

# SCRUTINY REPORT



**MEETING:** Health Scrutiny Committee

**DATE:** 14<sup>th</sup> March 2023

**SUBJECT:** Loneliness and Social Isolation Sub-Group Update Report

**REPORT FROM:** Councillor E FitzGerald

**CONTACT OFFICER:** Chloe Ashworth, Senior Scrutiny Officer

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## 1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

To inform Members of the Health Scrutiny Committee of the work of the newly established Loneliness and Social Isolation Sub-Group over the last Municipal year.

## 2.0 BACKGROUND

As part of its work programme for 2022/23 the Health Scrutiny Committee requested that the Loneliness and Social Isolation Sub-Group be established to discuss the topics raised and seek assurances on matters raised in Committee meetings.

The Membership of the Group comprised of Councillor E FitzGerald (Chair), Councillors Grimshaw, Walsh, Moss and Rizvi.

Due to the detail the Health Scrutiny wanted on groups effected social isolation and loneliness it was agreed that the sub-group be established to give time and space to have detailed briefings on current work to reduce social isolation and loneliness.

## 3.0 METHODOLOGY

The Group has met on the following occasions:-

03/11/2022  
23/01/2023  
06/03/2023

Councillor FitzGerald attended Youth Cabinet on 14/02/2023 and Councillor Moss visited the Nicky Alliance.

Members were supported in their work by Deb Yates, Strategic Lead for Integrated Commissioning, Older People, Karen Grant from the Nicky Alliance Centre and Dan Howe from Andy's Man Club.

During this municipal year the Committee agreed that the focus for 2022/23 should include the following:

- **Which demographics of people now identify as socially isolated or lonely -** Following on from the pandemic what work needs to take place on people who may feel lonely or socially isolated as there was a worry of people being withdrawn from society.
- **Schemes to prevent social isolation and loneliness -** For Members to discuss the good schemes which are run by different groups to see what they could learn from these groups.

Members sought assurances on the work being undertaken to identify and support the reduction of residents who identify as socially isolated or lonely.

#### **4.0 WORK UNDERTAKEN BY THE GROUP**

- **UPDATE ON THE LONELINESS AND SOCIAL ISOLATION STEERING GROUP**

Members considered the work of the established Loneliness and Social Isolation Steering Group. In addition Members were advised there is an older peoples network which is from age 50+ also. Members were informed that Lots of work was done by the Hubs during Covid, much of which has now stopped. Members noted that following the pandemic more people are identifying as lonely and there is importance in identifying these groups such as new parents / young families to see what is being offered. Members also provided examples of a reduction in attendance following the pandemic.

- **NICKY ALLIANCE CENTRE**

Members were informed about the service provision that the Nicky Alliance centre provide within the Jewish community. It was recognised that faith based communities may be better at tackling social isolation due the community aspect of religion. The group were interested in what lessons could be learnt from the centre and the work it was doing. Their work is aimed at all ages from thirty years plus and they provide classes, transport, activities and food. These services are heavily subsidised but there are payments from users and transport. One key lesson is that whilst the Jewish community and the person's family and friends can identify the risk of loneliness and the need for support, however, without engagement from the individual there will not be a successful outcome.

- **YOUTH CABINET**

Cllr FitzGerald attended Youth Cabinet explaining that 2021 report by Harvard University had found that 61% of young adults feel serious loneliness. Their feedback on this, how we can encourage young people to reach out and their 'ask' of us as a council and the wider healthcare system was: there has been a reduction in public spaces and activities for young people to be themselves, together and in real life – outcomes from the cuts were explicitly mentioned; parents are worried about young people being online but this can be a support from friends; they would like to see other young people talking about their experiences of being lonely rather than being told about it by adults in assemblies; they feel lonely and isolated if they don't have quality friendships (not quantity); it can be hard to come out of their shells post pandemic and even some aspects remain (classrooms not set up for group working). There was an overwhelming theme of a need for a better

generational understanding of their predicament and how they have been effected by our decisions.

- **ANDY'S MAN CLUB**

Members were informed about the work of Andy's Man Club. Members noted the statistic that suicide is the biggest cause of death for men under 50 and one man dies every two hours in the UK. The biggest cause of suicide are economic worries so they are concerned about the Cost of Living Crisis (not the pandemic). Their focus is not to tell people what to do or give advice, but to share experiences, give them a space to come together and take responsibility to make change. The group in Bury has been very successful at attracting and retaining members by giving them a sense of community and being part of something. The main group is 40-60 although this can change depending on location. Their view is men only have a small number of quality friends and are not good at asking for help. Whilst members come from a variety of sources most are told to come by a female partner, friend or relative. 90% of the comments on social media are from women supporting the positive experience of their partner. Members noted the successful of the club, the engagement of members and how it had increased additional new friendships and activities with others outside of the meeting.

## **5.0 ACTIONS TAKEN AS A RESULT OF THE GROUP**

1. Engage with young people through Youth Participation workers/Youth Cabinet/Schools to discuss issues and work being done for young people in the area.
2. To have a meeting with Cabinet Members for Children and Health to discuss the work of the T & F Group and next steps which could include ensure Councillor representation on the social isolation and loneliness Steering Group
3. Visit the Nicky Alliance Centre to see provision and meet with users.
4. Investigate what offer there is for new mothers and their toddlers who are socially isolated following the Covid19 pandemic. We were unable to meet with this group during the current municipal year.

## **6.0 CONCLUSION**

Members of the group supported by Strategic Leads within the Department have met on three occasions and interviewed and sought assurances 2 different partners.

The conclusion is that the general assumption that only older people are lonely is too narrow and we should recognise and support other groups.

That all the groups spoken to said the opportunity to be part of something was important. It could be online but real life was better.

The pandemic had created some problems but was not the main issue. It had impacted the Young People more significantly than the experience at the Nicky Alliance, and Andy's Man's Club cautioned against media reports saying it was a driver of suicide.

## **7.0 RECOMMENDATIONS 2023/2024**

Members of the Carers Sub-Group wished to put forward the following recommendations:

1. For members of the Health Scrutiny Committee to note the progress made by the task and finish group
2. For a councillor to become part of the Social Isolation and Loneliness Steering Group
3. For the Council to consider the impact of further cuts to Youth Services and how they can be increased.
4. To review the Steering Group's Terms of Reference and to understand what cohorts are being supported and considered.

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### List of Background Papers:-

Harvard Report on Loneliness <https://mcc.gse.harvard.edu/reports/loneliness-in-america>

Andy's Man Club <https://www.burytimes.co.uk/news/23063966.bury-andys-man-club-sees-another-record-breaking-turnout/>

[Andy's Man Club | #ITSOKAYTOTALK | Andy's Man Club \(andysmanclub.co.uk\)](#)

Verbal Report to Youth Cabinet by Councillor FitzGerald (text):

Hi everyone, as I said before I am Cllr Liz FitzGerald and I am Chair of the Health Scrutiny Committee. Thanks for allowing me to come here today to listen to your contributions as young people to our committee that is looking at Social Isolation and Loneliness.

I'll just take a couple of minutes to take you through what we are doing, the issue and what we would like to ask you about before I take your feedback.

It is this committee's job to scrutinise everything relating to health so our review goes beyond the council to the wider healthcare system in Bury to ensure it is working well for the residents.

Feeling lonely isn't always a mental health issue but it can become one. And feeling social anxiety can make it difficult to engage in everyday activities which could lead to a lack of meaningful social contact and cause feelings of loneliness.

When we first discussed this as a committee and started looking into it there was a tendency to see loneliness and a lack of social contact as something that mainly impacted older people. Searching for it on the internet we found that the NHS & government advice is generally based on this cohort and Age UK will be one of the first websites that comes up. And when you get to that website it just seems to say join a group which doesn't seem massively helpful.

However, analysis of the issue shows that - especially after the pandemic - other large cohorts of the population are finding themselves isolated and lonely. That despite all the ways we can engage with each other it is difficult to connect. It was children's mental health week last week and the School where I am Chair of Governors focused on the importance of good connections for good mental health.

A 2021 report by Harvard university found that 36% of all Americans - including 61% of young adults and 51% of mothers with young children - feel serious loneliness. It also talked about the steep costs of loneliness, including early mortality and a wide array of

serious physical and emotional problems, including depression, anxiety, heart disease, substance abuse, and domestic abuse.

So we have decided to try and speak to a wide group of people in Bury. These include yourselves, adult social care, faith based groups and next we will be speaking to Andy's man club.

So I am here today to ask - what are your thoughts on loneliness and social isolation for young people and how we can encourage them to reach out? And what would be your 'ask' of us as a Council and that wider healthcare system. We will report your voice back to challenge those institutions and try and make improvements.

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