

Summary of Learning

CONTEXT - We know from Ageing Better that the reasons for social isolation are many and varied and happen for a myriad of reasons including macro issues such as inequalities and deprivation as well as personal circumstances. These often occur in combination meaning people's situations are complex. Our learning has highlighted the following causes of social isolation for individuals in Ageing Better:

Undiagnosed and diagnosed **mental health** issues

Lack of **confidence or self-esteem**. Other barriers can sometimes be a mask for this lack of confidence

Transition points. This includes change points such as retirement, ill-health, bereavement and relocation

Environmental and physical factors. This represents barriers to someone being able to engage in activities or relationships

CONNECTIONS – The people who are most socially isolated (where isolation is entrenched and embedded) will need some level of one-to-one support to help address their isolation. This first connection needs to:

Be **holistic** and **person centred**

Be mindful that that person is an **individual**

Take place in a **“safe place”** i.e. an environment that suits that person – including their home

Offer enough **time** to understand and address the individual's particular barriers whilst focussing on their **strengths** and wants

Allow a **relationship** of trust not dependency to build which even at the start is looking and planning an exit route

Be undertaken initially by paid staff as a result of the complexity

ECOSYSTEM – The Ecosystem is fundamental to addressing social isolation as it is the space where individuals connect with the community. It works preventatively to keep people socially connected and steps in when social isolation occurs. It:

Provides a wide variety of ways and routes in and equally provides a wide variety of options and possibilities for individuals to engage with

Recognises the individuals and agencies on the ground in each locality who are key to finding and identifying socially isolated individuals from a range of different communities

Supports a community response as no one organisation or agency can “fix” this

Recognises that all have a role to play

Our learning from Ageing Better is that an effective local ecosystem needs the following components.

Interventions people **“need”** to do first (for example if a person is too worried about money to eat they can't think about other things) – these include psychological therapies, income maximisation and activities that help solve specific targeted challenges

Activities and places that people **want** to engage in and with - groups that are comfortable and accepting of people from all backgrounds

Opportunities and provision to help and support people set up their own activities and groups

Community development. Support for neighbourhood engagement and development which include age-friendly related activities such as supporting businesses to create a welcoming environment