Scrutiny
in Carmarthenshire

**Social Care
&
Health Scrutiny Committee**

**Task & Finish Review Report
2018/19**

Loneliness in Carmarthenshire

Contents

Version Control

Date	Version	Comments	Author
11/12/18	V0.1	Initial draft	Emma Bryer
15/03/19	V0.2	Second draft	Julia Wilkinson
10/04/19	V0.3	Third draft following review by T&F Group	Julia Wilkinson
25/04/19	V0.4	Minor updates by Chair & addition of Appendix A	Emma Bryer
22/05/19	V0.5	Minor updates by Chair	Chair
22/05/19	V0.6	Updated following consultation with EBM	Emma Bryer
14/06/19	V0.7	Updated recommendation 1 following feedback from Neil Edwards.	Emma Bryer
03/07/19	V1.0	Approved at Social Care & Health Scrutiny Committee	Emma Bryer
10/09/19	V1.1	Minor updates following PEB	Emma Bryer

Members of the Task and Finish Group

Cllr. Gwyneth Thomas (Chair)
Llangennech
Plaid Cymru

Cllr. Ieuan Davies
Llanybydder
Independent

Cllr. Ken Lloyd
Carmarthen Town North
Labour

Cllr. Louvain Roberts
Glanymor
Labour

Cllr. Emlyn Schiavone
Carmarthen Town West
Plaid Cymru

Cllr. Dorian Williams
Abergwili
Plaid Cymru

Chair's Foreword

There is overwhelming evidence any citizen of Carmarthenshire can feel lonely – it effects all ages, circumstances and stages of life. There is a growing recognition that loneliness is a serious problem with far reaching implications, not just for individuals, but also for wider communities and services that support them.

Addressing loneliness merits the attention of this group and the local authority as a whole, not only because it's the right thing to do, but because there is very strong evidence that loneliness can increase the pressure on a wide range of council and health services. It is devastating for individual lives and is often the tipping point for the need for health and social care services and can escalate and intensify the level of support needed.

> Loneliness and social isolation are growing problems not just here in Wales but across the UK and beyond – and with 1 in every 5 people now experiencing loneliness and/or social isolation.
>
> More of us now understand these can affect anyone, at any age, for a wide variety of reasons. They can, and do, have a significant impact on people's physical and mental health. It risks becoming a major public health crisis unless we act now, and work together to tackle the problem.
> – Huw Irranca-Davies

Loneliness can result in a number of physical and psychological problems including premature death, sleep problems, high blood pressure, poor quality of life, increased risk of heart attack and stroke, depression and suicide. When we feel socially rejected, it triggers a response in the brain similar to one from experiencing physical pain. Research demonstrates that loneliness has an effect on life expectancy that is equivalent to smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

During the review we consulted with various organisations on the impact of loneliness and it was heartening to see the amount of work already being done throughout Carmarthenshire to help address loneliness. It was acknowledged that there is great work being carried out by statutory agencies, our vibrant third sector, community members and volunteers. This must be supported strategically by the local authority, as it has an important role to play by working in partnership to tackle loneliness. The group recognised that we need to do more in Carmarthenshire to create the right conditions for connection so that communities and individuals can flourish.

I would like to thank all the organisations and individuals who engaged with the group. Their time and commitment provided us with a valuable insight into local issues and what is currently being done. I would also like to thank the Council Officers and the Councillors who participated in the Task & Finish Group.

Cllr. Gwyneth Thomas
Chair of the Task and Finish Group

1.0 The Task & Finish Review

1.1 Objectives and Scope

The Social Care & Health Scrutiny Committee has a key role to play in monitoring services, development of key policies and strategies, as well as identifying areas for improvement or development.

At its meeting on 21st May 2018, the Social Care & Health Scrutiny Committee agreed to establish a task and finish group to review the impact of loneliness in Carmarthenshire.

Following its first meeting, the Group agreed that the main aims of the review would be:

- To review the prevalence and impact on loneliness in Carmarthenshire
- To review strategy, action plan and services in place to address loneliness
- To formulate recommendations for consideration by the Executive Board.

1.2 Corporate / Community objectives and well - being objectives

The Group agreed that this review would contribute to achieving the following corporate / community objectives and well - being objectives and outcomes: -

County Council's Corporate Strategy 2015-20:

- People in Carmarthenshire are healthier
- Providing services as efficiently as possible, ensuring value for money
- Investigating and developing new ways of working and providing services
- Increasing collaboration with our partners and communities in order to support the delivery of services.

The outcomes of this review would also directly link to the following

Carmarthenshire County Council Well-being objectives:-

- Strongly connected people, places and organisations who are resilient to change.

Carmarthenshire County Council Ageing Well Plan:-

- Loneliness and isolation
- Dementia friendly communities
- Age friendly communities
- Opportunities for employment and volunteering.

Carmarthenshire's Vision for Sustainable Services for Older People:-

- Promote independence, community engagement and social inclusion
- Promote health and wellbeing of older people

1.3   Approach

The Task and Finish Group's membership was as follows:

- Cllr. Gwyneth Thomas (Chair)
- Cllr. Ieuan Wyn Davies
- Cllr. Ken Lloyd
- Cllr. Louvain Roberts
- Cllr. Emlyn Schiavone
- Cllr. Dorian Williams

The Democratic Services Unit based in the Chief Executive's Department, provided research and general support to the Group.

The following officers provided specialist advice and support during the Group's review:

- Julia Wilkinson (Locality Manager)
- Susan Smith (Community Resilience Co-ordinator)
- Martin Palfreman (Head of Regional Collaboration)

Initially, it was planned that the review would be completed in 5 meetings between May 2018 and November 2018. However, during this time a meeting had to be cancelled and additional referrals had been received extending the review timeline to 8 meetings up to May 2019 (see Appendix A).

The Group considered evidence and information from a variety of sources. Each session was designed to provide the Group with the relevant information, context and background to loneliness.

As part of the research, the task group interviewed / consulted the following:

- YMCA, Swansea – Ann-Marie Rogan / Charlotte Davies
- Carmarthenshire is Kind – Sue Smith / Julia Wilkinson
- Yr Hwb, Llansteffan – Cllr. Carys Jones
- Ferryside Men's Shed – Martin Smith / Ken Day
- 50+ Forum – Peter Loughran

2.0   Key Findings

Summary

- The impact of loneliness is often devastating and costly – with comparable health impacts to smoking and obesity.
- Loneliness is a significant and growing issue for many people. There are a number of risk factors which make someone vulnerable to loneliness and whilst growing older is one of these it doesn't just affect older people – in fact the 16-24 age group have recently been recorded as the loneliest group[1].
- Whilst there are no specific statistics on the prevalence of loneliness in Carmarthenshire statistics show that 17% of people across Wales are lonely[2].
- Taking action to address loneliness can reduce the need for health and care services.
- Effective action to combat loneliness is best delivered in partnership.
- Loneliness can be addressed by a number of effective interventions, which have been presented in a framework for action by The Campaign to End Loneliness. These actions are often low cost, particularly when voluntary and community effort is used and supported effectively.
- Action to combat loneliness should take place in the context of a wider preventative strategy that promotes overall wellbeing.

What is loneliness?

Loneliness is not about being alone - many people who are alone don't feel lonely. Loneliness is a personal and unwelcome feeling of lack or loss of companionship. It happens when there is a mismatch between the quantity and quality of social relationships that we have, and those that we want[3] .

There are different types of loneliness:

- Emotional loneliness is felt when we miss the companionship of one particular person; often a spouse, sibling or best friend.
- Social loneliness is experienced when we lack a wider social network or group of friends.

> What does it feel like to be lonely?
> I can tell you exactly, it's like being in a bubble and you want to get out but you just can't, you try and you can't do it, you just can't get out.
>
> Male: Wales
> (Trapped in a bubble)

---

[1] https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/latestnews/2018/loneliest-age-group-radio-4
[2] http://www.mentalhealthwales.net/2018/10/loneliness-and-social-isolation-is-a-growing-threat-to-public-health-we-must-tackle-it-together-huw-irranca-davies/
[3] (Perlman and Peplau, 1981).

Why is it important?

- The significant impact that loneliness can have on physical, mental and social health is well evidenced.

  - The Campaign to End Loneliness[4] points to research that shows lacking social connections is as damaging to health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day, with lonely older individuals more likely to visit their GP, use more medication and have a higher incidence of falls. They are also more likely to enter early into residential or nursing care.

  - Lonely people are more likely to have unhealthier diets, take less exercise and engage in behaviour that negatively impact on their wellbeing.   A recent study[5] has also found that the presence of loneliness is a predictor for depression, substance misuse and eating disorders.

- Addressing loneliness has been endorsed as a key form of prevention of social care needs in the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) and has been recognised by many research agencies such as the Kings Fund[6] as a way of shifting the focus of health and social care.

> "Individuals who are socially isolated are between two and five times more likely than those who have strong social ties to die prematurely."
> Michael Marmot (2010) – Fair Society, healthy Lives
> (The Marmot Review)

Who is at risk of being lonely?

- Key risk factors for loneliness include being in later older age (over 80 years), on a low income, in poor physical or mental health, cognitive impairment, having a caring role, living alone or in isolated rural areas or deprived urban communities.

- Research over decades has found a fairly constant proportion (10-13 per cent) of older people in the UK feeling lonely often or always. But over the same time period, there has been a growing percentage of older people who sometimes feel lonely and an increasing percentage of other age groups experiencing loneliness with almost 10% of people aged 16 to 24 also stating that they are "always or often" lonely. [7]

---

[4] https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/the-facts-on-loneliness/
[5] Spensley (2008)
[6] https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/projects/improving-publics-health/strong-communities-wellbeing-and-resilience
[7] Office for National Statistics
https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/lonelinesswhatcharacteristicsandcircumstancesareassociatedwithfeelinglonely/2018-04-10

- Other specific groups such as those with disabilities and sensory impairment. Parents have also been shown to be at risk. Research for Sense has shown that up to 50% of disabled people will be lonely on any given day and Action for Children reports 24% of parents surveyed state that they are always or often lonely.

Are people in Carmarthenshire lonely?

- Whilst there is no specific data for Carmarthenshire the National Survey for Wales showed that 17% of people in Wales were chronically lonely with 54% of people having experienced feelings of loneliness. Identified risk factors to loneliness are evident in the county which would suggest that loneliness is an issue here:

  - 30% of the population live alone.
  - West Wales is one of the poorest regions in Northern Europe and there are links between poverty and loneliness.
  - Two of the main sectors in Carmarthenshire are tourism and agriculture, which are seasonal and particularly in the case of farming, solitary.
  - Illness is a predictor of loneliness and 1 in 4 people in Carmarthenshire have a limiting long term illness.
  - 23% of the population is over 65.
  - 13% of the people in Carmarthenshire are carers.
  - 3 out of 10 people in the county suffer from a mental health condition.
  - The wellbeing assessment identified that people feeling that they belong to their community is reducing and that people see the importance of social connectedness.

- The Office of National Statistics has studied happiness levels in the county with Carmarthenshire residents reporting happiness levels of 7.37 out of 10. The county was rated 13th happiest in Wales out of the 22 Local Authority areas. The lowest in the West region and comparable with Cardiff and Torfaen[8].

What works in combatting loneliness?

There is a wealth of evidence across Carmarthenshire, Wales and the UK as a whole, of different projects and groups that are making a difference at community level in tackling issues of loneliness. It is difficult to evaluate the impact of these separate groups and The Campaign to End Loneliness and Age UK has looked at UK wide evidence to evaluate what works in addressing this issue and created a framework of evidence based actions that work in combatting loneliness.

The framework features four distinct categories of intervention that could be put in place at a strategic level and delivered locally to provide a system of services to prevent and alleviate loneliness.

1) **Foundation Services** that reach lonely individuals and understand their specific circumstances to help them find the right support.

2) **Gateway Services** like transport and technology that act as the glue that keeps people active and engaged, and makes it possible for communities to come together.

---

[8] https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/wales-news/happiest-and-saddest-parts-wales-10829744

3) **Direct Interventions** that maintain existing relationships and enable new connections – either group-based or one to one support, as well as emotional support services.

4) **Structural Enablers** are needed in their communities to create the right conditions for ending loneliness, such as volunteering, positive ageing and neighbourhood approaches.
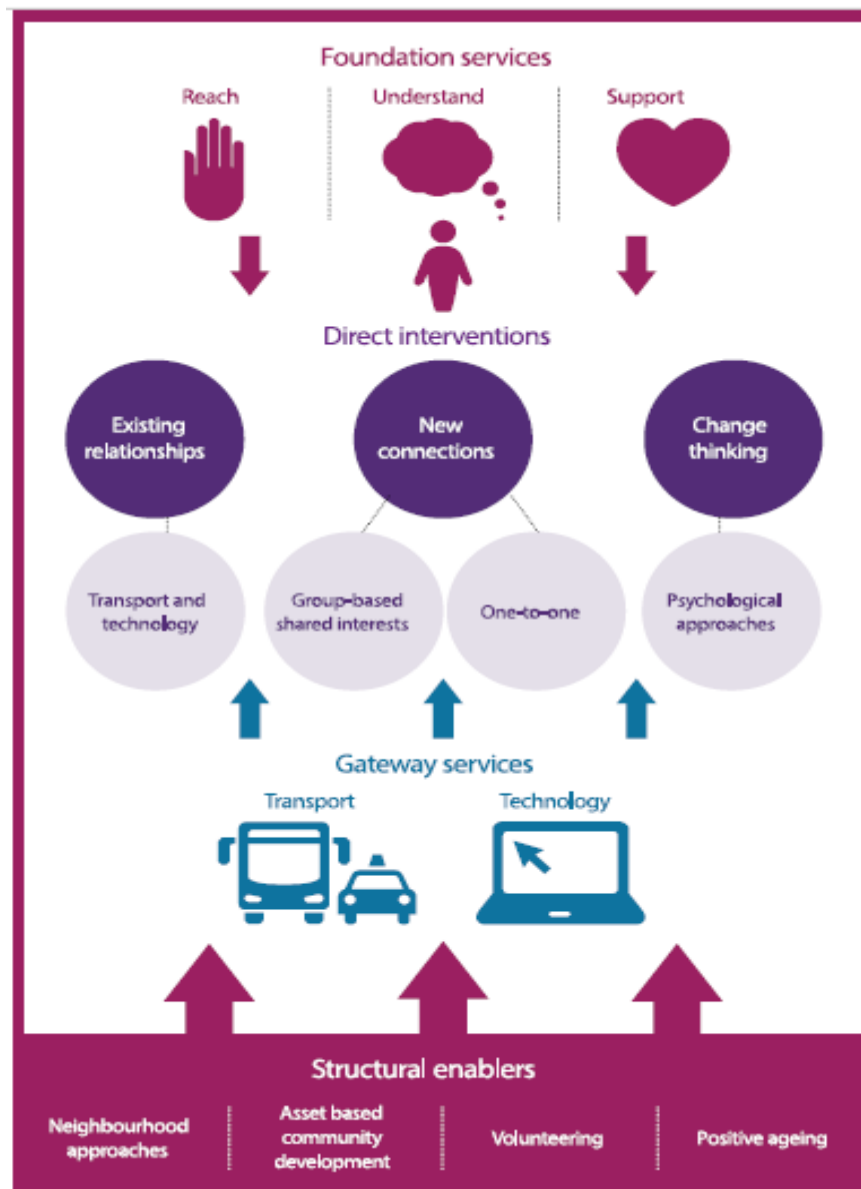
2.1 Visits & Meetings

The group took evidence of the excellent work that is going on across the county in groups and projects that were making a difference at local level. It was recognised that this scoping exercise was necessarily limited and it was clear that the visits that were undertaken were a tiny picture of the good practice across the county.

The Group received information outlining good practice in Carmarthenshire as well as presentations from a selection of organisations on the different initiatives being undertaken across the county in order to reduce the impact of loneliness.

It was noted that it was impossible to gain a thorough understanding of the extent and impact of this work as there is no coherent framework or resource that maps provision across the county.

Organisation	Key Findings / Summary
Y.M.C.A Swansea 	The Group received a presentation on the work of the YMCA which included the following: • Each YMCA is individually constituted and is set up especially to meet the requirements of the local community. • Many YMCA's in England are Registered Social Landlords. • A lot of family work is undertaken e.g. childcare provision, youth work (including combating loneliness), working with parents and enabling them to be the best parents they can be and empowering them. • YMCA Swansea would be willing to help facilitate the establishment of "Mixed Up" (A group for young people with disabilities that especially supports those with physical disabilities) in Carmarthenshire as they have an all Wales remit. They currently provide youth services in Neath Port Talbot and Ammanford. • They do a lot of work around health and wellbeing. They have a fitness centre which currently has 700 members and they help with obesity, back problems etc. They work with GP surgeries, Health Boards and the Health Authority, looking at what role the 3rd sector could play. There are 15 high end fitness studios in close proximity to the YMCA who charge around £25/week. At the YMCA you get an instructor to help you with your own individual programme for a fraction of the cost. It is also about looking at people's mental health "I am whole". Having personal aspirations can have a massive impact on your life. • They are looking at setting up a strategic partnership to look at befriending, domiciliary care, cleaning, tackling loneliness etc. • Digital Buddies – young people helping older people with technology to order shopping online, order prescriptions, contact relatives who live away etc. • Income is generated by letting out office space, hiring out rooms, hiring out the theatre and studio. If you have a community venue you have to make sure that it's self-sufficient.

	A café will open soon on the ground floor which will provide job opportunities for ethnic minorities. It will be used as a training hub for cooking, nutrition, customer service etc.
Yr Hwb, Llansteffan 	The Group received the following information regarding the work undertaken at the Hwb, Llansteffan: • The Hwb is run by a group of volunteers that are managed by the Hall Committee. The volunteers were selected based on their experience of working with older people and who demonstrated a "caring ethos". • Some of the volunteers have themselves suffered loneliness issues and the volunteering has helped overcome this. A lead volunteer is appointed for each month and they will be responsible for that month's activities. • The Hwb was set up to offer companionship for those in the community who were in danger of becoming isolated. While the Hwb is open to all ages the majority of those attending are over 50 years of age. • The Hwb has received no financial assistance and has evolved over time thanks to the hard work of the community. • The Hwb is promoted via social media and word of mouth. Posters are placed around the village and advertised in the Carmarthen Journal. • There is no direct cost to attendees but they are able to make donations towards the cost of refreshments. The donation fund is steadily building up and will be used for further activities. The hall is provided free of charge to the Hwb however all donations are given back to the hall. • The sessions include card games, Welsh language conversational corner, activities, CD and book exchange, kiddies corner but is centred around tea and chat. Activities are held at every session e.g. crafts, cake decorating etc. In addition, there are monthly events such as music, movies and presentations. A popular event is a monthly visit by a group of children from Llansteffan School. • The Hwb has a regular client base and has engaged with people who previously did not attend village events. The aim is to attract middle-aged residents so that loneliness can be prevented.

50+ Forum	The Group received the following information regarding the work undertaken at the 50+ Forum:
	• The Forum was set up following development of the Welsh Government Strategy for Older People that was commissioned by the Older People's Commissioner for Wales.
	• Each Local Authority has an elected member champion and a coordinator funded by Welsh Government.
	• The Forum is not a delivery body and no direct services are provided. The Forum works with partners to develop initiatives and holds organisation to account / calls on organisations to report on progress. The Forum works in partnership with the public sector and voluntary sectors at both local and national levels.
	• An example of work done by the Forum includes the setting up of the Walking Well Carmarthenshire initiative.
	• The Forum uses social media and the web to promote themselves and other organisations. They are active on social media (Face Book and Twitter). Monthly newsletters are distributed to members and regular surveys and consultations are undertaken. The Forum also produces an annual magazine.
	• An annual AGM event is held at the Botanical Gardens. The event is always well received with 400+ attendees. The event includes workshops and taster sessions.
	• There are currently 1649 members and until the GDPR regulation was introduced there was in excess of 2K members. Of the 1649 members only 760 use email as a means of communication.
	• The Forum also submit responses to Welsh Government consultations. Recent consultations include Tackling Loneliness & Social Isolation and a Local Toilets consultation.
	• Annual surveys are undertaken. A question was asked about the number of responses received. While the exact figures weren't available it was confirmed that the response was positive as the survey is timed to link in with the AGM event.
	• The Forum / Steering group has experts on technology and are helping people to realise the benefits of technology. This is an area where working in partnership is really important.
	• Another initiative that aimed to engage with the harder to reach people was the Shoe Box Appeal that utilised the domiciliary care service for deliveries.

Ferryside Men's Shed 	The Group received the following information regarding the work undertaken at the Men's Sheds, Ferryside: • Ferryside Men's Shed is governed by its own constitution and has appointed a Chair, Secretary and Treasurer. • It consists of a group of men who get together with shared interests and as a by - product become more socially connected. • It is based in the Council's former Education Centre and members of the group are fortunate that the building is rent free through the Ferryside Enterprise Group. The agreement is that the facility is rent free provided the buildings are maintained. On start-up, a grant of £4k was secured for the purchase of machinery. • The group consists of 40 all male members. The decision was taken that no female members would be entitled to join, however they are welcome to attend as guests. • Membership cost is £25 per annum plus £1 contribution per day to cover the cost of tea/coffee. Additional income is secured through the sale of items such as bee hives and bat shelters made by members. Members also generate income by undertaking general repairs for members of the community. The Task & Finish Group also visited the Men's Shed at Ferryside and witnessed first-hand the excellent work being undertaken by the Men's Shed.
Carmarthenshire is Kind 	The group was given information from Integrated Services that there is growing evidence that suggests kindness can cause improvements in subjective well-being as well as health and ageing well outcomes. Simple acts of kindness have a significant impact on perceptions of loneliness in older people and are defined as an essential component of successful communities. Prioritising action to address loneliness, in older people and those with physical disabilities is a key objective of Integrated Services. One of these actions has been the development of Carmarthenshire is Kind, an awareness session that outlines the evidence base of the benefits of kindness and aims to create a movement of kindness in Carmarthenshire. • Carmarthenshire is Kind is a 40-60 min awareness session that is based on the principles and structure of Dementia Friends and Dementia Friendly Communities. • It is not delivered from a public sector perspective but aims to recruit community champions to deliver the sessions to create a 'social movement' towards kindness which taps into national and international models. • The session can be delivered to any audience and is not focused on a specific group. • It outlines the evidence base of the positive impact of kindness not only on others and the community as a whole but also to

	individuals.
	• It promotes 5 key messages, that kindness:
	o Is good for us
	o Connects us
	o Is for everyone
	o Is contagious
	o Protects us
	• At the end of the session participants are asked to make a pledge to perform 1 act of kindness and are then identified as Carmarthenshire Friends by a heart badge.
	• The session can be delivered at an individual and organisational level.

3.0   Recommendations

Recommendation One:

Take a strategic approach to loneliness

The group felt that because loneliness was such a complex and prevalent issue that there was a risk that it would become overwhelming unless tackled at a strategic level - with strong leadership to drive improvements across the whole system.

It was felt that interventions to support connection and community resilience would be most effective if built into an overarching strategy for promoting wellbeing, bringing together partners from across the local authority and other local agencies, which would reflect ambitions outlined in The Wellbeing of Future Generations Act and Carmarthenshire's associated Wellbeing Plan.

This approach would show a top down commitment to tackling loneliness, with clear objectives and actions set out at all levels. This will include elected members, chief officers, town and community councils, churches, chapels and other faith groups, community projects and front line staff.

Action

Identify a senior officer at a Head of Service level, within the Authority to lead and drive an integrated approach to prevention where community connection and addressing loneliness is a priority. This role would work across all disability and age groups and be integrated in the communities' directorate and will also work closely with children and education.

Practical suggestion

No additional funding would be needed to address this action as it will use existing resources. It will be essential for this to be driven and delivered by the identified senior officer who would impact positively on the provision of statutory services.

Recommendation Two:

Address loneliness as an important shared priority

The group was very interested in the evidence that loneliness can be an issue for every age and group. Whilst social isolation has previously been viewed as a problem for older people it is clear that it is a wide scale issue that effects every age and population group.

Work should be done to highlight the issue of loneliness and efforts made to improve awareness of the issue, among professionals, communities and individuals themselves. This would reduce the stigma of speaking up about what can seem a deeply personal issue and would ensure that all local services understand the role they can play in combating loneliness. Understanding the potential risk factors for loneliness is vital to better target initiatives, and offer effective targeted solutions to those who are often hardest to reach.

Action

When the leadership is in place to drive this agenda, an integrated work stream should be developed to implement a practical and joined up plan to improve community connection, thereby delivering the directive from Welsh government.

The framework of four distinct categories of intervention that could be put in place at a strategic level and delivered locally to provide a system of services to prevent and alleviate loneliness:

- **Foundation Services** that reach lonely individuals and understand their specific circumstances to help them find the right support.

- **Gateway Services** like transport and technology that act as the glue that keeps people active and engaged, and makes it possible for communities to come together.

- **Direct Interventions** that maintain existing relationships and enable new connections – either group-based or one to one support, as well as emotional support services.

- **Structural Enablers** are needed in their communities to create the right conditions for reducing loneliness, such as volunteering, positive ageing and neighbourhood approaches.

Practical suggestion

No additional funding would be needed to address this action as it would involve a different way of working. It will be essential for this to be driven and delivered by the appointed senior officer.

Recommendation Three:

Focus on building and supporting community assets

Supporting communities to build their resilience to loneliness makes good sense as it harnesses community assets and resources. Services at a local level should work collaboratively to share resources, such as transport and buildings with better targeting of existing resources – using what we have got better to maximise its impact. The group recognises the vital role that town and community councils have to play in this. It acknowledges that in order to maximise the impact extra support should be given to create a joined up approach delivered locally.

Activity at community level should flow from a coherent authority-wide strategy, and should involve funding and resources to support this tailored approach. This will be dependent on local circumstances, recognising the particular assets and challenges present in each community.

Action

Work with all stakeholders including PSBs to ensure that we maximise all resources. This will include further attention to the community asset transfer approach with the aim of encouraging community activity.

Practical suggestions

- Ensure strong working relationship with HDUHB reflecting the Welsh Government 'A Healthier Wales: our Plan for Health and Social Care' plan. [9]
- Work with Un Llais Cymru / One Voice Wales and Carmarthen Area Committee to embed a proactive approach to loneliness in town and community councils.
- Work with the Town & Community Council Liaison Forum to raise awareness and encourage local action to reduce loneliness in their community.
- Work with regeneration and other Local Authority departments in order to provide community benefits that will address loneliness in contracts and work streams.
- Work with youth groups such as Carmarthenshire Youth Council and the Young Farmers Club Wales.

Recommendation Four:

Directly address barriers to connection

The group acknowledges that practical issues often exacerbate issues of loneliness. Priority areas suggested are:

- **Poverty:** lack of financial resources can be a barrier to engagement, with support such as Time Credits being one example of a practical solution to overcome this.

- **Rurality:** some researchers have cautioned that rural residents could be at greater risk of isolation due to the increased distances they must travel to visit their friends and family. Practical transport issues and increased local activities could help alleviate loneliness in rural areas. One example of good community rural work witnessed by the Task & Finish Group is the HWB in Llansteffan. See further information in 2.1 Visits & Meetings.

- **Transport:** issues of transport are consistently citied as a major barrier to connection and engagement in Carmarthenshire. It is vital that we come up with creative and innovative solutions to this ever present problem. Accessible transport should meet a range of mobility and sensory needs.

- **Information and communication:** there should be an up to date and useable resource for people to find out information or advice about services available in their area. The existing Dewis database and other communication options such as the Delta Wellbeing Information, Advice & Assistance service (IAA) should be fully utilised to provide easy access to services in Carmarthenshire.

- **Supportive communities:** Practical work should be done to ensure that barriers, such as poverty or rurality, are addressed at a community level. This would involve rolling out a model of age, dementia and disability friendly communities as well as initiatives such as *The Children's Zone*[10] and *Carmarthenshire is Kind*.

- **Engagement and coproduction:** involving people and communities not just in giving their opinion about the extent of the issue or suggesting services to improve it, but also

---

[9] https://gweddill.gov.wales/topics/health/publications/healthier-wales/?lang=en
[10] https://gov.wales/newsroom/people-and-communities/2017/children-first-pioneer-projects-announced/?lang=en

by delivering services, and ensuring that the potential contributions of community members as champions, supporters, advocates, workers and volunteers is maximised. This should include further promotion of the GP Social Prescribing initiative as a means of increasing social interaction and reducing loneliness.

Action

A co-designed action plan should be developed to address barriers to connection.

Practical suggestions

- More support for the Dewis website through transformation funds - with a Carmarthenshire specific link. [Funding already secured through Transformational Funds]

- Extending the Time Credit scheme, including initiatives to increase awareness and participation.

- Develop a county based community transport plan – improving awareness of what's available and how it connects together, replicating good practice of other local authority areas https://www.swansea.gov.uk/communitytransport.

4.0   Conclusions

It is clear that communities in Carmarthenshire and across the world are changing. Communication is often digital with many people across our county interacting with individuals, businesses and public services online rather than through talking to each other. Our citizens are also living longer, but not necessarily experiencing increased quality of life. Set against a backdrop of austerity, complex social and economic factors these changes mean that loneliness is being defined as a problem of epidemic proportions that may come to define our time[11].

We also now understand the negative impacts of loneliness. Feeling lonely is often linked to early deaths – on a par with smoking or obesity. It's also linked to increased risk of coronary heart disease and stroke; depression, cognitive decline and an increased risk of Alzheimer's. The 2016-17 National Survey for Wales found that 17% of adults in Wales feel lonely often or always[12].

Tackling loneliness not only alleviates the suffering, and improves the quality of life but it also brings wider benefits. It can support effective use of resources and reduce the demand for costly health and social care services. Given the high cost of these services there is a strong case for investment in this area, particularly given the relatively low cost of many effective schemes. For example a Community Agents scheme in Gloucestershire which identified the loneliest people in the community resulted in savings to health and social care services totalling £1.2 million, with every £1 that the scheme cost, the return on investment was calculated to be £3.10[13].

There are a myriad of activities and initiatives across Carmarthenshire that are bringing about positive change and are tackling loneliness at a local level. It is recognised however that a much more targeted and strategic approach is needed to maximise impact and the Task and Finish Group on loneliness has recommended 4 key actions:

1) Take a strategic approach to loneliness

2) Address loneliness as a shared priority

3) Focus on building and supporting community assets

4) Directly address barriers to connection

The group welcomes development of this work and once again would like to thank everyone involved in this Task and Finish project. Particular thanks is extended to Julia Wilkinson, Locality Manager, Emma Bryer and Michelle Evans Thomas, Democratic Service Officers, for their support and guidance throughout the process. Also, thanks to all the individuals and organisations who have contributed to the research in preparing the report.

---

[11] https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-42887932
[12] https://gov.wales/loneliness-and-isolation-rural-wales-ticking-time-bomb-huw-irranca-davies
[13] http://www.grcc.org.uk/individuals-and-families/community-wellbeing-service

5.0 Bibliography / References

Reference	Link
Carmarthenshire County Council Well-being objectives	http://www.carmarthenshire.gov.wales/home/council-democracy/consultation-performance/well-being-objectives-2017-18/#.Ws4iMuaosjY
Carmarthenshire Well-being Plan: The Carmarthenshire We Want - 2018-2023	www.thecarmarthenshirewewant.wales/media/8331/carmarthenshire-well-being-plan-final-may-2018.pdf
County Council's Corporate Strategy 2018-2023	http://www.carmarthenshire.gov.wales/home/council-democracy/strategies-and-plans/corporate-strategy/
Moving Forward in Carmarthenshire: the next 5-years	https://www.carmarthenshire.gov.wales/home/council-democracy/strategies-and-plans/moving-forward-in-carmarthenshire-the-next-5-years/
Carmarthenshire's Vision for Sustainable Services for Older People for the Next Decade: Promoting Independence Keeping Safe Improving Health and Well-Being 2015-2025	https://www.carmarthenshire.gov.wales/home/council-democracy/strategies-and-plans/social-care-and-health-older-peoples-strategy-2015-2025/
Carmarthenshire's Aging Well Plan	https://www.carmarthenshire.gov.wales/home/council-democracy/strategies-and-plans/ageing-well-plan/
A connected society: A strategy for tackling loneliness – laying the foundations for change	https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-connected-society-a-strategy-for-tackling-loneliness
Trapped in a bubble - An investigation into triggers for loneliness in the UK	https://www.redcross.org.uk/about-us/what-we-do/action-on-loneliness
Marmot Review report – 'Fair Society, Healthy Lives	https://www.local.gov.uk/marmot-review-report-fair-society-healthy-lives
Loneliness and Isolation: Guidance for Local Authorities and Commissioners Campaign to End Loneliness	https://campaigntoendloneliness.org/guidance/
Improving the public's health: A resource for local authorities	https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/improving-publics-health
The missing millions: in search of the loneliest in our communities Campaign to End Loneliness	https://campaigntoendloneliness.org/guidance/
A connected island: an Ireland free from loneliness. A Report from the Loneliness Taskforce	https://www.evidence.nhs.uk/search?q=loneliness
Loneliness and isolation: a toolkit for health and wellbeing boards Campaign to End Loneliness	https://campaigntoendloneliness.org/guidance/
Loneliness - What characteristics and circumstances are associated with feeling lonely?	https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/lonelinesswhatcharacteristicsandcircumstancesareassociatedwithfeelinglonely/2018-04-10
How you can reduce loneliness in your	https://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/default/files/jrf/migra

neighbourhood: Joseph Roundtree Foundation	ted/.../JRF_Loneliness_Process.pdf

(Ctrl+Click to follow the hyperlinks and read the documents)

6.0 Appendix A - Local information from Carmarthenshire County Councillors regarding activities in their area aimed at reducing loneliness.

Ward	Events
Abergwili	Brechfa Wind Farm Community Fund supports and funds a number of village activities within the local catchment area and beyond the 6 km boundary. Tackling loneliness is a major and important consideration for panel members who allocate funding. "Friend of Mine" - Peniel Community Primary School - Important Intergenerational work is taking place to tackle loneliness. Many associations in my ward organise local MYW/WI/Chapel activities with cultural programs during the winter months.
Burry Port	In the Burry Port Ward, we have a Community Friendship Group that meets every Monday. There is also a Dementia support Group that meets twice a week on Monday and Thursday.
Cilycwm	Living in a very rural ward surprisingly there is a lot of clubs etc. in Cilycwm Ward. We have spinners, weavers and dyers group in Llansadwrn, community garden, country women's group and Sinema Sadwrn held in the village pub. There seems to be more on for women in the ward. As for men there is a choir and the pub, unless they travel to different wards to attend vintage clubs (Agricultural Machinery etc.) and sheepdog trials and there is always the weekly livestock marts. One major concern I have is the residents in my ward who do not attend any of these clubs etc. as they live in very rural locations and are unable to travel due to different reasons. With Llandovery being our main town which is in another ward residents travel to town to attend a variety of classes, clubs etc. Folk dancing, jive classes and a friendship club only to mention a few.
Glanaman	It may be worthwhile for a communication to be sent to Cwmamman Town Council as I am aware that several events are held within the Community Centre and other Council owned properties which bring people of the community together.
Gorslas	In the Gorslas ward there are a couple of organisations/activities in the

	area that help with the loneliness agenda:
	Gorslas Old Age Group - meet monthly and organise trips and social activities. Drefach Old Age - meet regularly and organise trips and social events. Cefneithin and Foelgastell Welfare Association - weekly coffee morning for the elderly.
	In addition, the well-being committees in Gorslas, Cefneithin / Foelgastell and Drefach organise a number of events during the year which are open to everyone in the community to attend e.g. spring fairs, carnival, etc.
	In addition, we are working to establish a Men's Shed project in Drefach which will work to offer activities for men in the area. We are currently discussing a possible location in one of the wings of the former Ysgol y Gwendraeth.
Kidwelly	In the ward of Kidwelly, we did have a group of people set up going round visiting people that were living on their own and didn't have any family members, just to see if they wanted something or shopping or just a chat and company or help with any of their needs, but this work no longer happens as the group set up has now disbanded.
	I would be very interested personally to have help from anyone to set this great work back up in my ward.
Llandeilo	Like many rural or part rural wards, there is a lack of services coupled with poor transport links. Historically, the Authority cut the luncheon clubs and there is a very limited service offered by RVS.
	Llandeilo does have a number of club, societies etc. but unless you are a member or have an interest in the typical topic/subject, you may not interact. Chapels used to be a good meeting point/social gathering but numbers are dwindling.
	Trap is an active community and holds a lot of events in its old school. There are WI and Merched y Wawr groups in Llandeilo & WI in Trap. Llandeilo is forming a dementia friendly group and one of our objectives will be meeting places for carers.
Llandovery	At present in Llandovery Hospital we have Volunteers who attend Ward area and chat to Patients, read books/newspapers, we encourage patients to take part in board games, we have a small Library Trolley with a variety of Large Print Books. The visiting times at Llandovery Hospital were increased last October to help combat loneliness, families & friends can now visit from 2.30pm to 8.30pm. Also Friendship club, monthly meeting and twice weekly luncheon club in Dolau Bran.
Llanfihangel	As far as I know, there are no specific meetings taking place in my ward

Aberbythych	to deal with loneliness.
Llangadog	I am working closely with The Brecon Beacons National Park Authority as a member of the Park on behalf of Carmarthenshire County Council. Llandovery Male Voice Choir will sing in various locations within the Park to help promote the Welsh Language and Culture. The Well Being point of including men who live in rural areas to have a sense of belonging and being part of a community is very important and essential in preventing loneliness. Men who farm on the mountains like Llanddeusant, Myddfai and Gwynfe in the Llangadog Ward, rely on their weekly choir practise as a sociable event. Mindful of isolation, loneliness and depression in men, we want to raise the profile of how important this group of older men are and how we need to recruit men to keep the choir going.
Llangennech	The Bryn Hall committee, The Senior Citizens, and Bryn W.I. have events to reduce loneliness In Llangennech, lunch for the elderly is arranged by Crossroads every Wednesday and the Community Council pays the cost of the taxi to collect the people attending. There is space for 20 and they meet in the Community Centre. The "Knit and Natter" group meet every Monday morning with about 25 women coming together weekly to knit and make cards. There are successful karate classes and short mat bowling sessions held in the Community Centre on several nights each week. Also history lectures and folk dancing classes are held weekly and there is a strong Merched y Wawr movement in the village.
Llannon	A Community Council dinner club in Tumble Hall and an "Opportunity" forum.
Llansteffan	See P13 for full details of the Llansteffan "Hwb".
Llanybydder	Llanybydder are at present setting up a Men's Shed at the redundant family centre porta cabins, it is at a very early stage, but lots have shown an interest I have also met with a representative from Men's Sheds Wales, unfortunately they only provide support, but no funding.
Llwynhendy	We as a group have applied for a number of grants to help tackle loneliness within the Llwynhendy Area. We were successful in receiving a grant and are now able to take residents out on monthly trips. Our first trip was to the Ashburnham Hotel for a Lunch, which we all thoroughly enjoyed. Our next planned trip is in April to the Gower Heritage Centre.

	We have also secured the use of a bus for our area, transport is a major issue for most residents therefore, we can now pre book the bus and take residents out. We set up a knit and natter group in the Llwynhendy Library, they meet every Monday between 2pm-4pm. Last July the knit and natter were involved with the children in the local schools developing "Under the Sea Project". It was lovely to see the elderly and young coming together. They are currently working on another project for this year. We are in the process of setting up a bingo night, at the Bryn and Trallwm Centre. We are working with the ICC, providing breakfast which the Llwynhendy/ Pemberton Forum pay for, to encourage parents and children to participate together in activities. I am also in the process of looking at developing a community hall within Llwynhendy, within this Centre we will be developing a number of groups to encourage wellbeing and isolation within our community.
Newcastle Emlyn	Friendship Club meets every Thursday afternoon at Church Hall, Church Lane and every Saturday Churches from the Emlyn Deanery hold a Community Coffee morning from 10.30 to 12.
Whitland	Currently the Taf QT club for those with dementia and their carers. The Co-op did something briefly which was a weekly coffee and cake in the Memorial Hall but that has now ceased. The men go to the pub and occasionally the women. The problem is the really lonely do not engage. Jake Morgan mentioned the Vinkler Initiative in Spain. I believe this may mean clamshell in the Catalan language. This does explain the lonely issue quite well but translation may not be accurate. I believe there is an initiative where CCC ring up people or contact them on occasions.

7.0   Appendix B – Task & Finish Group Meetings and Attendance

Meeting	Councillors Present	Officers Present
Thursday, 21st June, 2018 10:00 a.m. Democratic Services Committee Room, County Hall, Carmarthen	Cllr. Gwyneth Thomas Cllr. Ieuan Wyn Davies Cllr. Ken Lloyd Cllr. Louvain Roberts Cllr. Emlyn Schiavone Cllr. Dorian Williams	Julia Wilkinson Michelle Evans Thomas
Wednesday, 13th September, 2018 9:30 a.m. Meeting Room 11, Y.M.C.A. Building, 1 The Kingsway, Swansea	Cllr. Gwyneth Thomas Cllr. Ieuan Wyn Davies Cllr. Ken Lloyd Cllr. Dorian Williams	Ann-Marie Rogan Charlotte Davies Julia Wilkinson Michelle Evans Thomas
Wednesday, 17th October, 2018 10:00 a.m. Regeneration Meeting Room, County Hall, Carmarthen	Cllr. Gwyneth Thomas Cllr. Ieuan Wyn Davies Cllr. Ken Lloyd Cllr. Louvain Roberts Cllr. Emlyn Schiavone Cllr. Dorian Williams	Susan Smith Julia Wilkinson Michelle Evans Thomas Emma Bryer
Tuesday, 11th December,2018 2:00 p.m. Democratic Services Committee Room, County Hall, Carmarthen	Cllr. Gwyneth Thomas Cllr. Ken Lloyd Cllr. Dorian Williams	Martyn Palfreman Michelle Evans Thomas Emma Bryer
Thursday, 17th January,2019 10:00 a.m. Democratic Services Committee Room, County Hall, Carmarthen	Cllr. Gwyneth Thomas Cllr. Ieuan Wyn Davies Cllr. Ken Lloyd Cllr. Louvain Roberts Cllr. Emlyn Schiavone Cllr. Dorian Williams	Susan Smith Michelle Evans Thomas Emma Bryer
Thursday, 14th February, 2019 2:00 p.m. Ferryside Men's Shed	Cllr. Gwyneth Thomas Cllr. Ieuan Wyn Davies Cllr. Ken Lloyd Cllr. Emlyn Schiavone Cllr. Dorian Williams	Emma Bryer
Monday, 11th March, 2019 10:00 a.m. Democratic Services Committee Room, County Hall, Carmarthen	Cllr. Gwyneth Thomas Cllr. Ken Lloyd Cllr. Emlyn Schiavone Cllr. Dorian Williams	Julia Wilkinson Emma Bryer
Wednesday 10th April, 2019 1:00 p.m. Committee Room 1, Spilman Street, Carmarthen	Cllr. Gwyneth Thomas Cllr. Ieuan Wyn Davies Cllr. Ken Lloyd Cllr. Emlyn Schiavone Cllr. Dorian Williams	Julia Wilkinson Emma Bryer
Wednesday 22nd May, 2019 10:00 a.m. Democratic Services Committee Room, County Hall, Carmarthen	Consultation with EBM: Cllr. J Tremlett Cllr. Gwyneth Thomas Cllr. Ieuan Wyn Davies Cllr. Ken Lloyd	Emma Bryer

Poem used by Carmarthenshire is Kind to show how one small gesture can make a difference.

Smiling is infectious

You catch it like the flu

When someone smiled at me today

I started smiling too

I walked around a corner

And someone saw me grin

When he smiled I realised

I'd passed it on to him

I thought about the smile

And then realised its worth

A single smile like mine

Could travel round the earth

So if you feel a smile begin

Don't leave it undetected

Start an epidemic

And get the world infected

Spike Milligan