Tackling loneliness

By Alexander Bellis

Contents:
1. **Understanding loneliness**
2. **The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness**
3. **The Government's Loneliness Strategy**
4. **Loneliness strategies elsewhere in the UK**
5. **Contacts and advice**

Contents

Summary

The latest official figures suggest that just under half of adults in England experience loneliness occasionally or more often. The proportion of adults reporting that they often or always feel lonely (6%) shows little variation by gender or by region, but the data does suggest that younger people are more likely to report feeling frequently lonely. Certain groups are also associated with an increased risk of loneliness, such as those with a long-term disability, widowed homeowners, unmarried middle-agers, and young renters.

Studies have found links between loneliness (or social isolation) and poorer health outcomes, such as early death, higher rates of depression and cognitive decline. This may lead to higher costs in the public and private sector due to greater service usage, absences and productivity losses.

The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness

The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness published its report, Combatting loneliness one conversation at a time: A call to action, in December 2017. Many of its recommendations were taken up by the Government, including creating a "Minister for Loneliness" by adding cross-government work on loneliness to the remit of the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Sport and Civil Society. The Government also announced two funds relevant to combating loneliness – £98 million for the healthy ageing programme and £20 million (including a new £11 million Building Connections Fund) to support organisations working to combat loneliness.

The Government's Loneliness Strategy

The Government's loneliness strategy, A connected society: A Strategy for tackling loneliness – laying the foundations for change, was published in October 2018. It explained how the UK Government would provide 'national leadership' through a range of measures. These include (but are not limited to):

- a commitment by the Government to use measures developed by the Office for National Statistics as its standard way of measuring loneliness. The strategy also encourages other organisations to do the same;

- a range of initiatives to enable everyday services to connect those at risk of loneliness to support, such as social prescribing;

- initiatives centred on local infrastructure, enabling people to use community spaces, and efforts to ensure loneliness is considered in the housing and planning system;

- exploring how to reduce the stigma around loneliness and raise awareness of the importance of social connections; and

- efforts to support community groups and promote digital inclusion.

The Minster for Sport and Civil Society will lead on the Strategy. They will be supported by a cross-government ministerial group, which will publish an annual progress report on the loneliness agenda.

The Loneliness Strategy extends to England only. However, the Government aims to ensure that work is 'complementary' with that of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Scotland published its own loneliness strategy (A Connected Scotland) in December 2018; a Welsh strategy is in development.

1. Understanding loneliness

1.1 What is loneliness?

Although there are many definitions of loneliness, most agree that it is an individual's **negative perception of the quality or quantity of their social relationships**.[1] Occasionally feeling lonely is normal. When loneliness is considered in policy and by stakeholders, the focus is on those who often feel lonely, or whose loneliness has become chronic.

Although they may be linked, loneliness is usually distinguished from **social isolation**, which is an **objective measure** of an individual's social network (size, frequency of contact etc).[2] It is possible to be lonely whilst being in a relationship or part of a large social network.[3]

1.2 What causes loneliness?

It is difficult to provide a comprehensive guide to the 'causes' of loneliness because of its subjective nature, but there are some common themes, as set out in the Government's Loneliness Strategy (see section 3):

> The causes of loneliness will vary from person to person and we don't always know exactly what it is about an experience like unemployment that makes us lonely, or how these different factors might interact and build up over time. But there are some common themes. Previous experiences and conditions are thought to be important, combined with 'trigger' events that push a person into loneliness.[…]

> Some factors are likely to be specific to the individual – for example, a person's personality or level of resilience at a particular time.[4]

Some of the common causes of loneliness identified include:

- **Structural causes**. Changes to a community's social and physical infrastructure (available activities, spaces, transport, statutory services etc) can make disconnection and social isolation with others more likely (these are explained in more detail in section 1.4 below).[5]

---

1   Vasiliki Tzouvara et al., A narrative review of the theoretical foundations of loneliness, British Journal of Community Nursing, Vol 20, No 7, July 2015

2   Aparna Shankar et al., Loneliness, Social Isolation, and Behavioral and Biological Health Indicators in Older Adults, Health Psychology, Vol 30, No. 4, 2011 pp377-385.

3   Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness, Combatting loneliness one conversation at a time: A call to action, p8.

4   HM Government, A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness, October 2018, p19.

5   British Red Cross and Co-op Foundation, Trapped in a bubble: An investigation into triggers for loneliness in the UK, December 2016, p7.

- Some **personalities** may be more prone to feeling lonely, with some people better able to cope with, and respond to, their social situation than others.[6]

- Any subjective feeling of a social network 'mismatch' is likely to be coloured by **cultural expectations,** so geography, identity and culture may shape feelings of loneliness.[7] It has also been suggested that certain **societal beliefs and norms** may make loneliness more likely, such as the inappropriateness of talking to strangers, modern work/life balance, the stigma of loneliness, and wider discourse which questions whether individuals are 'deserving of support.'[8]

- **Life events** can also 'trigger' lonely feelings. Triggers can happen at any stage of a person's life (see box 1 for more details). Some research has suggested that when an event causes an identity crisis, being socially isolated or lonely can develop into a default behaviour and become chronic.[9]

Box 1: Age and loneliness 'triggers'

Loneliness is popularly associated with **ageing**[10] and the various life events that older people experience such as retirement, bereavement, ill health and a lack of support from family members who have moved away.[11] It is thought that around 1 in 12 people over 50 are "often" lonely, and the problem may be worse for the very oldest.[12]

However, **loneliness can affect people of all ages.**[13] Evidence suggests that differences in age do not change the likelihood of experiencing loneliness, but do influence the circumstances, and amplify the effect of factors that can increase the risk of feeling isolated.[14] Loneliness can be experienced throughout childhood, even amongst those as young as five.[15] Some research has in fact indicated that younger people (16-24 year olds) may experience loneliness more often than older people.[16] Surveys

---

6   Ade Kearns et al., Loneliness, Social Relations and Health and Wellbeing in Deprived Communities, Psychol Health Med. 20(3), 2015 pp332–344.; Mental Health Foundation, The Lonely Society, 2010, p15, p17

7   McHugh, JE et al., The Discrepancy between Social Isolation and Loneliness as a Clinically Meaningful Metric: Findings from the Irish and English Longitudinal Studies of Ageing (TILDA & ELSA), International Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry, 32 (6), 2017, p13

8   British Red Cross and Co-op Foundation, Trapped in a bubble: An investigation into triggers for loneliness in the UK, December 2016, p7

9   British Red Cross and Co-op Foundation, Trapped in a bubble: An investigation into triggers for loneliness in the UK, December 2016, p8, p28

10   For instance, research by Kanter Public, on behalf of the British Red Cross and the Co-op Foundation, found that the public often saw loneliness as an older-person issue. (Red Cross and Co-Op Foundation, Trapped in a bubble: An investigation into triggers for loneliness in the UK, December 2016, p18)

11   Mental Health Foundation, The Lonely Society, 2010, p16; Age UK, All the Lonely People: Loneliness in Later Life, September 2018, p2

12   Ibid; Independent Age, One-third of older people say feelings of loneliness are out of their control, 15 November 2016. Social Finance, in Investing to tackle loneliness, 2015, illustrate data from the English Longitudinal Study of Ageing, that suggests those aged over 80 are more likely than those between 52 and 79 to be lonely (page 6).

13   Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness, Combatting loneliness one conversation at a time: A call to action, 2017, p8

14   Age UK, All the Lonely People: Loneliness in Later Life, September 2018, p2; Maike Luhmann and Louise C. Hawkley, Age Differences in Loneliness from Late Adolescence to Oldest Old Age, Developmental Psychology, 23 February, 2016

15   Action for Children, It starts with hello, 2017, p3, p6

16   Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport press release, 'Let's Talk Loneliness' campaign launched to tackle stigma of feeling alone, 17 June 2019

amongst students have additionally suggested that around 46% of students felt lonely during their time at university,[17] with 15% feeling isolated on a daily basis and another third on a weekly basis.[18]

Life events and factors that have been identified as potentially leading to youth loneliness include shifts in relationships, changing educational environment, social pressures to conform or succeed, physical and emotional development, leaving home, going into employment, or starting a family.[19] Children can be particularly at risk of loneliness if they are victims of abuse or neglect or are in care or care leavers.[20]

An issue that has been highlighted by some regarding youth loneliness is that there are more support services available for elderly people experiencing loneliness, and older people may be more likely to know where to turn for help than younger people.[21]

1.3 Who is at risk of loneliness?

The Government's Loneliness Strategy (see below) notes that people who report being lonely are likely to have at least one of several characteristics, including being aged 16-24, being widowed, having poor health, having a long-term illness or disability, having caring responsibilities and being unemployed. It also noted the important role of "wider cultural attitudes", stating that "there is some evidence that members of some marginalised groups are more likely to feel lonely." [22]

Other characteristics that have been identified[23] as potentially linked to an increased risk of loneliness include:

- **Gender**: some studies have suggested that women are more likely to report feeling lonely. For instance **new mums** aged 18-24 have been found to be particularly susceptible to loneliness as they adopt to their new "identity", leave employment, refocus their attention on their child and, potentially, have to cope with a changed relationship with their partner.[24]

- **Lower income/socioeconomic status.**

- **Work status**: unemployment and retirement have been associated with loneliness. Certain professions may also make socialisation particularly difficult. For example, the British Royal Legion has stated that one in four members of the serving **armed forces community** (i.e. serving personnel, reservists, veterans and family members/dependents) feel lonely or socially

17   THE, If you're feeling lonely at university, you're not alone, 1 November 2018.
18   Wonkhe, Trendence UK, Only the lonely - loneliness, student activities and mental wellbeing at university, undated.
19   Action for Children, It starts with hello, 2017, p7; Co-op Foundation, All our emotions are important: Breaking the silence about youth loneliness, 2018.
20   Action for Children, It starts with hello, 2017, pp10-5.
21   Red Cross and Co-Op Foundation, Trapped in a bubble: An investigation into triggers for loneliness in the UK, December 2016, p17
22   HM Government, A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness, October 2018, p20
23   Maike Luhmann and Louise C. Hawkley, Age Differences in Loneliness from Late Adolescence to Oldest Old Age, Developmental Psychology, 23 February 2016; Susan Davidson and Phil Rossall, Evidence Review: Loneliness in Later Life, Age UK, 2015; and British Red Cross and Co-op Foundation, Trapped in a bubble: An investigation into triggers for loneliness in the UK, December 2016, pp6 and 9
24   British Red Cross and Co-op Foundation, Trapped in a bubble: An investigation into triggers for loneliness in the UK, December 2016; Katherine Lee et al., Lonely within the mother: an exploratory study of first-time mothers' experiences of loneliness, In Press, Journal of Health Psychology, 2017.

isolated 'always' and 'often' for a variety of reasons.[25] It has also been said that leaving the armed forces, and the resulting loss of camaraderie and purpose, can also make it difficult to form relationships in civilian communities.[26]

- **Living arrangements**: living alone, particularly if used to a busier home (i.e. after children have left), may, it has been suggested, increase the risk of loneliness. **Homeless** people have also been highlighted as at risk of loneliness, not only due to lack of contact and lower self-esteem, but also because a leading driver of homelessness is relationship breakdown.[27]

- **Relationship status**: singles, divorcees and the recently bereaved have been identified as potentially at greater risk of loneliness. However, it has also been suggested that a poor-quality intimate relationship can engender loneliness.[28]

- **Disabilities and health concerns:** it has been suggested that having a long-term illness or disability can limit an individual's ability to socialise due to a variety of reasons such as accessibility problems, communication difficulties, anxiety and stigmatisation.[29] People with particular conditions, including HIV, dementia and cancer, and those who move into a care home, have also been cited as at increased risk of loneliness.[30] **Carers** of those with disabilities and health problems can also become lonely; a survey from Carers UK in 2017 found that 81% of carers had felt lonely or socially isolated due to their caring responsibilities.[31]

- **Not being part of a social organisation**. It has been argued that volunteering, or being part of a community group, can reduce loneliness levels.

- **Small number of friends**. It has been suggested that the greater the number of friends, in general, the less likely someone is to be lonely. However, this is not a straight-forward association; the frequency and quality of contact are also important and will depend on the individual.

- **Ethnicity and language**: it has been suggested that being part of a minority ethnic group could be a risk factor for loneliness: the Red Cross and Co-op Foundation have argued that this is due to various "barriers to belonging" such as discrimination

[25] Royal British Legion, Loneliness and social isolation in the armed forces community, July 2018.

[26] Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness, Combatting loneliness one conversation at a time: A call to action, p10; HM Government, The Strategy for our Veterans, CM 9726, November 2018, p17.

[27] Shelter, 'I was all on my own': experiences of loneliness and isolation amongst homeless people, 2015.

[28] Campaign to End Loneliness, Alone in the crowd: loneliness and diversity, 2014 pp22-3.

[29] Sense, "Someone cares if I'm not there", 2017

[30] Sense, "Someone cares if I'm not there", 2017; Campaign to End Loneliness, Alone in the crowd: loneliness and diversity, 2014

[31] Carers UK, The world shrinks: Carer loneliness, 2017; similar experiences were reported in Konstantina Vasileiou et al., Experiences of Loneliness Associated with Being an Informal Caregiver: A Qualitative Investigation, Frontiers in Psychology, 8:585, 2017

and difficulties accessing services;[32] other research by The Forum, a charity for **migrant and refugee** community leaders, has drawn similar conclusions.[33] Refugee Action has argued that difficulties in accessing language classes are a major barrier to integration and tackling loneliness.[34] Surveys have also highlighted that minority ethnic people are less likely to participate in the social activities they enjoy.[35]

- **Sexual orientation**: some studies have suggested that some LGBT persons may be at risk of loneliness.

1.4 Infrastructure and services

As set out above, changes to a community's social and physical infrastructure have been identified as a potential cause of loneliness.

Social infrastructure

'Social' infrastructure deficiencies that have been cited as potentially increasing levels of isolation include:

- the absence or unsuitability of formal support services for lonely people (e.g. they are often aimed at older people). Knowledge of the support available is also often poor;[36]

- poorly designed support services: ad hoc services can be missed when they end, and lesser-quality interventions can increase dissatisfaction;[37]

- an increasingly individualistic, online based society, coupled with the subsequent closure of physical local services such as post offices; older people may find themselves shut out by the digitisation process.[38] Social media may also be a problem: see box 2 for more details;

- changing family dynamics, with parents working longer hours and spending less time with their children;[39] and

- not knowing, or lacking trust in, neighbours or having a fear of local anti-social behaviour.[40] However, some studies have indicated that this association may be explained by lonely people

---

[32]   Red Cross and Co-op Foundation, Barriers to Belonging: an exploration of loneliness among people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, June 2019
[33]   The Forum, This is how it feels to be lonely, 2014
[34]   Refugee Action, Safe but Alone: the role of English language in allowing refugees to overcome loneliness, October 2017
[35]   Campaign to End Loneliness, Alone in the crowd: loneliness and diversity, 2014, pp30-2
[36]   British Red Cross and Co-op Foundation, Trapped in a bubble: An investigation into triggers for loneliness in the UK, December 2016, pp35-6.
[37]   British Red Cross and Co-op Foundation, Trapped in a bubble: An investigation into triggers for loneliness in the UK, December 2016, pp35-6.
[38]   Mental Health Foundation, The Lonely Society, 2010, p10 and Dhruv Sharma et al., Developing Radical-Digital Interventions to Tackle Loneliness Amongst the Elderly, Lancaster University Research Directory, 2015
[39]   Action for Children, It starts with Hello, 2017, p16
[40]   Ade Kearns et al., 'Lonesome town'? Is loneliness associated with the residential environment, including housing and neighborhood factors? Journal of Community Psychology, Vol. 43, No. 7, (2015) pp849–867

being more likely to have negative impressions of their neighbourhood.[41]

Box 2: Social media

It has been suggested that social media may displace real social interaction or trigger lonely feelings in people who compare their own experiences to 'perfect' lives portrayed online by others.[42] Online bullying is also a concern.[43] However, the picture is complicated and the Loneliness Strategy recognises studies have shown both have a positive <u>and</u> negative impact of social media.[44]

Studies of young adults and adolescents (not children) have found a link between high social media usage and self-reported social isolation or loneliness. However, it is possible that causality is the other way around: i.e. lonely people are more likely to use social media.[45]

Other research has found that social media can help people interact and enhance relationships.[46] People with autism may find it helpful[47] and it has been suggested that children, who increasingly are spending time at home, may be able to use social media to better express their identities.[48] Some studies of older people have also found that social media usage can improve and complement traditional social interaction, potentially depending on the platform used.[49]

A lack of, or inappropriate, physical infrastructure, such as **housing**, **transport** and **nearby community facilities**, can also make it more difficult for someone to interact with others. This can be a particular issue in sparser rural areas of the UK where the number of over 85s is due to grow faster over the coming years.[50] Transport and housing are discussed in more detail below.

---

[41] Timothy Matthews et al., Loneliness and Neighborhood Characteristics: A Multi-Informant, Nationally Representative Study of Young Adults, Psychological Science 2019, pp1–11

[42] Co-op Foundation, All our emotions are important: Breaking the silence about youth loneliness, 2018 and Jenna L. Clark et al., Social Network Sites and Well-Being: The Role of Social Connection, Current Directions in Psychological Science, Vol. 27(1) 2018, pp32–37; Ariel Shensa et al., Social Media Use and Perceived Emotional Support Among US Young Adults, Journal of Community Health, 41(3), June 2016, pp541–549;

[43] Action for Children, It starts with Hello, 2017, p16

[44] HM Government, A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness, October 2018, p20

[45] Brian A. Primack et al., Social Media Use and Perceived Social Isolation Among Young Adults in the U.S, American Journal of Preventative Medicine, 53(1), July 2017, pp1–8; C.T. Barry et al., Adolescent social media use and mental health from adolescent and parent perspectives, Journal of Adolescence 61 (2017) 1e11; and Rebecca Nowland et al., Loneliness and social internet use: Pathways to reconnection in a digital world? Perspectives in Psychological Science, 13, 2018, pp70-87.

[46] Rebecca Nowland et al., Loneliness and social internet use: Pathways to reconnection in a digital world? Perspectives in Psychological Science, 13, 2018, pp70-87.

[47] Gerrit I. van Schalkwyk et al., Social Media Use, Friendship Quality, and the Moderating Role of Anxiety in Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder, J Autism Dev Disor, 2017

[48] Action for Children, It starts with Hello, 2017, p16.

[49] Rebecca Nowland et al., Loneliness and social internet use: Pathways to reconnection in a digital world? Perspectives in Psychological Science, 13, 2018 pp70-87 and C.J. Hutto et al., Social media gerontology: Understanding social media usage among older adults, Web Intelligence 13 (2015) pp69–87; Matthew Pittman and Brandon Reich, Social media and loneliness: Why an Instagram picture may be worth more than a thousand Twitter words, Computers in Human Behavior, 62 (2016), 155e167

[50] HM Government, A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness, October 2018, p20 and British Red Cross and Co-op Foundation, Trapped in a bubble: An investigation into triggers for loneliness in the UK, December 2016, p35; James

Transport

Bus services are an important mode of transportation for tackling social isolation, particularly amongst the elderly or the disabled who require an affordable and convenient way of getting around. Where there is no viable commercial market, **community transport** (delivered by third sector organisations) can step in to provide door-to-door services from volunteer drivers, minibus travel for specific groups (particularly the elderly and disabled) and community bus services.[51] These are particularly useful in rural areas.

However, fears have been expressed that the over-regulation of community transport in the UK may threaten the existence of such services[52], and that the short-term financing and general underfunding of bus services outside of London is resulting in reduced mobility for many people.[53]

Access to **rail** can also help tackle loneliness and social isolation. While the Government does not directly operate these services, it plays an important role in funding this mode of travel, as well as prescribing the accessibility requirements for operators. However, rail connections are not always profitable, particularly in rural areas. In response to this, non-profitable services are guaranteed by Government obligations in franchise agreements; profitable rail services also help to cross-subsidise these non-profitable services through the franchising model.

In England and Wales, **community rail** lines have also been set up to help fill gaps in services. These are supported by a local partnership organisation with an aim to engage local people in the development and promotion of the routes, services and stations.

One of the Government's standalone rail initiatives to tackle loneliness has been the development of the Community Rail Strategy. The Government launched its consultation on the Strategy in November 2017 and published its final Strategy in November 2018. The premise behind the strategy is to provide support for community groups by reinventing unused and underused railway property into spaces dedicated to social activities. A useful summary of the way in which community rail can help tackle loneliness is provided in this January 2019 Railway Technology article.

For more background information about the bus industry, as well as recent policy development, see the House of Commons Library briefing paper, Bus Services Act 2017.

For more general information about the railway and rail franchising see the House of Commons library papers A Quick Guide to the Railways and Passenger rail services in England.

Kempton and Sam Tomlin, Ageing alone: Loneliness and the 'Oldest Old', Centre Forum, April 2014, p22 and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs/TNS BMRB, 2013 Rural Ageing Research Summary Report of Findings, 2013, p8.

[51]   Community transport is mostly funded by local authorities, but the Government has made various single year funds available for community transport, for example, the £25 million Community Minibus Fund. Bus Service Operator's Grant is also paid to community transport operators, which also provides all central Government funding for bus services.

[52]   See the Transport Select Committee's December 2017 report into community transport for more details. The Government has also consulted and published a formal response (March 2019) on this issue.

[53]   See Transport Committee, Bus services in England outside London, Ninth Report of Session 2017–19, HC 1425, 22 May 2019, p3 for more information.

As explained in the Local Government Association's guide to Combating loneliness, **driving** can be an essential transport option for older people, particularly in rural and more remote residential areas. Heavy traffic, poor road conditions, inadequate street lighting and poorly-positioned signage can be barriers to confident city driving, particularly for older people. Considering and addressing the full range of environmental factors that affect older and less able people's use of the road network can help address social isolation. For example, parking bays being located close to buildings and increased drop-off and pick-up bays may improve accessibility.

More information about local roads funding is available in the Library briefing paper Local road maintenance in England.

Accessibility

Having accessible transport for people who are less mobile or visually impaired is critical to tackling social isolation. Many day-to-day problems for disabled people stem from confusion over the rules, poor or insufficient communication, inadequate training, and/or a lack of enforcement.

Under section 29(7) and 20 of the *Equality Act 2010*, service providers must make "reasonable adjustments" for disabled service users. The UK is approaching the point where all buses, coaches and trains must be accessible to disabled people (January 2020) and in many cases these vehicles already meet the requirements. Taxis are also accessible in many parts of the country, though non-metropolitan urban areas and rural areas lag somewhat behind. However, there are some outstanding issues that are not fully addressed, such as the enforcement of wheelchair spaces and the lack of audio-visual equipment on transport.

These accessibility related transport issues are discussed in more detail in the House of Commons Library briefing paper Access to transport for disabled people.

Affordability

Having affordable transport is also important. Concessionary bus fares are provided to large numbers of people affected by social isolation, including elderly people and benefit claimants.

Section 28(3) of the *Railways Act 1993*, as amended, requires that all train operating companies (TOCs) participate in the following mandatory schemes:

- Young Persons (16-25) Railcard (for young people aged between 16 and 25 and students in full time education);

- Senior Railcard (for those over the age of 60); and

- Disabled Persons Railcard (for those with severe disabilities).

On 2 January 2019, the Millennial Railcard was introduced. For a £30 fee, the new railcard will offer similar benefits to the Young person's 16-to-25 railcard but for those aged between 26 and 30. More details of the fares can be found on the website, Where and when can I use my railcard?

More information about concessionary bus fares is available in the Library briefing paper Concessionary bus fares.

Housing

There is some mixed evidence to suggest that certain **types of housing**, particularly high-rise flats, can lead to greater social isolation.[54] However, research has often focussed on the **appropriateness of a building** for a subset of people.

For older and disabled persons, benefits have been identified from moving post-retirement to more suitable housing, such as **extra care or specialist retirement housing schemes** which offer a ready-made community. Erosh, a membership organisation for professionals in the sheltered and retirement housing sector, published a new guide: [Addressing Loneliness and Social Isolation in Older People](#) (May 2018) which contains advice and case studies demonstrating the role sheltered and retirement housing organisations can play in preventing and addressing loneliness and social isolation.

A recognised challenge is the lack of attractive housing options for older and disabled people. In [Breaking the Mould](#) (2018), the National Housing Federation (NHF) identified the following requirements for successful developments:

1   Accessibility

2   Space and attractiveness

3   Safety and security

4   Age-friendliness

5   Offer of freedom, choice and flexibility

6   The option to have help at hand

7   Provision of flexible, personalised support

8   The ability for residents to socialise and feel included[55]

There is growing interest in **cohousing projects** as a solution.[56] Further research in this area can be found in the Library's [Loneliness reading list](#) published alongside this paper.

1.5 How common is loneliness?

The latest figures on loneliness suggest that just under half of adults in England experience loneliness 'occasionally' or more often. In 2017/18, 23% of adults (16+) reported they never felt lonely; 31% hardly ever; and 45% occasionally/some of the time/often/always.[57]

6% of adults reported they often or always feel lonely (over 1 in 20 adults aged 16+). This proportion shows little variation between men

---

[54]   Ade Kearns et al., ['Lonesome town'? Is loneliness associated with the residential environment, including housing and neighborhood factors?](#) Journal of Community Psychology, Vol. 43, No. 7, (2015), pp849–867.

[55]   NHF, [Breaking the Mould,](#) 2018

[56]   For a definition, see Hopwood H & Mann F, [Cohousing Project for Older Women and Implications for Loneliness](#), June 2018

[57]   DCMS, [Community Life Survey](#), 2017/18

and women or by region. But it does vary by age and, particularly, by whether a person has a limiting long-term illness (LLTI) or disability.
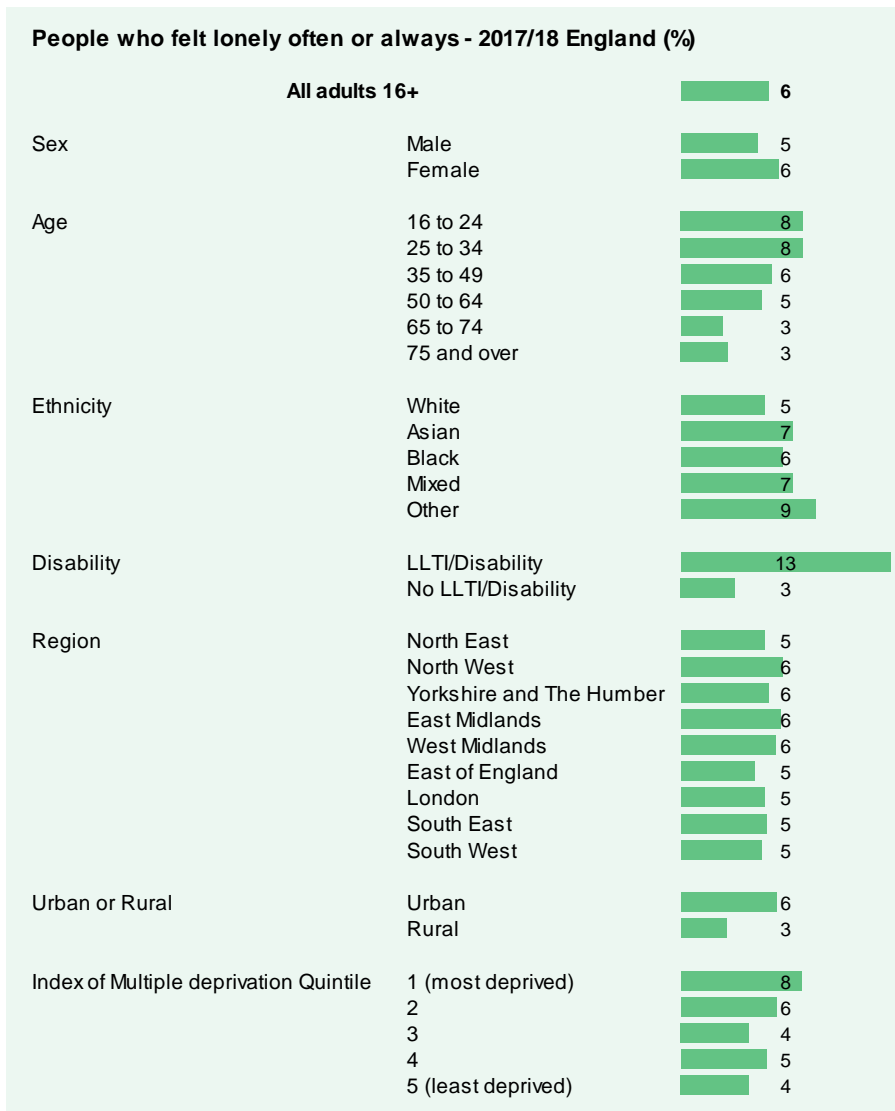
Older people were less likely than younger to report feeling lonely 'often or always'. This description applied to 8% of 16 to 24 year olds but only 3% of those aged 75+. There is other data that suggests that feelings of loneliness could be even higher for under 16s. Among children aged 10 to 15 years 11.3% said that they were "often" lonely. This was more common among younger children aged 10 to 12 years (14.0%) than among those aged 13 to 15 years (8.6%). 27.5% of children who received free school meals said they were "often" lonely, compared with 5.5% of those who did not.[58]

13% of adults (16+) with a disability or limiting illness reported feeling lonely often or always, equivalent to around 1 in 8. For people without a disability or illness just 3% reported feeling lonely often or always.

For adults, feelings of extreme loneliness are more prevalent for people who live in urban areas than rural and those in more deprived areas.[59]

---

[58]   ONS, Children's and young people's experiences of loneliness: 2018

[59]   Table excludes respondents who answered 'don't know' and those with missing answers. A limiting long term illness (LLTI) or disability is classified as someone having any physical or mental health condition or illness which are expected to last for 12 months or more and their condition and/or illness reduces their ability to carry out day to day activities. "Quintiles" represent 20% or one-fifth of all areas. DCMS Community Life Survey 2017/18.

People who felt lonely often or always - 2017/18 England (%)

	All adults 16+	6
Sex	Male	5
	Female	6
Age	16 to 24	8
	25 to 34	8
	35 to 49	6
	50 to 64	5
	65 to 74	3
	75 and over	3
Ethnicity	White	5
	Asian	7
	Black	6
	Mixed	7
	Other	9
Disability	LLTI/Disability	13
	No LLTI/Disability	3
Region	North East	5
	North West	6
	Yorkshire and The Humber	6
	East Midlands	6
	West Midlands	6
	East of England	5
	London	5
	South East	5
	South West	5
Urban or Rural	Urban	6
	Rural	3
Index of Multiple deprivation Quintile	1 (most deprived)	8
	2	6
	3	4
	4	5
	5 (least deprived)	4

Source: DCMS Community Life Survey 2017/18

Broader factors, often in combination, can underpin loneliness and these have been considered by the Office for National Statistics.[60] Three sets of combined characteristics were found to be associated with greater risk of feeling lonely more often:

- Widowed older homeowners living alone with long-term health conditions

- Unmarried, middle-agers, with long-term health conditions

- Younger renters with little trust and sense of belonging to their area

---

[60]   ONS Loneliness, What characteristics and circumstances are associated with feeling lonely? 24 October 2018.

Widowed

Older widowed homeowners who live alone and have long-term health conditions were particularly likely to report feeling lonely more frequently. Of all individuals in this group, 69% reported that they felt lonely "occasionally" or more frequently. This compared with 46% in the sample overall who reported feeling lonely as frequently.

The people in this group tended to be:

- in worse general health;
- living alone;
- homeowners;
- aged 65 years or older; and
- have a long-term physical or mental health condition.

Unmarried, middle-agers, with long-term health conditions

At even greater risk of feeling lonely more often were unmarried middle-agers also with long-term health conditions. In this group 81% of individuals reported that they felt lonely "occasionally" or more frequently, compared with 46% of the sample overall.

People in this group were characterised as:

- single (never married), separated, or divorced;
- living alone but more likely to be renting than owning their own home;
- reporting a long-term physical or mental health condition;
- unlikely to describe their general health as "very good" or "good" (and so have "very bad" to "fair" health); and
- be 35 to 64 years old.

Younger renters with little trust and sense of belonging to their area

One younger group were identified as experiencing loneliness more often. In this group 61% of individuals reported that they felt lonely "occasionally" or more frequently, compared with 46% of the sample overall. Respondents in this group were characterised as:

- single, separated, or divorced;
- living with others and/or as a couple;
- renting;
- in "good" or "very good" health without any long-term health conditions or disabilities; and
- aged 16 to 34 years.

Who is least lonely?

The same ONS analysis identified married homeowners in good health living with others as a group who were who were the least lonely. Only 15% of individuals in this group reported that they felt lonely "occasionally" or more frequently, compared with 46% of the sample overall.

Their characteristics are:

- living with a partner in a marriage or civil partnership;

- in better general health;

- own their own home;

- do not live alone;

- are aged 35 years or older (though skewed more towards 65 years and over); and

- have a strong sense of belonging to their neighbourhood.

1.6 The potential impact of loneliness

Health outcomes

Many studies have found links between loneliness or social isolation and poorer outcomes, principally in health; some have found that the effect may differ according to whether an individual is experiencing social isolation or loneliness. It is, however, difficult to prove causality on both counts. For instance, Shankar et al. (2011) found a link between loneliness and physical inactivity, but noted illness or lack of energy may lead to less social interactions, not the other way round.[61]

The Government's Loneliness Strategy (see section 3) outlined some of the negative impacts that being chronically lonely may have:

- **Early deaths**. Its health impact is thought to be on a par with other public health priorities like obesity or smoking.

- A greater **risk of inactivity, smoking and risk-taking behaviour**.

- An increased risk of **depression, low self-esteem, reported sleep problems and increased stress response**.

- **Cognitive decline** and an increased risk of Alzheimer's.[62]

Further research into the link between loneliness and physical and mental health can be found in the Library's Loneliness reading list published alongside this paper.

---

[61] Aparna Shankar et al., Loneliness, Social Isolation, and Behavioral and Biological Health Indicators in Older Adults, Health Psychology, Vol 30, No. 4, 2011, pp377-385.

[62] HM Government, A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness, October 2018, pp18-9.

The cost of loneliness

It is thought that loneliness can lead to greater pressure on public services. The Government's Loneliness Strategy explained the potential wider effects for society:

> Feeling lonely frequently […] can also have wider effects for society. For example, lonely people are more likely to be readmitted to hospital or have a longer stay. […] There is also evidence that lonely people are more likely to visit a GP or A&E and more likely to enter local authority funded residential care. […] At work, higher loneliness among employees is associated with poorer performance on tasks and in a team, […] while social interaction at work has been linked to increased productivity. […] A study by the Co-op and New Economics Foundation attempted to calculate the cost of this, estimating that loneliness could be costing private sector employers up to £2.5 billion a year due to absence and productivity losses. […][63]

A number of studies have attempted to calculate the cost of loneliness on the economy. These are primarily based on direct impacts that are more easily measured, but there may be indirect effects (such as benefit payments, financial impacts outside of the working age) that are not costed. A 2019 literature review, looking at 12 studies (eight of which were carried out in the UK), found that most costs found were likely to be conservative. The authors thought this was due to a lack of evidence in some categories, such as productivity (particularly through volunteering) in the older population, and the financial impact due to isolation in younger communities. The review also found that most researchers believed that loneliness interventions could reduce these costs, but lacked evidence to support this hypothesis.[64]

Other studies include the following:

- The New Economics Foundation and the Co-op Foundation published a report called The Cost of Loneliness to UK Employers (February 2017). This estimates that loneliness costs UK employers approximately £2.5 billion a year.[65]

- A 2015 report published by Social Finance looked at the potential costs of loneliness to the public sector. The authors estimate that an individual may cost commissioners £12,000, or £60 million for a cohort of 5,000 older lonely people.[66]

---

[63]   HM Government, A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness, October 2018, pp18-9.

[64]   Cathrine Mihalopoulos et al., The economic costs of loneliness: a review of cost-of-illness and economic evaluation studies, Social Psychiatry Psychiatric Epidemiology (2019) pp1-14.

[65]   New Economics Foundation and the Co-operative Foundation, Cost of Loneliness to UK Employers, February 2017.

[66]   Social Finance, Investing to Tackle Loneliness, June 2015, pp10-12.

The cost of scams

The elderly and vulnerable are often targeted by doorstep, phone or online scams. Scams are increasingly sophisticated and those who are isolated - the elderly, the disabled, those with mental health problems - are most at risk. There is now evidence of so-called "cuckooing", where gangs travel to towns and befriend vulnerable people, only to take control of their homes. It is estimated that scams cost the UK economy between £5bn and £10bn each year with 53% of people aged 65 or over saying they have been targeted by a scam.[67] Brown et al., writing for Bournemouth University, provide more detail in [How loneliness in older people makes them more vulnerable to scams](#) (24 July 2017).

Steps have been taken to address the issue. The [National Trading Standards Scam Marshal scheme](#) (mentioned in the Government's Loneliness Strategy), is where individuals who have experienced scams share their experiences and help others to recognise and report scams.

From time-to-time, Trading Standards teams have joined with Citizens Advice Bureaus to operate scam awareness campaigns, providing consumers with practical advice on how to avoid being scammed.

More detail is in the Library briefing paper, [Scamming and its effect on vulnerable persons](#), written for the [backbench debate](#) on scamming on 8 September 2016. There is also a Library paper on [Banking scams](#) (May 2019).

1.7 Loneliness prevention and intervention

The What Works Centre for Wellbeing was asked by the Government to look into the current evidence regarding effective loneliness interventions. The Centre conducted a "systematic review of evidence reviews" with the aim of answering the question, "What is the effectiveness of interventions to alleviate loneliness in people of all ages across the life-course?"

The Centre's report, published in 2018, noted a number of limitations with the available evidence and stated that "more large-scale, controlled study designs are required to draw any solid conclusions about what approaches are most effective, for which groups of people, in what settings and for how long."[68]

The report identified the following categories of interventions that had been subject to study:

- **Leisure activities** (including indoor gardening, music, physical activities)
- **Therapies** (including animal assisted therapy, reminiscence therapy, cognitive enhancement and humour therapy)
- **Social and community interventions** (including community sharing, shared meals, and advice/signposting services)
- **Educational approaches** (including relationship training, psychosocial help and skills training)

---

[67] National Trading Standards News, [Home Office fund expansion of scam marshals programme](#), 7 November 2018
[68] What Works Centre for Well-being, Tackling loneliness briefing on the [Tackling Loneliness website](#), October 2018

- **Befriending**

- **System-wide activities**, designed to change the culture of an organisation or community.[69]

Its key findings included:

- There is no one-size fits all approach to alleviating loneliness in older population groups and tailored approaches are more likely to reduce loneliness.

- It is not clear what approaches are effective in alleviating loneliness but several mechanisms were identified, such as:

  o tailoring interventions to people's needs;

  o developing approaches which avoid stigma or reinforce isolation; and

  o supporting meaningful relationships.

- The evidence about the effectiveness of group-based interventions versus those delivered in one-to-one settings was inconclusive.[70]

Some organisations, such as the Campaign to End Loneliness, have argued that a strategy incorporating all levels - individual, community and society – will be most effective.[71] Age UK has also argued that communities need to be strengthened with "the social and physical infrastructure that can help build resilience."[72]

The Campaign to End Loneliness (CtEL) has set out a loneliness framework which, it states, "presents the full range of interventions needed in a local area to support older people experiencing this very individual problem." It is centred around four types of interventions that focus not just on interventions tackling an individual's loneliness, but also the wider community:

Foundation services – services to reach and understand the specific needs of those experiencing loneliness.

Direct interventions – a menu of services that directly improve the number or quality of relationships older people have.

Gateway Services – improving transport and technology provision to help retain connections and independence in later life.

Structural Enablers – create the right structures and conditions in a local environment to reduce those affected by, or at risk of, loneliness.[73]

The links above direct readers to example interventions. CtEL has also published guidance on its website aimed at local authorities and other commissioners, setting out the strategic approach that it believes should be taken. CtEL has further guidance to help organisations identify

---

[69] What Works Centre for Well-being, Tackling loneliness briefing on the Tackling Loneliness website, October 2018

[70] What Works Centre for Well-being, Tackling loneliness briefing on the Tackling Loneliness website, October 2018

[71] Campaign to End Loneliness, Promising approaches, January 2015, p8

[72] Age UK, All the Lonely People: Loneliness in Later Life, pp8-9

[73] Loneliness Framework, Campaign to End Loneliness website, accessed 30 April 2019

people experiencing or at risk of loneliness and measure an organisation's impact on loneliness in later life.

The Library reading list that accompanies this paper contains links to further research and case studies.

2. The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness

2.1 The Commission's Report

The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness was established after the death of Jo Cox MP in June 2016. Its final report, [Combatting loneliness one conversation at a time: A call to action](), was published in December 2017.

As well as looking at the communities affected by loneliness, the Commission's report noted that the evidence base is increasingly demonstrating a link between loneliness and "serious health consequences not only for individuals' wellbeing but also for their health and the economic stability of wider society."[74]

The Commission made several recommendations to the UK Government:

National Leadership

- The Government should lead on the development of a UK wide strategy for loneliness across all ages and should report annually to Parliament on progress in reducing loneliness.

- A nominated lead Minister should drive action on loneliness across Government and should have lead responsibility for the development and implementation of the loneliness strategy.

- The current Family Test, which Government departments are expected to use to analyse new policies, should be developed into a Family and Relationships Test so that policies are assessed for their impact on connections between individuals and communities.[75]

The Library has a paper on the [Family Test]().

Measurable progress

The Commission called for better data-gathering on loneliness across all generations, including:

- a **national indicator** on loneliness across all ages included in national indicator sets (including the Public Health outcomes Framework);

- **measures of loneliness** included in major national studies; and

- **annual reporting on loneliness** by the Office for National Statistics.

The report also called for:

- investment in a programme to develop the evidence around what works in tackling loneliness, led by the Government's [What Works centres](); and

---

[74]   Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness, [Combatting loneliness one conversation at a time: A call to action](), December 2017, p10
[75]   Ibid., p14

- Public Health England to create "easy-to-understand messages to help individuals connect with others and avoid loneliness."[76]

Catalysing action

The Commission's report recommended that the Government create an innovation and spread fund to:

- **stimulate innovation** in solutions to loneliness, for all ages;

- **provide seed funding** for communities to develop self-sustaining community activities which enable people to connect; and

- **scale-up and spread** promising approaches to reaching out to isolated lonely individuals.[77]

The report ended by calling on local government, public sector leaders, business leaders, employers and individuals to take action against loneliness in communities.

Although the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness has ended its activities,[78] the Jo Cox Foundation still exists and the British Red Cross, Co-op Partnership, Campaign to End Loneliness and APPG on Loneliness will continue the Commission's work.[79]

2.2 Initial Government response

The then Prime Minister, Theresa May, hosted a reception on 17 January 2018 to "celebrate Jo Cox's legacy, and the important work of her family, Foundation and Loneliness Commission." In her speech, the then Prime Minister set out the action the Government was taking in response to the report:

> […] the Commission's report, which was published just before Christmas, highlights a range of areas where action is needed. And in response, we've started work on an England-wide strategy to tackle loneliness, which will be published later this year.
>
> Work has also begun on developing the evidence base around the impact of different initiatives, across all ages and within all communities. And the Office of National Statistics is committed to establishing a framework for measuring loneliness, so consistent figures can be used in major research studies. And we will create a new, dedicated fund that will see government working with charities, foundations, and others, to stimulate innovative solutions, provide seed funding for community initiatives, and scale-up existing projects.[80]

At the same time, the remit of the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Sport and Civil Society was expanded to include cross-

---

76   Ibid., pp4, p10
77   Ibid., p18
78   Loneliness commission established by murdered MP Jo Cox is wound up, Independent, 10 April 2018
79   Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness, Combatting loneliness one conversation at a time: A call to action, December 2017, p5
80   Prime Minister's Office et al. PM's speech at Downing Street reception to celebrate the legacy of Jo Cox:17 January 2018, 19 January 2018.

government work on loneliness. Tracey Crouch MP, who held this role at the time, was dubbed by many as the UK's first 'loneliness minister.'

In the months that followed, the Government announced two funds relevant to the issue of loneliness:

- In March 2018, the Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy created several funds to develop technologies and industries to "help the UK prepare for the challenge of an ageing society." This included £98 million for the 'healthy ageing programme' which aimed to create "products and services which will help people to live in their homes for longer, **tackle loneliness**, and increase independence and wellbeing"[81] (emphasis added).

- In June 2018, the Government announced £20 million of funding to help organisations working to combat loneliness. This included:

    o A new £11 million 'Building Connections Fund' that will be distributed to successful applicants that can help bring communities together. The Government contributed £5 million to the fund, with £5 million pledged from the Big Lottery Fund and £1 million allocated by the Co-op Foundation. The What Works Centre for Wellbeing is working with a number of organisations to evaluate the activities carried out through the Fund'.[82]

    o £5 million of players money committed by the People's Postcode Lottery to top up existing grants it has given to charities that combat loneliness.

    o £4 million from the Health Lottery to charities that work to improve social links in disadvantaged areas across England.[83]

More information about the Building Connections Fund can be found on the National Lottery Community Fund website.

In August 2018, the Government published its Civil Society Strategy, which set out how it hopes to enable local communities to 'reach their full potential'. It hopes to bring together businesses, public services, the third sector and society in general to tackle issues such as loneliness and social isolation, two themes mentioned at numerous points in the strategy.[84]

---

[81]   Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy press release, Government announces £300 million for landmark ageing society grand challenge, 12 March 2018.

[82]   What Works Centre for Wellbeing, webpage on Loneliness, accessed 10 April 2019

[83]   Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport et al. press release, £20 million investment to help tackle loneliness, 18 June 2018.

[84]   HM Government, Civil Society Strategy: building a future that works for everyone, August 2018.

3.   The Government's Loneliness Strategy

Following a consultation held between 22 June 2018 and 20 July 2018, on 15 October 2018 the Government published A connected society: A Strategy for tackling loneliness – laying the foundations for change (hereafter referred to as the 'Loneliness Strategy' or 'Strategy').

Responses to the consultation were published in annex A of the report. From over 400 responses, the Government identified nine 'essential elements' to a loneliness strategy:

- A strategy should be "person centred with peer support".

- The strategy should involve:

    — "accessible and affordable transport";

    — a "localised focus and approach";

    — "increased knowledge of resources" and look at the "availability and range of resources"; as well as

    — "partnership working" and "co-production of services"

- The strategy should also "de-stigmatise the issue" and "mobilise the community."

The Government added that there were "no quick fixes" and "it will require a societal response and a united effort for many years to come." Respondents to the consultation had flagged many local organisations, funds, infrastructure that could play a part, requiring much better communication between local actors.[85]

The Government also noted that systematic measurement of loneliness and better impact assessment of projects and interventions should be a focus of future work to tackle loneliness.

3.1 Proposals

The Loneliness Strategy's proposals were developed using feedback from the consultation and from workshops conducted by the Loneliness Action Group.[86] It extends to England only, but discussions are underway with devolved administrations to ensure that work is 'complementary' with that of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.[87]

The Strategy calls upon local authorities, public services, employers, volunteers and individuals to consider their role in tackling loneliness. Central Government, it says, will provide 'national leadership' through a variety of measures, outlined below.[88]

---

85   HM Government, A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness, October 2018, p65.
86   Led by the British Red Cross and Co-op partnership.
87   HM Government, A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness, October 2018, p15
88   Ibid, pp15-6.

Measuring loneliness and knowledge sharing

The Strategy explained that the ONS was in the process of developing a package of measures that could be used to measure loneliness nationally. The Government was, it said, committed to using this package as its standard way of measuring loneliness and would encourage other organisations to do the same.[89]

Since the Strategy's publication, the ONS has published its [guidance for use of the national indicators on surveys](#) (December 2018). The ONS recommends asking four questions for adults, including a single direct question of "How often do you feel lonely?". An adapted version is recommended for children.

In addition, following on from the Jo Cox Commission's recommendation (see section 2.1 above) a consultation on [Proposed changes to the Public Health Outcomes Framework from 2019/20](#) was opened in January 2019 and closed the following month. The proposed loneliness-related indicators are on page 18. The Government is, at the time of writing, analysing the feedback.[90]

The Strategy additionally stated that the Prime Minister had asked the [What Works Centre for Wellbeing](#) to look into the current evidence regarding effective loneliness interventions (see section 1.7 above).The strategy noted that most studies examined by the Centre focussed on the over 55s, and stated that this suggested more evidence was needed for other age ranges.[91] The What Works Centre's publications can be found on [its webpage on Loneliness](#).

On top of the work of the What Works Centre for Wellbeing, the Strategy stated that a number of Government departments and agencies will work to improve sharing of good practice and learning on tackling loneliness. This will include training for Jobcentre work coaches to encourage them to ask about social connections in conversations with claimants who are struggling with work preparation activity.[92]

Promoting social connections

The Loneliness Strategy outlined the Government's aspiration to improve cross-sector connections between organisations, so someone experiencing loneliness can be directed to appropriate help. Specific measures are described below.

Social prescribing

Social prescribing is described in the Strategy as something that:

> ...enables organisations to refer people to a range of services that offer support for social, emotional or practical needs. This could include feelings of loneliness, as well as for debt, employment or housing problems, or difficulties with their relationships.

---

[89]   Ibid., pp21-2
[90]   The Public Health Outcomes Framework measures public health trends on a quarterly basis.
[91]   HM Government, [A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness](#), October 2018, p22
[92]   Ibid., p33

It additionally explained that "social prescribing connects people to community groups and services, often through the support of a link worker". Such schemes employ individuals who take referrals from local agencies (e.g. GPs) and work to produce a plan to meet the person's wellbeing needs. They can help people to overcome feelings of loneliness by connecting them to activities and support within their local area.[93]

Some Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs), with NHS England support, are already exploring the use of social prescribing schemes; when the Loneliness Strategy was published, NHS England estimated that 60% of CCGs had commissioned some form of social prescribing. Other voluntary sector organisations also run referral and connector schemes. The Loneliness Strategy noted the announcement, in July 2018, of £4.5 million of funding to 23 social prescribing projects in England,[94] and the social prescribing partnerships supported by the Communities Fund.

The Loneliness Strategy recognised that more evidence is required on the impact of social prescribing, but highlighted that preliminary evidence suggests it may be linked to fewer A&E attendances.

The Strategy committed to making social prescribing a 'core element of local provision' by:

- having a **universal national offer of social prescribing** in place by 2023. This would be achieved by embedding link workers and making them available in every Primary Care Network;

- creating, through a mapping exercise led by NHS England, a **database of social prescribing schemes** by the end of 2018;

- publishing a **best practice guide to social prescribing** through NHS England;

- launching an **online social prescribing platform** for commissioners and practitioners in late 2018;

- piloting new accredited **learning programmes for link workers** in early 2019; and

- creating **regional social prescribing steering groups** in 2018.

NHS England would also publish **a Common Outcomes Framework for social prescribing** in 2018/19, so that the impact of social prescribing can be better understood. This has been published: see box 3 for more details.

The Department of Health and Social Care, along with NHS England and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), would, the strategy stated, **assess how organisations currently refer individuals in**

---

[93]   Ibid., p25

[94]   See the press release Social prescribing schemes across England to receive £4.5 million by the Department of Health and Social Care, 23 July 2018

social prescribing schemes. Using these findings, these departments will test methods to spread better practice in 2019/20.[95]

Based on a Jersey-based project called 'Call and Check' the Government also indicated it wanted **to test a scheme in which postal workers reach out to isolated older people**. A set of questions would help the local authority or volunteer sector professional to direct those at risk of loneliness to "friends, family, neighbours or local voluntary sector services." The Home Office will run the trial, called 'Safe and Connected', in Liverpool, Whitby and New Malden in 2018/19, with an evaluation anticipated in June 2019.[96]

It was also hoped that including the new loneliness measure in a revised Public Health Outcomes Framework (see above) will better guide local Health and Wellbeing Boards can better guide strategic decision-making regarding social prescribing.[97]

Box 3: Social prescribing - actions so far

NHS England has a website dedicated to Social prescribing. It sets out good practice for commissioners, and describes a 'standard model' for social prescribing that appears to be most effective. A summary guide to social prescribing was published on 31 January 2019, going into further detail about best practice for local leaders. Annex D considers a Common Outcomes Framework, as promised in the Loneliness Strategy.

Social prescribing is expected to help the NHS deliver Universal personalised care by 2023/4. To support this, the NHS Long Term Plan (January 2019) committed to training 1000 social prescribing link workers by the end of 2020/21, with more staff to be trained by 2023/24. The Long Term Plan aimed for over 900,000 people to be able to be referred to social prescribing schemes by then.[98]

Seven Regional Social Prescribing Steering Groups, covering England, have been established, looking at how to "maximise the impact of social prescribing in their region." These have been supported by networking events. A cross-Government "social prescribing taskforce has also begun to meet regularly.[99]

NHS England also has a webpage called Social prescribing – frequently asked questions.

In March 2019, Public Health England published Social prescribing: applying All Our Health. This guidance for health and care professionals recommends the ways in which front-line professionals and leaders can promote and adopt social prescribing practices.

Both NHS England and Public Health England collaborate with the Social Prescribing Network which provides research and evaluation, supports schemes and runs conferences: it is in the process of setting up regional networks across England, Ireland and Scotland.

Increasing participation in local activities

The Strategy outlined a number of initiatives aimed at increasing opportunities for individuals to volunteer or take part in local activities. These included:

- The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) launching five pilots, by March 2019, to test **new models of volunteering** to attract those who conventionally would not be able to do so;

---

[95]   HM Government, A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness, October 2018, pp25-7.

[96]   Ibid., p27.

[97]   Ibid., p28.

[98]   NHS, The NHS Long Term Plan, 7 January 2019, para. 1.40

[99]   PQ 268587 [on Loneliness: Social Prescribing] 27 June 2019

- Sport England using £1 million from its Active Ageing Fund to support two **programmes tackling loneliness through sport and physical activity**;

- the Arts Council working with health providers to help **expand social prescribing opportunities**. The Arts Council will also work with the Government to promote the role played by arts and culture in encouraging social connections.[100] More information on their efforts so far was provided in response to a [parliamentary question from 2 July 2019](#); and

- **DCMS and the Arts Council using the new loneliness measure to analyse their programmes**. Furthermore, it is expected that DCMS will "run masterclasses on evaluation and measuring the impact of library services in reducing loneliness, with reference to the new loneliness measure".[101] These masterclasses ran in August 2018 and March 2019.[102]

The Strategy acknowledged that the Government will need to address the barriers that prevent people from engaging in local groups and projects. It is hoped that the pilots to be run by DCMS will help people overcome such issues. The Strategy also noted that language barriers may be a factor, and it pointed to the Government's [Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper](#) (March 2018); this set out how MHCLG (Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government) will continue to pay for language courses for the unemployed and those looking for work, but also introduce an England-wide scheme to encourage the setting up of volunteer-led conversation clubs.[103] The Green Paper also contains commitments to build upon the support already offered by Central and Local Government to help integrate refugees.[104]

Improving how organisations connect people

The Loneliness Strategy identified certain 'trigger points' where the Government believed departments could act to prevent loneliness:

- DWP would integrate advice on loneliness into the [Tell Us Once initiative](#), a voluntary service in which the Government will notify most necessary organisations following an individual's death.

- The Department for Transport (DfT) would explore with seven mobility centres how signs of loneliness can be identified and how their staff can raise awareness of the loneliness agenda and help service users continue to access transport if they no longer want to drive. In May 2019, the Government provided a grant of £250,000 to start this trial, expected to end before Autumn 2019.[105]

---

[100] HM Government, [A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness](#), October 2018, p53-4.

[101] Ibid., p55.

[102] [PQ HL16538 [on Loneliness]](#) 2 July 2019

[103] HM Government, [A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness](#), October 2018, p55.

[104] Ibid., p56

[105] [PQ277716 [on Loneliness]](#) 22 July 2019

- The Home Office would help to expand the [National Trading Standards Scam Marshal Scheme](#) to improve the resilience of victims, or potential victims, of fraud. £100,000 of funding from the Home Office was assigned to this in November 2018.[106]

- The upcoming new Veteran's Strategy would also look at social isolation and community integration.

The Loneliness Strategy also commits DCMS to running four pilots to explore how data could make it easier for people to find local activities.[107]

Box 3: Tackling loneliness in the armed forces community

A new [Veteran's Strategy](#) was published in November 2018. In its analysis of the issues faced by veterans, the first theme was "Community and relationships" which recognised that loneliness and social isolation are reportedly part of many veterans' experiences. By 2028, the key outcome for this theme is that veterans will be able to "build healthy relationships and integrate into their communities."

That month, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) also published the [Armed Forces Covenant Annual Report 2018](#). Within it, the MOD highlighted a report from the Royal British Legion: '[Loneliness and social isolation in the armed forces community](#)' (2014) and said it had met the Legion to discuss how to translate the research findings into practical, tangible interventions. In its report, the Legion had recommended better data-gathering and research on the prevalence and causes of loneliness in the armed forces. The Legion also raised concerns about the Future Accommodation Model and recommended the MOD explicitly monitor loneliness and social isolation in the pilot project. The MOD is seeking to encourage greater private ownership/renting among service personnel but there are concerns this may isolate personnel and their families from the armed forces community.[108]

Carers and people with disabilities

The Strategy noted the Government's efforts to improve the support for carers, including though measures to help carers stay in employment (thus retaining social networks) and a range of other actions outlined in the [Carers Action Plan 2018 to 2020](#).[109] In particular, the Carers Action Plan commits the Government to working with local government on a sector-led improvement programme focused on implementation of the duties relating to carers as set out in the *Care Act 2014*.

The Care Act statutory guidance is clear that universal social care services may include "interventions and advice" that "reduce loneliness or isolation". In addition, when local authorities seek to purchase social care services through "outcomes-based commissioning", the statutory guidance notes that this should "emphasise … ways of reducing loneliness and social isolation" among other factors.[110]

For more information, the Campaign to End Loneliness has published a briefing paper on [The Care Act 2014 and Loneliness](#).

---

[106] National Trading Standards press release, [Home Office fund expansion of Scam Marshals programme](#), 7 November 2018

[107] HM Government, [A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness](#), October 2018, p32

[108] Royal British Legion, [Loneliness and social isolation in the armed forces community](#), July 2018.

[109] HM Government, [A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness](#), October 2018, pp29-30.

[110] Department of Health and Social Care, [Care and Support Statutory Guidance](#), October 2018, paras 2.6 and 4.16.

The Government also pointed to its **efforts to help disabled people with long-term health conditions**, who are vulnerable to experiencing loneliness, including:

- taking action to improve employment and volunteering opportunities;

- publishing guidance on social work best practice which can help social workers better support people at risk of loneliness.[111] The Strategy noted that these efforts will continue and since its publication the Government has commissioned an evidence review to support the Chief Social Worker in this capacity;[112]

- its commitment to continue provide concessionary travel to elderly and disabled people;[113] and

- the Inclusive Transport Strategy and the new National Planning Policy Framework (July 2018), which require that developments "address the needs of disabled people and reduced mobility in relation to all modes of transport."[114]

Developing community infrastructure

The Loneliness Strategy highlighted measures that the Government was taking to **'unlock the potential' of underutilised community spaces**, including:

- the recognition of the importance of community space in the Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper;

- upcoming guidance for community groups wanting to take local assets into community ownership;

- DCMS and MHCLG designing a programme of work regarding the sustainability of community hubs and spaces;

- the 25 Year Environment Plan setting out a "long-term approach to protecting and enhancing the natural environment and its commitments include creating more green infrastructure"; and

- DEFRA (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs) and PHE working together on the three-year 'Natural Environment for Health and Wellbeing' programme which supports local actors in promoting the natural environment and the use of green spaces to improve physical and mental health.[115]

It then set out further measures the Government would take to 'unlock access to their local spaces':

- DCMS would provide up to £1.8 million of funding to develop community spaces in "innovative and creative" ways: a £1.6

---

[111] HM Government, A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness, October 2018, p30.
[112] PQ277686 [on Loneliness:Social Services] 22 July 2019
[113] See the Department for Transport press release, Free bus passes for older and disabled people protected for the future (10 April 2018) for more information.
[114] HM Government, A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness, October 2018, pp30-1.
[115] HM Government, A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness, October 2018, p37

million 'Space to Connect' Fund, administered by the Co-op Foundation, has since been launched.[116]

- New guidance would be published in 2018 for schools to maximise the use of their premises. The Department for Education's Governance Handbook 2019 (updated in March that year) includes information on the use of school premises for extended activities and community services (see section 6.11.2).

- The DWP will encourage jobcentres to open up their spaces if possible. BEIS (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) will also encourage businesses to provide community spaces outside of business hours.

- DEFRA will support rural community infrastructure action: in particular, it will convene a regular meeting of a 'rural stakeholder group' to advise government departments on how to help local initiatives.[117]

Transport

Transport is a central theme in the Government's Loneliness Strategy, which acknowledged that "good transport links…are important to help people to access work, stay healthy and remain linked into their communities." It was also noted that many respondents in the call for evidence "highlighted the importance of access to inclusive and affordable transport as vital to tackling loneliness".[118]

The Government said it was "investing billions…in maintaining and upgrading our transport infrastructure, [which] is one of the most important things government can do to help people remain connected." The Government identified local buses, community transport and community rail as key elements of transport infrastructure that are important for tackling loneliness, especially for those living in rural areas or those on lower incomes.[119]

There were few new funding announcements, but the Government announced several transport measures as part of the Strategy:

- The Government would set out, via the Community Rail Strategy (published November 2018), how the Government will support community rail partnerships to improve local transport provision.

- The Government would fund the Community Transport Association to enable the existing Community Transport specific training to be recognised as part of the qualification for professional coach and bus drivers.

- The Government would help to create partnerships between transport providers and community organisations who are developing ideas and initiatives for how transport can be used to

---

[116] HC deb 4 July 2019 c1331
[117] HM Government, A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness, October 2018, pp38-9
[118] Ibid., pp20 and 40.
[119] Ibid., p40.

help tackle loneliness, and use industry-wide forums to promote these.

- Inclusive transport would be made a key feature of the [Future of Mobility Grand Challenge: the Future of Urban Mobility Strategy](#) (published March 2019).[120]

These are on top of the Government's [Inclusive Transport Strategy](#) (which was published in July 2018), setting out how it wants the transport industry to move forwards in improving accessibility and how it intends to help the industry achieve this. It includes several actions to be achieved between 2018 and 2020.

Housing and planning

The Strategy outlined efforts that had been made to make the housing and planning system foster better communities, including the publication of the 2018 Green Paper, [A New Deal for Social Housing](#).[121] This paper refers to social landlords' role in promoting community cohesion and supporting thriving communities:

> Many residents shared positive experiences including community activities that supported participation and community centres which acted as a hub for information and social interaction. Black, Asian and minority ethnic residents told us they particularly valued these additional services which helped to break down barriers between residents and support everyone in developing important skills.[122]

The Green Paper did not contain direct reference to loneliness, but it did reference residents' activities, such as gardening projects, recycling schemes and buddying activities, to tackle social isolation.[123] The Paper asked whether social landlords should be required to report on the social value they deliver beyond their key responsibilities.[124] Reponses to the consultation exercise are being analysed.

The Loneliness Strategy also explained how the Government intends to help private tenants, including **consulting on longer tenancies** which could increase the "length of time lived in a neighbourhood and the sense of belonging to it". The Government was also "committed to **diversifying the housing market**, including growing the build to rent sector, where landlords build and operate dedicated private rental blocks."[125]

The Strategy committed the Government to funding research into the impact of **community-led housing and cohousing solutions** on loneliness. Bids for this research funding have been invited and the

---

[120] Ibid., p41. The [Future of Mobility: urban strategy](#) was published in March 2019.
[121] Ibid., p42.
[122] MHCLG, [A New Deal for Social Housing,](#) (Cm 9671), 18 August 2018, para 127
[123] Ibid., para 116
[124] Ibid., para 129
[125] HM Government, [A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness](#), October 2018, p42

studies are also expected to look at the value for money and best practice.[126]

A number of planning measures were also outlined in the Strategy, including:

- encouraging, through Homes England and other government programmes, the **consideration of loneliness in design quality**; and

- running industry events to **promote the role of design in tackling loneliness**. It was hoped that subsequent case studies and evidence would be published by the end of Spring 2019, which would help support the recently revised National Planning Policy Framework. In February 2019, a national conference called Better Design, for Better Places took place, tackling this subject.[127]

Box 5: Housing and planning - actions so far

The Government response to the consultation on Overcoming the barriers to longer tenancies in the private rented sector was published in April 2019. The Government proposed repealing Section 21 of the *Housing Act 1988* (as amended) to abolish so-called 'no-fault evictions' and provide private tenants with greater security of tenure.[128]

In May 2019, the Government was challenged on the provision of accessible housing (PQ 251314 on Housing: Older People). The Government responded that the White Paper, Fixing our broken housing market, underlined their "commitment to do more to provide the homes we need for all in our society, including for older and disabled people." This included looking at the barriers to older people who might benefit from moving home, and exploring ways to "stimulate the market to deliver new homes for older people." The Government also underscored the revised National Planning Policy Framework (issued in February 2019), which "expressly requires local plans to include a detailed needs assessment for housing our older and disabled populations." Future guidance was promised to help councils put these policies in place. [129]

The revised National Planning Policy Framework also states that "planning policies and decisions should aim to achieve healthy, inclusive and safe places that … promote social interaction".[130] The associated Planning Practice Guidance on design (from 2014) observes that "achieving good design is about creating places, buildings, or spaces that work well for everyone, look good, last well, and will adapt to the needs of future generations" and that planning should promote access and inclusion and cohesive and vibrant neighbourhoods.[131]

Digital inclusion

The Loneliness Strategy suggested that the Government would '**maximise the power of digital tools' to connect people**. It would do this, it said, by making loneliness a criterion in the £400,000 Digital Inclusion Innovation Fund, through which the Government is supporting three pilot projects aimed at addressing the digital exclusion of older and disabled people.[132] Since the Strategy was published, a 'Tech to

---

126 PQ 275810 [on Loneliness] 15 July 2019
127 PQ 275812 [on Loneliness] 15 July 2019
128 MHCLG, Overcoming the barriers to longer tenancies in the private rented sector: summary of responses and government response, 15 April 2019
129 PQ 251314 [on Housing: Older People] 15 May 2019
130 MHCLG, National Planning Policy Framework, CP 48, February 2019: page 27
131 MHCLG, Guidance: Design, 6 March 2014
132 PQ 245824, 29 April 2019

Connect' Challenge has been established, ran by Nesta with £1 million of Government funding.[133]

The Strategy also stated that the Government would **consider loneliness in the consultation on internet safety**, run by the Home Office and DCMS.[134] The Government's response to the Internet Safety Strategy Green Paper, which was published in May 2018, said that the Government would ensure that links between internet safety and the loneliness strategy are "appropriately reinforced".[135] The Online Harms White Paper that followed in April 2019 did not make specific reference to loneliness, although it did contain a section on empowering users generally to understand and manage risks online.

The Government's broader approach to supporting digital inclusion through building digital skills is set out in the March 2017 Digital Strategy (Section 2).[136] This includes plans to "introduce an entitlement to full funding for basic digital courses from 2020, similar to the entitlements already in place for maths and English."[137]

Reducing the stigma of loneliness

The Strategy noted that the stigma surrounding loneliness needs to be challenged. In order to do so, the Government made a number of commitments aimed at building a "**national conversation to raise awareness and reduce the stigma around loneliness**":

- Loneliness would feature in guidance content for Relationships and Relationships and Sex Education due to be introduced to schools' curriculum by 2020 (see box 6 below).

- Public Health England would incorporate loneliness into their upcoming mental health campaign. The Every Mind Matters campaign was later piloted in the Midlands in October 2018 and will be launched England-wide in October 2019.[138]

- BEIS would encourage employers to support employees' well-being, including loneliness, through the Employers Pledge.[139] This is part of the campaign Time to Change, led by the charities Mind and Rethink: more can be read on the Employer Pledge website.

- DCMS would also explore how to spread the message that social wellbeing is important. In June 2019, DCMS' 'Let's Talk Loneliness' Campaign was launched.[140]

---

[133] HC deb 4 July 2019 c1331
[134] HM Government, A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness, October 2018, pp44-5
[135] DCMS, Internet Safety Strategy Green Paper consultation: government response, May 2018, pp54-55.
[136] DMCS and Home Office, Online Harms: White Paper, 8 April 2019, from page 85.
[137] PQ 245824 [on Digital Technology: Older People], 29 April 2019
[138] PQ 277687 [on Loneliness:Health Education] 22 July 2019
[139] HM Government, A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness, October 2018, p11
[140] DCMS press release, 'Let's Talk Loneliness' campaign launched to tackle stigma of feeling alone, 17 June 2019

- The Department for Education (DfE) would improve mental health support for students and would set up a working group to review the support needed for students transitioning to university.[141] Further information on the Government's progress and the working group is available in two DfE press releases ([Government creates new student mental health taskforce](), 7 March 2019) and ([New package of measures announced on student mental health](), 28 June 2018).

Box 6: Loneliness and relationships and sex education

Section 34 of the *Children and Social Work Act 2017* provides for relationships and sex education to be taught in all schools in England. The new requirements mean that, from September 2020:

- All primary schools in England will teach 'Relationships Education'
- All secondary schools will teach 'Relationships and Sex Education'

In July 2018 the Government [announced]() the introduction of statutory health education alongside statutory RSE.[142]

[Statutory guidance on the RSE and Health Education]() was published in June 2019. Loneliness is dealt with in the guidance under the requirements to educate children about mental wellbeing issues.

The guidance sets out that at primary level children should learn about how "isolation and loneliness can affect children and that it is very important for children to discuss their feelings with an adult and seek support."[143]

Youth Loneliness

The Loneliness Strategy outlined the steps the Government had taken to tackle 'youth loneliness',[144] including support for new parents. Measures highlighted were efforts to:

- fund anti-bullying organisations;

- set up a cross-government ministerial group to "recommend ways to improve family support during early years (0 to 2), which are particularly crucial years for preventing loneliness among new parents" (see box 7);

- support families with multiple needs via the Troubled Families Programme;

- set up a new cross-government group to build on the recommendations of the [Lord Farmer review]() (2017). The Farmer review looked at prisoners and their relationships with friends and family. Lord Farmer is also reviewing "how to strengthen family ties for women serving sentences in the community, after release and in custody."

- work alongside young people to develop solutions by setting up a national Young Commissioners and Inspectors Group to involve young people directly in national services affecting young people.[145] The Government has also invested £1 million in

The Library has a briefing paper on the [Troubled Families Programme]().

---

141 HM Government, [A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness](), October 2018, pp47-51
142 DfE press release, [New relationships and health education in schools](), 19 July 2018
143 Department for Education, [Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education](), February 2019, p33
144 HM Government, [A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness](), October 2018, p57
145 Ibid.

the Centre for Youth Impact, with the aim of reviewing and building the evidence base for the effectiveness of youth services.[146]

The Strategy then stated that the DCMS would use £100,000 of the Uniformed Youth Fund to research how uniformed groups can tackle youth loneliness. It also outlined a range of measures that the DfE would take to help tackle youth loneliness, including:

- New online guidance to support schools to make their facilities accessible to the wider public.

- Support for apprenticeships for young people with special educational needs or disabilities.

- Best practice guidance on work placements for young people with special educational needs or disabilities.

- Mental health support and a new working group for students transitioning into university, particularly in the first year.

- Continued improvements on support for care leavers at risk of loneliness, following the Care Leaver Strategy.

- Extending Personal Advisor support to all care leavers to age 25.

- Continuing the Staying Close pilot programme in eight local areas, with a view to rolling out the programme nationally.

- Providing £5 million to test social impact bonds to deliver three payment by results contracts, for programmes aiming to support young care leavers who are Not in Education, Employment or Training or at risk of becoming NEET.

- £6 million funding for two Innovation Programme projects for care leavers – the Family Rights Group's Lifelong Links project and Derby's Local Area Coordinator project – both focusing on reducing isolation and loneliness among care leavers.[147]

Box 7: Ministerial group on support during the early years (0-2)

As the Government's loneliness strategy document noted, a Ministerial Group has been established to "consider how the Government can improve the coordination and cost-effectiveness of early years (conception to age 2) family support and identify gaps in available provision", and to "make recommendations to the relevant Secretaries of State."[148]

On its creation, the Early Years Ministerial Group on Family Support was led by Andrea Leadsom, then the Leader of the House. The then Membership of the Ministerial Group can be seen in this answer to a PQ on 12 February 2019.[149] Following Ms Leadsom's subsequent resignation, a new Chair has not been announced. However, in an application to the Backbench business committee on this subject, Ms Leadsom noted that the group had completed its work, which had been submitted to Secretaries of State for approval.[150]

---

[146] DCMS and OCS, PEOPLE: enabling a lifetime of contribution, 9 August 2018, Mission 3: Opportunities for young people.

[147] HM Government, A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness, October 2018, p58.

[148] PQ 196820 [on Children and Young People] 3 December 2018 and PQ 220330 [on Early Years Ministerial Group on Family Support] 18 February 2019

[149] PQ 220328 [on Early Years Ministerial Group on Family Support] 18 February 2019

[150] Backbench Business Committee, representations for backbench debates, 2 July 2019

3.2 Next steps – oversight of the loneliness strategy

In the Loneliness Strategy the Government committed to **appointing an independent evaluator** to evaluate the impact of projects funded by the Government. It also set out that the cross-government approach would be facilitated in a number of ways:

- The Minister for Sport and Civil Society would continue to lead cross-government work on loneliness.

- A **cross-government ministerial group** will oversee the delivery of the commitments set out in the strategy, and publish an **annual progress report.**

- Efforts would be made to **'embed' loneliness in the policy-making process**. Ministers in MHCLG, BEIS and DfT would have their portfolios expanded to include loneliness. Future single departmental plans will be expected to demonstrate their progress in tackling the issue. As recommended by the Jo Cox Commission, loneliness would also be added to the Family Test, which all departments are supposed to consider when developing policies.

3.3 Comment

Stakeholders were broadly supportive of the Government's Loneliness Strategy, but some also noted that a strategy alone was not enough and wider action from non-government actors was needed to tackle loneliness.

Laura Alcock-Ferguson, Executive Director of the Campaign to End Loneliness, for example, described the Strategy as a "comprehensive" strategy that rightfully recognises the risks that loneliness poses to public health but suggested that more funding might be required to match other public health concerns:

> Billions per year is spent on obesity and we would expect to see similar long-term investment for loneliness, an issue that impacts the health and wellbeing of millions. The £1.8 million announced today to unlock community spaces and build social connections, even with the £20 million announced earlier this year, is surely just the start of investing in the prevention and alleviation of loneliness. **Our research shows that for every £1 invested in loneliness you can save £3 in health costs. It pays to tackle loneliness.** [151]

She also supported efforts to tackle the 'stigma' of loneliness, citing **their own research which found that more than half of British adults say admitting to loneliness is difficult**. Finally, she argued that the "strategy alone does not provide all of the innovation and resources needed to create a more connected society. Wider innovation

---

[151] Campaign to End Loneliness, Campaign to End Loneliness response to Government loneliness strategy, 15 October 2018

and leadership is also needed from non-governmental organisations working together."[152]

Age UK Caroline Abrahams, Charity Director at Age UK, said,

> All of us who worked as part of the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness are well aware that government can't solve loneliness alone - that will take concerted action across society. But government can provide the leadership and direction to make sure action and funding follow. So it's good to see the Prime Minister confirming that GPs in England will be able to refer patients experiencing loneliness to community activities and voluntary services by 2023.
>
> We hope that government continues to show leadership in tackling loneliness and that this strategy is able to harness the political and public energy to really challenge what has become a devastating and distressing reality for so many people.[153]

Nesta, a UK-based innovation charity, which has worked on loneliness-related projects, was also positive. They praised the "serious, comprehensive commitment to taking this action" and the way it tackles the issue from many angles, such as planning, housing transport, culture and technology. Nesta singled out efforts to grow the evidence base and improve the scalability of projects as particularly welcome. They added:

> It is highly encouraging to see the Government's commitment to considering loneliness in transport, planning and design, but we think it could go even further in supporting the development of radically different ways of connecting and living together.
>
> There are a number of promising approaches growing in scale, which show that new ways of living together and organising are possible. For example, Homeshare brings together people with spare rooms with people who want to live in affordable sociable accommodation. Meanwhile, Shared Lives Plus, which we have been supporting since 2012, is an innovative form of social care where Shared Lives carers share their home and family life with an adult who needs care or support to help them live well.[154]

Relate, a UK charity concerned with relationships, was positive about many parts of the Loneliness Strategy, including social prescribing and the Relationships and Sex Education addition to the curriculum, but the CEO was "disappointed to see no mention of the potential role of counselling in supporting people to build self-esteem and in turn, find the confidence to build connections."[155]

---

[152] Ibid.

[153] Age UK, The government vs loneliness, 15 October 2018

[154] Nesta, Time for action: Nesta's response to the Government's loneliness strategy, 16 October 2018.

[155] Relate, The loneliness strategy is a welcome move, but why not make it broader? Undated.

4. Loneliness strategies elsewhere in the UK

4.1 Scotland

In December 2018, the Scottish Government published A Connected Scotland: our strategy for tackling social isolation and loneliness and building stronger social connections which set out the Government's four priorities:

Priority 1: Empower communities and build shared ownership

Priority 2: Promote positive attitudes and tackle stigma

Priority 3: Create opportunities for people to connect

Priority 4: Support an infrastructure that fosters connections

A National Implementation Group will develop a delivery plan and tools for evaluating performance against it. As part of a general communications plan, the Government also suggested that it would report on progress every two years. The Scottish Government also committed up to £1 million until 2020 to "help build capacity and pilot innovative approaches to tackling social isolation and loneliness."[156]

On 22 January 2019, the Scottish Government announced the make-up of the National Implementation Group.

More detail, including 'early actions' that will be taken as part of these priorities, can be found on the strategy's webpage.

4.2 Wales

The Welsh Health, Social Care and Sport Committee published the results of its Inquiry into loneliness and isolation in December 2017, which made a number of recommendations regarding a future Welsh Government strategy as well as greater investigation of the loneliness issue, its impact on public services, and the funding required in the voluntary sector to provide services to help.[157]

The Welsh Government ran a consultation called Connected communities - Tackling loneliness and social isolation between October 2018 and January 2019. A summary of responses was published in March 2019.[158]

A written statement by Julie Morgan AM, Deputy Minister for Health and Social Services, outlined the 'key messages' from the consultation:

---

[156] Scottish Government, Local Government and Communities Directorate, A Connected Scotland: our strategy for tackling social isolation and loneliness and building stronger social connections, December 2018.

[157] National Assembly for Wales, Health, Social Care and Sport Committee, Inquiry into loneliness and isolation, December 2017.

[158] Welsh Government, Consultation – summary of responses: Connected Communities, March 2019.

- The importance of reducing stigma in relation to loneliness and social isolation and promoting positive attitudes towards social connections.

- Helping people to understand the trigger points and identify signs of loneliness and social isolation.

- The key role of schools in building emotional and psychological resilience in children and young people and in developing an early understanding of loneliness and social isolation, in themselves and empathy towards others.

- The need to focus on building individual and community resilience by developing and supporting local solutions and encouraging everyone to play their part, including local businesses.

- Creating opportunities for people to connect through better access to information about available services and support; sharing and scaling up good practice in services and support; promoting and enabling volunteering; promoting and enabling physical activity and sport; and supporting people to be able to participate in communities through schemes such as social prescribing and community connectors

- The importance of a community infrastructure that supports social connections such as access to community spaces, a good transport network, access to digital technology, good quality accessible housing and good neighbourhood design.

- The key role that workforces can play in recognising the signs of loneliness and social isolation and referring people to services or support, particularly the health and social care workforce, but also education, housing, transport and businesses.

- Longer term and sustainable funding for the Third sector is required.

- Ministerial responsibility for loneliness and social isolation should not rest solely within the health and social care portfolio and should be included within other portfolios such as housing, transport, local government, economy and business.

A final strategy is expected later in 2019.[159]

4.3 Northern Ireland

The Northern Ireland Executive does not have a loneliness strategy. For more information about the issues of loneliness in Northern Ireland, see A Connected Island: An Ireland Free From Loneliness, from the Loneliness Taskforce (commissioned by the charity ALONE). Note that this looks at both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

---

[159] Written Statement: Connected Communities – outcome of Loneliness and Social Isolation consultation, Welsh Government website, 29 March 2019.

5. Contacts and advice

The Campaign to End Loneliness has a webpage on I feel lonely. What can I do? It also has a webpage of Helpful links which includes:

- **Independent age**, providing befriending services: **0800 319 6789**

- **Royal Voluntary Service** for help, advice and support: **0845 608 0122**

- Call **The Silver Line** for information, advice or just for a chat, 24 hours a day and 7 days a week **0800 470 80 90**

- Visit **Friends of the Elderly** for year round support or call **0330 332 1110**.

- **Age UK**, support and advice for older people, advice line: **0800 169 6565**

- **Contact the Elderly**, tackling loneliness and social isolation among older people: **0800 716543**

- **Sense**, for advice and support on deafblindness **0300 330 9256** or **020 7520 0972**. Textphone: **0300 330 9256** or **020 7520 0972**

- For further information and support you could also visit **Mind's How to cope with loneliness** or call **0300 123 3393**

- If you are younger and feeling lonely, you can call **SupportLine** on **01708 765 200**, or the **Calm Zone**, which is a helpline offering support to men in the UK, of any age, who are down or in crisis, **0800 585858**.

- If you are under 25, you can also call **Get Connected** on **0808 808 4994**

Independent Age also has a webpage on If you're feeling lonely.

Universities and colleges provide information to help students with mental health problems and information on the UCAS website, Feeling lonely at university is more common than you think, gives some advice to prospective students.

Age UK has also published a guidance note, Avoiding scams –Smart ways to protect yourself and the consumer body Which? also provides information on how to safeguard yourself from scams. The Action Fraud website highlights the latest scams based on reports from the public.