

**Date:** 10 December 2020

**Title:** Update on the Social Isolation Co-Design Project

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**Report Sponsor:** Dr Jane O'Grady

**Purpose of Report:** This report provides members with an update on progress with projects identified as part of the system wide approach to social isolation started in 2019.

**Report for information, discussion, decision or approval:** *For Information*

**Related [Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#) Priority:** *Addressing social isolation is a Health and Wellbeing Board and system wide priority cutting across the overarching start well, live well, age well priorities.*

**Recommendations:** **The Health and Wellbeing Board is asked to receive the update on the Social Isolation projects and approve in principle the proposals for progressing the project.**

### **Executive summary**

- 1.1 In 2019 a multi-agency process involving a wide range of partners considered the Buckinghamshire shared approach to prevention and identified social isolation as the area of focus. People experiencing social isolation are likely to experience poor physical and mental health and are more likely to create increased demand on services due to increased need, but also inappropriate use of services as a means to achieve social contact.
- 1.2 A Multi-agency workshop generated a number of potential 'quick wins' and two potential longer term projects to address social isolation. There has been some progress this year but we have been limited because of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.
- 1.3 This report provides an update on progress and outlines proposals for taking forward the projects previously identified; to research and develop a screening tool, and to collate and share learning and good practice about local social isolation projects.

### **Background**

- 1.4 Social isolation is a state of having inadequate social relationships, both in terms of the quality and quantity of these interactions. It can affect people at any age through a range of circumstances related to the individual and the community. People experiencing social isolation are likely to experience poor physical and mental health and are more likely to create increased demand on services due to increased need, but also inappropriate use of services as a means to achieve social contact.

- 1.5 Members of the Board will recall that in 2019 a multi-agency process involving a wide range of partners considered the Buckinghamshire shared approach to prevention and identified social isolation as the area of focus. A two day workshop was held in September 2019 to explore the issues and impacts of social isolation and identify possible solutions. Five key areas of focus were identified:
- Sharing information and building insight to inform the development of future projects on social isolation
  - Development of early identification processes and pathways to prevent social isolation
  - Increasing access for professionals to information on community assets and other forms of support through the development and maintenance of a local directory of services
  - Better multi-agency co-ordination, particularly for residents who are already socially isolated and are known to a number of services
  - Mobilising communities to develop community assets to prevent social isolation.
- 1.6 The workshop generated a number of ideas to address the five identified themes. These included a number of potential 'quick wins' and two potential longer term projects which required further time and resource to explore (considered and approved by the Board at its meeting on 5 December 2019).

### **Progress**

- 1.7 This report provides information on progress to date but this is, of course, in light of the unprecedented events of 2020 and the impact that the global pandemic has had on the work programmes of every partner, and not least on our residents. Members will already have heard about the feedback from the Health Impact Assessment<sup>1</sup> which highlighted that 23% of survey respondents were concerned about feeling lonely and being isolated as a result of the restrictions put in place in March. The issue of social isolation in our communities has grown, but so has the focus on it, and one of the outcomes of the community and agency responses to the pandemic has been that many isolated residents have been contacted and supported over recent months. Much of this work has been captured by the community support hubs and the recently established community boards and is referred to in the following paragraphs.

### **Quick Wins**

- 1.8 The Bucks Online Directory of community assets and services – has been updated and relaunched in 2020 to be more user friendly, and to include assets and services to help residents affected by the Covid-19 restrictions. This is being actively promoted to partners and residents, online and via the community boards.

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<sup>1</sup> Buckinghamshire Covid-19 Health Impact Assessment and Health and Wellbeing Recovery Plan Priorities October 2020

<https://buckinghamshire.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s12741/HIA%20HWPB%20Recovery%20Plan%20Report%206%20Octoberf.pdf>

- 1.9 Exploring how other strategies and action plans can contribute to reducing social isolation, for example the new Community Boards and the Buckinghamshire Cultural Strategy – this work is underway. All of the Community Boards have received local health profiles and have been identifying local priorities to tackle through a series of sub-groups, with a number of them identifying social isolation. The Board Co-ordinators are working closely with the Buckinghamshire Culture project officer to identify opportunities in their local areas.
- 1.10 Growing social assets through other workstreams (for example sports and physical activity) – there are a number of examples of projects established directly or indirectly in response to Covid-19 which offer social contact for potentially isolated residents including befriending schemes (such as the Bucks Disability Service “Buddies” scheme, the Clare Foundation, Age UK and Bucks Older People’s Action Group digital inclusion scheme, and the countywide Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Communities Network which delivered projects to mark Black History Month and Diwali).
- 1.11 A number of the actions identified have been delayed or postponed because of the impact of Covid-19 on organisational capacity and work programmes. This includes incorporating ‘tackling social isolation’ as a screening tool, building on existing joint work on frequent contacts and other initiatives of partners, and expanding existing partnerships.
- 1.12 A co-ordinated communications campaign has been delayed but there is an opportunity to incorporate this into the councils Winter Communications Plan. Training for frontline staff has been postponed, however as Making Every Contact Count (MECC) training is stepped back up, social isolation and support available can be included via this strength based approach. MECC training is currently being delivered to Contact Centre staff in the council.

#### **Longer term projects**

- 1.13 A multi-agency workshop was held in September to review the two project proposals and this was done through the Covid-19 lens.
- 1.14 Partners were updated on the public health Covid-19 Health Impact Assessment and were able to share some of their organisation’s experience and response to social isolation during this period. In light of the impact of the pandemic the group revisited the original proposals.
  - i. A project to consider the potential for developing or sourcing a screening tool, and a multi-agency agreed pathway for those ‘at risk’ of social isolation. There is currently no screening tool, but across the partners there are many opportunities to identify people at points in their lives where the risk of becoming socially isolated is increased (for example redundancy, retirement, bereavement, becoming or stopping being a carer, moving to a new area).

It is recommended that a multi-agency task and finish group continues to develop a 'tool' (carrying out further research on what could work) to identify those at risk of isolation and facilitate signposting to support services. This tool would need to be multifunctional, adaptable for existing processing and assessments, and able to be used opportunistically via a Making Every Contact Count 'MECC' approach.

- ii. A project to consider identifying hot spot areas, where the risk factors for social isolation might be clustered, and then piloting work in one of those areas to get greater local insight into the problem and co-design solutions with local communities.

In light of the impact of and response to the Covid-19 pandemic it was felt that there would be little added-value to creating a pilot project, but it is recommended that the learning and research carried out to date (along with learning from current community projects set up to address social isolation in response to Covid-19, e.g. The Clare Foundation digital inclusion scheme and local community responses) is shared with stakeholders to inform the development of their social isolation projects, for example the Community Boards which have identified social isolation as a priority. This could take the form of a single, or series of webinars, and / or written case studies.

In addition, to establish a multi-agency 'social isolation forum' to enable the ongoing sharing of best practice and learning to ensure that stakeholders, including community boards, are able to link in with best practice and seek guidance when considering developing and/or funding local projects.

## **Consultation and communication**

- 1.15 All workshops have involved stakeholders from NHS (Bucks Healthcare Trust and the Bucks Clinical Commissioning Group), local authorities, Police, Fire and Rescue services, and the Voluntary Sector.
- 1.16 Progress with this work has been reported to the Health and Wellbeing Board at regular intervals, providing all partners with an opportunity to comment.
- 1.17 It is proposed that a multi-agency approach is taken to progress work on the two projects outlined in paragraph 1.14 and the outcomes will be shared widely.

## **Next steps**

- 1.18 The public health team will take forward the proposals and progress the project as part of the 2020/21 work programme.

## **Background papers**

1.19 Previous Health & Wellbeing Board reports in March, June and December 2019 which can all be found at:

<https://buckinghamshire.moderngov.co.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?Committeed=350>