

| <b>Housing, Health &amp; Communities Committee</b> |                                                                      |
|----------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Meeting Date</b>                                | 28 <sup>th</sup> October 2025                                        |
| <b>Report Title</b>                                | Loneliness Project Update                                            |
| <b>EMT Lead</b>                                    | Emma Wiggins, Director of Regeneration & Neighbourhoods              |
| <b>Head of Service</b>                             | Charlotte Hudson, Head of Housing & Communities                      |
| <b>Lead Officer</b>                                | Sarah-Jane Radley, Community & Partnerships Manager                  |
| <b>Classification</b>                              | <b>Open</b>                                                          |
| <b>Recommendations</b>                             | 1. The committee is asked to <b>note</b> the contents of the report. |

## **1 Purpose of Report and Executive Summary**

- 1.1 The report provides an update on the progress of the Swale Loneliness Project which aims to raise awareness and tackle the significant negative consequences loneliness can have on an individuals health and wellbeing.

## **2 Background**

- 2.1 Policy and Resources Committee agreed the delivery of a Loneliness project for Swale – 27 November 2024. Funding allocated via UK Shared Prosperity Fund at Economy and Property Committee – 9 April 2025.
- 2.2 The issue of loneliness cannot be underestimated as it is a pathway to many wider issues and the impact can be vast. It is not just the old that suffer from loneliness, which is often a misconception. The impact on the young and all the way through the lifecycle can have multiple effects and result in people requiring access to services that could have been prevented.
- 2.3 Loneliness can be defined as a negative experience resulting from the perception that our social relationships are not as we would want them to be (Perlman & Peplau, 1981). It has been described as having two components: an emotional component (an unpleasant, negative feeling) and a cognitive component (the perception of unwanted disconnection from others) (Badcock et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2022).
- 2.4 Loneliness is therefore a subjective experience that occurs most often when we feel that our social relationships (e.g., friendships) are not as fulfilling as we would wish, irrespective of the size of our social network. This is not the same as social isolation (which refers to an objective lack or scarcity of social interactions and infrequent interactions with others; Donovan & Blazer, 2020), in part because voluntary isolation (or solitude) is often appreciated by those that seek it, and

because we can experience loneliness even when we have a large social network. Loneliness has also been defined as a feeling of not being understood by others (Jung et al., 1995).

*'Loneliness is a subjective, unwelcome feeling or lack or loss of companionship. It happens when there is a mismatch between quantity and quality of social relationships that individuals have, and those they want'*

2.5 National data shows that 5% to 18% of adults feel lonely 'often' or 'always' and 11% of children aged 10 to 15 'often' feel lonely.

2.6 Loneliness can happen due to a wide range of issues including, but not exclusively:

- More deprived areas – cost of living
- Disability
- Mental health
- Care givers
- Lack of transport – public or private
- Life limiting long term illness
- Moving home or new area

Most importantly it can happen to anyone!

2.7 The project scope has been developed in conjunction with local Voluntary Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) organisations who were keen to collaborate and develop a piece of work that establishes an informed understanding of the scale of the issue being faced within the borough, compliment work that is already being undertaken and establish the gaps or barriers that need to be addressed.

2.8 We presented the opportunity to Swale Voluntary Alliance which is made up of several voluntary sector organisations including Swale CVS (accountable body), Age UK Kent Rivers, Children & Families, Citizen Advice Swale, Diversity House, EKC, Faversham Umbrella, MVA and SATEDA. The group then developed a delivery plan which engages residents and delivers a number of outcomes.

2.9 The timeframe for this project is April 2025 – March 2026. There was a slight delay in issuing the funding due to release of the funding. However, the consortium proceeded to start recruitment for a Project Coordinator, and he started employment in June 2025.

2.10 The Strategic Objectives of the project which were developed as a result of collaborative work with multiple partners and the learning acquired through similar projects are as follows:

**Raise awareness**

- Promote understanding of loneliness across all demographics
- Reduce stigma through public engagement events

#### **Enhance collaboration**

- Map and interlink existing services addressing loneliness
- Strengthen partnerships with NHS, Social Care, and community organisations

#### **Improve access to services**

- Develop a central directory for loneliness related activities and services
- Promote social prescribing and volunteer led initiatives
- SVA Platform enhancement of service directory

#### **Sustainability and legacy**

- Build volunteer and capacity resilience
- Secure future funding and embed a sustainability plan post grant period

#### **2.11 The SVA Project Delivery Plan includes five delivery phases:**

##### **Phase 1 – Research and mapping**

- Map current service directories and provision across Swale
- Identify overlaps, gaps and accessibility barriers
- Begin baseline measurement of activities with underrepresented groups to enable tracking of 20% increase

#### **2.12 Phase 2 – Community and Stakeholder Consultation**

- Hold 4 focus groups and workshops with residents, including underrepresented groups, to capture lived experiences.
- Consult at least 200 stakeholders (statutory, VCSE, community leaders).
- Invite co-design partners to shape the platform and directory.
- Begin early campaigns and surveys to raise awareness and encourage wider engagement.

#### **2.13 Phase 3 – Platform & Directory Development**

- Build the digital service directory and searchable database
- Train support staff and/or peer mappers in using and updating the system.
- Deliver training for VCSE partners on how to use the platform to showcase services and attract funding.
- Conduct pilot testing with selected organisations and residents.

- Continue to identify gaps via mapping and feed this into directory development.

#### 2.14 Phase 4 – Launch and Promotion

- Officially launch the directory and database
- Promote widely via **local campaigns**: QR codes, GP surgeries, social prescribing networks, libraries, schools, and local radio.
- Engage connectors and VCSE groups to embed use of the platform in frontline work.

#### 2.15 Phase 5 – Review, Feedback & Legacy

Gather user feedback through surveys and focus groups

Evaluate performance against indicators:

- 30 workshops/campaigns/surveys delivered across all phases.
- 200+ stakeholders consulted
- Directory completed, usage figures captured
- At least 20% increase in activities by underrepresented groups compared to baseline.

Present outcomes to stakeholders and funders

Develop a **legacy and sustainability plan**, including:

- Ongoing host/maintenance arrangements for the directory.
- Securing embedded funding opportunities for local organisations.
- Guidance for VCSEs on how to use mapping data to strengthen funding bids

2.16 Delivery of phases one and two are well underway and the Project Coordinator has to date captured 429 survey responses, including attending a variety of face-to-face groups and activities across the borough, through digital surveys which have been shared across a variety of networks and mechanisms, including through Swale BC communications.

2.17 Work to continue to build an understanding of the levels of loneliness as well as mapping services and activities that tackle loneliness continue. The data gathering is intended to inform potential collaborative efforts to bring in funding to the borough and develop opportunities to link with wider projects and activities.

2.18 As the Project Coordinator builds on the current work, we continue to encourage engagement with him to ensure that the project has captured responses from across a wide range of groups.

2.19 A program of Community Champion style engagement sessions will be delivered, we encourage participation with these sessions with representation from across the council and wider community.

- 2.20 We encourage engagement with the Project Coordinator regarding existing activities that are being delivered within the borough and how we can capture these for future promotion and engagement.
- 2.21 In response to the gap analysis created through the data collected, opportunities for funding, collaborative projects and innovative resolutions to the issues presented will be developed.
- 2.22 The project will deliver a comprehensive evaluation and monitoring report that can be used to for legacy projects.

### **3 Proposals**

- 3.1 The Committee is asked to **note** the contents of the report.

### **4 Alternative Options Considered and Rejected**

- 4.1 The option to deliver the project in-house, by employing someone as part of the Community & Partnerships Team to deliver the work was considered. However, we did not move forward with this proposal as the cost to the council to employ someone was significantly more than to work with our partners in the VCSE, who also have very close links to the communities that we need to engage with and can mobilise much quicker. The option to do nothing was rejected as it was agreed by Council to proceed with delivery of this work.

### **5 Consultation Undertaken or Proposed**

- 5.1 Research was carried out to gather information about existing loneliness projects and to further understand the effects and implications of Loneliness on communities and the impact to services. We worked closely with Bromley Council who have a strategy for tackling loneliness (Annex I) which runs from 2022-2026 to develop our localised offer and join a wider UK network on tackling loneliness.

### **6 Implications**

| <b>Issue</b>                     | <b>Implications</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Corporate Plan                   | This project supports the following priorities:<br>Community – this project that supports residents who are lonely and helps to tackle the effects collaboratively.<br>Health & Housing – this project supports residents who are lonely and tackles wider health inequalities. |
| Financial, Resource and Property | Funding allocation of £40,000 for the period of 1 April 2025- 31 March 2026.                                                                                                                                                                                                    |

|                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                              | <p>Grant issued to Swale Voluntary Alliance to provide full delivery of the project within the expected timeframe.</p> <p>Community &amp; Partnership Team, resource to monitor delivery and develop delivery program with SVA.</p> <p>Staffing resilience is a concern for the delivery of the project completion date in March 2026.</p> |
| Legal, Statutory and Procurement                             | None identified at this stage                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Crime and Disorder                                           | None identified at this stage                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Environment and Climate/Ecological Emergency                 | None identified at this stage                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Health and Wellbeing                                         | This work is being delivered by the voluntary and community sector with an emphasis on improving wider determinants of health through tackling loneliness.                                                                                                                                                                                 |
| Safeguarding of Children, Young People and Vulnerable Adults | All organisations delivering this project have safeguarding policies and procedures and the required training.                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |
| Risk Management and Health and Safety                        | None identified at this stage                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Equality and Diversity                                       | All organisations delivering this work ensure that the relevant equality & diversity training has been carried out and work is delivered with the required parameters.                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Privacy and Data Protection                                  | None identified at this stage                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

## 7 Appendices

### 7.1 None

## 8 Background Papers

- [Bromley Loneliness Strategy 2022-2026](#)
- [Agenda for Policy and Resources Committee on Wednesday, 27 November 2024, 7.00 pm](#)
- [Agenda for Economy and Property Committee on Wednesday, 9 April 2025, 7.00 pm](#)