplication and ensure local VCSE organisations are adequately supported.

For the future

The government must ensure that new social prescribing schemes are effective in tackling loneliness. As social prescribing is rolled out, it will be vital to measure its impact on loneliness. Government will also need to be ready to act if social prescribing leads to unsustainable increases in demand for community activities and services.

Recommendations

We recommend that:
- All those involved in social prescribing, including link workers and those referring into them, should receive training on loneliness. This should draw on learning from existing schemes, including the British Red Cross and Co-op partnership's Community Connectors.
- NHS England should include the recommended loneliness measures in the Outcomes Framework for social prescribing.
- Government should commit to taking action if social prescribing creates unsustainable demands on the VCSE sector, as identified through Outcomes Framework monitoring or other sources of information.

Tackling loneliness through public services

Progress has been made against pledges relating to the role of Jobcentre Plus in tackling loneliness. Nearly 20,000 staff members across approximately 600 Jobcentre Plus sites have taken part in a bespoke two-day training on mental health, which includes a focus on loneliness. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) staff are keen to engage with social prescribing.

There has also been progress in establishing open data pilots exploring how to better map, capture and share information about local loneliness support in three local authorities: Elmbridge Borough Council, Hull City Council and Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council, with additional support and input from other councils too. Results are expected by March 2020.

In addition, government has started work against commitments to pilot new initiatives to tackle loneliness through other public services, like transport and postal services. There has been good progress against most of these pledges. However, not all schemes are tracking their impact on loneliness among beneficiaries and, in some cases, the link between planned activities and loneliness is not clear.

Examples of action to tackle loneliness through public services:

- The DWP added information about loneliness to its bereavement Tell us Once initiative.[15]

- The Home Office, in partnership with Royal Mail, piloted a scheme where postal workers engage with older people on a regular basis and by asking a series of questions, they can also be referred on to other services. Pilots in New Malden, London, Liverpool and Whitby showed that three quarters of people valued visits by postal workers. The Home Office is exploring options to further refine the scheme and to consider whether it can be fully rolled out.

- The Department for Transport (DfT) is working with seven mobility centres to trial how staff can help raise awareness of loneliness and work with others, such as local VCSE organisations, to support them. Interim results from the trial are due at the end of 2019, after which a decision will be made about further funding.

- The Home Office has supported the recruitment of over 1,000 Scam Marshals as part of a scheme run by National Trading Standards.[16]

[13] British Red Cross, Co-op, Kaleidoscope Health and Care (2019) *Fulfilling the promise: How social prescribing can most effectively tackle loneliness* British Red Cross / Co-op

[14] Jopling, K, Howells, A (2018) *Connecting Communities to tackle loneliness and social isolation: Learning report*, British Red Cross / Co-op

[15] See: www.gov.uk/after-a-death/organisations-you-need-to-contact-and-tell-us-once

[16] See: www.friendsagainstscams.org.uk/scammarshals

Sharing and spreading best practice

There has also been good progress against pledges to develop best practice guidance around tackling loneliness. However, again, further action in the form of funding and/or policy guidance is likely to be needed to ensure that identified good practice is replicated across the country.

Examples of good practice guidance:

- The Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) has worked with the Local Government Association (LGA) and the National Association of Local Councils (NALC) to develop guidance on combatting loneliness to be published in autumn 2019.
- The Chief Social Worker has been working to share best practice in tackling loneliness and hopes to publish guidance later in 2019.

Action by employers and businesses

As well as encouraging action across public services, government has sought to encourage action on loneliness across other sectors including businesses. Since the launch of the strategy, there has been positive progress against pledged activity through joint working between the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and the Campaign to End Loneliness.

An employers' network, convened to champion the government's Employer Pledge (around supporting employees' social wellbeing), has met twice since the launch of the Strategy and involves participants from across the public, private and voluntary sector including the British Red Cross and Co-op. A good practice guide highlighting examples of how employers have taken action to promote connection and reduce loneliness among their employees is being developed. The Campaign to End Loneliness continues to receive interest from new organisations in joining the network and/or signing the pledge.

A second strand of work around encouraging and supporting businesses that undertake work in the community to reduce loneliness (such as the Co-op Funeralcare's bereavement support groups and the Chatty Café initiative which is being rolled out in Costa coffee shops) is under development, but is at an earlier stage.

While business interest in the loneliness agenda has been strong, there have been challenges in converting this into concrete action. In some cases, businesses have been reluctant to claim any leadership on this agenda despite their positive practice. Looking to the future, there will be a need to convert interest in tackling loneliness into practical action by businesses, and to spread action beyond those who have already engaged.

Areas for future focus

Frontline public services and businesses can play a vital role in supporting individuals who are at risk of or experiencing loneliness, and in creating the right conditions for people to develop and retain positive social connections.

Positive progress has been made in sharing good practice and establishing pilot schemes across a number of public services. However, it will be important that the impact of this work is evaluated using recommended loneliness measures. This data will be vital in determining which schemes should be prioritised for roll-out. Government should make clear how it intends to build upon this work, either through the incorporation of effective practice into policy and/ or the provision of funding to support replication.

In relation to business activity, spreading engagement with the loneliness agenda beyond those businesses that are already enthused will be a challenge. However, government has considerable power to bring together business leaders and to create incentives to tackle this agenda, for example, through its procurement activity and its wider work to promote positive business practice.

Recommendations

In addition to the recommendations on social prescribing set out above, we recommend that:

- Government should set out a clear plan of action for rolling out those pilot programmes across departments which are shown to be effective in tackling loneliness, either through policy guidance and/or the provision of funding.

- Ministers should use their convening power to encourage more businesses to engage with the loneliness agenda, and to consider how this work can be incentivised.

3

Progress in improving community infrastructure

Chapter three of the Strategy set out plans for ensuring community infrastructure, such as community spaces, transport and housing, could be used to bring people together and to address loneliness.

Areas of progress

Opening up public space – pilots and good practice

Opening up community spaces to encourage people to come together and build relationships was a key area of the Strategy. The government has already distributed several million pounds to support pilot programmes around opening up community spaces. However, plans for future roll-out of initiatives which prove successful are not yet clear.

Examples of pilot programmes around community infrastructure:

- £1.8m of funding was pledged by the government to help local people maximise the potential of underutilised community spaces in innovative and creative ways. An initial pot of £1.4m (made up of £1m from the announced fund plus £400k of additional funding) was distributed by the Co-op Foundation to 144 projects working with young people to design improvements to local services and spaces. The money funded co-creation and co-design of plans to improve existing services or to influence change in local provision of community spaces or activities for young people. A learning publication from this exercise has been published.[17]

- A further £1.6m, provided through a match-funding partnership between the government and the Co-op Foundation, is now being distributed through a new fund, Space to Connect. Community organisations across England can apply for funds to improve spaces where people can connect and co-operate. The scheme will be subject to a full evaluation.[18]

- To tackle loneliness in rural areas, £3m has been provided via Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) to improve village halls.[19]

- Loneliness was featured in the criteria for bidding for the DCMS' new £400,000 Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund. Grants were awarded in early 2019.[20]

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[17] Man, M, Abrams, T, McLeod, R (2019) Building Connections Fund: Co-design and Community Spaces: Final Report, NPC Available at: www.thinknpc.org/resource-hub/the-building-connections-fund

[18] See: www.coopfoundation.org.uk/funding_support

[19] See: acre.org.uk/our-work/village-hall-improvement-grant%20fund.php

[20] See: www.gov.uk/government/news/new-funds-to-boost-diversity-of-people-working-in-digital-and-tech-jobs

There has also been work undertaken to share and spread best practice on the use of various types of community spaces such as schools, rail properties, business premises, Jobcentre Plus etc. In some areas, progress is on track. For example, guidance on the use of school premises has been drafted and monitoring is under way via existing school reporting mechanisms. Also, the DWP has encouraged the use of Jobcentre Plus for social groups through its staff intranet. In other areas, guidance has been stalled, sometimes due to practical challenges which have emerged around opening these spaces.

Housing

The strategy included several commitments around housing. Work is broadly on track but, in some areas, plans have been scaled back or remain yet to be delivered. Furthermore, commitments to include loneliness in key strategies and programmes have been met by the inclusion of very limited references to loneliness, and in some cases references to concepts linked to loneliness rather than loneliness itself.

Activities on housing

- The assessment process for new garden communities, announced by Homes England, included considerations around loneliness and social cohesion (although loneliness was not mentioned explicitly in the design principles). There are also new requirements on the existing 23 garden communities to show how they address health and wellbeing.[21]

- Research on the impact of community-led housing and cohousing solutions on loneliness and the development has yet to start, but procurement is now in train and it is expected to report in March 2020.

- Planning Practice Guidance around the principles of good design for health and wellbeing, which is expected to feature loneliness, is expected to be published in Autumn 2019.

Transport

In relation to transport, the picture is similar to that in housing.

- A pledge to address loneliness through the Future of Mobility Grand Challenge has been met through reference to loneliness in its urban strategy. The strategy highlights the role of transport innovation in tackling loneliness, and names inclusion as one of its core principles, such that transport innovation should benefit all parts of society, including those who are older or who have disabilities or are otherwise less well connected.[22]

- Pledges around community transport, a sector under considerable pressure, have been met in part. However, vital funding for the Community Transport Association was not expected to deliver until September 2019, enabling community transport-specific training to be recognised as part of the qualification for professional coach and bus drivers.

- While pledges to create new partnerships with transport providers and community organisations already working to tackle loneliness, and to use industry-wide forums to promote their work, have been met, there is no clarity around how the good practice being identified will be rolled out across the country.

Activities to encourage good practice on loneliness among transport providers:

- At the UK Bus Summit, Ministers announced a new partnership with Greener Journeys to encourage bus operators to come together to tackle loneliness.[23]

- The DfT has been working in partnership with the Association of Community Rail Partnerships (ACoRP), which is raising awareness about how activities such as volunteering on the railways can help to tackle loneliness.

- Ministers have spoken about the importance of the transport sector supporting the loneliness agenda with a wide range of stakeholders at the Department's Transport Communications Network in January 2019.

Areas for future focus

Ensuring that communities have the right infrastructure in place to support social connection will be vital, but work against the strategy in these areas has been characterised by piloting and promoting good practice rather than significant policy to address gaps that are perceived on the ground.

Government has yet to make clear how learning from pilot programmes and good practice initiatives on opening up community space will be rolled out across the country. In our engagement with stakeholders, we also heard real concern about the wider context of ongoing loss of community spaces. Clear plans for rolling out effective initiatives will be vital and is likely to need specific investment.

Furthermore, while opening up public spaces is a positive step, new space alone is unlikely to address loneliness. Without specific action to link these initiatives to support for those who are lonely, this work will mainly benefit those who are already socially connected and engaged. It is vital that these initiatives are integrated into wider work to tackle loneliness, for example through social prescribing.

Transport and housing have consistently been identified as areas in which action on loneliness will be needed. However, government action in this area is modest compared to the scale of need perceived by stakeholders, with a focus on promoting good practice and encouraging activity, rather than addressing gaps in provision.

While progress is on track with most actions, the extent to which these activities will result in meaningful impact on levels of loneliness is less clear. Much of the commitment has been met by including loneliness, or concepts relating to it, in strategy documents. Often these strategies or plans were already well developed, and the loneliness strategy pledge has been met without significant new policy development work occurring. In some cases, including new concepts within strategies is a vital first step in

informing a wider programme of work, but it is not yet clear how these new commitments to tackling loneliness will translate into tangible action. It will, therefore, be important that strategies are monitored to understand the true impact of including loneliness within them.

In the next phase of the Strategy, it will be important to spread learning from pilots and good practice exercises, and to develop more concrete work in the areas of housing and transport.

Recommendations

We recommend that:

- In the next phase of the Strategy, government should move from developing good practice and pilots to robust action to secure the infrastructure required to support connection. This should include:

- Funding for local authorities to provide community spaces for people to connect, drawing on the learning from current pilots.

- Ensuring new planning practice guidance is developed in collaboration with experts in tackling loneliness, and its impact on social connection and loneliness monitored.

- Action to loneliness-proof decisions on housing, and transport planning, funding and provision, with examples of substantive changes made to such policies included in the government's 2020 progress report on the Loneliness Strategy.

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[21] See: www.gov.uk/government/publications/garden-communities

[22] HM Government (2019) *Future of Mobility: Urban Strategy*, HM Government Available at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/future-of-mobility-urban-strategy

[23] See: www.gov.uk/government/speeches/buses-that-build-a-better-society

4

Progress in building a culture of connected communities

Chapter four of the Strategy sets out how the government will tackle the stigma surrounding loneliness and build people's awareness of what they could do to help themselves and others by building a national conversation and supporting community groups to thrive.

Areas of progress

Campaign to end the stigma of loneliness

There is significant evidence of a stigma associated with loneliness, with 30 per cent of Britons saying that they would be embarrassed to say they felt lonely.[24] Tackling this stigma will be vital if people are to feel able to access the support they need.[25] The government made a number of pledges towards tackling this stigma and there has been good progress against these to date.

- The Let's Talk Loneliness campaign was launched in June 2019 with the aim of encouraging people to talk about their feelings of loneliness. Key elements of the campaign included adverts across 20 big screens around the country and provision of social media assets to a wide range of stakeholders. The campaign was developed in consultation with stakeholders in the Loneliness Action Group.

- The Co-op Foundation was given £25,000 by government, which they match-funded, to commission a specialist agency to work with young people to develop a campaign that works for them, and to fund further research on youth loneliness.

- PHE is launching the mental health campaign Every Mind Matters in autumn 2019, which will include information on loneliness.

Stakeholders welcomed the government's efforts to spark a wider conversation to help break down stigma. However, the limited

budget has restricted the campaign's reach. The learning from previous public campaigns, such as Time to Change around mental health, is that both significant and sustained investment is required to make a difference to public attitudes. However, at present, there is little clarity around how the loneliness campaign will be sustained.

Furthermore, while stakeholders were pleased to feed in to the development of the campaign, the evidence base on which it was built was very limited, as little is known about what kinds of public campaigning are effective in tackling loneliness. Measuring the impact of the government's campaign as a trailblazer in this area, and using this data to inform future work, will be vital.

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[24] Mental Health Foundation (2010) *The lonely society.* Available at: www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/the_lonely_society_report.pdf

[25] Lau, S., Gruen, G. E., (1992) *The social stigma of loneliness: Effect of target person's and perceiver's sex.* Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 18(2), 182-189; Rotenberg, K. J., Kmill, J. (1992) *Perception of lonely and non-lonely persons as a function of individual differences in loneliness.* Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 9(2), 325-330; Rotenberg, K. J., Bartley, J. L., & Toivonen, D. M. (1997) *Children's stigmatization of chronic loneliness in peers.* Journal of Social Behavior and Personality, 12(2), 577; Mental Health Foundation (2010) *The lonely society.* Available at: www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/the_lonely_society_report.pdf

Focus on: reducing loneliness among children and young people

Tackling loneliness among children and young people is a key priority – not just due to the relatively high levels of loneliness being recorded in the surveys among these groups, but also due to the potential for work with children and young people to have a preventative impact right across the life course. One of the biggest challenges government faced in developing its Strategy was the relatively limited evidence to inform this work. As such, improving the evidence around children and young people has been a key priority for government. Alongside this, the Strategy included a range of other pledges relating to reducing loneliness among young people, from children to university students.

Loneliness in the curriculum

A major focus of work on children and young people has been to build teaching on loneliness into the curriculum for schools. Good progress has been made in this area on the back of the introduction of the new subjects of Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education (HE) for primary and secondary school children. Statutory guidance for the new subjects was published in June 2019 and some pilot schools will begin teaching from September 2019, with teaching in all schools from September 2020. Loneliness is referenced within the guidance for the new subjects, with a focus on making sure pupils are aware of how loneliness can affect children and how they can be supported. There is also a focus on how to build healthy relationships.

Ensuring that this teaching on loneliness is meaningful and makes a difference will now be vital. To advance this, the Department for Education (DfE) has assigned £6m to the development of a support programme which will be ready for 2020, and has committed to seeking input from the Loneliness Action Group.

Other action on loneliness among children and young people

There has also been positive progress against most of the other pledges relating to children and young people. However, again, a key challenge will be ensuring that the activity is having the desired effect on loneliness. Given the lack of evidence available on children and young people's loneliness, these activities represent a 'best guess' at what might be effective in reducing loneliness. Rigorous monitoring will therefore be needed to work out which activities are most effective in practice.

Examples of work to address loneliness among children and young people:

- Recognising the transition to higher education as a key trigger for loneliness, the DfE has established a working group, the Transition Network, which is addressing loneliness as part of a wider agenda around supporting students with life skills training.[26]

- Best Practice Guidance has been published on the inclusion of young people with special educational needs and disability (SEND) in work placements. A similar document is planned for apprenticeship training suppliers and employers.

- As part of the Building Connections Fund, two different partner organisations will be developing sector-wide work on youth loneliness. A youth loneliness learning network for organisations to share their knowledge is being developed by UK Youth, and the National Youth Partnership is developing a suite of resources for the youth sector, drawing on previous practice recommendations.

- The 2019 #iwill campaign focused on supporting young people to look after local green spaces and wildlife habitats while allowing young people to build social connections.[27]

- There has been positive progress against a range of pledges relating to care leavers, a group recognised as particularly vulnerable to loneliness. This includes £6 million funding for two innovation programme projects focused on reducing isolation and loneliness.

26 See: www.gov.uk/government/news/government-creates-new-student-mental-health-taskforce

27 See: www.iwill.org.uk

For the future

Work on a number of pledges made in the Strategy is now being taken forward as part of wider action to develop a Youth Charter.[28] This is a positive step as it will ensure that the priorities of children and young people are reflected in government policy and that work across government on these issues is better coordinated. However, it will be important to ensure that the focus on loneliness is retained as this project develops. Bringing together stakeholders working across different departments on youth loneliness with those working on the Charter would be a good first step in developing a coherent agenda for loneliness.

As the new curriculum is rolled out, the government must ensure that teachers are supported with adequate materials and training on loneliness specifically to teach this new subject. This will be crucial to ensure that loneliness is not lost within the wider curriculum. Naturally, schools will adopt a wide range of approaches in the delivering the new curriculum, so tracking the impact of this work on pupils' understanding and experiences of loneliness will also be vital. Additional funding must be provided and adjustments must be made to the support package if they are needed beyond the pilot year.

There is also a need for training and support around loneliness to be provided to other practitioners working with children and young people, particularly those most at risk, to improve the number of young people who are identified for early help and support.

The various programmes that have been launched for young people need to both inform, and be informed by, the emerging evidence base around what works. It will be important that learning from the Building Connections Fund, and from organisations working with

at-risk groups of young people such as those with special educational needs and care leavers, is pooled and shared rapidly. Rigorous monitoring of the impact of work being undertaken under the Strategy, using recommended loneliness measures, will be key.

Recommendations

We recommend that:

- The impact of the introduction of loneliness to the new curriculum for RSE and HE should be monitored, and teachers should be supported to implement this effectively, for example, through high-quality learning materials and training around loneliness.

- Initiatives to reduce loneliness among children and young people should be evaluated using recommended loneliness measures and evidence pooled to increase understanding of what works.

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[28] The Youth Charter evolved from a roundtable the Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, held in April 2019 with the youth sector, sports bodies, charities and creative organisations as part of the Prime Minister's Serious Youth Violence Summit to tackle knife crime. The Youth Charter is currently in development by the government alongside youth sector organisations and young people, and will set out to give young people a voice on the issues of importance to them and coordinate government youth policy. This work is being led by DCMS.

Photo © iStock

Supporting group activities

The government has worked with a range of organisations to take forward work to support group activity to strengthen local social relationships and community ties. This has included:

- Providing grants to youth groups to fund 6,250 additional places for disadvantaged and underrepresented young people and 1,000 adult volunteers. Research to support this has also been commissioned with Youth United, taking a largely youth-led approach.

- Launching five pilot projects to test and develop new models to support age-friendly and inclusive volunteering opportunities. The Centre for Ageing Better provided match funds and is managing the programme.

- Sport England awarded grants from its Active Ageing Fund to two programmes which specifically tackle loneliness through sport and physical activity for people over 55. Programmes will be launched in August 2019.

- Through the celebrating age programme, ACE has funded 32 projects that seek to increase engagement of older people with the arts, some of which focus specifically on tackling isolation. Likewise, the creative people and places programme also includes projects that incorporate these issues.

However, as in other areas of the strategy, plans for future roll-out and scaling of these initiatives are not yet clear.

Areas for future focus

Ensuring that loneliness across the life course is part of the national conversation will be vital if we are to continue to make progress on this issue. In the next phase of its work, government needs to restate its commitment to tackling loneliness and to supporting a national conversation. To do this, it will need to sustain and build upon its national loneliness campaign, learning from the Let's Talk Loneliness campaign to further develop and refine its work.

While a whole host of activity is being developed through grants programmes to encourage community activity to promote connection and reduce isolation, there is a risk that opportunities are missed to develop the evidence base around what works in tackling loneliness. Where government is supporting activities aimed at reducing loneliness, the recommended measures should be used to identify their impact on loneliness, so that this can inform policy and funding decisions. Government should set out clear plans for rolling out effective practice – either by building such approaches into policy or by working with funders to identify resources to support scaling.

Recommendations

In addition to the recommendations on work with children and young people set out above, we recommend that:

- Government commits to future funding of public campaigns on loneliness, drawing on learnings from the Let's Talk Loneliness campaign, and building in robust evaluation.

- Government should continue to focus work on groups at particular risk of loneliness – including children and young people, those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, those from black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) backgrounds, new parents and carers, and more.

- Where public money is being used to support activities to reduce loneliness, the impact should be monitored using recommended measures, and emerging evidence should be fed into the wider evidence base on loneliness.

5

# Progress in developing a cross-governmental approach to loneliness

Chapter five set out how the government would build on the Loneliness Strategy, recognising that it was a first step in addressing this issue. Pledges related to how the Strategy would be taken forward across government and embedding loneliness in policy-making across government.

Areas of progress

Maintaining focus on the Strategy

Since the launch of the Loneliness Strategy, a significant amount of work has gone into establishing the Whitehall infrastructure needed to drive forward this cross-cutting agenda. Progress against the pledges made in these areas is harder to assess because work is ongoing, but we have seen positive signs of commitment to the Loneliness Strategy across government.

- Ministers across government who had loneliness written into their portfolios have taken an active interest in the agenda, despite some churn in ministerial positions. Ministers have been committed to tackling loneliness and to honouring the legacy of Jo Cox MP.

- Ministers and officials attend regular cross-government meetings, to share ideas and report on progress. Since the Strategy was launched, the ministerial group has met twice and further meetings are planned.

- Government has engaged with the Loneliness Action Group in the implementation of the Strategy. The Minister for Loneliness spoke at a conference hosted by the British Red Cross and Co-op on behalf of the Group in May 2019 and officials from various departments and arm's-length bodies have attended meetings.

- Work has begun on developing the first annual report on tackling loneliness, which is expected to be published later in 2019.
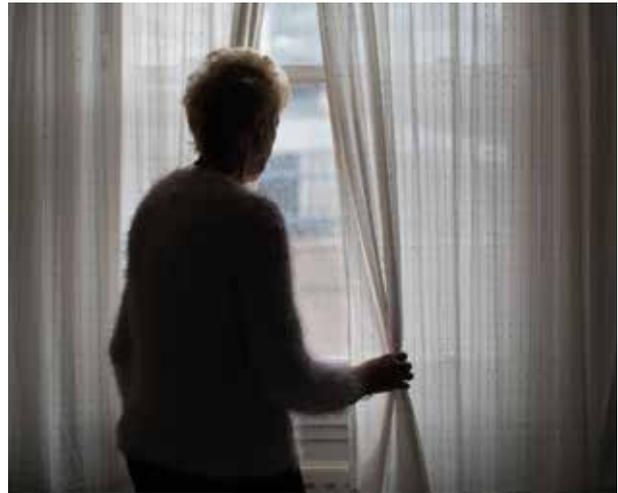
It is heartening to see the commitment to the delivery of the Loneliness Strategy across government, by both Ministers and officials. Officials cited the Loneliness Strategy as a good example of effective and collaborative cross-government working. Several interviewees talked about how the Strategy had encouraged teams and departments out of siloed working.

However, as would be expected, some departments have made more progress than others, both in taking forward their pledges and in embedding this agenda in their work. Some departments have found loneliness to be a natural fit, and have been able to slot loneliness into wider work relatively easily. For others, work on loneliness has entailed laying the groundwork by engaging with new stakeholders and building new relationships. The delivery and development of the Loneliness Strategy is only possible with cross-government working and it is hoped that the recent changes in government will not affect this commitment.

Focus on:
the Loneliness Test

The development of an ongoing mechanism through which the impact of policy on connection and relationships could be assessed was a key ask of the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness.

The Commission argued that government should develop a policy test around loneliness such that all new government policy would need to be assessed against its potential impact on loneliness and social connection. When the Strategy was launched, the government committed to ensuring that impacts on loneliness were considered across policy, and indicated that it was minded to deliver this pledge by incorporating consideration of impact on loneliness into the current Family Test. The Family Test has been in place since 2014 and is led by the DWP.[29] It requires all government departments to consider the impact of their policies on family relationships.

Since the publication of the Strategy, the inclusion of loneliness within the Family Test has been confirmed and DCMS officials have been working with colleagues at the DWP to develop guidance to support this. Guidance on the revised Family Test, including reference to the connection between family relationships and loneliness, is due to be published in autumn 2019.

For the future

The new guidance that has been produced to encourage consideration of loneliness as part of the Family Test is a positive step forward. However, it is too early to assess how the new Test will be received across government or what its impact on loneliness will be.

It is not clear that the Family Test has been very effective in driving better policy for families to date, or that the Test is taken seriously across government.[30] Fresh efforts will therefore be required to ensure that the new Test makes a difference on loneliness.

There is also a need for further work to deliver the promise to consider the impact of policy on loneliness in the round. The work done to date falls short of delivering a full-scale Loneliness Test, because the new guidance will see loneliness considered only in so far as it may be the result of change to family relationships. As such, impact of policy on social relationships, and the resulting impact on levels of loneliness, will not be considered.

In the coming year, the government will need to do more to deliver a true Loneliness Test – this could be achieved by further extension of the Family Test to cover impact on social as well as family relationships, or by the development of a new test. Once tests are established, Ministers will need to champion them across their departments and government will need to celebrate examples of their effective implementation against key policy agenda, to ensure that the changes made have a tangible impact on loneliness.

As well as action within government, ongoing external scrutiny will be needed to ensure that policy tests are being used and are making a difference. Bodies such as the APPG on Loneliness and third sector campaigning organisations will have a vital role to play in providing support and challenge around these tests.

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[29] Abreu, L, Bellis, A (2019) *The Family Test House* of Commons Briefing Paper Number 07714

[30] Centre for Social Justice (2019) *A review of the Family Test* Centre for Social Justice

However, even when maximally effective, policy tests such as the Family Test still have some limitations. Tests are applied to new policies, but they cannot address gaps where no policy development is planned. Results of any future Loneliness Test must therefore be reported upon as part of a wider assessment of the nature and impact of government action on loneliness, so that areas of inactivity and gaps can be identified.

We recommend:

- The government should continue work to develop a full-scale Loneliness Test, through which the impact of policy on both family and social relationships and the resulting impact on loneliness is considered and acted upon.

- Ministers should champion the new inclusion of loneliness in the Family Test and celebrate examples of its use.

- By the time it publishes its second annual report on loneliness in 2020, a Loneliness Test should be in place and government should set out examples of how the Test has impacted public policy, as part of a wider assessment of the impact of government policy on loneliness.

Engagement with stakeholders

The Strategy committed the government to engaging with stakeholders, including the Loneliness Action Group. The evidence we gathered through this review showed that this pledge was being met:

- Government has engaged with the Loneliness Action Group through formal meetings and informal consultations.

- The Campaign to End Loneliness has worked closely with officials within BEIS to support its new employers' champions network and to develop the Employers Pledge, as well as meeting regularly with the team at DCMS.

- Grant-making bodies including The National Lottery Community Fund and Co-op Foundation have worked closely with government to pool and distribute funds.

- Stakeholders have been engaged in a wide range of discussions both with the Loneliness Strategy team and with individual government departments.

The strong engagement between the Loneliness Action Group and the government was reflected in a broadly positive assessment of progress by its members who were surveyed for this report. 53 organisations responded to the survey, of which:

- 50 per cent felt that progress against the Strategy had been as good as expected

- 3 per cent felt that progress was better than expected

- 21 per cent said it was slower than expected

- 27 per cent not as good as expected or behind.

Respondents praised cross-departmental working and involvement of other stakeholders, as well as the appointment of a Loneliness Minister and the availability of funding behind the Strategy. With 64 per cent of respondents reporting that they had been involved in the delivery of the Strategy, this group has a close view of what the government is doing, and this is reflected in the positive assessment of progress.

However, among those perhaps less closely involved in the work of the government, views were less positive. Members of the supporter network of the Campaign to End Loneliness (made up of grassroots organisations and individuals) were also surveyed on their sense of progress. 36 responses were received, of whom:

- Only 8 per cent felt that progress had been as good as expected

- 44 per cent said it was slower than expected

- 47 per cent said it was not as good as expected or behind

- No respondents felt that progress was better than expected.

When asked to name the most important actions that government has taken so far, the majority struggled, stating that they did not know or were unaware of actions the government has taken. A few named the appointment of a Loneliness Minister and others that awareness of the issue had been raised among the public.

The differences between the responses from the Loneliness Action Group and the Campaign to End Loneliness supporter network may reflect the limited public reporting on action on loneliness, such that those not so closely involved in the Strategy are less aware of its progress. More regular reporting on progress may therefore help to address this.

However, it is also likely to reflect the reality that, while positive work is being done to pilot new approaches and share good practice, the wider context of cuts, particularly to local government funding, continues to heavily impact the social infrastructure upon which people rely to support their connections.

Areas for future focus

The Loneliness Strategy was an important first step in tackling loneliness. The commitment from government at all levels is very welcome and has been essential in driving progress to date. This needs to continue if loneliness is to be addressed.

However, there are worrying signs that cross-governmental commitment may be weakening – for example, despite the provision of guidance to government departments on including loneliness in Single Departmental Plans, only the DCMS and DEFRA refer to activity on loneliness in their published plans.

As we move into the second year of the Strategy, government must make a renewed commitment to the loneliness agenda – setting out a concrete plan for embedding this work and making sure that efforts to assess policy for its impact on loneliness lead to tangible changes which support connection and reduce loneliness.

It will also need to increase the pace and scale of roll-out of learning on loneliness – scaling up successful pilots and spreading good practice by embedding these within policy guidance and providing funding for replication across the country.

Recommendations

In addition to the recommendations on the Loneliness Test set out above, we recommend:

- Government should restate its overall commitment to tackling loneliness as a priority – with continued emphasis on loneliness as a cross-governmental responsibility, coordinated by the Minister for Loneliness and a dedicated team of officials.

- Government should set out plans for sustained action and investment in tackling loneliness across all departments. These should be published alongside the first annual report.

- Government should demonstrate its ongoing commitment to a national conversation on loneliness by providing additional and sustained support for the national loneliness campaign, building on the learning from its Let's Talk Loneliness campaign.

Conclusion and recommendations

While it is still early days in the implementation of the Loneliness Strategy, the overall picture is one of positive progress. Many of the pledges made in the Strategy have already been delivered and the remainder are on track. The loneliness agenda has been well received across government and is galvanising positive cross-departmental cooperation. This is a great achievement.

Strong progress has been made in relation to the development of new measures on loneliness and the roll-out of social prescribing. There have also been positive moves to embed loneliness in the machinery of government and in the policy-making process, particularly through the work to incorporate loneliness into the Family Test.

However, in other areas, apparent progress perhaps reflects the relative modesty of the original pledges, and there is still more to do to secure tangible change in the levels of loneliness found in communities up and down the country.

The Strategy was always billed as a first step. As we move into another year, there is a need to consolidate and build upon the progress made to date. Without action at greater scale and pace, the impact of the Loneliness Strategy is unlikely to be felt in communities – many of which are struggling in a context of cuts to a range of key public services, and squeezes on the VCSE sector. For example, there is still more to be done to improve the provision of community support and activities and around key agendas such as transport and housing.

Translating the Strategy's ambitions into tangible differences in people's lives will require a step change in the nature of activity across government – from development all the way to delivery.

There are six key areas for priority action:

1. **Sustain and fund action across government:** We need a renewed commitment to tackling loneliness across government departments. 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.

2. **Measure impact:** Government must measure the impact of its activity on loneliness, including through the Public Health Outcomes Framework (PHOF) and ensuring that where public money is spent on tackling loneliness, the impact is evaluated using recommended measures.

3. **Move from development to delivery:** In the next phase of the Strategy, government should build on the learning from pilots and identification of good practice, making plans to embed successful interventions in policy and investing in the replication of effective schemes across the country.

4. **Invest in the infrastructure communities need to stay connected:** Social connection depends on local community infrastructure. Government should invest in the provision of community space, and support and activities to enable connection. We also need to ensure that transport policy and investment are loneliness-proofed, and that housing policy supports social connection and participation.

5. **Ensure social prescribing delivers for loneliness:** Government must continue to deliver on its commitment to tackling loneliness through social prescribing. It can do this by ensuring staff are trained in understanding and addressing loneliness, assessing the impact of schemes using

recommended loneliness measures, and funding the services and support that communities need to enable people to reconnect. PCNs should be encouraged to draw on learnings from existing schemes, including the Connecting Communities programme delivered by the British Red Cross and Co-op partnership.

6. **Build capacity to address loneliness among children and young people:** The pledge to teach children about loneliness in schools must be backed with a robust support offer to teachers. Continued investment will be needed to find out what works in addressing loneliness among children and young people, and to roll out effective approaches across the country.

The Loneliness Action Group has been proud to work alongside government through the first year of implementation of this world-leading Loneliness Strategy. Much has been achieved. But there remains much to do. As we move into the next year of implementation, a wide range of stakeholders across business and civil society, working alongside the APPG on Loneliness, is committed to providing continued support and challenge to government as it takes forward this ambitious agenda and vital work.

Next steps

To continue the work of this report in assessing the progress made in tackling loneliness, the APPG on Loneliness will be conducting an inquiry throughout the year ahead.

For more information and to stay in touch with the work of the APPG, please contact LonelinessAction@redcross.org.uk

Appendix 1: Interviewees

The following government departments and arm's-length bodies were interviewed as part of the development of the shadow report:

- Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
- Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport
- Department for Education
- Department for Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs
- Department for Health and Social Care
- Department for Transport
- Department for Work and Pensions
- Home Office
- Ministry of Housing, Local Government and Communities
- NHS England
- Office for National Statistics
- Public Health England

The following non-governmental organisations were also interviewed:

- Age UK
- Arts Council England
- Campaign to End Loneliness
- Co-op Foundation
- The National Lottery Community Fund
- What Works Centre for Wellbeing

Appendix 2: Pledge-by-pledge tracker

A full list of progress made against each of the 58 commitments in the Loneliness Strategy is available at: redcross.org.uk/shadowreport

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