

Maidstone Borough Council

Community, Environment and Housing Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 11 November 2014

A review of Loneliness and Isolation in the Over 65s of the Maidstone Borough

Report of: Tessa Mallett, Overview & Scrutiny Officer

1. Introduction

- 1.1 At the Community, Environment and Housing Overview and Scrutiny meeting of 12 August 2014 the committee recommended that Jo Tonkin, Public Health Specialist, Kent Public Health be asked to provide a report on Loneliness and Isolation in Maidstone to the review Working Group prior to the meeting of 11 November 2014.
- 1.2 On 9 October 2014 the Working Group, comprising of Councillors Wilson, Mortimer, Round, Newton and Sargeant, met with Jo Tonkin, Public Health Specialist, Kent Public Health and Louise Holden, Public Health Workforce Development Programme Manager, Kent County Council. The Working Group discussed the contents of the report and the scope of the review.
- 1.3 At this meeting the Working Group agreed to revise the scoping document for this review to focus on Loneliness and Isolation in the Over 65s of the Maidstone borough. The revised scoping document is attached as **Appendix A**.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 The Committee are recommended to interview the following witnesses to help with their evidence gathering for this review:
 - Jo Tonkin, Public Health Specialist, Kent Public Health;
 - Louise Holden, Public Health Workforce Development Programme Manager, Kent County Council;
 - Colin Thompson, Public Health Consultant, Medway Council;
 - Janet Greenroyd, Kent Community Warden Service, Maidstone District Supervisor;
 - Samantha Sheppard, Adult Social Care, Kent County Council;
 - Paul Coles, AgeUK, Maidstone
 - Sarah Robson, Community Partnerships Manager, Maidstone Borough Council;
 - Sarah Shearsmith, Community Development Team Leader, Maidstone Borough Council.
- 2.2 The Committee are recommended to note the definitions of loneliness and isolation before interviewing these witnesses:

- **Social Isolation** is 'characterised by an absence of social interaction, social support structures and engagement with wider communities and structures¹.
- **Loneliness** describes an individual's personal, subjective sense of a lack of connection and contact with others and the quality of their social relationships. There is generally a discrepancy between what they want and what they are actually getting.
- The differences to note in particular are a person can choose to be isolated and not be lonely; a person can be socially active but still feel lonely.

2.3 For this part of the review the Committee may want to focus their questioning on the following areas:

- How big is the issue of loneliness and isolation in the over 65s of Maidstone Borough;
- What areas is it most prevalent;
- What is the impact of the issue;
- What work is currently being done to combat the issue;
- Where are the gaps in provision.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

3.1 At the Working Group meeting on 9 October 2014 it was agreed to focus the review of loneliness and isolation in the over 65 age group.

3.2 It was agreed to split the review over two meetings. This meeting of 11 November 2014 and another Working Group meeting provisionally booked for 3pm on Wednesday 26 November 2014.

3.3 The meeting of 11 November 2014 will focus on establishing how big the issue is for the borough; if there are any particular areas in the borough where the issue is greater; what is currently being done; where are the gaps in provision.

3.4 The Working Group meeting of 26 November 2014 will focus on what is being done in other areas to combat loneliness and isolation; what is working; what can be learnt; what can be done to fill the gaps in provision in Maidstone borough. All committee members are invited to attend this meeting.

3.5 The Working Group agreed to invite students from local grammar and high schools in the borough who may be interested in taking forward ideas they may generate as a result of listening to the evidence gathered during the meetings.

¹ Taken from Varney, 'Public Health Approaches to Social Isolation and Loneliness' – <http://campaigntoendloneliness.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2013/07/Public-Health-Approached-to-Social-Isolation-and-Loneliness-Part-1.pdf>

- 3.6 Students from Oakwood Park Grammar School and Invicta Grammar School attended a briefing meeting with members of the Working Group on 23 October 2014. Students from Maidstone Girls Grammar School have also shown an interest in being involved.
- 3.7 The students will attend the meeting of 11 November 2014 to observe and listen to the evidence gathered. At the meeting of 26 November 2014 the students will be invited to inform the Working Group of any projects they are currently involved in working with the over 65 year olds of the borough and outline any ideas they may have to help fill the gaps identified in provision.

4. Impact on Corporate Objectives

- 4.1 The review will primarily impact on the Council priorities: 'For Maidstone to be a decent place to live' and 'Corporate and Customer Excellence'

5 Relevant Documents and information

- 5.1 Appendix A – Revised scoping document for the review of Loneliness and Isolation in the Over 65s of Maidstone Borough.