

# Consultation Response

Loneliness Call for Evidence:  
Office for Civil Society, DCMS

Consent of Age UK has been obtained for the purposes of consultation on policy and practice.



## About this consultation

The Loneliness Team in the Office for Civil Society (DCMS) was set up following the Government's acceptance of the recommendations of the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness. Among other things they are committed to developing a Loneliness Strategy as a first step in tackling the long term challenge of loneliness. The strategy will be focused on where government has the clearest opportunity for action. They recognise that loneliness is a complex issue that affects many different groups of people, and that the evidence base is still developing. The consultation is a call for evidence from people and organisations with experience of working to reduce loneliness.

## About Age UK

Age UK is a national charity that works with a network of partners, including Age Scotland, Age Cymru, Age NI and local Age UKs across England, to help everyone make the most of later life, whatever their circumstances.

In the UK, the Charity helps more than seven million older people each year by providing advice and support. It also researches and campaigns on the issues that matter most to older people. Its work focuses on ensuring that older people: have enough money; enjoy life and feel well; receive high quality health and care; are comfortable, safe and secure at home; and feel valued and able to participate.

## Key points and recommendations

- **More than a million older people** experience chronic loneliness and without interventions to improve support and increase resilience this number will increase as the older population grows.
- Effective, community wide approaches to tackling loneliness combine **personalised** **ts-2.16192**

time.

- Voluntary and community sector organisations have a vital role to play in addressing loneliness as their missions are often concerned with the needs and aspirations of the **whole person**. Statutory services, in particular GPs and their practice managers and reception staff, district nurses and social care workers, police community support workers and fire and rescue services, also have a key role in **identifying** lonely people and referring them to the holistic, person centred services that the third sector can offer. Initiatives such as social prescribing and joint approaches with the voluntary and community sector such as *community connectors* and *care navigators* should be encouraged.
- We are delighted that the government strategy will work **across Government Departments** as loneliness cuts across a range of policy areas including health and social care, transport, housing and communities, rural affairs etc. Central Government departments can play a crucial role in raising awareness among front line services, providing training, encouraging local partnerships and funding services.
- Currently, national funding cuts, especially to local government, are having an adverse impact on many local voluntary and community sector initiatives to address loneliness, as well as on wider community services such as public and community transport and public

but such schemes need sufficient funding in order to promote, recruit and manage volunteers, and to ensure safeguarding processes are followed.

## 1. Introduction

Addressing loneliness amongst older people is an essential element of Age UK's work and has been for a number of years. We know that over a million older people are chronically lonely at any one time and we have directed significant amounts of our national and local capacity towards preventing and tackling it. However, it should be noted that much of our learning around what works in tackling loneliness faced by older people is transferrable to other groups, particularly the focus on finding and identifying lonely people, the importance of understanding their individual needs and responding to these in a personalised way.

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We are confident that the ONS findings don't demonstrate the importance of age per se, but rather that some risk factors are more likely at different ages. We would suggest that it would be better to express this first bullet point as a trigger point for loneliness commonly experienced by young people – such as leaving school or college – and then analyse the reasons why some individuals experience loneliness as they make that transition, and what helpful interventions there may be.

We have also found other factors that contribute to older people becoming lonely:

- Low income. Age UK provides holistic services and

- *Institutional and organisational changes that support social relationships (eg, health and social care services, employers)*
- *Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_*

Local Age UKs have a lot of experience in working on all of the above areas within their communities and regions. Along with other local charities they have a key role to play in building community capacity and helping to shape the work of the local statutory services. As well as services targeted at loneliness, services that they offer that are likely to contribute to reducing loneliness include:

- Lunch clubs and day centres
- Purposeful activity such as physical activity programmes, digital inclusion classes, creative and cultural programmes – all of which give people opportunities to do



- TPAL is based on a **holistic, personalised approach**, including personal support to the individual experiencing loneliness, community activation, partnerships with statutory authorities, other parts of the local voluntary sector and private business, and development of local activities.
- TPAL reaches out to **find people experiencing loneliness** who may not be in contact with any of the local services providing activities for older people. Age UK's Loneliness Mapping Tool comes into play here: it identifies neighbourhoods where older people are at higher risk of being lonely<sup>7</sup>. Under TPAL networks are developed of people in direct contact with older people who can signpost them to our services– such as taxi drivers, hairdressers, shop workers and faith groups as well as the front line in health, social care, fire and rescue, police community support groups and other voluntary services.
- TPAL works with people who are lonely to **find out what their loneliness is about and help them to help themselves and by providing the support necessary for them to reconnect** . This can including issues like access to benefits and referrals for housing adaptations, as well as befriending/mentoring/coaching support to help those who are chronically lonely regain their confidence and self-esteem.
- TPAL **mobilises a wide range of services in communities** to pool resources and insights in order to find lonely older people and signpost them to services and activities.
- TPAL identifies **gaps** and where possible works to develop new services and activities.
- Within TPAL there has been agreement about a standardised approach to **measuring loneliness**, so as to assess the impact of interventions over time.

Age UK services work with other community based local services and approaches, such as social prescribing and asset based community development.

Local Age UKs are particularly well placed to develop this holistic approach and co-ordinate with others. Their core focus is supporting the well-being of older people in their areas, and helping to provide a voice for older people as place shapers. They offer a wide range of services and activities, including information and advice on topics such as how to access



people are unable to resolve the set of problems that exacerbate feelings of loneliness or act as barriers to receiving the support they need.

Interventions can also only be partially successful if targeted at whole communities, unless they actively seek out lonely people, many of whom are unlikely to be in contact with activities and groups.

Groups and activities also need to be made accessible through providing transport where necessary and identifying the access requirements of, for example, disabled people, those with cognitive impairments or with limited or no English.

We do not think it is useful to rank different services – for instance befriending, mentoring and group activities – in terms of their effectiveness. Different interventions work for different people, which is the whole point of taking a personalised approach. Age UK's approach rests on providing support to help people identify what might help them reconnect and try it out. Often a person requires more than one service or activity.

To successfully tackle loneliness in our communities there should be a range of services and opportunities available to provide bespoke support - some light touch and short term, some in depth and over a longer time period. An example of a light touch solution would be an in-depth conversation, information about local services and activities and possibly encouragement to volunteer, followed up subsequentl

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**6. We plan to develop a cross-government strategy that combines some policies that reduce the risk of loneliness across society and some that focus on reducing the risk at specific trigger points. Do you have any comments or suggestions on our proposed approach?**

It is important to provide or enable community wide activities and services that people can engage with, whether lonely or not, as a way of building strong resilient communities.

It is also important to build public awareness of loneliness. The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness made an excellent start with its 'Happy to chat' badges and 'start a conversation' slogan and the Campaign to End Loneliness continues with its awareness raising 'Be more Us' campaign. Age UK's 'No-one should have No-one' campaign also plays an important part.

At the same time, all communities require projects and initiatives that will reach and support people for whom loneliness is already entrenched or for whom it is at a high risk of becoming entrenched. These services need to begin by listening to what the person's circumstances and aspirations are. What would restore pleasure and purpose to their

Appendix 1

### **Disclosure of responses**

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) controls the information you provide in your answers. Information is being collected and processed by DCMS, with your consent, for research purposes to inform the development of the Loneliness Strategy. All information will be processed in compliance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation and used to develop the Loneliness Strategy.

In developing the Loneliness Strategy, DCMS may publish findings from the research. If we do so, we will ensure that neither you nor the organisation you represent are identifiable, and any responses used to illustrate findings are anonymised. The only third party who we will share your information with is Qualtrics, who will be processing the survey on behalf of DCMS. Your information will not be shared with any other third parties. It will be retained for 2 years for analysis and reporting after which

**Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation? (Select one)**

- Organisation

**If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, which of the following options best describes it? (Select all that apply)**