

People and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Dorset County Council



Date of Meeting	14 th March 2019
Officer	Dr David Bonner
Subject of Report	Analysis of the recent Loneliness Survey and related reports
Executive Summary	<p>Loneliness and social isolation can have a huge impact on our mental and physical wellbeing. You can even feel lonely if you are surrounded by other people. Loneliness can have a variety of causes – an upsetting life event, a loss, or sometimes it just creeps upon you. It can affect people of all ages and the effects can get worse over time.</p> <p>Loneliness can be both an indicator of social well-being and pertains to the feeling of missing an intimate relationship (emotional loneliness) or missing a wider social network (social loneliness).</p> <p>To gain a greater understanding of how loneliness is affecting people in Dorset, a short survey was undertaken from November 2018 through to January 2019. The survey was conducted on-line and through the County Council Newspaper 'Your Dorset'. The survey gave us an insight into how our residents feel in relation to key factors that can identify whether people feel they are happy with their level of social interaction.</p> <p>The analysis undertaken looked to identify levels of loneliness from respondents to help provide an evidence base for improved support in the community.</p>

Social Isolation and Loneliness Survey

	<p>The survey has used a set of nationally recognised questions specifically designed to elicit overall levels of loneliness as well as levels of emotional and social loneliness. These responses are scored. (DeJonge gierveld loneliness scale)</p> <p>In 2018 the Council also undertook their annual Adult Social Care Survey. This data informs part of the national Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework (ASCOF) figures and includes a measure for social contact.</p> <p>Also, in 2018 the Young Researchers published an extensive survey on a range of issues facing school aged children including questions focused on Social Isolation and Loneliness.</p> <p>The People and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee is encouraged to consider the information in this report, look at the evidence and analysis provided and recommend that this is a topic which it wants to signal as an important one for the new Dorset Council and any further work it wishes to progress.</p>
<p>Impact Assessment:</p>	<p>Equalities Impact Assessment:</p> <p>At this stage this report is not looking at determining a new strategy, policy or function and therefore does not require an EQIA. However, the survey points to the need for further work with some groups with protected characteristics to understand the results, which suggest greater social isolation and loneliness being experienced within these groups.</p> <hr/> <p>Use of Evidence:</p> <p>The analysis in this report is focused on a survey undertaken by Dorset County Council across Dorset on Social Isolation and Loneliness from November 2018 to January 2019, it also considers the top-level outcomes on social isolation from the Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework (ASCOF) survey undertaken in 2018 and the Young Researchers Survey completed in 2018 – to reflect further work undertaken on this subject.</p> <hr/> <p>Budget:</p> <p>There are no current budget implications.</p> <hr/> <p>Risk Assessment:</p> <p>Having considered the risks associated with this decision using the County Council’s approved risk management methodology, the level of risk has been identified as:</p>

Social Isolation and Loneliness Survey

	<p>Current Risk: LOW Residual Risk: LOW</p>
	<p>Other Implications:</p> <p>There is an opportunity to engage with the voluntary sector to ensure that work on this important subject is joined up wherever is possible.</p>
Recommendation	<p>That the committee:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (i) Considers the analysis and results of the survey (ii) Highlights that that this is a topic which it wants to signal as an important one for the new Dorset Council and any further work it wishes to progress including looking at the example of local providers like 'Future Roots' helping to tackle the challenge of mental health and social isolation in older men in the rural/farming community.
Reason for Recommendation	<p>Loneliness and Social Isolation can have a significant impact on our residents and have serious health implications. The new council wants to highlight the importance of this issue in the County.</p> <p>The previous work of a Policy Development Panel of this Committee gave a full account of the issues to the Committee. At that time the Committee highlighted the importance of raising the issue of social isolation generally as a determinant of health and wellbeing for people in Dorset. Previous discussion by this Committee has also noted that this subject is one which should be highlighted for the new Dorset Council for its consideration in due course.</p>
Appendices	None
Background Papers	Members working group on Social Isolation – Meeting 5 Children and Young People, Tuesday 6 th March
Officer Contact	<p>Dr David Bonner (Strategic Insight, Intelligence and Performance Manager, Insight, Intelligence and Performance)</p> <p>Email David.Bonner@dorsetcc.gov.uk Tel 01305 225503</p> <p>Pete Jackson (Insight, Intelligence and Performance)</p>

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1. Introduction

1.1 Loneliness and social isolation can have a huge impact on our mental and physical wellbeing. You can even feel lonely if you are surrounded by other people. Loneliness can have a variety of causes – an upsetting life event, a loss, or sometimes it just creeps upon you. It can affect people of all ages and the effects can get worse over time.

1.2 Loneliness can be both an indicator of social well-being and pertains to the feeling of missing an intimate relationship (emotional loneliness) or missing a wider social network (social loneliness).

2. Dorset County Council's Loneliness and Social Isolation Survey

To gain a greater understanding of how loneliness is affecting people in Dorset, a short survey was undertaken from November 2018 through to January 2019. The survey was conducted on-line and through the County Council Newspaper 'Your Dorset'. The survey gave us an insight into how our residents feel in relation to key factors that can identify whether people feel they are happy with their level of social interaction.

The analysis undertaken looked to identify levels of loneliness from respondents to help provide an evidence base for improved support in the community.

The survey has used a set of nationally recognised questions specifically designed to elicit overall levels of loneliness as well as levels of emotional and social loneliness. These responses are scored. (DeJonge gierveld loneliness scale)

2.1 Number of respondents and total overall loneliness

As this survey was a self-selecting survey as opposed to a fully representative, random sample of the Dorset population the results are therefore not statistically robust. A survey specifically dedicated to questions on loneliness and social isolation by its very nature may elicit far greater numbers responding as lonely than a fully representative, random sample of the Dorset population. However, it is still a good level of response and as such can provide very useful insight and information on social isolation and loneliness.

3. Findings

- The survey had a good response rate of 445 residents
- Of those responding 30% could be classified based on their answers as Very Severely Lonely
- 32% of respondents could be classified as Severely Lonely
- 28% of respondents could be classified as Moderately Lonely

Social Isolation and Loneliness Survey

- 9% of respondents could be classified as Not Lonely

The survey also asked a further set of questions in relation to a range of characteristics including: Age, Gender, Sexual Orientation, Carers and Internet use. The survey also asked for the postcode of the respondents to help to assess patterns in geographical distribution. All these questions were included based on previous research on loneliness that has highlighted sections of the community that might be more prone to loneliness.

Age and Loneliness

3.1 To ascertain levels of total loneliness by age group, and compare them, the scores for each respondent were considered based on their responses which was then translated into a scale of loneliness.

- The highest levels of responses received were from those aged between 45 to 64 and 65 to 84 (33% and 32%)
- 16% of responses were from those aged between 30 to 44
- 9% and 7% of responses were from those aged 18 to 29 and 85 and over
- The lowest number of responses were from those aged under 18 (*see Young Researchers' Report 3.1 for additional data on this age group*)
- Loneliness levels were high for all age groups
- 84% of respondents aged between 18 and 29 were either Severely or Very Severely Lonely
- 74% of respondents aged between 30 and 44 were either Severely or Very Severely Lonely
- 50% of respondents aged under 18 and 85 and over were either Severely or Very Severely Lonely

Gender and Loneliness

3.2 To ascertain levels of total loneliness by gender, and compare them, the scores for each respondent were considered based on their responses which was then translated into a scale of loneliness.

- 61% of Females and 65% of Males were either Severely Lonely or Very Severely lonely
- A far greater proportion of females responded (69%) compared to males (29%)
- The numbers of respondents who preferred not to say or self-describe were too low to score

Sexual Orientation and Loneliness

3.3 To ascertain levels of total loneliness by sexual orientation, and compare them, the scores for each respondent were considered based on their responses which was then translated into a scale of loneliness.

- The highest level of responses received were from Male Heterosexual and Female Heterosexual respondents which together represented 86%
- 5% of respondents were Bisexual
- 2% of respondents were Gay Men
- 2% of respondents were Gay/Lesbian Women

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- All levels of loneliness were high
- 80% of Female Bisexual respondents were either Severely or Very Severely Lonely
- Male Bisexual respondent numbers were too low to score
- 66% of Male Heterosexual respondents were either Severely or Very Severely Lonely
- 60% of Female Heterosexual respondents were either Severely or Very Severely Lonely
- 76% of Lesbian and Gay Women respondents were either Severely or Very Severely Lonely
- 44% of Gay Men respondents were either Severely or Very Severely Lonely
- Prefer not to say or other respondent numbers were too low to score
- The number of responses for Lesbian and Gay Women and Gay Men were low but have been included however, they will need to be treated with a degree of caution because of the low response rate

Carers and Loneliness

3.4 The survey looked at whether respondents were carers or not and whether this has any effect on loneliness. Carers were slightly more likely to respond as being Severely or Very Severely Lonely.

- 14% of respondents were carers
- 84% of respondents were non-carers
- 62% of non-carers who responded were either Severely Lonely or Very Severely Lonely
- 69% of those who were carers were Severely Lonely or Very Severely Lonely

Loneliness and Internet Use

3.5 The survey looked at whether respondents were internet users or not and whether this has any effect on loneliness. Internet users were slightly more likely to respond as being Severely or Very Severely Lonely.

- 13% of respondents were non-internet users
- 86% of respondents were internet users
- 59% of non-internet users were classified as either Very Severely or Severely Lonely
- 63% of internet users were classified as Very Severely or Severely Lonely

Spatial Distribution of respondents

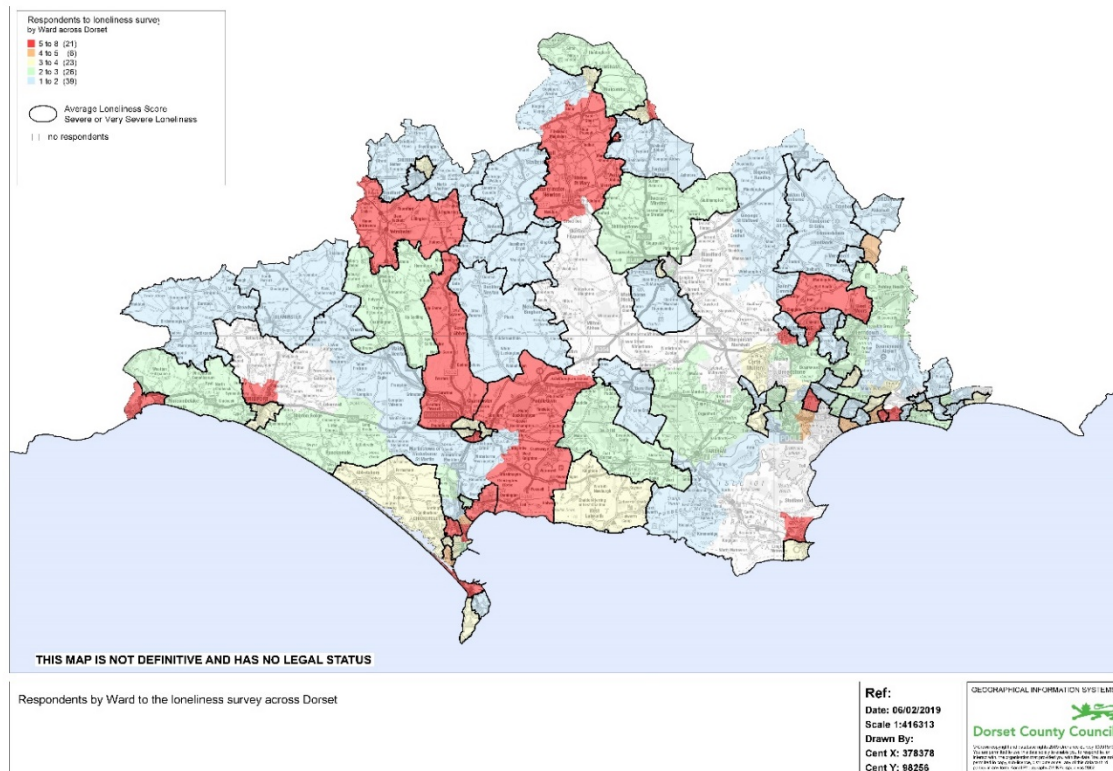
3.6 The survey had responses from across Dorset including from Bournemouth and Poole, the responses from outside the County Council area may well reflect the ability of respondents to access the survey online giving an opportunity for access to residents outside the County Council area.

The analysis of the survey looked at the number of respondents by both District and Ward.

- The greatest number of respondents to the survey were from West Dorset 23%
- The lowest number of respondents were from Christchurch Borough 5%
- Although directed at Dorset residents, there were 25% of respondents who gave their postcodes from outside the County Council area

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- The highest proportion of residents with Severe or Very Severe Loneliness were within East Dorset where two-thirds of the respondents met these criteria based on their answers
- The lowest proportion of residents with Severe or Very Severe Loneliness were from Purbeck with 41%
- Figure 1 illustrates respondent levels across the County and highlights a higher number of respondents from parts of Weymouth and West Dorset as well as significant pockets in East and North Dorset.
- Levels of Severe and Very Severe Loneliness were distributed across the Wards in the County



Summary

3.7 The survey had a good response rate of over 400 residents across the County. Levels of respondents varied by age with the greatest proportion of respondents between the ages 45 and 84. Females outnumbered Males in responses. Most respondents had high levels of loneliness.

3.8 The data highlights degrees and types of loneliness with younger age respondents showing acute levels of loneliness with 84% of those between 18 to 29 classified as Severely or Very Severely Lonely. Male respondents showed slightly higher levels of Severe and Very Severe Loneliness.

3.9 Bisexual Women also had higher levels of Severe and Very Severe Loneliness. Gay and Lesbian Women had high levels of loneliness although the numbers responding were very low, so it is difficult to draw too much of a conclusion. Levels of loneliness were higher for Carers compared to non-Carers and loneliness was slightly higher for internet users compared to non-internet users.

Social Isolation and Loneliness Survey

3.10 The distribution of respondents illustrated a higher proportion from West Dorset District and Weymouth & Portland Borough and the lowest from Purbeck District. Levels of Severe and Very Severe Loneliness were highest in East Dorset at 66% and lowest in Purbeck at 42%.

At a smaller geographic level, the report has highlighted areas that have higher respondents with Severe or Very Severe Loneliness.

The results of this report can help to provide empirical evidence for the Council and our partner organisations to help to target initiatives to different groups and places that need them most.

4 Adult Social Care Outcome Framework (ASCOF) Survey

4.1 The Adult Social Care Survey is carried out annually by local authorities on behalf of NHS Digital. This postal survey asks service users questions about quality of life (including loneliness) and what impact care and support services have on their quality of life. The survey questions are designed by NHS Digital, with support from local authorities and Dept of Health. This national survey informs measures in the Adult Social Care Outcomes Framework (ASCOF).

4.2 Results

	Dorset 2015	Dorset 2016	Dorset 2017	Dorset 2018	Change	National Ranking
Proportion of people who use services and carers, who reported that they had as much social contact as they would like	46.4%	50.1%	41.3%	55.1%	↑	1 st quartile 1/150

- There were 382 respondents to the survey.
- There has been a significant increase in the proportion of service users who are content with the amount of social contact they have. This means that figures have recovered from the previous drop in 2017.
- Dorset was the best performing Council in England based on this measure in 2018.
- Women are more likely to report feeling isolated as are older people.
- Not surprisingly there is a strong correlation between social contact and ability to access places in the local area.
- The top themes of things that prevent people from accessing places in their local are needing either a PA or family or friends to accompany them as they are unable to go out alone, an ongoing health condition which impacts either their mobility, balance or confidence etc.
- Suitable transport options were another factor – particularly for those who require a wheelchair to get about.
- And many found places in their local area inaccessible due to steps, uneven ground, rural locations and poor pavements.

- Interestingly people also cite difficulty in getting outside of their own home due to steps and doorways as preventing factors.

5 Young Researchers' Report – Social Isolation

5.1 In 2017/18 Dorset County Council's Young Researchers (Dorset Pupils trained in research skills) undertook research to help shape service development of local authorities and their partners. They researched the topics of social isolation, volunteering and young people's aspirations.

5.2 Headline Social Isolation Survey Results for Dorset pupils aged between 11 and 18

- 31% of respondents did not have enough people that they felt comfortable asking for help
- 19% of respondents rarely or never felt confident most situations
- 17% of respondents often felt lonely
- 41% of respondents answered yes to 'I spend time worrying about things'
- 13% of respondents found it difficult to make friends

5.3 The report made a series of recommendations to help tackle social isolation for young people. The following six recommendations were made in partnership with decision makers from the overview and scrutiny group on Social Isolation in March 2018:

- (i) To write to all secondary schools to request more work experience opportunities for young people.
- (ii) To work to see the re-establishment of through ticketing on busses.
- (iii) To promote the work of the Young Researchers to colleagues.
- (iv) To maintain contact with the Young Researchers and break down information so that everyone can understand the implications.
- (v) To help everyone in Dorset overcome social isolation and loneliness.
- (vi) To try to help support services such as CAMHS more easily accessible for young people.

6 Rural and Farming Communities

6.1 This report also considers the issues faced by social isolation in our rural community. and the work undertaken by a local provider 'Future Roots' is worth highlighting in this respect. Future Roots have set up two Care Farms across the County and have a number of schemes looking to help those who are the hardest to reach and who are struggling with transitions in life. Future Roots Countryman's Club has been set up to work with older people and has developed out of a pilot project that tackled the specific challenges faced by older men from rural communities. It aimed to help older men in Dorset become more resilient to the life-changes they experience as a result of rural isolation and ageing and was funded by the Lottery and grant-funded by the County Council and Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group through the Dorset Partnership for Older People (POPP).

6.2 Work is also undertaken by a range of organisations and groups including the National Farmers Union and Young Farmers. Within the council, officers working with County Farms Estate and Trading Standards also contribute to the agenda of identifying people at risk of social isolation.

7 Conclusion

7.1 This report provides an update on three surveys undertaken by Dorset County Council in relation to loneliness and social isolation. It also highlights examples of how a local provider is engaged in on-going work with our community. Taken together the surveys help to provide empirical evidence for the Council and our partner organisations to help to target initiatives to different groups and places that need them most.

Mike Harries
Chief Executive
February 2019