

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 26 SEPTEMBER 2018

POSITION STATEMENT FROM THE CABINET LEAD MEMBER FOR HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Tackling Loneliness and Social Isolation

There is increasing evidence and awareness that loneliness and social isolation has an impact on people's physical and mental health, wellbeing and independence. This has led to concerns that loneliness and social isolation is having a negative impact on people, communities, and the demand for public services.

The Government have recognised this is a problem; responding to the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness they have appointed Tracey Crouch as the "Loneliness Minister" and are promising to bring forward a national strategy in the autumn.

Neil O'Brien, MP for Harborough has also been actively involved both as Vice-Chair to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Loneliness as well as running events in Market Harborough and Oadby to bring together people and organisations who are seeking to tackle loneliness in their local area.

Over the next few months the County Council will be working with the University of Leicester and other partners to:-

- Develop better understanding of the nature, extent and impact of loneliness and social isolation on people, communities and public services through collation of evidence from Council data and surveys and discussions with services, partners, and community organisations.
- Consider the role the Council can play in tackling loneliness and social isolation across Leicestershire such as leadership and coordination, communications campaigns and potential improvement to delivery of existing services.

The Council and our public sector partners are already doing a great deal: for example the day-to-day work of our social workers supporting vulnerable children, adults and families; the blue lights services working to keep people safe; our network of local area coordinators who are actively connecting people within communities; and our trading standards team working to protect vulnerable people being taken advantage of.

Every time we connect with someone it makes a difference. However, this is not something we can do alone and fortunately there are some amazing volunteers and community groups in Leicestershire that are already doing a huge amount of good work to tackle loneliness and isolation, including community connection projects for older people, good neighbour schemes, local groups to cater to a wide range of interests such as:

- The knitter and natter groups in places such as Enderby and Ullesthorpe,
- Age UK's men in sheds;
- Loughborough Leggo youth group for young people with learning disabilities; and
- Bottesford's Friendly Bench.

Our community libraries also provide great community facilities and spaces across the County.

However these activities can only ever be part of the solution if we are to address the problems of loneliness and social isolation. The solution needs everybody to be involved – making and maintaining connections with their neighbours, work colleagues, fellow students and all the other people in their communities. This in turn builds our own personal resilience reducing the chance of becoming lonely and isolated. Elected members as local community leaders have an important role to play.

'Start A Conversation' – suicide prevention campaign

Death from suicide has devastating consequences for family, friends and colleagues. There are on average 55 deaths from suicide each year in Leicestershire and it remains the biggest killer of men under 50 and the leading cause of death in young people.

Covering Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland and working in partnership with a number of organisations from a variety of sectors from the community, the 'Start A Conversation' campaign launched on World Suicide Prevention Day on 10 September.

The aim is to make sure that people are aware of the warning signs of suicidal behaviour and have an open and honest approach to conversations.

The campaign also seeks to:

- Remove stigmas and myths and make it ok to have conversations about suicide
- Provide information and advice to individuals at crisis point
- Build safer communities through awareness raising
- Help people maintain good mental health
- Support those who have been bereaved by suicide

Residents and business can support the campaign by making a pledge highlighting the steps they will take to sure that they always start a conversation.

To make a pledge and find out more visit www.startaconversation.co.uk