

For general release

REPORT TO:	Health and Social Care Scrutiny Sub Committee 17 January 2017
AGENDA ITEM:	11
SUBJECT:	Annual Report of the Director of Public Health 2016
LEAD OFFICER:	Rachel Flowers, Director of Public Health
CABINET MEMBER:	Cllr Louisa Woodley, Cabinet Member for Families, Health and Social Care
PERSON LEADING AT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEETING:	Rachel Flowers, Director of Public Health

ORIGIN OF ITEM:	This report forms part of the Committee's work programme for 2016/17
BRIEF FOR THE COMMITTEE:	The Committee requested this report to examine the work of the Director of Public Health and to identify future areas of work for the committee in a future work programme.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 Loneliness and social isolation can impact people across a wide range of life course groups in the population. There are strong associations between loneliness/social isolation and economic and social inequality, vulnerability, sexuality, disability, age and ethnicity. Older people, single parent households, teenage parents, and BME households newly settled in the country, especially those who may experience difficulty communicating in English, are all at greater risk of social isolation.
- 1.2 The 2016 Director of Public Health Report focuses on social isolation and loneliness and identifies risk factors for these issues across the life course (pregnancy and early years, children and young people, working age, and retirement and later life).
- 1.3 The final section of the report presents recommendations for how individuals and communities can play their part in addressing loneliness and social isolation across the various stages of the life course and uses a number of case studies to illustrate examples of initiatives in the borough.
- 1.4 It is a statutory requirement for the Director of Public Health to produce an Annual Report (Health and Social Care Act 2012, Section 31 (5)) and for the Council to publish this (Health and Social Care Act 2012, Section 31 (6)).

2. DETAIL

2.1 Background

There is well-established evidence for treating social isolation and loneliness as key priorities due to their adverse effects on wellbeing and links to health inequalities and social exclusion. This has been highlighted by the Opportunity and Fairness Commission:

Too many local residents live isolated and empty lives [...]. This takes a huge toll on their mental and physical health but it also increases costs on local services [...]. Increased [hospital] admissions and patients in beds unable to return home because they have no one to support them are the inevitable consequence of social isolation (page 7).

There are strong economic as well as social arguments for taking action to reduce and prevent social isolation and loneliness. A wide range of preventable health problems and wider social problems are known to arise out of loneliness:

- Reduced social capital and cohesion, resulting in fragmentation of communities and reduced resilience
- Increased likelihood of youth offending, especially through membership of gangs and unemployment
- More likely to develop mental ill health problems and depression
- Greater incidence of falls and need for long-term residential or nursing case
- Higher incidence of obesity, smoking, substance and alcohol abuse
- Increased visits to GPs and use of medication
- Greater use of accident and emergency service

Relationships and human interaction have a significant impact on an individual's health and wellbeing. Research shows that protective aspects of neighbourhood relationships otherwise called social capital, are important for preventing self-harm and suicide. Social capital can be defined as "the sum of positive relationships including families and neighbours that serve as buffers to the negative influences within one's immediate environment" and can build resilience and reduce the effects of other negative factors like deprivation on individuals in a community.

2.2 Report Focus

The Croydon Congress and Croydon Opportunity and Fairness Commission final report highlighted services provided by the council and its health, social care and voluntary sector partners to address loneliness and social isolation.

The Croydon Opportunity and Fairness Commission report also found that the natural inclination for most of us is to ask what more the government can do to address many social issues however, there is so much individuals and communities can do for themselves to address loneliness and social isolation:

Local services can provide the supporting framework and help nurture the best ideas but Croydon residents must play their part (page 39).

The Director of Public Health Report identifies risk factors for loneliness and social isolation across the life course at four stages:

- pregnancy and early years;
- children and young people;
- working age; and
- retirement and later life

It also recognizes and discusses that certain individuals and groups are more vulnerable than others and are therefore likely to be particularly at risk.

The final section of the report presents recommendations for how individuals and communities can play their part in addressing loneliness and social isolation across the various stages of the life course and uses a number of case studies to illustrate examples of initiatives in the borough.

2.3 Risk Factors

Risk factors for loneliness and social isolation can be categorised into four distinct areas highlighted below.

Table 1: Risk Factors for Loneliness and Social Isolation

Categories	Examples of Risk Factors
Personal factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sexuality • Ethnicity • Age
Life changes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New, young or lone parenthood • Becoming a carer (both young and old) • Retirement • Separation from a partner/bereavement • Unemployment
Health, wellbeing and disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cognitive or sensory impairment • Physical or mental impairment or disability • Substance misuse problems
Wider or social determinants of health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domestic abuse and violence • Long term unemployed • Recent migration • Poverty and deprivation • Homelessness • Stigma and discrimination

Specific examples of issues relevant to each of the life course stages were identified:

Pregnancy and early years

- Being a new parent, young parent or parent carer
- Having a physical or learning disability
- Lack of or inadequate social networks for support during pregnancy

- Maternal depression and a lack of awareness of and how to access mental health support
- Ethnicity and deprivation or low income

Children and young people

- Adverse childhood experiences like abuse, neglect, witnessing drug or alcohol abuse or experiencing domestic violence
- Being bullied
- Being a young carer
- Being a looked after child or recently leaving care
- Being not in employment, education or training (NEET)
- Teenage pregnancy
- Sexual identity (LGBT - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered)
- Having a physical or learning disability
- Ethnic identity especially those from an economically disadvantaged background

Working age people

- Unemployment
- Bereavement or relationship breakdown
- Having a physical or learning disability
- Mental ill health
- Being an unpaid carer
- Substance misuse and addiction

Retirement and later life

- Retirement/unemployment
- Becoming a carer
- Bereavement/ loss of a spouse or partner

2.4 Recommendations (Together Taking Responsibility - Quick Tips)

A number of recommendations for how individuals and communities can address loneliness and social isolation across the various stages of the life course are highlighted in the report. Examples of some of the recommendations included in the report are below:

General Tips

- Maintain frequent contact. If someone you know has hit a milestone birthday, lost a spouse or other important person, or is ill or immobile, they need more contact so make a note to call or visit often.
- Socially isolated older people may be vulnerable to a variety of unexpected problems and may have underlying issues such as dementia. Loved ones should consider informing trusted neighbours that there is a vulnerable adult in the neighbourhood so they keep a friendly eye out and check in on them regularly.
- If you know a carer or a loved one in your family shoulders the burden of caring for an elderly family member, take whatever steps you can to make that person's life easier and to allow them to have a social life of their own.

Tips For Carers

- If you are a carer, remember to take care of yourself. It is not just the person you are caring for who is at risk of social isolation, it is you.

- Peer support from people who understand can help you feel less alone, for example through a carer support group or social activities organized by a local carers organization.

Tips For New Mums

- Join antenatal classes – meet other women in a similar situation to you especially if you are the only one of your friends who is approaching parenthood and are therefore feeling disconnected from them.
- Practice positive thinking - Create positive scenarios in your head and picture your future life with your baby in a happy, fulfilling setting. You could also record positive events of the day or week - even tiny details such as laughing at a joke, enjoying lunch with friends or seeing an uplifting movie can help to combat negative feelings.
- It can be hard to break away from new day-to-day responsibilities as a parent, but you need to take time for yourself and will feel so much better for getting out of the house for a walk or a coffee with a friend/ family or an exercise class.

Tips For Children and Young People

- Find something you like doing and do more of it. Sometimes it is hard to find the motivation, especially if you don't feel confident or you worry about what other people think. Making small goals can help you to feel more positive about yourself. You don't have to be perfect at it to enjoy yourself.
- Be careful when comparing yourself to others and remember that things are not always what they seem from the outside. Social media, and the fact that we very often only see what other people want to share about their lives, can make you feel like you are the only one feeling lonely.

Tips For Parents

- Research shows that children who achieve a healthy weight tend to be fitter, healthier, better able to learn, and are more self-confident. They are also less likely to have low self-esteem and be bullied. Listen to your child's concern about their weight, they need to feel supported and loved. Five key ways to help your child achieve a healthy weight are:
 - [Be a good role model](#)
 - [Encourage 60 minutes of physical activity a day](#)
 - [Keep to child-size portions](#)
 - [Eat healthy meals, drinks and snacks](#)
 - [Give Less screen time and more sleep](#)
- Children need to understand that all of us have unique differences that make us individuals. We are all far more alike than we are different, and these differences should not be feared or ridiculed.

Tips For Working Age Adults

- Nurture your support network – do not underestimate the importance of what you have to offer.
- Expand your social network – online social sites are ideal places to meet people who share similar interests and hobbies.
- Volunteering is also a great way of maintaining and expressing a sense of purpose and staying connected with your community.
- Maintain contact with family and friends over the phone; social media or video conferencing applications can be the next best thing to being with them.

Tips For Older Adults

- Share a meal with others whenever possible.
- Undiagnosed or untreated hearing problems may lead to avoidance of social situations because of difficulty communicating or embarrassment. Have your hearing checked and hearing problems treated as needed.
- Be open to learning how to use technology to maintain connections. A computer with a camera is a bridge to anyone in the family.

2.5 Case studies (Out in the Community...)

The case studies included in the report that demonstrate how residents of various backgrounds at risk of social isolation are being supported by members of their communities are summarized below.

Table 2: Summary of case studies included in 2016 Director of Public Health Report

Life Course Group	Case Studies
Mothers	<u>Bump Dance Fitness</u> An initiative started by a group of New Addington residents who are passionate about safety and healthy living aimed to engage local mums from the community to make new friends, combat isolation and keep healthy and safe.
Young People	<p><u>Lingua House</u> An initiative started by members of the Afghan community who identified a need to develop English language classes to help younger members of the community develop their language skills and therefore take greater part in the wider community.</p> <p><u>Sports in the Rec</u> An initiative started by local Broad Green residents with sporting skills and expertise who identified the need to create a safe and interactive space for vulnerable young people in the area to take part in activities. Many of young people targeted are typically unable to affordable opportunities to take part in sport.</p>

CONTACT OFFICER

Rachel Flowers, Director of Public Health
Rachel.flowers@croydon.gov.uk
 020 8726 6000 x65596

Appendices

Appendix 1: Annual Director of Public Health Report 2016