

Addressing Social Isolation & Loneliness faced by Cardiff Residents following the outbreak of Covid-19

Reason for the Report

1. To provide Committee Members with an overview of how the Council is addressing social isolation & loneliness for Cardiff's adult population following the outbreak of covid-19.
2. Members and meeting participants will note, that in line with the Committee's terms of reference, the remit of this work will be around the adult population of Cardiff, those aged 18 plus.

Background

3. When considering the Committee's work programme for 2020/21, Members agreed to undertake a piece of work around how the Council is addressing social isolation and loneliness following the outbreak of covid-19. With a particular focus on;
 - The Council's role in addressing and mitigating social isolation and loneliness following the outbreak of covid-19.
 - How the covid-19 pandemic has heightened social isolation for all demographics of Cardiff citizens aged 18 plus.

- To understand and assess how the Council is working with partners, such as the Welsh Government, charities and religious communities to understand and address this issue.
 - To discuss local issues and challenges and consider measures in place to both mitigate and address loneliness and social isolation brought forward by the pandemic.
4. Representatives from the following organisations have been invited to attend the Committee meeting to share their knowledge, views and perspectives of the impact of covid-19 on social isolation and how the Council can work towards addressing the issue:
- **Welsh Government**
To provide insight into the national context and their perspective on how challenges are being addressed at a local level. To also provide an update on national policy and facilitate understanding on how the Council and Welsh Government work together to address this issue.
 - **British Red Cross**
To provide an overview of how the full spectrum of society have been impacted by social isolation and loneliness and the demands and findings of the organisation. To also share their perspective on how social isolation can be best addressed by local authorities and to provide an overview of their published reports, [‘Life after Lockdown’](#) and [‘Lonely and Left Behind’](#)
 - **Project Hope**
To provide an overview of their organisation along with insight into how their demographic, young adults aged 18 plus, have been impacted. To also share their perspective on how local authorities can best engage with this age group.
 - **Age Connects Cardiff & Vale**
To provide an overview of how the older demographic have been impacted and the demands on their organisation in relation to social isolation and loneliness. To also share their perspective on how social isolation for the older demographic can be best addressed by local authorities

- **Religious Sector Representation; Church in Wales & Roman Catholic**¹
To provide their respective insight into how the religious sector have been impacted and to share their perspective on how local authorities can best address this issue and engage with religious communities.

Structure of Papers

5. Attached at **Appendix A** is a briefing note formed by the service area providing insight into how social isolation and loneliness is being addressed by the council following the outbreak of covid-19. The note includes sections on;
 - ❖ Keeping in touch;
 - ❖ Help for Local Volunteer Groups;
 - ❖ Digital Social Inclusion;
 - ❖ Removing Barriers to Digital Deprivation by Upskilling & Providing Equipment;
 - ❖ Activities & Learning
6. **Appendix B** is written evidence submitted by some of the external participants in order to aid Members consideration in advance of the meeting. Submissions have been received from
 - Welsh Government
 - British Red Cross
 - Age Connects Cardiff & Vale and;
 - Roman Catholic & Church in Wales attendees.
7. Attached at **Appendix C** is a short briefing note prepared by the scrutiny research team setting out the national context and outlining how policies and measures introduced in response to the pandemic have impacted various individuals and service user groups who benefit from the services provided by Cardiff Council.

¹ Being mindful of time constraints, and to ensure the meeting is of a feasible length it was determined that religious representatives for this meeting be based on the 2020 ASK Cardiff survey results, with the largest amount of respondents, 39.2%, being of Christian denominations.

8. When considering the attached Appendices and the information provided at the meeting, Members are reminded of the Committee's Terms of Reference. Members will note some areas contained within the Appendices fall outside of the Committee's remit, for instance funeral restrictions and education matters for those of primary or secondary school age. However, for contextual reasons, and to aid Members consideration, they are included as key elements which contribute to the issue of social isolation and loneliness.

Scope of Scrutiny

9. During the meeting, Members will have the opportunity to:

- Consider the impact of social isolation and loneliness and assess how the council is both addressing and mitigating social isolation and loneliness for Cardiff residents since the outbreak of the pandemic
- Understand how services have adapted, and discuss any known local challenges or issues
- Any new initiatives established by the council
- Determine if the Council is being proactive and preventative in its approach.
- Assess how the council works with partners on the issues of social isolation – such as charities, health boards and governing bodies.

Issues

10. The impact of social isolation and loneliness on the well-being of Cardiff residents' have been exacerbated during the pandemic. The introduction of lockdown and shielding measures means that the issue of loneliness and social isolation has increased amongst all demographics.

11. Research undertaken by the British Red Cross in June 2020² highlighted that those particularly at risk included people who lived alone and were shielding, younger people, people from Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME)

² ' Life after lockdown: Tackling loneliness among those left behind' Accessed 18 Jan, 2021 - <https://www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/we-speak-up-for-change/life-after-lockdown-tackling-loneliness>

backgrounds, people with long-term physical and mental health conditions and people who were financially insecure.

12. Conventional approaches toward tackling loneliness and social isolation are challenged by the social distance measures in place across the country. Digital technology can be used to tackle loneliness and isolation, however digital exclusion for certain demographics continues to be an acknowledged challenge. However, as detailed in **Appendix A**, in response to the pandemic council services such as Cardiff Hubs and Libraries, Independent Living Services, the Advice service and Adult Learning's digital support team have significantly increased the digital offer in a bid to combat social isolation.
13. The council's digital support team is working alongside both internal and external partners in order to stimulate digital inclusion across Cardiff's residents'. Partners who the team engage with include Social Services/Independent Living Services, BT, Digital Communities Wales, local volunteer groups and Public Health Wales. Referrals have been set up into the team to ensure that those who need help towards accessing online platforms can access it easily.
14. In a bid to further stimulate digital inclusion and address social isolation, Cardiff Council's advice service are also offering free tablets with internet access to individuals on a low income who do not have a device and internet connection at home and whose wellbeing is impacted by social isolation or wish to access online training.
15. In response to the crisis the council has introduced a range of measures and initiatives to support individuals who may be subject to loneliness and its challenges. A briefing note is attached at **Appendix A**. A brief overview of *some* of the work undertaken by the Council following the outbreak of the pandemic is summarised below.

Cardiff Hubs

October 2020 saw the launch of the new Cardiff Hub website³ providing information on Council services such as Advice Services, Adult Learning Cardiff, Into Work Advice and Library Services along with an overview of upcoming free online events, including but not limited to;

- a. Bilingual bookstart
- b. Keep On Moving
- c. Goldies Cymru
- d. Story Time
- e. Wellbeing Wednesday

Adviceline

Following the initial shielding advice by the Chief Medical Officer for Wales proactive work was undertaken by the Council's Adviceline to ensure contact was made with each individual to offer advice both during and post shielding. From 23 March to 24 August 2020, 18,772 outgoing calls were made and 15,720 calls were received by the Council's Adviceline, with 1,449 home visits also being completed. Over 7,000 additional wellbeing phone calls have also been made by volunteers. In addition, during the initial period of shielding individuals were supported with emergency food parcels and weekly food boxes from the Welsh Government⁴.

Social Services Review Team

The Review team has provided support to carers through regular phone contact. This has provided emotional support to carers and those at risk of isolation, the team also provided signposting and identified other needs such as support for collection of prescriptions where people have not been able to access normal support services.

³ www.cardiffhubs.co.uk Accessed: 4 Jan 2021

⁴ On average, there were 2,000 residents at any one time in Cardiff receiving a food box from the Welsh Government

Volunteer Cardiff Website

The Volunteer Cardiff website provided the platform for the 'Together for Cardiff' volunteering initiative' enabling volunteers to help ensure much needed food and medical supplies reached the most vulnerable. The website has also become a source of information and support bringing mutual aid groups and other local organisations such as Cardiff Third Sector Council together in one place. From the 1st April to October 2020 there have been over 100,469 hits on the website. To complement and further support the rapid increase of volunteering across the city, partners developed a network of trusted community groups, or Anchor Organisations, to enable key messages and resources such as e-learning to be disseminated to newly established volunteer groups. The network also provides an avenue for the food response coordinated by Food Cardiff.

Welsh Government Self Isolation Support Payment scheme

From November 16 2020, the Council's Benefits Assessment Team have administered the Self Isolation Support Payment scheme in Cardiff with Advice and Hub staff offering additional support to clients eligible to make a claim.

The Welsh Government-funded payments of £500 are available to people who meet all of the below criteria:

- on low incomes
- unable to work from home
- told to self-isolate by the NHS Wales Test, Trace, Protect service (TTP)
- will lose income as a result of having to self-isolate

Way Forward

16. At this meeting, the following witnesses will be in attendance:

- (i) Councillor Susan Elsmore (Cabinet Member for Social Care, Health & Well-being)
- (ii) Councillor Lynda Thorne (Cabinet Member for Housing & Communities);
- (iii) Sarah McGill (Corporate Director, People & Communities);
- (iv) Jane Thomas, (Director of Adults Social Services, Communities and Housing);
- (v) Louise Barry (Assistant Director, Adult Services)

(vi) Members will also receive evidence from the following:

- The Welsh Government
- British Red Cross
- Project Hope
- Age Connects Cardiff & Vale
- Church in Wales & Roman Catholic Representative

17. At the start of this meeting, Cabinet Members and officers will provide Members with an overview detailing how the council has responded to the issue of social isolation and loneliness since the pandemic.

18. Following the service area's overview, Members will hear evidence from the externals and enter into allocated Q&A sessions with each witness. Following discussions; the Cabinet Members and council officers will then be invited to comment and reflect on discussions at the end of the meeting.

19. Following the discussions, Members will be able to decide if they wish to feed any comments, observations or recommendations to the council's Cabinet for their consideration.

Legal Implications

20. The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters there are no direct legal implications. However, legal implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications. Any report with recommendations for decision that goes to the Cabinet/Council will set out any legal implications arising from those recommendations. All decision taken by or on behalf of the Council must (a) be within the legal powers of the Council; (b) comply with any procedural requirements imposed by law; (c) be within the powers of the body or person exercising powers on behalf of the Council; (d) be undertaken in accordance with the procedural requirements imposed by the Council e.g. Scrutiny Procedure Rules; (e) be taken having regard to the Council's fiduciary duty to its taxpayers; and (he) be reasonable and proper in all the circumstances.

Financial Implications

21. The Scrutiny Committee is empowered to enquire, consider, review and recommend but not to make policy decisions. As the recommendations in this report are to consider and review matters there are no direct financial implications at this stage in relation to any of the work programme. However, financial implications may arise if and when the matters under review are implemented with or without any modifications. Any report with recommendations for decision that goes to Cabinet/Council will set out any financial implications arising from those recommendations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is recommended to:

- i. Consider the information set out in this report and its subsequent appendices;
- ii. Consider the information provided by witnesses to this meeting;
- iii. Decide whether it wishes to relay any comments or observations to the Cabinet; and
- iv. Decide the way forward with regard to any further scrutiny of this issue.

Davina Fiore

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28 January 2021