



Department for  
Digital, Culture,  
Media & Sport

# **Loneliness Annual Report: the third year**

**Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport**



## Ministerial foreword

Over the past year, the COVID-19 pandemic has continued to highlight how crucial it is to feel connected with others. Many of us have been able to reconnect with our loved ones in person again. We have been able to be together in our communities, too. Local organisations across the country have continued to adapt and provide opportunities for people to connect safely.

However, we know that a large number of people felt lonely and isolated in this country long before the pandemic. That is why, three years ago, the government published a strategy to tackle loneliness and build a more connected society.

We know that people who felt lonely before the pandemic are likely to continue to feel this way even without restrictions in place. There are also those who have lost confidence because of the impacts of COVID-19, and who may struggle to reconnect or feel left behind as

restrictions ease. For these reasons, tackling loneliness has remained — and will continue to be — a priority for this government.

Over the past year, we have worked across government and across society more widely to drive forward action to tackle loneliness and support a connected recovery from COVID-19. This included:

1. **Publishing our [Tackling Loneliness Network \(TLN\) Action Plan](#)** in May, in partnership with TLN members
2. **Delivering the [£4 million Local Connections Fund](#)** in partnership with the National Lottery Community Fund
3. **Continuing to support organisations to take action through the [Tackling Loneliness Hub](#)**, our Social Connection Funders Group, and our Loneliness Evidence Group
4. **Reaching more people than ever through our loneliness campaign activity**, including through a Loneliness Engagement Fund to target the groups most likely to experience loneliness

This report sets out further detail about what we have achieved over the past year, including updates on delivery against commitments in the TLN Action Plan. It also sets out our plans for the future.

Over the coming year, our work will continue to be guided by the three objectives we set out in our original strategy in 2018:

1. **[Reducing stigma](#)** by building the national conversation on loneliness, so that people feel able to talk about loneliness and reach out for help.
2. **[Driving a lasting shift](#)** so that relationships and loneliness are considered in policy-making and delivery by organisations across society, supporting and amplifying the impact of organisations that are connecting people.
3. **[Playing our part in improving the evidence base on loneliness](#)**, making a compelling case for action, and ensuring everyone has the information they need to make informed decisions through challenging times.

As we move forward, it is vital that we build back better, that communities continue to rally together and support each other, and that we all take part in the conversation on loneliness.

Government cannot do this alone, and we are grateful for the continued support of the organisations large and small, across all

sectors, who are working to tackle loneliness in their communities. Together, we can continue to build a more connected society.

## Reducing stigma



**Objective One:** We will reduce stigma by building the national conversation on loneliness, so that people feel able to talk about loneliness and reach out for help.

Anyone can feel lonely, but it isn't always easy to admit. COVID-19 highlighted the importance of social connection and showed many people how difficult it can be when you feel isolated. It is important that we continue to talk more openly about loneliness, building on our shared experiences.

## Loneliness campaign activity

Since 2019, we have been building a national conversation around loneliness through the Let's Talk Loneliness campaign. Over the past year we have continued to encourage people to take steps to help themselves and others. In June, during Loneliness Awareness Week, we worked with partners including BT, TikTok and Royal Mail to reach millions of people.

For the latest phase of loneliness campaign activity, we made an exciting step and transitioned to become part of the established [Better Health: Every Mind Matters campaign](#), which shares advice to help people look after their mental health and wellbeing. As part of this, in January, we launched a new campaign phase that focussed on supporting young people aged 18-24, following insight that showed this group are at a high risk of loneliness but also least likely to take action. Our campaign encourages young people to take action to reach out to someone they know who might be feeling lonely, because helping someone else can often be a great first step towards helping ourselves feel less lonely too.

## **Loneliness Engagement Fund**

In order to support our wider communications activity, we launched the [Loneliness Engagement Fund](#) in September to reach the groups in England most affected by loneliness during COVID-19. We provided nine grants to support organisations to work with these groups. These organisations are using the funding to carry out communications and engagement activity that will reduce the stigma around loneliness, and encourage people to take steps to help themselves and others.

## **What we will do next**

Over the next year, we will continue to work with partners as part of the Better Health: Every Mind Matters campaign to grow the national conversation on loneliness. We will continue to remind people that it is

OK to feel lonely, and encourage everyone to take action to help themselves and others.

## How to get involved

- Visit the [Every Mind Matters website](#) for top tips on tackling loneliness, and put them into action. Talk openly about loneliness with those around you, and take practical steps to help yourself and your community.
- Download our campaign toolkit and help us spread the word through social media using #EveryMindMatters.

### Case Study: Armchair Adventures



Made by Mortals is a Community Interest Company based in Manchester that creates immersive podcasts, films and musical theatre shows in collaboration with professional artists, health and social care organisations and community participants. They created Armchair Adventures, an interactive, immersive and fun podcast for the whole family, which combats loneliness through fun, creative activities and sharing real life stories. This creates connections between the generations whilst reducing the stigma around loneliness

The podcast series is co-created with people across Tameside, Greater Manchester. All of the local co-creators either live alone, have experience of mental health illness or disability, and are committed to using fun and creativity to support themselves and others with feelings of loneliness. In the first phase of the project, Armchair Adventures reached more than 25,000 people.

The project received £25,000 funding this year through the DCMS Loneliness Engagement Fund to create three more episodes of Armchair Adventures, together with an interactive workshop and activity pack. In this second phase of the project, Armchair Adventures aims to reach more than 50,000 people — and create an even bigger impact!

## Driving a lasting shift

# Driving a lasting shift



**Objective two:** We will drive a lasting shift so that relationships and loneliness are considered in policy-making and delivery by organisations across society, supporting and amplifying the impact of organisations that are connecting people.

We know that work to tackle loneliness is best done in partnership. We are continuing to work across government departments and across sectors to support action at a national and local level.

## **Local Connections Fund**

In partnership with the National Lottery Community Fund, we delivered the second round of the £4 million [Local Connections Fund](#) in 2021. Through the Local Connections Fund, we have awarded almost 1,700 microgrants to charities and community groups throughout England that help people to connect through the things that matter to them. We've supported community projects like songwriting workshops in Devon and dance classes in Bedfordshire. We have also supported health and wellbeing projects such as an online chat service in Durham, and projects that support education, climate and the environment like nature walks in Lambeth.

## **The Tackling Loneliness Network**

Over the past year we have continued to grow our Tackling Loneliness Network, which now brings together over 100 organisations across the public, private and charity sectors who are working to tackle loneliness. In May, we published our [Tackling Loneliness Network Action Plan](#), in partnership with Network members. This plan set out actions that the government and Network members are taking to support a connected recovery from COVID-19. Updates on progress against these actions are set out at [Annex B](#).

As part of the Action Plan, we established the Tackling Loneliness Champions group. The Champions are a group of organisations who have pledged to take additional actions to tackle loneliness in their work. Led by the British Red Cross and Age UK, the Champions have driven forward action and provided leadership across the wider Tackling Loneliness Network, including by running an online event to celebrate the people and organisations working to tackle loneliness and connect their communities on the ground every day. Working with



the What Works Centre for Wellbeing, they have worked to increase their organisations' capability to evaluate the impact of their work to tackle loneliness.

In June, we launched the [Tackling Loneliness Hub](#) in partnership with the Campaign to End Loneliness. The Hub is a digital space for Network members to connect, share, and learn from each other. Since launching, the Hub has also supported Network members through a series of blog posts, events, and seminars to provide spaces for discussion and collaboration.

## Work across government

We are continuing to work across government departments to tackle loneliness, building on the commitments in the original 2018 strategy. Detailed updates on these commitments are provided at [Annex A](#).

This includes:

- the Department for Transport leading a cross-government project under the government's Shared Outcomes Fund to explore innovative ways of reducing loneliness (this £5.8 million project seeks to identify and evaluate ways in which transport can provide solutions to the societal challenge of loneliness)
- NHS England and NHS Improvement continuing to expand provision of social prescribing, which can help to connect people who are lonely to support in their community
- Health Education England supporting health and care workers to tackle loneliness through a new [e-learning offer](#), launched in June

## Volunteering

Volunteering can build social connections and support wellbeing. We want to remove barriers to participation and make volunteering more inclusive. In November, DCMS launched a £7 million fund with Arts

Council England, Pears Foundation and NHS Charities Together to help people access more volunteering opportunities across a range of sectors including the arts and sport. The [Volunteering Futures Fund](#) will provide opportunities to a diverse range of people, including those experiencing loneliness, as well as young people, those with disabilities and those from ethnic minority backgrounds.

## What we will do next

Over the next year, we will continue to grow the Tackling Loneliness Network and support Network members to collaborate and learn from each other. The Tackling Loneliness Champions will continue to meet over the course of the coming year to share insights and evidence, and to work together to grow the national conversation on loneliness. We will continue to work with the Social Connection Funders Group to bring together funders to share information, learning and advice.

We will also continue to embed tackling loneliness in relevant work across government, including considering how the benefits of social connection can be reflected in the government's new Mental Health Strategy.

## How to get involved

- [Volunteer for a local community group](#).
- Consider setting up a local group to help support isolated people in your community.



### **Case study: EPIC Dad**

EPIC Dad is a Community Interest Company in Suffolk that brings together dads, giving them a place to socialise, build connections, and get parenting advice. It gives dads a space to be honest about their struggles and improve their confidence. EPIC Dad received a grant through the Local Connections Fund to support this work.

One dad who has benefited from this is Andy. Andy is a father of two, and found it hard to juggle his work/life balance at the beginning of the pandemic.

I didn't have anywhere I felt I could express my worries or questions about my parenting – it was a really lonely place.

Andy took part in a 5 week 'Dads Matter' course offered by EPIC Dad as part of their fatherhood support work, which gave him practical parenting advice to build his confidence, as well as the opportunity to socialise with other dads.

I was feeling really lonely in how I was feeling with my struggles as a dad before I joined in with EPIC Dad – but now I know that I'm not alone.



### Case study: Big Steps 4 Change

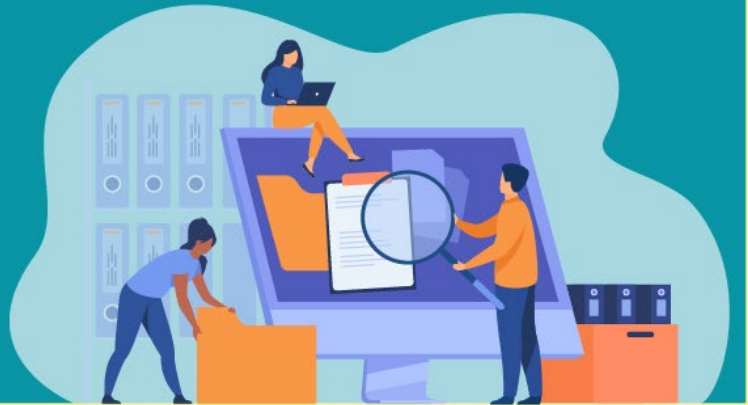
Big Steps 4 Change helps to reduce loneliness within the community whilst empowering people to achieve their full potential. They received funding through both rounds of the Local Connections Fund to reach out to members of the community in Enfield over the phone. They organised face to face gatherings in open spaces, including a community barbecue. This gave participants a chance to rebuild their confidence in socialising, and enabled them to meet people in similar situations.

Justina, who had been shielding since the pandemic began, was able to meet people from her age group (70+). Windham, who lives alone, was able to build new friendships over good food.

This project showed the importance of community spirit, and the happiness expressed by participants demonstrates the value in looking out for each other.

# Expanding the evidence base

## Expanding the evidence base



**Objective three:** We will play our part in improving the evidence base on loneliness, making a compelling case for action, and ensuring everyone has the information they need to make informed decisions through challenging times.

Over the past year, we have continued to develop our understanding of loneliness, including the impact of COVID-19 on people's experience of loneliness.

## Loneliness levels in England

We have continued to measure levels of loneliness amongst adults aged over 16 in England. Findings from the [2020-2021 Community Life Survey](#) show that most adults (95%) agreed that if they needed help there are people who would be there for them. The proportion of adults reporting that they felt lonely often or always remained similar to 2019/20 at 6%. Adults were more likely to report feeling lonely often

or always if they had a disability or a limiting long-term illness, were under 24, or if they lived in a deprived area.

In April, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) published [the first estimates of loneliness at a local authority level](#). This work found that areas with a higher concentration of younger people (aged 16-24) and areas with higher rates of unemployment tended to have higher rates of loneliness during the study period (October 2020 to February 2021).

## Evaluating loneliness funding

In August we published [an evaluation](#) of the £11.5 million [Building Connections Fund \(BCF\)](#). This was the first ever government fund dedicated to tackling loneliness in England. We also published [an evaluation](#) of the £5 million Loneliness COVID-19 Fund, which was launched in May 2020 to support 9 national organisations to deliver services aimed at addressing loneliness. This evaluation found that the participants at greatest risk of loneliness during COVID-19 were women, younger adults, people from ethnic minority and mixed ethnic backgrounds, and adults living with a disability.

## Tackling Loneliness Evidence Group

Over the past year we have brought together experts and academics through a new Tackling Loneliness Evidence Group, to identify what we still need to know about loneliness, and how to start addressing current evidence gaps. The Evidence Group published [a review of priority evidence gaps in January](#). The report provides non-specialists with an informed, expert overview of the evidence gaps that still need to be filled in the field of loneliness. Using the findings from the report, we commissioned new research this year to address the priority evidence gaps.

## What we will do next

Findings from the 2021-2022 Community Life Survey will be published in 2022, and will include findings on loneliness levels in the UK. We will continue to build the evidence base, working in partnership with the Tackling Loneliness Evidence Group.

## How to get involved

As an organisation, you can evaluate if your interventions tackle loneliness. The What Works Centre for Wellbeing has [produced guidance on how to do this.](#)



### Case study: Reading Friends

[Reading Friends](#) is a reading befriending programme delivered by The Reading Agency, a national charity that tackles life's big challenges through the proven power of reading. The programme uses reading to start conversations and connect people socially, tackling loneliness and isolation.

With an award from the [DCMS Winter Loneliness Fund](#), The Reading Agency provided funding, training and resources for 102 English library authorities to deliver Reading Friends to diverse audiences at risk of loneliness including new and expectant parents, young carers, older people and those living with dementia. The Reading Agency rolled the programme out through public libraries as a frontline intervention to support wellbeing and connect people during the winter lockdown.

Rochdale Libraries started a weekly 'Mums, Bumps and Babies' Zoom group to offer new and expectant parents the chance to share stories and make new friends. Without the usual mum and baby groups available, many participants said this was exactly what they needed. For some experiencing anxiety during pregnancy, the group offered much needed support, enabling them to talk to others and know they were not alone.

By being part of the reading friends group it has not only helped me get my confidence back up, gave me something to look forward to on a Wednesday, it has given me the opportunity to take up reading again and have some "me" time. I've also been able to meet new friends who have been in a similar situation to myself.

There is no doubt the enormous impact Reading Friends had on the lives of many last winter through 70,000 reading befriending engagements. 83% of participants felt more socially connected and 72% less lonely. Sharing stories really changed lives.

## **What to do if you are feeling lonely**

Feelings of loneliness depend on the person, and we can all feel lonely at times. Some people can enjoy being alone, but others may not. We may feel lonely even if we are surrounded by others. You should not blame yourself for feeling like you are struggling, now or at any other time.

Loneliness has no common cause. Sometimes it can be triggered by a life event or change in situation, or it may not be triggered by anything at all. Feeling lonely is different for everyone and we all



experience it in different ways. This also means that there are lots of ways we can try and overcome loneliness, using the right help and support. It's really important to remember that loneliness and difficult feelings can pass.

## **Top tips**

To support those around you, or yourself, you may want to take some of the actions below. More information on what you can do if you are feeling lonely is available on the [Every Mind Matters website](#).

- 1. Keep in touch with those around you**
- 2. Join a group**
- 3. Do things you enjoy**
- 4. Share your feelings - but don't compare yourself to others**
- 5. Help someone else feel connected (including by volunteering)**

## **Support**

You may feel that you cannot put these steps into action and this could be for any reason. Be patient, with yourself or others, as tackling loneliness and the negative emotions that can accompany it can take time. If you feel you would benefit from more support, information is available on the [Every Mind Matters website](#).

# Annex A: Update on 2018 Tackling Loneliness Strategy commitments

This year we have grouped the commitments thematically and provided an update by theme. More information on these commitments can be found in the 2018 [Tackling Loneliness Strategy](#) and previous annual reports from [2020](#) and [2021](#).

We have not provided updates against those commitments that were completed in previous years, or that are now being delivered as business as usual.

## Raising awareness and reducing stigma

### The government will:

- drive awareness of the importance of social wellbeing and how we can encourage people to take action through easy-to-understand messages and information, including as part of the government's mental health campaign

In 2021, during Loneliness Awareness Week, the #LetsTalkLoneliness campaign reached millions of people by working in partnership with organisations including BT, Royal Mail, ASDA, and TikTok.

In 2021, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) worked closely with the Better Health: Every Mind Matters campaign to highlight the links between loneliness and mental health and signpost people to support. In 2022, DCMS will continue to raise awareness of loneliness through the Better Health: Every Mind Matters campaign to build on our work to reduce the stigma associated with loneliness. This includes launching a new campaign phase focussed on supporting young people aged 18-24 in January.

## Building the evidence base

### The government will:

- use the Office for National Statistics (ONS) recommended measurement package as its standard way of measuring loneliness
- continue to explore how it can contribute to evidence building and sharing, including through its evaluation of the Building Connections Fund
- include the ONS approved loneliness measure within its consultation on revising the Public Health Outcomes Framework

We have updated what we know about loneliness since the 2018 Loneliness Strategy, including by establishing the Loneliness Evidence Group this year. Working with experts and academics as part of this group, we have worked to understand what we still need to know about loneliness. We set this out in the [Tackling Loneliness Evidence Review](#).

Data using the loneliness measure has now been published in the Active Lives Survey, Active Lives Children and Young People Survey, Tri-Service Families Continuous Attitudes Survey, the Community Life Survey and the People and Nature Survey. Data has also been collected by the National Travel Survey, The Opinions and Lifestyle Survey, The English Housing Survey, Understanding Society, the Student COVID-19 Insights Survey, Mental Health of Children and Young People in England, Taking Part, and Taking Part Children and Young People.

ONS [research](#) has provided an insight into the societal factors that may affect loneliness levels in different demographic groups during the COVID-19 pandemic. ONS has been able to produce a map of loneliness in England and some parts of Scotland and Wales to local authority level.

The ONS loneliness measure has been included as an indicator in the Public Health Outcomes Framework. Presenting the data this year will help local authorities to work preventatively to tackle chronic loneliness by showing whether a local area or inequalities grouping has higher than national average levels of loneliness.

DCMS has been actively encouraging partners and funding recipients to use the ONS loneliness measure to help understand the effect of their programmes on loneliness and isolation. Examples of this include the COVID-19 Loneliness Fund evaluation and the Building Connections Fund evaluation, where grant recipients were supported to use the ONS loneliness measure within the evaluations of their funded programmes.

The final learning report for the [Building Connections Fund](#) was published in August 2021. The final report contained learning from both before and during COVID-19.

## **Working across government**

- The Minister for Civil Society will continue to lead cross-government work on tackling loneliness.
- Ministers from all the departments involved will continue to meet formally as a group, to take forward government's work on loneliness and to oversee the delivery of the commitments in this strategy.
- The government will publish an annual progress report on the loneliness agenda.
- The government will continue to explore additional options to ensure social relationships are considered across its wider policy-making.

Nigel Huddleston is the minister responsible for the tackling loneliness agenda, as part of his wider portfolio as the Minister for Sport, Tourism, Heritage and Civil Society.

DCMS continues to lead work to deliver the Tackling Loneliness Strategy, working in partnership with departments across government. This includes continuing to support other departments to include consideration of loneliness in their policymaking and strategic planning. DCMS has paused the Ministerial Group during COVID-19, but we will continue to engage with other government departments on this issue.

# Growing social prescribing

## The government will:

- support all local health and care systems to implement social prescribing connector schemes across the whole country;
- map all social prescribing connector schemes across England to create a national database of local social prescribing schemes;
- assess how a variety of organisations and services currently refer individuals into social prescribing schemes and local provision; and
- provide arts and cultural programmes as part of the planned expansion of social prescribing.

NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSE/I) has continued to deliver a comprehensive support offer to recruit, train and support social prescribing link workers, including those recruited during COVID-19. The target to recruit 1,000 social prescribing link workers within Primary Care Networks (PCNs) by April 2021 was exceeded. In September 2021, the headcount of link workers was 1,582.

NHSE/I continue to work with local partners and associates to improve knowledge of where social prescribing schemes are based across England, including collating routine intelligence returns from regions. NHSE/I are continuing to develop data collection routes to better understand how organisations and services currently refer individuals into social prescribing schemes. This includes the development of a minimum dataset, which aims to standardise data collected during social prescribing interactions.

NHSE/I has expanded their regional social prescribing offer which supports Integrated Care Systems (ICSs), PCNs and their partners to embed social prescribing approaches. New PCN advisors have been introduced in 2021/22 to support PCNs to embed social prescribing and other personalised care roles, providing advice on best practice.

In 2021/22, the National Academy for Social Prescribing (NASP) delivered their [“Thriving Communities”](#) programme, a support offer for voluntary community, faith, and social enterprise groups, aimed at supporting communities impacted by COVID-19 in England. This included setting up a Thriving Communities Network with over 6,000 members to support local community groups, and launching the £1.8

million Thriving Communities Fund, in partnership with Arts Council England (ACE).

ACE has published a Delivery Plan for 2021-2024, setting out how ACE will deliver its ten year strategy over the next three years. This includes connecting people in their communities and improving health and wellbeing through creative and cultural activity. In 2022, ACE will publish a plan that builds on their partnership with the National Academy for Social Prescribing. The plan will set out how ACE will support and invest in the cultural sector to develop closer partnership working with health and care providers and deliver joint projects aimed at improving the health and wellbeing of local communities and supporting them to recover from the pandemic.

### **The government will:**

- publish a best practice guide to social prescribing
- launch an online social prescribing platform for commissioners and practitioners
- pilot new accredited learning programmes for social prescribing link workers
- establish regional social prescribing steering groups

Local social prescribing schemes continue to be supported by the national network of regional facilitators and regional learning co-ordinators. NHSE/I continue to support development of social prescribing through sharing good practice, including a new series of 'regional spotlight' events for regions to showcase innovative services and schemes to connect people with their local communities.

NHSE/I's free online community now has 4,750 members who are actively involved in developing and delivering social prescribing, enabling discussion and peer support to share best practice. NHSE/I's fortnightly webinar series for social prescribing link workers has continued through 2021, including a webinar on loneliness and social isolation.

NHSE/I are also continuing to develop best practice guidance for social prescribing, including refreshing the [social prescribing summary guide](#), the [welcome pack for link workers](#), and the [PCN reference guide](#). NHSE/I's e-learning programme now consists of 9 modules

including mental health and welfare rights. A module on children and young people's social prescribing will be delivered by April 2022. In addition, NHSE/I are working on an ICS social prescribing maturity framework to support mature, thriving social prescribing infrastructure across systems.

## **Helping people to connect through transport initiatives**

### **The government will:**

- build partnerships to explore how transport can be used to tackle loneliness

As part of its £5.8 million Shared Outcomes Fund project on Transport and Loneliness, the Department for Transport (DfT) will work with local authorities and charities to develop proposals for trials that will use transport interventions to help reduce loneliness. These trials will be evaluated by academics working in conjunction with DfT, and their findings captured to be shared more widely.

The Tackling Loneliness with Transport Fund aims to strengthen the evidence base for how transport might help lonely people. DfT will collaborate with other government departments throughout the project.

### **The government will:**

- explore with seven mobility centres in England how they can help to identify signs of loneliness or lack of social connections
- provide funding for community transport driver qualifications
- put the need for inclusive transport at the heart of its approach to the Future of Mobility Grand Challenge, making sure that our future transport system works to overcome problems like loneliness and social exclusion

The Mobility Centres pilot was set up in 2019 by DfT to provide advice through Mobility Centres on alternate means of travel for those unable to drive. The trial is in its concluding stage, with slight delays due to

the impact of COVID-19. Once the evaluation has concluded, DfT will evaluate the possibility of full implementation of all thirteen Mobility Centres in England.

The government believes that community transport operators provide vital services that reduce isolation by linking people with their communities, helping take them to shops, work, and school, and that the safety of these services matters. The Minibus Driver's Awareness Scheme (MiDAS) is administered primarily by the Community Transport Association (CTA) and is designed to enhance minibus driving standards and promote the safer operation of minibuses. DfT has provided initial funding of £38,000 to adapt and improve MiDAS so that it is better able to meet passenger needs in the future, supporting the wider government objective of delivering a transport system which is accessible for all.

In November 2020, a call for evidence was launched to seek views on DfT's assessment of the emerging trends that will shape rural mobility and how industry, government and rural communities could work together to help harness the opportunities. Respondents identified key issues such as the lack of transport options for rural areas, social isolation, making transport more accessible, and the need for proactive government support. An [analysis of the responses](#) was published in September 2021, with a view to publishing a Future of Transport: Rural Strategy in due course.

## **Helping people to connect in their local area**

### **The government will:**

- launch pilots to explore how better use of data can help make it easier for people to find local activities, services and support
- work with the Local Government Association (LGA) to explore an effective means of sharing learning and good practice amongst local authorities

The work started by the LGA and DCMS to develop an open data standard has now progressed further with several other stakeholders and is called the Open Referral UK Standard. It is being reviewed currently by the Data Standards Authority. The standard supports the



publication of information about local services to make them easier to find. Ten organisations are currently actively using the Open Referral UK standard in their community directories. To support the adoption of the standard, [a dedicated website](#) and discussion forum have been created, along with case studies and step-by-step guidance for new adopters.

The LGA continues to highlight the impact of loneliness and mental health in policy and improvement work in local government. In particular, the LGA seeks to highlight the benefits of early intervention and the wider role of council services, such as parks and libraries, in addressing loneliness. The LGA also continues to seek out and share good practice from councils about locally led approaches and interventions to support people who are experiencing loneliness.

The LGA has published [a series of case studies](#) that demonstrate a range of innovative work by councils and their partners to promote loneliness. The LGA have also updated their loneliness guidance for councillors, and this will be published shortly.

## **Creating more opportunities for people to connect**

### **The government will:**

- launch pilots to test and develop new models of flexible and inclusive volunteering opportunities, supporting people who might otherwise miss out due to their life circumstances

DCMS published its [independent evaluation of the DCMS 50+ Volunteering Programme](#) in December, which was based on age friendly and inclusive volunteering projects. The evaluation found that collectively, the programme mobilised over 25,320 new volunteers and supported over 474,730 new beneficiaries. Grantees reported that the programme helped them develop new ways of working and approaches to engaging volunteers, as well as influence cultural shifts within their organisations. The evaluation highlighted that where people are more isolated, more resources are required to help them participate.

In November, DCMS launched a £7 million fund with Arts Council England, Pears Foundation and NHS Charities Together to help people access more volunteering opportunities across a range of

sectors including the arts and sport. The [Volunteering Futures Fund](#) will provide opportunities to a diverse range of people, including those experiencing loneliness, as well as young people, those with disabilities and those from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Sport England will deliver programmes which specifically tackle loneliness through sport and physical activity for people over 55.

Sport England's 18-month partnership with British Red Cross (BRC) has seen 876 people experiencing loneliness receive support to be physically active. Now, in its final stages, the learning from this project is being scaled and adopted by other services across BRC. A full evaluation and impact report will be published in November 2022.

Carers UK, in partnership with Sport England have now completed a pilot and published [The Carers and Physical Activity Report](#). Following pilot findings, the Carers Active Hub is being developed to help carers find ways to be active locally and connect with others to reduce feelings of loneliness. In April 2022, the first ever Carers Active April will take place.

## **Unlocking the potential of underutilised community spaces**

**The government will:**

- devote funding to help local people maximise the potential of underutilised community spaces in innovative and creative ways
- publish guidance for schools on maximising the use of their premises, as well as other forms of income generation that can be beneficial to the community
- collect data on which schools already allow use of their premises, in order to understand how best to support other schools to do so
- help support community groups wishing to make use of unused or underused railway property through the Community Rail Development Strategy
- share good practice and encourage all Jobcentres that can open up their space to local community groups to do so

DCMS' Space to Connect Fund was a £1.6 million fund in conjunction with the Co-Op Foundation that ran from June 2019 to March 2021. [The evaluation of the first year of the fund](#), published in December 2021, found that community spaces provided a focal point for communities to come together, to interact and form social connections, and to have a shared interest in a community asset. These spaces also enabled people to participate in a wide range of activities, including exercise, learning, and social action.

The government believes schools should support maximum use of their premises and facilities by the local community for meetings and events in the evenings, at weekends and during the school holidays. Work on guidance for schools on maximising the use of their premises has been postponed because of COVID-19. Guidance has been produced and will be published in due course. 2019/20 data on which schools already allow use of their premises was collected as planned. Analysis and publication of the data have been postponed as the data was heavily affected by COVID-19.

Community rail is a grassroots movement working to engage communities in their local railway. The Community Rail Development Strategy encourages community groups to make use of unused or underused railway property. Initiatives led by community groups range from people helping to maintain station gardens to major refurbishment schemes. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, community rail partnerships and station adoption groups have been partnering with voluntary organisations, charities, and food banks to support vulnerable people and help people to connect in their community, making use of local rail facilities (such as station gardens or cafes) to do so.

While Jobcentres have remained open to help customers and provide face-to-face support, the use of space for additional activity by local community groups that can help foster social connections amongst customers has been impacted by COVID-19. According to local availability, partner organisations offering support to Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) customers are now being accommodated if possible.

# Supporting more organisations and front line staff to tackle loneliness

## The government will:

- work with the Campaign to End Loneliness and businesses to capture and share the work they are doing to help tackle loneliness in the wider community and to promote this work and develop it further
- improve knowledge sharing about tackling loneliness among social workers
- enhance the Tell us Once initiative by integrating advice for those at risk of experiencing loneliness

Employment can be a vital lifeline for social contact. DCMS commissioned the Campaign to End Loneliness to produce a [good practice guide](#) on employers and loneliness, which was published in May 2021.

As part of the holistic Care Act 2014 assessments, social workers have ensured that care and support plans improve people's connection with others to reduce their loneliness. The Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) is also producing a safeguarding briefing for social workers undertaking statutory duties which will guide quality and consistent approaches into addressing areas including where loneliness may place a person at risk. This will be published shortly.

The Tell Us Once initiative allows people to register a birth or death once rather than multiple times. DWP has revised the letter that is issued to citizens who use the Tell Us Once service to notify the government of a bereavement so that it includes suggestions for sources of support for loneliness. In 2020, DWP also committed to amend the Tell Us Once birth registration letter to signpost customers to organisations who can offer support for new parents who may be experiencing loneliness. Since then, the birth registration service has changed and is now being mainly delivered by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) through an online service.

This year, HMRC and DWP have worked closely together to help signpost loneliness support for new parents at birth registration.\* HMRC will provide their staff with information on loneliness and how to signpost customers who are feeling lonely to support services.

DWP have also launched Armed Forces Champions within Jobcentres. Part of this role includes raising awareness and promoting targeted local provision that will address loneliness within the Armed Forces Community.

## **Tackling loneliness in rural areas**

### **The government will:**

- support community infrastructure and community action to tackle loneliness in rural areas
- convene a rural stakeholder group to advise and support the work of government departments and help with the local communication of initiatives and good practice

The Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) network of Rural Community Councils has prioritised work with local partners on tackling loneliness in rural areas, using the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs' (Defra) contribution to its funding. Over the past year, ACRE has worked with voluntary groups to help them overcome the challenges of COVID-19, including supporting people to connect safely. ACRE has also supported England's 10,000+ village halls, assisting them to access grant funding and reopen as restrictions were lifted, to further support people to connect safely in their communities.

ACRE is also helping people to connect through its good neighbour and village agent schemes, for example through community transport schemes and outreach services such as mobile pop-up cafes which reach the most remote and isolated areas.

Defra will hold a roundtable with stakeholders working to tackle loneliness in rural areas in 2022.

## **Supporting communities to come together through good planning and housing**

## **The government will:**

- fund research into the impact of community-led housing and cohousing solutions on loneliness
- encourage loneliness to be included as a measure of design quality and community cohesion in garden communities assessment and support

The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) commissioned the London School of Economics to undertake research on the effectiveness of community-led housing (especially cohousing) in reducing loneliness across all ages. The [report](#) was published in November 2021. Its key findings give strong support for the thesis that community-led housing is effective in reducing loneliness for those who take part.

DLUHC and Homes England are continuing to support new settlements, including Garden Communities. DLUHC published the [National Model Design Code](#) in July this year and updated the [National Planning Policy Framework](#) to set an expectation that all local authorities would produce a local design guide, with their community, to reflect aspirations for design standards of new homes and neighbourhoods. We are piloting the application of the National Model Design Code with local authorities across the country. A fuller review of the National Planning Policy Framework is likely to be required in due course to reflect our wider planning reforms, subject to decisions on how they are to be taken forward.

## **Helping people to connect digitally**

The government will ensure that all individuals feel empowered to manage online risks and participate online, including people who are experiencing loneliness.

DCMS have now published the [Full Government Response to the Online Harms White Paper consultation](#), which sets out the new expectations on companies to keep their users safe online. In May 2021 DCMS published the [Online Safety Bill](#) in draft for pre-legislative scrutiny. The Bill was subject to pre-legislative scrutiny by a Joint

Committee of MPs and Peers, and the Joint Committee reported with its recommendations in December 2021. DCMS and Home Office are fully considering these recommendations and are committed to introducing the Bill as soon as possible after that.

DCMS is also empowering people to connect safely online through the [Online Media Literacy Strategy](#), which was published in July 2021. The Strategy has an amplified focus on those who are most vulnerable online such as disabled users or those who experience disproportionate amounts of online abuse. Alongside the Strategy we have published the first annual Online Media Literacy Action Plan, which includes upskilling library staff and youth workers to help them support those they work with to stay safe online.

## **Tackling loneliness amongst young people**

### **The government will:**

- feature loneliness in guidance for teachers on delivering the new subjects of relationships education at primary level and relationships and sex education at secondary level, which will emphasise the value of social relationships
- provide support for people entering higher education courses
- work with the National Apprenticeship Service to encourage employers to offer work placements and apprenticeships to young people with special educational needs or disabilities

Due to the impact of COVID-19 not all schools have been able to implement the full Relationships and Sex Education curriculum, but they will be expected to do so from this academic year.

Students and those in higher education can be at risk of loneliness, especially when starting their course, and this can lead to greater feelings of anxiety, stress, depression and poor mental health. The Department for Education (DfE) has worked with the Higher Education (HE) sector and other government departments to share sector-led tools and resources which support students with the transition to HE.

DfE has worked with the Office for Students (OfS) to provide Student Space, a mental health and wellbeing platform designed to bridge any gaps in support for students arising from COVID-19. This resource provides dedicated one-to-one phone, text and web chat facilities as well as a collaborative online platform providing vital mental health and wellbeing resources. Student Space has a specific section hosting resources focussing on friendships and social life.

Offering work placements and apprenticeships to young people with special educational needs or disabilities will help to remove barriers and raise awareness of opportunities available, so that this group feels less isolated and excluded from society. DfE is supporting the largest ever expansion of traineeships as part of the government's Plan for Jobs to ensure that more young people have access to high-quality training. The Chancellor confirmed an additional £126 million (academic year 2021/22) at Budget to fund a further 43,000 traineeship places in the 2021/22 academic year. DfE have extended the £1,000 incentive payments for offering traineeship work placement opportunities until 31 July 2022. DfE are working with employers in the Apprenticeship Diversity Champions Network to understand barriers to taking on apprentices with declared learning or developmental disabilities, and collate best practice and what works. Results were published in a report during National Apprenticeship Week in February 2022.

### **The government will:**

- continue to deliver improvements on support for care leavers at risk of loneliness

The cross-governmental Ministerial Board has met 5 times and considered a range of issues, including increasing care leavers' participation in education, employment & training; and helping care leavers to access the health support they need, in particular mental health support.

DfE's Get Help With Tech (GHWT) programme continues to prioritise care leavers, with 5,200 laptops and data packages made available exclusively for care leavers in May 2021. A further 10,000 laptops were made available to care leavers and children with a social worker in October 2021. The government also allocated £150,000 to three care leaver charities - Become, Drive Forward and the Care Leavers



Association – to enable them to provide additional support to young people, with a focus on outreach to young people at risk of loneliness and isolation.

**The government will:**

- support the #iwill campaign to engage 10 to 20 year-olds to take part in meaningful social action

The #iwill campaign, as run by Step Up To Serve, closed in December 2020 but has now been handed over to the new #iwill partnership, supported by charities Volunteering Matters and UK Youth. The National Youth Social Action Survey was not run last year as it is carried out face to face in the young people's homes and lockdown didn't allow this. Instead, they carried out a [Youth Social Action Rapid Evidence Assessment](#). The assessment highlighted the role that social action can play in enhancing a sense of belonging for young people.

# Annex B: Update on Tackling Loneliness Network Action Plan commitments

More information on these commitments can be found in [Tackling Loneliness Network Action Plan](#).

## Sharing resources and learning

- The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) will publish a report bringing together good practice on how employers can support social connections amongst their staff.
- The Association of Convenience Stores (ACS) will engage its membership on the issue of loneliness by producing a guide on wellbeing and tackling loneliness.
- Centre for Ageing Better (CfAB) will share learning from its Connected Communities programmes and evidence of what works to support more people to enjoy the wellbeing benefits of social connections and inclusive approaches which support community participation.
- DCMS will support more councils to tackle loneliness, including by providing a space for councils on the Tackling Loneliness Hub to share resources, insights and case studies.

DCMS commissioned the Campaign to End Loneliness to produce a short report bringing together emerging good practice on how employers can support social connections amongst their staff, drawing on the expertise of Network members and employers. [The report](#) was published in May 2021.

ACS published their [best practice guidance for retailers](#) on supporting their employees' wellbeing in September 2021. The guide includes advice on the issue of loneliness, and how retailers can support their employees to develop good social connections. The guide has received thousands of unique downloads. The [ACS Local Shop Report 2021](#) highlighted that the average customer visits their local shops 2.5 times per week and 39% of customers know the people running and working in their local shop well.

This year CfAB supported Manchester Urban Ageing Research Group to undertake a [longitudinal qualitative study](#) into the impact of the pandemic on older people living in deprived communities. CfAB will also publish a report on Community Connectedness, and on Volunteering and Helping Out later this year. They will hold a national event to bring together the findings of these three reports.

CfAB also worked with the What Works Centre for Wellbeing (WWCW) on a research project which investigated a model that links individual and community wellbeing through a range of mechanisms. The technical report will be published shortly, and resources will be provided for practitioners to support them to apply the learning from the project.

DCMS has invited a number of councils who are actively working on loneliness to join the [Tackling Loneliness Hub](#), providing a dedicated space for councils to connect with each other, share their insights, and access resources from across different sectors.

## Convening organisations

- Together Co will convene a local Tackling Loneliness Network for organisations that want to be part of a connected recovery in Brighton & Hove.
- DCMS will explore a range of opportunities to tackle digital exclusion, including how the Digital Inclusion Impact Group can facilitate high-impact partnerships between government, business and civil society to support digital inclusion.
- DCMS will convene a [Social Connection Funders Group](#) and a group of organisations interested in coordinating research activity.
- The Digital Inclusion task and finish group, led by BT, will host a digital inclusion workshop.

Together Co is convening a series of meetings with partners across sectors from throughout the city of Brighton & Hove, to discuss what it would take to build a coalition for addressing loneliness and building connection across Brighton and Hove. The first meeting was attended by around 50 organisations and individuals from across the city and discussed the assets already available in the community and established that there was enthusiasm for coordinating activity to increase impact. Subsequent meetings will work towards a plan of action and consider how this could be resourced.

The Digital Inclusion Impact Group launched in September 2021 with Dell Donate to Educate, a pilot project to provide children with access to technology. The group will coordinate a programme of community led activity around improving access, connectivity and digital skills.

DCMS set up the Social Connection Funders Group to bring together funders interested in social connection. The group met three times in 2021, and will continue to meet in 2022. DCMS set up the Tackling Loneliness Evidence Group in 2021. The Evidence Group published a review of priority evidence gaps in January. [The report](#) provides non-specialists with an informed, expert overview of the evidence gaps that still need to be filled in the field of loneliness. Using the findings from the report, DCMS commissioned new research this year to address the priority evidence gaps.

The digital inclusion task and finish group's workshop, which will be facilitated by Red Badger, will be scheduled to take place in the coming months.

## **Organisations including tackling loneliness in strategic planning**

- The Post Office will consider connectedness as a specific theme in its Corporate Social Responsibility strategy.
- DLUHC will continue to consider the role of the planning system in reducing loneliness and social isolation in future amendments to national planning policy and associated guidance.
- DCMS will work to build a volunteering legacy that supports individual wellbeing and connected communities.

In line with their purpose 'We're here, in person, for the people who rely on us', Post Office's corporate responsibility strategy includes a focus on loneliness. The Post Office is exploring how they can make the most of their role in this important agenda with support and advice for Postmasters as they run their businesses at the heart of their community. With 11 million customer sessions each week, Post Offices provide a vital contact point for people in every community across the UK to carry out essential cash, mails and bill payment transactions as well as offering the face-to-face contact many people rely on to feel connected.

DLUHC has committed to improving the planning system, in a way that embraces digital technology, benefits communities and creates places in which people can take real pride. Ministers are considering how to best take forward last year's proposals for planning reform, and an announcement on next steps will be made in due course.

DCMS has launched a £7 million fund with Arts Council England, Pears Foundation and NHS Charities Together to help people access more volunteering opportunities across a range of sectors including the arts and sport. The Volunteering Futures Fund will provide opportunities to a diverse range of people, recognising that there are people across the country facing barriers to volunteering. The fund will have a strong focus on young people, those experiencing loneliness, those with disabilities and those from ethnic minority backgrounds.

## Reducing stigma

### DCMS will:

- continue to engage with broadcasters to reduce stigma and raise awareness of loneliness
- ensure that loneliness communications activity supports young people

DCMS continues to work with partners on the Tackling Loneliness Network, including Channel 4 and the BBC, to raise awareness of loneliness.

DCMS has provided support to campaigns focussed on loneliness amongst young people, including the Co-Op Foundation's Lonely Not Alone campaign. Through the Loneliness Engagement Fund, DCMS has provided funding to the Jo Cox Foundation and the National Youth Theatre amongst others to help reach more young people with communications and engagement activity that will help to reduce stigma and highlight where young people can get support.

DCMS also launched [a new campaign phase](#) in January 2022 as part of the Better Health: Every Mind Matters campaign, focussed on supporting young people aged 18-24. The campaign encourages young people to take action to reach out to someone they know who

might be feeling lonely, because helping someone else can often be a great first step towards helping ourselves feel less lonely too.

## **Signposting people to support**

- The Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) will work with bereavement organisations to disseminate guidance and best practice on supporting people who have been bereaved.
- NHS England and NHS Improvement (NHSE/I) will prioritise improving older people's access to and uptake of Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) services.\*
- Health Education England (HEE) will launch an e-learning module on loneliness and isolation for healthcare workers.
- NHSE/I, DHSC, HEE and DCMS will explore further ways to signpost people to social prescribing and other loneliness support.
- NHSE/I will launch a toolkit to support primary care networks (PCNs) and partners to expand their social prescribing offer to children and young people, with particular focus on mental health and loneliness.

The government's loneliness communications activity has increased the awareness of the connection between bereavement and loneliness over the past year, partnering with bereavement organisations to signpost to support. DHSC will continue to work alongside DCMS to explore how to support people who have been bereaved to access loneliness support.

NHSE/I has an active workstream focusing on equalities for older people, particularly in terms of older people's access to IAPT. In 2021 an NHSE/I-commissioned older people's positive practice guide for IAPT was published by British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies, Age UK, and the Mental Health Foundation. This gives providers clear guidance on how to adapt services to better meet the needs of older people.

A poster was produced by HEE with input from NHSE/I, DHSC and DCMS to raise awareness of the Tackling Loneliness and Social Isolation elearning module, as well as additional resources from the Let's Talk Loneliness campaign. This was disseminated to primary care staff through DHSC channels.

NHSE/I are exploring producing a series of factsheets for specific groups, starting with carers, to promote social prescribing and other

community-based support. NHSE/I are also developing a toolkit on social prescribing for children and young people which is due to launch in the coming months. NHSE/I are exploring the inclusion of social prescribing for children and young people within existing clinical pathways, and exploring the development of a specific children and young people's social prescribing outcome measure.

- JCDcaux will explore how to signpost young people to support and services could be included on their free wifi spots.
- DCMS will ensure that hard-to-reach areas don't miss out on lightning-fast next generation broadband through its new £5 billion programme, Project Gigabit.
- WhatsApp will develop a chatbot messaging service to offer anyone impacted by loneliness a simple and secure way to find information and support.

JCDcaux continues to provide hundreds of free, fast wifi spots across the country to aid with a range of social issues including loneliness. JCDcaux also provided a national outdoor advertising campaign for the third year during Loneliness Awareness Week.

DCMS continues to deliver Project Gigabit to ensure that hard-to-reach areas don't miss out on lightning-fast next generation broadband. This will help people to access support online and to stay in touch with friends and families.

The Connection Coalition (an initiative of the Jo Cox Foundation) and WhatsApp launched a Loneliness Advice chatbot service on WhatsApp during Loneliness Awareness Week in June 2021. This innovative new service enables people feeling lonely to simply message 07902 922 908 to access information and tailored resources from organisations including the Marmalade Trust, The Jo Cox Foundation, Age UK, The Mix, The British Red Cross and the #LetsTalkLoneliness campaign. Whatsapp and the Connection Coalition also launched the #FaceOfLoneliness campaign in December 2021 to encourage everyone to end the stigma of loneliness by highlighting that loneliness affects people of all ages, from all walks of life.