

Report to: People Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 19 November 2024

By: Director of Adult Social Care and Health

Title: Stewardship approach to tackling loneliness in East Sussex

Purpose: To update on progress with implementation of the stewardship approach to tackling loneliness

RECOMMENDATIONS The People Committee is recommended to note the progress update on implementation of the stewardship approach to tackling loneliness and provide any relevant feedback.

1. Background

1.1 In April 2021, a public health funded COVID-19 recovery project was initiated in East Sussex. The overall aim of this 'Connected People and Places' project was to gain a better understanding of the nature and impact of loneliness on East Sussex residents and identify future opportunities and approaches to mitigate the worst effects of loneliness. Loneliness had previously been identified as a topic area of interest for scoping and exploration by the People Scrutiny Committee. Therefore, rather than a full scrutiny review, a Loneliness and Resilience Reference Group was formed to provide valuable input to the project and its recommendations.

1.2 The resulting project activities and recommendations have formed the basis of the 2022/23 annual Director of Public Health (DPH) report, '[Connecting People and Places - Bringing communities together in East Sussex](#)', which focuses on social connections and multi-agency work to tackle loneliness.

1.2 The PartnershipPlus Executive Board¹ holds the responsibility for ensuring that progress is made with the recommendations to tackle loneliness as a system across East Sussex. The headline recommendations are to:

- establish a System Stewardship Group to build and maintain the required collaborative leadership across the system;
- create a 'connection test' to apply a loneliness perspective to the policy making process;
- develop an action plan for developing social infrastructure rooted in the principles of ABCD (asset-based community development) and harnessing the potential of community ownership and community businesses;
- 'connect the connectors' by creating learning communities that learn and test ideas together and model and incentivise ongoing learning; and
- mobilise and equip a movement of connectors stretching across all public facing roles, businesses and communities.

1.3 The stewardship approach which underpins this programme seeks to encourage system partners to make best use of available resources to tackle loneliness, make decisions collectively and hold joint responsibility for the achievement of improved outcomes. To enable this to happen it is important to attend to the quality of relationships in the system and to hold each other to

¹ PartnershipPlus is partnership of senior leaders from local authorities, the NHS, the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VSCE) sector and others in East Sussex.

account as joint stewards of the system. It requires partners to take on system leadership behaviours i.e. working beyond the boundaries of their organisation and formal role, moving away from authority and control to embrace an adaptive and collaborative leadership style, and an explorative, learning mindset.

1.4 To support the development of the stewardship approach, the Council has worked in collaboration with the East Sussex Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector Alliance and system partners to design how a host/convenor could be appointed to facilitate multi-agency progress. From December 2023 the Council entered into a two-year grant agreement with the organisation selected to lead the stewardship facilitation function, Sussex Community Development Association (SCDA). As part of the arrangements, East Sussex Community Voice (ESCV) is providing evaluation, data and monitoring capacity, and other VCSE organisations such as 3VA, Age UK East Sussex, Care for the Carers and Possability People are helping reach target communities and involve other local organisations as the project develops. A Programme Facilitator and a Loneliness Stewardship Reference Group have been supporting delivery and guiding development of the programme.

1.5 A progress update about the programme was requested by the People Scrutiny Committee following a previous presentation delivered at its March 2024 meeting.

2. Community engagement

2.1 An important first step for the Stewardship Group was to establish an aspirational long-term vision for the programme which will help to quickly communicate its aims. A number of proposed vision statements were consulted upon with system partners, informed by previous engagement activities and the recent input of the Stewardship Group. The following provisional vision statement has been agreed:

“Our vision is for East Sussex to be a place where no-one feels lonely.”

2.2 This statement is based on the principle that, whilst some people may choose and enjoy social isolation at times, no one chooses to be lonely. By definition, loneliness is a mismatch between someone’s desired levels of connection and what they experience.

2.3 This vision statement will be used, when appropriate, in conjunction with the existing ‘Connecting People & Places – Tackling loneliness in East Sussex’ programme identity, which emphasises the importance of positive social connections between people within local communities.

2.4 Community engagement and the lived experience of individuals and communities continues to form an important part of the programme. The wide range of partners involved, along with specific collaboration and engagement events, such as those listed below, are helping to shape the development of the programme.

- **Shared Learning Lunches** – Hastings and Rother for frontline practitioners to learn about loneliness and share their experience. Events held throughout summer and autumn in Hastings and Rother areas initially.
- **‘Connecting the Connectors’** in-person event aimed at frontline staff/volunteers, co-hosted with Hastings Voluntary Action (HVA) in partnership with the National Academy for Social Prescribing (NASP) - 65 participants. 80 new connections were made and recorded between participants.
- Developing a **“Let’s Talk About Loneliness”** engagement format to build on our understanding of experiences of loneliness in East Sussex e.g. trialled at Recovery Café Eastbourne (women’s group) in August.

- **Creative Health and Tackling Loneliness (TL) programme** – online shared learning event, in collaboration with Public Health and the Creative Health Associate South East (NHS Sussex) – September – 30 arts projects attended. Focus to support fundraising opportunities.

2.5 The programme is keen to encourage as many people as possible in East Sussex to have a better understanding of loneliness and the importance of social connections, and how they can help tackle it. Between December and January we will launch communications inviting anyone with an interest to get involved. The key routes will be:

- accessing our new ‘Loneliness Matters’ awareness training (online and in-person) or the [National e-learning for Health \(NeLFH\) resource](#)
- joining a local event, including shared learning lunches, themed events and activities focused around communities of interest.
- joining the new online East Sussex [Tackling Loneliness Hub](#) group (see Section 4.1).

2.6 A previous proposal to create local loneliness ‘champions’ is still under consideration.

3. Governance

3.1 Since the last update provided to the People Scrutiny Committee, the programme has developed defined workstreams that will enable the appropriate engagement of system partners. The Loneliness Stewardship Reference Group has further developed the programme’s core governance, communications planning and evaluation principles.

3.2 This collaborative work will underpin our broader communications strategy which includes existing public sector and VCSE representation, private sector organisations and other networks and bodies such as Chambers of Commerce, Team East Sussex and the East Sussex Wellbeing at Work programme.

3.3 The first formal meeting of the Stewardship Group took place in May 2024 and involved a wide range of system partners and 35 individual attendees. The session covered: the background to the system stewardship approach; the intended purpose of the group; exploration of a shared vision; the role of members as stewards; presentation of emerging collaborative work with partners; and small group discussion on collaboration opportunities to help create a healthy system that helps tackle loneliness. The next meeting of the Stewardship Group is planned for the New Year.

4. Collaboration, learning and events

4.1 The programme has established an online [East Sussex Tackling Loneliness Hub](#) group which will provide a focus for sharing information and keeping up to date with developments. The group is hosted within the Tackling Loneliness Hub, an online learning and exchange space for people working on loneliness across research, policy and practice funded by the Department for Culture Media & Sport and supported by [Neighbourly Lab](#).

4.2 The Hub will help us to:

- create a committed and established network across all sectors in East Sussex;
- support people to work collaboratively and generate action;
- share best practice and increase the evidence base on loneliness; and
- support a local conversation on loneliness and connection.

4.3 The Programme Facilitator has continued to network widely to ensure that links and collaboration between the programme and existing groups and other programmes are made. For example, collaboration has taken place with the following groups/programmes:

- Social Prescribing Information Sharing Group
- East Sussex Mental Health Action Group (MHAG) and VCSE Mental Health Network, Men's Mental Health Community of Interest
- Creative Health Support Collaborative
- Rother Community Network supported by Rother Voluntary Action (RVA)
- Hastings Voluntary Action (HVA) Community Resource Hub, HVA Ageing Network, Mr Hastings and St Leonards (men's mental health project)
- National Academy for Social Prescribing (NASP) Older People programme – in collaboration with HVA Ageing Network
- Suicide Prevention Steering Group
- East Sussex Senior Association (ESSA)
- Adult Social Care Life Transitions work
- Community Networks Support Programme (CNSP)

4.4 The 'Connection Test' element of the work programme aims to embed considerations about the impact on loneliness within existing impact assessment processes, backed up with the available evidence base. Work has begun to explore this potential within health impact assessments and/or equalities impact assessments.

4.5 Groups, services and organisations across the county will be invited to explore whether their activities help people feel less lonely. This is part of collective efforts to understand more about the nature and impact of different activities and approaches to tackle loneliness in county. A new short and accessible guide to measuring loneliness has been developed (see Appendix A). This encourages services to measure loneliness through incorporating between one and three validated questions into their monitoring and evaluation.

5. Evaluation

5.1 East Sussex Community Voice have been working alongside the Loneliness Stewardship Reference Group and Programme Facilitator to ascertain the evaluation needs of the programme. Due to the complexities of measuring systems change, and changes in behaviours and attitudes, it has been proposed that Ripple Effect Mapping (REM) would be a suitable approach to support the evaluation of the programme. REM is a qualitative method that can be used to capture the wider (intended and unintended) impacts of a programme over time. Through this approach, people who have been involved in the delivery of the programme are brought together in a participatory workshop (or workshops) to co-create ripple effect maps by visually mapping out what they have done and the impacts to date over a timeline. This can be a way of capturing information such as stakeholders involved, changing mindsets, and shifts within systems; it also indicates the length of time it takes for different impacts to occur.

5.2 Other more immediate evaluation activities have included assessment of the effectiveness of the first stewardship group meeting in achieving its aims through a questionnaire co-created and distributed to stewardship group members. A template 'learning log' has also been created which will allow the project team to capture learnings from programme activity and support both the facilitation and evaluation of the programme.

6. Conclusion and recommendations

6.1 The stewardship approach to tackling loneliness in East Sussex has progressed through the formation of the multi-agency Stewardship Group and the creation of a shared vision for the programme. Numerous co-produced events have taken place to build programme capacity and support collaborations to tackle loneliness across the county. Shared learning and training events will increase the capacity for anyone with an interest to contribute to the programme delivery. It is recommended that the Committee note this progress and provide any relevant feedback.

APPENDIX A: A short guide to measuring loneliness for organisations in East Sussex

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