

Improving community connections

Context

Ealing's Council Plan focuses on thriving cohesive communities where people have a strong sense of local connection and involvement in their local area and a strong focus on early help and a preventative approach.

People of all ages can be socially isolated. We saw this starkly during the Covid-19 lockdowns and now, as we see the impacts this has had on communities and individuals. Social isolation broadly refers to the absence of contact with people. A lack or loss of meaningful social relationships can result in social or emotional loneliness for the individual. The effect of loneliness and isolation can be as harmful to health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day and is more damaging than obesity.

Some groups are at a higher risk such as older people who are more likely to suffer from social isolation because of loss of friends and family, loss of mobility, deterioration in physical health or loss of income. Carers, refugees, people with mental health problems and those with disabilities, long-term conditions or sensory impairments are also at risk. Being socially isolated and or lonely can affect both physical and mental health as well as life expectancy.

Some impacts of social isolation and loneliness include:

- More frequent use of public services due to lack of support networks such as more likely to visit a GP, visit A&E, have an emergency admission, more likely to enter residential care.
- Increased likelihood of developing certain health conditions such as depression, dementia, be physical inactive which may result in developing diabetes, suffering a stroke or developing coronary heart disease.

In Ealing half of the over 65s live alone and over 60% of adult social care users want more social contact. For families and young people, social isolation and deprivation can be a vicious cycle preventing families from getting out of their disadvantaged position, having long term effects on child development, education, employment, health, emotional and psychological development and growth. Vulnerable groups such as care leavers and young carers are at particular risk in this category.

The Care Act 2014 places a general duty on councils to take action on loneliness and isolation to meet the prevention duties, and to meet care and support needs identified during assessments.

National and local health, social care and public health priorities place an emphasis on preventative and early intervention work to improve the wellbeing of the whole population. There are many places such as libraries, schools, community centres, sports centres, places of worship or pubs in localities which could provide opportunities for people to get together and develop connections and we want to see groups linking up with these organisations for this purpose.

There is increased use of social prescribing as a means of enabling GPs, nurses and other primary care professionals to refer people to a range of local, non-clinical services. Social prescribing aims to address people's needs in a holistic way and support people to take greater control of their own health. Evidence indicates that it can lead to improvements in quality of life and mental and general wellbeing and reduce levels of depression and anxiety.

Budget

The proposed budget for community connections is £0.420m per year for 4 years (2023/24 to 2026/27) subject to annual approval.

Proposed funding priorities

We want to fund a wide range of community projects to provide solutions and opportunities for people that tackle social isolation.

People who have lived experience of using services should be central to those services being developed, run, monitored, and reviewed. When resources are limited it is especially important to make sure that what is provided is what is wanted and needed and is responsive to those concerned. As well as unique insights into how to improve services, people with lived experience can also tell us what works best and what is most important.

The aim overall is 'coproduction', with people working alongside each other to create the best possible services. Involvement in training staff, gathering views and opinions about proposed changes, and monitoring and reviewing services are all important. When people are involved their confidence and skills are developed, they have better access to and engagement with services, and their own health and wellbeing can often be improved.

This funding stream will focus on the following outcomes:

- Promoting social inclusion, encourage independence and develop personal resilience taking a preventative approach focussed on those most at risk of isolation
- Build positive relations between different groups and communities that will support high levels of community cohesion in Ealing.

Main changes from 2019/23 funding arrangements

The consultation is seeking views from the sector about the focus for the community connections grants and the method of delivery. Any changes to the 2019-23 programme will be identified as a result of the consultation feedback.