

REPORT UNDER RULE 2 (VI) OF THE CITY COUNCIL PROCEDURE RULES**Report by Councillor Jane Loffhagen, Chair of the Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee**

Officers: Graham Watts, Democratic and Elections Manager and Jess Cullen, Democratic Services Officer.

Members of Committee: Jane Loffhagen [Chair] Naomi Tweddle [Vice Chair] Liz Bushell, Bill Bilton, Hilton Spratt, Helena Mair, Jackie Kirk, Sue Burke, Christopher Reed and Alan Briggs

The Community Leadership Scrutiny Committee met on 11 June 2019 to discuss the work programme – after much discussion it was agreed to undertake a scrutiny review of social isolation in the City of Lincoln, and link this to some research on Community Integration. This followed concerns expressed by members of the Committee that social isolation existed throughout the city, particularly in relation to the elderly, single parents, students and carers, and that frequent comment was made about increased divisions in the community. We also agreed to ensure that the previous work completed by the Committee was followed up after it was put before the Executive. A full report on the progress of this was provided to the Committee on 11 June 2019.

The scope of the first part of the review into Social Isolation was to investigate:

- How prevalent social isolation actually was in Lincoln and why it was occurring;
- What support was currently in place for people suffering from isolation;
- Whether the current support was sufficient to address the issue of social isolation.
- How the City Council could help to address this issue.

Representatives from a range of organisations delivering services and support across the city and wider county were invited to attend meetings of the Committee in order to contribute to the review and provide evidence which was used to formulate recommendations. These organisations had been identified as part of the scoping of the review. We also sought copies of the Government paper “A Connected Society” which was a published national strategy for tackling loneliness.

Evidence Gathering

The Committee received evidence over three meetings from a range of internal and external representatives, as follows:

- Councillor Donald Nannestad, Portfolio Holder for Quality Housing (City of Lincoln Council)
- Councillor Rosie Kirk, Portfolio Holder for Reducing Inequalities (City of Lincoln Council)
 - Ben Barley, Chief Executive of Voluntary Centre Services
 - Sian Wade, Network Co-ordinator at Active Faith Network
 - Victoria Sleight, Neighbourhood Lead for Social prescribing for the South of the city (Lincolnshire Partnership Foundation Trust) met with the Chair and Graham Watts prior to one of the meetings the meeting on the evidence from which was fed into the next meeting of the Committee.
 - Amanda Sowerby, Operations Director, Age UK (Lincoln and South)

- Rachel Bethell, Marketing and Outreach Officer (The Network)
- Malcolm Ryan, Service Manager (Carers First in Lincolnshire)
- Subash Chellaiah, Chaplain (University of Lincoln)
- Paul Carrick, Neighbourhood worker, Sincil Bank

The above meetings were really interesting and thought provoking. They were well attended by members and were the source of a fount of information about how differing groups are addressing isolation in their various target groups. I cannot report all this here as the report would be too voluminous, but it was a fascinating process. Thanks are due to all our guests for their help in this scrutiny review, as well as to members for their thoughtful contributions.

In addition, we were aware that the Council conducted a survey in relation to the Lincoln Lottery Community Fund during August 2019 which sought suggestions for the good causes the fund should be allocated towards in Lincoln. 113 people responded to the questionnaire and social isolation was the top response, with 50% of people suggesting that the fund be used towards addressing social isolation in Lincoln. Voluntary Centre Services had been appointed to allocate funding to good causes in relation to social isolation. Funding applications could be submitted for up to £5,000, which chose projects or activities having to:

- directly support Lincoln residents;
- meet one or both of the areas selected by residents;
- demonstrate that they will begin to spend the funding within 6 months of allocation;
- confirm they will spend all funding allocated within 12 months;
- have a clear and defined outcome;
- should not be a project already financially supported by the City of Lincoln Council or another council/public body.

Information was also provided regarding the 'Age Friendly East Lindsey' scheme as part of the national 'Ageing Better' Programme which had been delivered by East Lindsey District Council since 2015 and had been successful in achieving its objectives in relation to reducing isolation and loneliness within an ageing population. Funding for this scheme had been obtained via the Big Lottery Fund in partnership with Community Lincs. The Minister for Civil Society, Baroness Barran, has announced a £2 million fund to help organisations at the frontline of tackling loneliness across the country. This announcement came one year since publication of the Government's Loneliness Strategy. The funding aims to support frontline, grassroots organisations that bring people together and help them build social connections. These could include community cafés, street parties, coffee mornings or local walking groups.

Key Findings and Conclusions

It was made very clear throughout the review that social isolation and loneliness are prevalent in Lincoln, although it was acknowledged that this is also the case in other towns, cities and rural areas across the country. From a local perspective, there was a significant amount of support available to people through a range of organisations and services seeking to address the issue of social isolation and loneliness. However, it was also apparent that each organisation approached this issue independently with very few examples given of working in partnership or sharing information and good practice.

Conclusion 1

The Council could play a more active role in bringing these organisations together to encourage and perhaps facilitate greater partnership working and sharing of information and good practice through an annual event or forum held at least once a year. The Council could also assist partner organisations in the promotion of services, events and activities available in communities, including publicity of Neighbourhood Board meetings, as well as raising awareness via social media and other platforms, such as the 'Your Lincoln' residents' magazine, on the issue of social isolation and loneliness.

A vast array of services, events and activities are available in communities across the city that would help people suffering from social isolation and loneliness. The promotion and publicity of these is vitally important in order that as many people as possible are aware of what is available to them wherever they live in the city. A common frustration in speaking to all contributors as part of the review was that they knew there were people suffering from social isolation and loneliness, but that they did not necessarily access services or support mechanisms available to them and in some cases did not even consider themselves to be suffering from social isolation or loneliness.

Conclusion 2

More could be done to promote the symptoms or characteristics associated with social isolation, as well as contact details of key organisations and service providers. The signposting of information and services to support people suffering from social isolation and loneliness was therefore very important, particularly in terms of reaching those people suffering from associated symptoms but not necessarily accessing services. The Council could assist in the signposting of this information via its website, social media and literature at its offices, community buildings and other facilities used by the public such as the Crematorium, for example.

There is a role for City Council staff, and elected Members, to play in their day-to-day business when engaging with residents in identifying symptoms of social isolation and loneliness and signposting them to relevant organisations or services.

Conclusion 3

The issue of social isolation and loneliness should be highlighted to the Council's staff and elected members, particularly those who come into contact with residents regularly as part of their day-to-day business in order that they can identify symptoms and understand what services or organisations to signpost people to. Consideration should be given to any necessary training to facilitate this.

A contributing factor for some people in feeling isolated was the cultural shift towards online services across all sectors. A substantial amount of people in the city did not have access to a computer or the internet and would therefore struggle with the concept of only accessing services online. The Council itself is promoting self-service via its website and more electronic forms of communication as part of embracing the overarching rural move to digital service provision. This inherently carries the risk of missing signs of isolation that might be apparent in direct contact between people.

Conclusion 4

Acknowledging those people unable to access online services or electronic communication, the Council should ensure that there is always an option to contact any of its service areas without the need to access the service online. This will help to ensure that those residents in the city who do not have access to a computer or the internet are still able to contact the

authority which in turn should help address an aspect of isolation that is getting progressively worse for some people as a result of a cultural shift in all sectors to online service provision.

Local activities and events were highlighted throughout the review as an important way for residents to be able to interact with other people and their communities. During the review anecdotal examples were given of difficulties experienced by people when seeking to hold events, particularly regarding the various regulations, licenses and other legal considerations that need to be taken into account. It was suggested that the way this information is relayed to people upon making a request can be quite intimidating and off-putting, whereas it would be much more helpful to people if such support was provided in a more approachable and supportive manner.

Conclusion 5

A review should take place to ensure that the Council's approach to responding to requests for holding community events includes guidance and advice that is supportive and user-friendly, taking into account the fact that many people making requests to hold these events may have never done so before. This will hopefully encourage more people to hold events in their communities, providing more opportunities for people to engage.

Conclusion 6

Consideration should be given to ways in which the Government's £2 million funding aimed at addressing loneliness could be promoted to those front line organisations so that it could be effectively utilised in Lincoln. Further consideration should also be given to the availability of external funding to support the issue of social isolation and loneliness in the City of Lincoln, similar to the successful Big Lottery Fund bid awarded to East Lindsey District Council as part of the national 'Ageing Better' Programme.

A final report was sent to the Executive, with Executive members being impressed with the thorough nature of the evidence gathering. The Executive supported all of the Committee's conclusions, agreeing that they would be included the Health and Wellbeing strand of the Council's Reducing Inequality Theme of Vision 2025.

The work above was completed by the end of November 2019 and it was then proposed that an investigative questionnaire be compiled and distributed to ask residents about Community Integration to support the second of the Committees Scrutiny Reviews around this issue. This questionnaire had been produced but was unable to be distributed due to the calling of a General Election in December 2019, so this piece of work has been rescheduled for later this year.

The Committee has started its evidence gathering on the issue of Community Integration and further meetings are scheduled.

We have also been informed that Social Isolation will form one of the key stands of the Clinical Commissioning Groups Mental Health Hub work, and that partner agencies are planning this currently.