

“WHEN THE CULTURE AND THE COMMUNITIES THAT ONCE CONNECTED US TO ONE ANOTHER DISAPPEAR, WE CAN BE LEFT FEELING ABANDONED AND CUT OFF FROM SOCIETY. IN THE LAST FEW DECADES, LONELINESS HAS ESCALATED FROM PERSONAL MISFORTUNE INTO A SOCIAL EPIDEMIC. MORE AND MORE OF US LIVE ALONE. WE WORK AT HOME MORE. WE SPEND A GREATER PART OF OUR DAY ALONE THAN WE DID 10 YEARS AGO. IT SOMETIMES FEELS LIKE OUR BEST FRIEND IS THE SMARTPHONE.”

Rachel Reeves MP, Co-chair,  
Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness

## ARE YOU CONTACTLESS?

Changing the way we connect in a digital world



**BARNSLEY**  
Metropolitan Borough Council



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# FOREWORD

I am the Director of Public Health in Barnsley and every year I am required by law to produce a report about the health of people who live in our town. This report helps me, my team and our wider partners to identify any key issues, flag up any problems, make new recommendations and describe how we are helping residents, their families and their friends to live healthier, happier lives.

In our 2017 annual report, we captured a snapshot in time to illustrate the health and wellbeing of Barnsley's residents. Through the completion of a short diary, residents told us about their physical and mental health on 7 November 2017 and what might have made it better or worse. The response from residents was overwhelming and details of how we have responded to the issues raised can be found in chapter 1 of this report.

More residents wrote about loneliness, social isolation and the importance of connections with others than any other subject in the diary entries we received. I remember in particular one diary entry from an eighty-four year old female resident who wrote:

**“ I’M GOING OUT TODAY – LOOKING FORWARD TO THIS, EVEN IF IT IS TO A HOSPITAL APPOINTMENT. ”**

**“JO ALWAYS LOOKED FORWARDS, NOT BACK: SHE WOULD HAVE SAID THAT WHAT MATTERS MOST NOW ARE THE ACTIONS, BIG AND SMALL... THAT’S A RESPONSIBILITY FOR ALL OF US.”**

Seema Kennedy MP and Rachel Reeves MP, Co-chairs of the Jo Cox commission on Loneliness

This diary entry was a stark reminder of the importance of our connections with other people, no matter how brief they may be. A ten minute conversation during a hospital appointment might be the only human contact someone has that day or sadly, that week.

During a conversation about social isolation last year, a local resident told us how it was great that her bus pass was now contactless but it meant she did not even need to speak to the driver anymore. This example illustrates how the world is changing and it is important we continue to embrace digital and technological advances. Our report will provide examples of how this can improve our connections with others but it will also discuss how we need to change in the way we connect with other people in our communities.

Loneliness is one of the greatest public health challenges of our time. No-one should live unknown or feel alone. Everyone should have the social contact they need. We welcome the Government strategy for tackling loneliness, ‘A Connected Society’, which was published in October 2018. The strategy suggests how we must all lay the foundations for change and you can read how this plan will be implemented locally in the recommendations included in chapter 6.

We are the most digitally connected generation in history but if our society is to address the growing loneliness epidemic, we need to rethink how we connect with others in this new world.

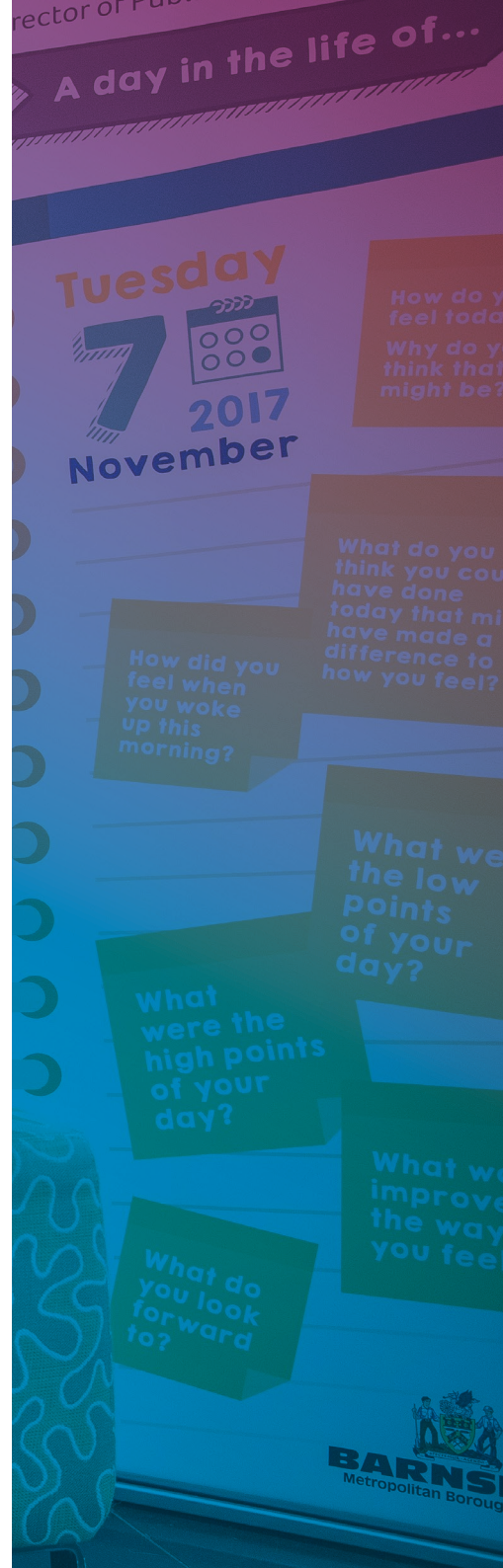
**Julia Burrows**

Director of Public Health, Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council

# I. OUR PROGRESS SINCE MY 2017 ANNUAL REPORT

I would like to thank the residents of Barnsley who took part in 'A day in the life of'. Along with colleagues across the council, I was overwhelmed by the response we received and I am incredibly grateful to all those who took the time to share their thoughts, feelings, worries and aspirations with us. This chapter summarises what we have done since November 2017 and describes the programmes of work we will continue to deliver in response to what you told us.

From all the diaries we received, in addition to our connections with others, four other key themes were identified where we have focussed our efforts over the past 12 months.



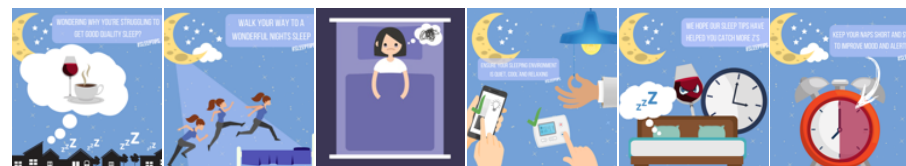
## I. RESILIENCE

Put simply, resilience is the ability to cope with and rise to the inevitable challenges, problems and set-backs you meet in the course of your life, and to come back stronger from them. It is having the ability to bounce back in the event of adversity. Building personal resilience is one of three public health priorities in the refreshed public health strategy for Barnsley [www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/health-and-wellbeing/barnsley-public-health-strategy](http://www.barnsley.gov.uk/services/health-and-wellbeing/barnsley-public-health-strategy). Over the next three years, we will examine what tests our own resilience and what major moments in life have the most impact, for example, separation, retirement, bereavement and illness. We will support residents to grow their own resilience through focussing on what can be done now, tomorrow, next week; next month and beyond. We are working with our primary schools to improve the resilience of future generations. The Thrive Programme is currently delivered in 32 schools, with 113 staff trained to date and aims to improve the social and emotional mental health and resilience of young people.

## 2. SLEEP

Sleep is crucial to our health and wellbeing. An occasional night without sleep makes you feel tired and miserable the following day, but prolonged nights with poor sleep can lead to more serious issues and undoubtedly makes us feel down and our mood low. Unfortunately, too many people in Barnsley are suffering from a lack of, or poor sleep. Therefore, using an evidence-based toolkit we have launched a local campaign to help people understand the importance of sleep, sharing hints and tips on how to improve both the quantity and quality of our sleep. Key messages include cutting down on caffeine, less technology use before bed and having a regular bedtime routine. We will continue to evaluate this campaign to identify the difference it has made to residents' sleep.

Smoking, alcohol and a poor diet can also affect how we sleep and significant progress has been made in tackling these other public health priorities. We are continuing to work with residents to 'make smoking invisible' and thereby protecting children and young people from the harms of tobacco in addition to helping smokers to stop. Through programmes such as Best Bar None, Reducing the Strength and Purple Flag, we are working to tackle the affordability, availability and acceptability of alcohol; and a food plan which aims to nourish our town with good food for all, was launched in October 2018.





### 3. WORK

We are working with Barnsley employers across the borough as part of our Healthy Workplace Awards scheme and our first awards ceremony was held in September 2018 recognising the excellent contribution organisations are making to the health and wellbeing of their employees.

Our workplace health offer to businesses includes signposting to services; provision of training; support with health needs assessments; and advice on how small changes can make a big difference to an employer's bottom line. There are over 50 businesses in Barnsley that are actively engaged with workplace health reaching in excess of 18,000 employees. We will continue to encourage businesses to further improve their employment offer by implementing additional measures that will improve the health and wellbeing of their employees and to help keep them in work.



**Best Workplace Health and Wellbeing Intervention Award - Amalgamated Construction Ltd**



**Workplace Health Champion Award - Paul Hewkin, Distinction Doors**



**Healthiest Barnsley Business Award - XPO LOGISTICS**

### 4. FIVE WAYS TO WELLBEING

In our last report, we recommended that we continue to build the Five Ways to Wellbeing (connect, be active, take notice, learn and give) into our daily lives as a way of improving our overall wellbeing and growing our resilience.

There are many examples we could share to illustrate this further but we have chosen to focus on the programmes which have been implemented over the past twelve months to provide opportunities to increase activity levels for everyone.

We have published a new Active Travel strategy which is committed to improving cycling and walking across the borough. Following the Tour de Yorkshire in May 2018, we have worked with a number of cycle clubs and community groups to maximise the legacy of this fantastic event. We have continued to support schools to join the growing Daily Mile movement and now have over 30 schools in the borough delivering this or a similar scheme. Walk Well Barnsley has gone from strength to strength delivering 12 regular walks with over 1,827 attendances throughout the year.

## 2. INTRODUCTION: WHAT'S OUR PROBLEM?

Loneliness and social isolation are damaging our health, both mentally and physically. There are links between health and social inequality and social isolation; many factors associated with social isolation are unequally distributed in society. Social disadvantage is linked to many of the life experiences that increase risk of social isolation, including poor maternal health, teenage pregnancy, unemployment, and illness in later life. In addition, deprived areas often lack adequate provision of good quality green and public spaces, creating barriers to social engagement.

Being cut off from social interaction is not only a problem for the elderly but also younger people, and the impact it has on our bodies is thought to be equivalent to smoking over a dozen cigarettes a day. Recent studies have shown that social isolation and loneliness are associated with a 50% excess risk of heart disease (Public Health England, 2015).

Social Isolation is the inadequate quality and quantity of social relations with other people at an individual, group, community and larger social environment, whereas loneliness is an emotional perception that can be experienced by individuals regardless of the breadth of their social networks (Public Health England, 2015).

“  
I GO OUT TO WORK  
WHICH I ENJOY BUT I  
SOMETIMES FEEL LONELY.  
I COULD IMPROVE THIS  
BY GOING OUT MORE BUT  
I FIND THIS DIFFICULT ON  
MY OWN.”

Barnsley resident aged 57  
(A Day in the Life of, 2017)

Other national studies have found that adequate social relationships increase the likelihood of living longer. Although the true cost of social isolation is difficult to determine, studies have found that interventions to improve someone's social contact can provide a substantial return on investment up to the value of £5.96 for every £1 invested (PHE, 2015).

The Campaign to End Loneliness (2018) has described how loneliness places individuals at greater risk of cognitive decline. Lonely individuals are more prone to depression and loneliness and low social interaction are predictive of suicide in older age.

Lonely individuals are more likely to visit their GP, have a higher use of medication, higher incidence of falls and increased risk factors for long term care and chronic illness.

The Campaign to End Loneliness wants loneliness to be a public health priority at a local and national level and we hope our report goes some way to addressing this issue across Barnsley. Over the next 12 months we will work with colleagues, partners and local communities to ensure that:

- people most at risk of loneliness are reached and supported;
- services and activities are more effective at addressing loneliness; and
- a wider range of loneliness services and activities are developed.



The Jo Cox Foundation was established so Jo's friends, family and colleagues could continue her work and highlight the issues she cared about so deeply, including the despair caused by loneliness in the UK. The Foundation has supported the continuation of the work of the Loneliness Commission that Jo established before her death in summer 2016. This advocated for a UK wide strategy to tackle loneliness and social isolation across the lifecycle and across all society. Therefore, it was welcomed when the government published 'A Connected Society': a strategy for tackling loneliness in October 2018.

Whilst successfully campaigning for national action, the Loneliness Commission has been running their "Happy to Chat" campaign which aims to strengthen relationships by encouraging people and businesses to start a conversation. The objective is to connect people, and by wearing the "Happy to Chat" badge as a visual indicator so people would feel comfortable to stop and chat. The campaign is part of a bigger movement which is being led by national charities and organisations and one that we will work hard to promote across Barnsley throughout 2019.

Sadly, loneliness can happen to anyone, at any time and too many residents are lonely or isolated, suffering ill health as a result. How many times during one day do we ask "are you contactless?" when buying goods or services and have we ever really thought what that means? It is now possible to spend a day working, shopping or travelling without speaking to another human being and for some people this can be repeated day after day (HM Government, 2018).

We want to ensure that nobody living, working or studying in Barnsley feels lonely and we all have a role to play. Small things can make a big difference and we would ask everyone to think about their neighbours, their friends and their family.

Our society is changing and we are experiencing a digital revolution which brings innovation, opportunities and possibilities to communicate and connect with others in ways that we have never seen before. However, too many residents in Barnsley do not have the social connections they need or want.

**“  
MY TIP FOR A HAPPY  
LIFE IS TO VOLUNTEER  
AND HELP ONE ANOTHER.  
IT GIVES YOU A GOOD  
FEELING AND MAKES  
YOUR DAYS HAPPY. ”**

**Barnsley resident aged 44  
(A Day in the Life of, 2017)**

**“  
MY TIP FOR BEING HEALTHY  
IS KEEPING REGULARLY  
ACTIVE AND CONNECTING  
WITH COMMUNITIES AND  
GROUPS, REMAINING  
SOCIAL. ”**

**Barnsley resident aged 53  
(A Day in the Life of, 2017)**

### 3. THE EVIDENCE: WHAT DO WE KNOW?

**We are the most digitally connected generation in history and technology has changed the way we communicate and connect with other people...**

We can communicate faster and more cost-effectively than ever before. If you're in the same room with someone, there's certainly nothing faster than just opening your mouth and talking. But in our global economy, many of the people we need to communicate with are in different locations.

Technology has created limitless opportunities for us to connect with our friends and family across the world. It allows us to keep in touch with those who live far away and makes it easy to arrange social events through group chat and discussion. It can also help those with caring responsibilities in providing a quick and simple communication method.

Most people may have experienced more efficient services as a result of technology. From booking a holiday to ordering a bus ticket, there is little that can't be done via technology.

**...but not always in a good way...**

We make less telephone conversations, instead relying on text messaging and other smart phone applications. There is no doubt that these can make life easier by being able to communicate with large groups of family or friends at the same time, but when was the last time you called a friend or family member purely for a chat?

Messaging technology has created pressure to reply as quickly as possible which can often create anxiety. Those sending a message can not only identify if their message has been delivered but also at what time it was read.

Technology has reduced the number of conversations we now have on the high street as part of our day to day life. For example: self-serve check outs in supermarkets (which at times can be the only pay point available); self-service in banks and building societies; and contactless bus passes which remove the need to even speak to the driver.

It is now commonplace to see people of all ages wearing head phones in public spaces which could give a signal to other people of "do not talk to me". This is a particularly familiar sight on public transport which traditionally might have been a place for people to start a conversation.

Tablets, screens and other electronic devices are contributing to a loss in the art of conversation and commonly used to pacify children. Many fast food restaurants now feature these as a way of encouraging families and young people to visit.

We should continue to embrace technology and the many benefits and advantages this brings. But alongside this, reconsider how we connect with each other and never forget the importance of human warmth.

It is difficult, if not impossible to know how many residents feel lonely or how many are socially isolated. That's why it is so important that we all take the time to look out for our friends, families and neighbours and that we work hard to keep our own social relationships strong, so that we are better protected at vulnerable points in our lives which might include separation, illness or bereavement.

#### FEELING LONELY IS OFTEN LINKED TO EARLY DEATHS

on a par with smoking or obesity. It is also linked to increased risk of coronary heart disease and stroke, depression, cognitive decline and an increased risk of Alzheimer's.

It is estimated that between 5% and 18% of UK adults feel lonely often or always. This could mean that approximately, between...

**10,000 AND 35,000 ADULTS IN BARNESLEY FEEL LONELY OFTEN OR ALWAYS**



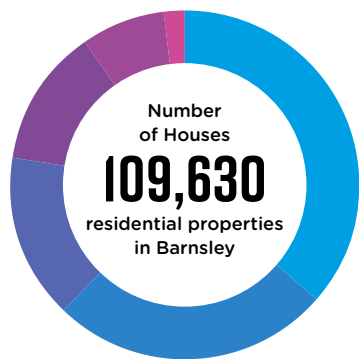


One focus of the Government’s strategy for tackling loneliness is to improve the evidence base so we better understand what causes loneliness, its impact and what works to tackle it.

National data available to us locally provides an indication as to the extent of loneliness and social isolation experienced in Barnsley.

- In 2017, there were 109,630 residential properties in Barnsley. Although the percentage of people living alone in Barnsley is currently lower than the regional and national averages, projections suggest that this will change and that by 2039, 32.3% of the adult population in Barnsley will live alone.
- Approximately 13% of residents aged over 65 years in Barnsley live alone and could be at risk of social isolation.
- Many people in Barnsley depend on work for their social contact and feelings of wellbeing; residents told us this in the diaries they shared as part of A Day in the Life of. Although trends are declining over time, 1 in 5 households were workless in 2016 and are, therefore, at risk of loneliness and social isolation.

In December 2018, the Office for National Statistics published some worrying statistics about children’s and young people’s experiences of loneliness. Although these are national figures, we can make some assumptions about their relevance locally.

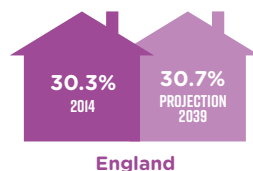
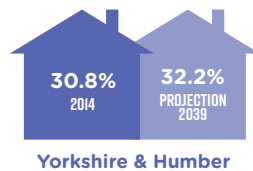
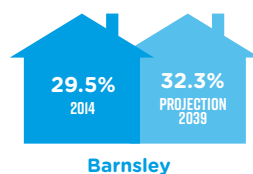


**TYPES OF HOUSES**

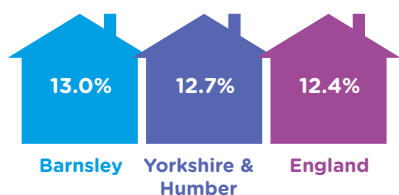
- Semi-detached 36.4%**
- Terraced 25.8%**
- Bungalow 15.3%**
- Detached 12.9%**
- Flats 7.6%**
- Other 3.9%**

**MID-2014 BASED HOUSEHOLD PROJECTIONS – RESIDENTS LIVING ALONE**

From the 2014 base year, Barnsley has slightly fewer one person households compared to both the regional and national rates. If recent trends continue, the number of one person households will increase to a high 32.3% by 2039.

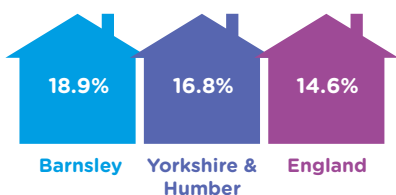


**RESIDENTS LIVING ALONE AND AGED 65+ YEARS**



The 2011 Census showed that 13.0% of households in Barnsley contained residents aged 65+ years that were living alone and could be at risk of social isolation.

**% OF HOUSEHOLDS THAT ARE WORKLESS**



Trends show that the numbers of workless households are declining over time; however, in 2016 almost 1 in 5 households in Barnsley were workless.

**CHILDREN (AGED 10 TO 15 YEARS)**

- 11.3% of children said that they were “often” lonely; this was more common among younger children aged 10 to 12 years (14.0%) than among those aged 13 to 15 years (8.6%).
- 27.5% of children who received free school meals said they were “often” lonely, compared with 5.5% of those who did not.

**YOUNG PEOPLE (AGED 16 TO 24 YEARS)**

- 9.8% of young people said that they were “often” lonely.
- Nearly half of young men reported that they “hardly ever or never” felt lonely, compared with 32.4% of young women.

**QUALITATIVE RESEARCH WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE FOUND THAT:**

- A range of predictable transitions linked to schooling and the move on from secondary education can trigger loneliness in children and young people.
- Children and young people described embarrassment about admitting to feeling lonely, seeing it as a possible “failing”.
- Practical, social and emotional or mental barriers to participating fully in social life and activities can also contribute to loneliness.
- The intersection of multiple issues and triggers to loneliness, or more extreme and enduring life events such as bereavement, disability, being bullied or mental health challenges, may make it more difficult for children and young people to move out of loneliness without help.
- Their suggestions for tackling loneliness included: making it more acceptable to discuss loneliness at school and in society; preparing young people better to understand and address loneliness in themselves and others; creating opportunities for social connection; and encouraging positive uses of social media.

# SOCIAL ISOLATION

Only 45% of adult social care users have as much social contact as they would like; less than both the regional and national averages (meaning 55% of adult social care users in Barnsley feel lonely).

Only 33.5% of adult carers have as much social contact as they would like, less than both the regional and national averages (this means that over two thirds of carers in Barnsley feel lonely).

## There are many other contributing factors which impact on our connections with other people:

- The 2011 Census reported that 26.9% of households in Barnsley do not own a car or a van and are therefore dependent on public transport to access wider community neighbourhoods.

## People's access to woodland within 500 metres of where they live

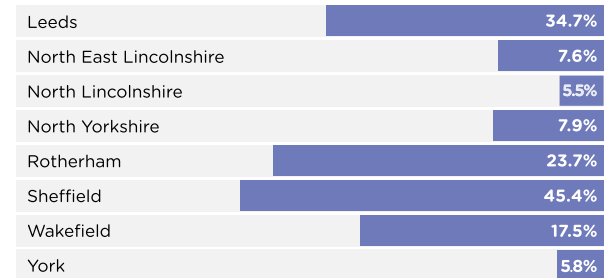
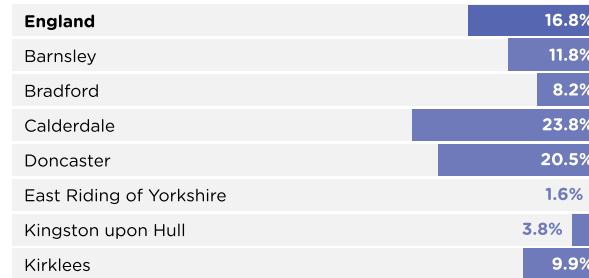
- Access to green space such as woodland, supports wellbeing and allows people to engage in physical activity and to connect with other people. Both the presence of a woodland and the number of people who can readily access the space represents a significant asset to that community. Woodlands provide spaces for community activities, social connectedness, volunteering as well as employment. Woodlands provide spaces for community activities, social connectedness, volunteering as well as employment.

The positive impact our pets can have on the way we feel - both physically and mentally - was made clear in the diary entries we received for a day in the life of:

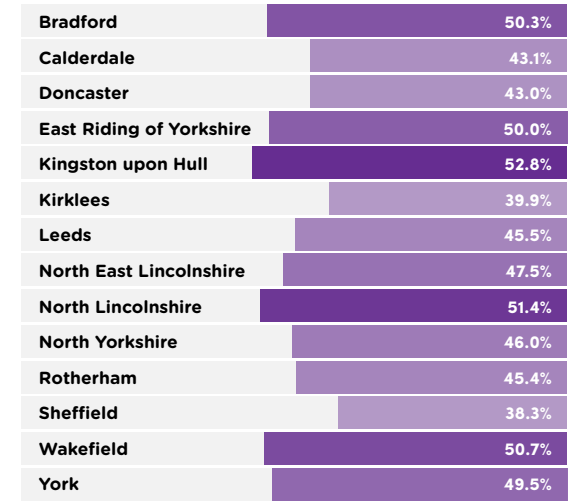
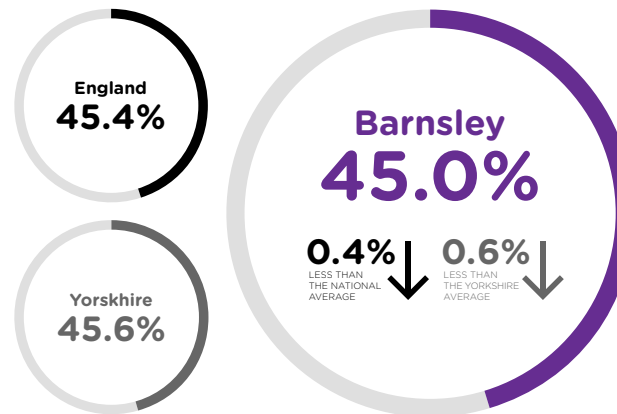
"Get a dog and go out for a walk (borrow one if you don't want one permanently). Strangers will talk to you and become your friend." Female, 57

A dog walk in the fields. This is the best part of the day, so peaceful, just listening to the birds and enjoying the countryside." Male, 64

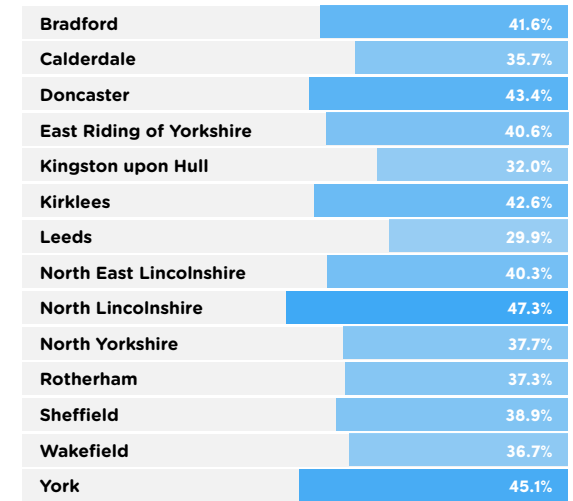
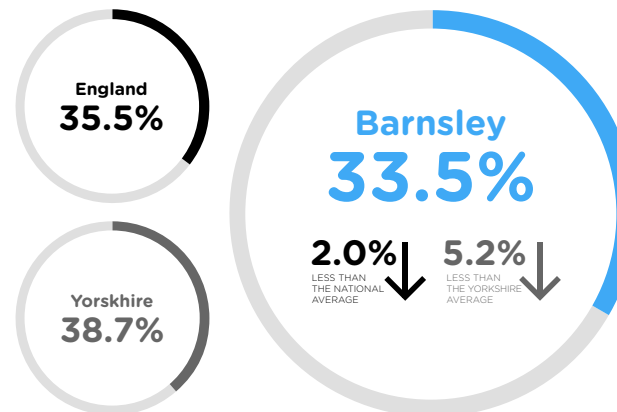
People's access to woodland within 500 metres of where they live



Percentage of **adult social care users** who have as much social contact as they would like



Percentage of **adult carers** who have as much social contact as they would like (18+ years)



## 4. WHAT YOU TOLD US...



**Our 2016 annual report was a short film which aimed to find out what being healthy means to those living and working in Barnsley and how our approach to promoting good health might need to change, from the decisions we make, to the services we provide. Making this video taught us that if we want to succeed in raising health and wellbeing to be the best it can be, we need to get out more and listen and engage with what matters to people who live, work and learn in Barnsley.**

The public health team spent October and November of 2018 talking with local residents, young people and community groups about their connections with other people and how this might impact on their feelings of loneliness and social isolation. In particular, we asked residents to think about how technology has improved their communication and where it might have had a positive or negative impact.

Here is a summary of the community groups who participated in the production of this report and we would like to express our sincere gratitude to each person who shared their thoughts and feelings with us and helped to shape our future response.

We have included some of the comments we received over the next few pages.

### CHITTY CHATTY BUS

'Hattie' is a retired bus from the original Skegness Seaside which was transformed into a community bus, kitted out with seating areas, tea and coffee making facilities, games and activities. 'Hattie' is supporting Stagecoach in their efforts to bring communities together and promote health and wellbeing around the area. As part of 2018 National Inclusion Week, members of the public were encouraged to stop by and have a chat with light refreshments and to have a look onboard the child friendly bus. In partnership with Age UK Barnsley, 'Hattie' was on tour in Barnsley to bring people together to promote social inclusion to show that no one needs to be alone.

### KIDDY WINX PLAY CAFÉ

Kiddy Winx Play Café is a learn and play facility in Thurnscoe and is dedicated for parents and carers with children under 5. There is a cafe and activity room that hosts classes and regular activities suitable for babies and toddlers. The café is one of ten locations for the breastfeeding drop-in groups offered by Barnsley infant feeding team.

### KEYRING

KeyRing is a supported living network made up of a number of ordinary homes. People who need support live in all but one of them. These people are KeyRing members who help each other out and meet up regularly, gaining greater independence, improvements in their wellbeing and stronger social connections.

### HUMANKIND

Recovery Steps Barnsley is an integrated drug and alcohol recovery service for Barnsley. Their aim is to help as many people as possible to recover from and be free from drug and alcohol dependency and to reduce the harm that is caused to individuals, families and communities. Many of HumanKind's clients are vulnerable adults, many of whom are detached from communication in the tech era we currently live in.

### CENTREPOINT

Young people in Barnsley become homeless for lots of reasons, including relationship breakdown and mental health problems. Centrepoint works with Barnsley Council and our partners to provide support and accommodation. Along with a safe place to stay, their services include technical and practical support to help young people to live independently.

### SOCIAL CARE FORUM

A professional forum made up of Barnsley Council's social workers who work on a daily basis with the borough's most vulnerable families and young people and those that don't often access or connect with other services.

### DIAL

Established in 1985, DIAL is an information, advice and support organisation for disabled people and carers in Barnsley. The charity is an independent user-led organisation which works with local people to coproduce and design services, raise awareness amongst the community of the abilities and rights of disabled people and represent their views with local service planners and providers.

## OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH SOCIAL MEDIA

“

My best friend emigrated but I don't do Skype or Facebook. We send written letters which I find very therapeutic.

”

“

I don't speak that much to my dad unless I go to his. Every so often he will send me a photo of his tea... he likes to be sarcastic because I take photos of my food sometimes and he just sends me a picture of a sandwich which makes me laugh, so I suppose that keeps me connected to him.

”

“

Social media is sometimes negative because of online bullying.

”

“

I use my games console and 'go live' online with people across the world. I play games and speak with the same people, we have built a network. I have even made friends with some of them on Facebook.

”

“

I bet I sound a lot like my grandad here because he hates social media, but I agree with him on one thing which is that pretty much every young person's life revolves around social media and the internet and games. What would happen to the world if all of it wasn't there anymore?

”

“

Social media has helped us all to keep in touch with people more regularly than we would have done and also to speak to people who we would not normally speak to.

”

“

Technology and definitely social media is replacing 'normal' communication.

”

“

People are isolating themselves and not getting out anymore, instead just staying in on social media.

”

“

It's not like you can walk away from it on social media... it's just constant.

”

“

I think it's a relief when you don't have your phone because I remember mine getting taken off me for a week because I wouldn't come off it. It was just that relief of not knowing what's going on.

”

“

Social media makes it easy (and cheap) to have relationships and friendships with people who are out of town. I use it to talk to my sister, brother, parents and cousins who live in other countries.

”

“

Group chats on Facebook means we can support each other as new parents.

”

“

People often express emotion through social media e.g. emojis rather than talking to people. They seek instant gratification.

”

“

You connect less with people if you see their life through social media and compare it to yours. Theirs is perfect; you're not as good as them.

”

“

It's good for friendship making. It makes you feel more accepted by people, so you go onto social media if you're not very good at being social so you can make friends and maybe meet up with those new friends. You can have more people to hang about with which makes you more happy and interactive with people.

”

## KEEPING CONNECTED BY GETTING OUT AND ABOUT

“

Everything can be done at home which is very sad. Dad's dog died but now he is older he didn't want another one which also means he doesn't get out anymore.

”



“

I like the women's group. I can make friends and get out of the house. My children like it as they can mix with others and do activities. It improves their social skills which they wouldn't get at home.

”

“

There are voluntary groups within services that enable people to come together like here at HumanKind - the walking group. We meet weekly and only use our phones to take photos.

”

“

Markets are a great way to help people to communicate in person. People go there not only to shop but to meet and talk to people.

”

“

At KeyRing we have our hub where we all come and do things. We share the room with other groups. We have made friends and all know each other by name.

”

“

Coming to the women's group has improved my mental health. Coming here is a good distraction; I can engage with the activities and talk to people. It brings people together. If the group was not here I would be isolated and go into my shell and stay at home. Coming here provides self-relief; I can relate to other women that are here which makes me realise that there are other women like me, in similar situations, it makes you realise you aren't the only one.

”

“

I recently took part in 'my dancing town' which encouraged people to come out during the evening. People had a good time and got involved.

”

“

Community shops are a really good starting point.

”

## OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH TECHNOLOGY

“

Technology allows me to contact old friends from school and old colleagues who I would have lost touch with otherwise.

”

“

Not everyone has access to technology which further isolates them.

”

“

I use my phone to video our group trips and share this with our network. We can laugh at the memories we've made.

”

“

Technology has changed the way we communicate; it's made communication instant and in real time.

”

“

My sister (aged 7) sits on YouTube and other stuff and doesn't engage for hours while she is on it; it's scary.

”

“

Technology has isolated people which may result in more mental health problems.

”

“

The internet and social networking and buying online is making global communication an everyday thing for most people, although some people at the older end remain in fear of even learning the technology.

”

“

My kids are at University and it feels good that I can contact them at any time to check how they are.

”

“

We don't communicate in person anymore; even sending birthday greetings by text message.

”

“

Communication through technology helps to get information quicker. It's made the world smaller. I was in the army and I was able to keep in touch with my kids from far away and have video calls with them. This helped us all.

”

“

Technology has enabled people to communicate all hours of the day. If people are lonely or need support they can now talk to someone online during the evening or night. Previously this wasn't possible.

”

“

The use of technology is disconnecting some groups of people from society, those who can't afford, unable to use (the blind) or older people who don't think they can use it.

”

“

It leaves my parents out who are not technology literate and makes them feel isolated when everyone is using phones.

”

“

I don't use self-checkouts anymore because of the less human contact side of things.

”

## SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS AFFECTS EVERYONE

“

There are lots of voluntary groups for old older people but nothing for younger.

”

“

We need better signposting to groups for families.

”

“

People just don't talk to each other face to face anymore.

”

“

We need more groups and other things where young people can get together and just talk about what's happened to them in their life. There isn't anything anymore.

”

“

Have more intergenerational projects which allow older and younger people to learn more about each other and develop skills which both groups are losing out on.

”

“

I have teenagers and their generation doesn't connect with people as much face to face. I feel that they are losing skills such as social etiquette. My son is back from university and he never leaves the house because everything he needs is online and especially now that his friends all live out of town.

”



In April 2018, we held a number of focus groups with older residents to find out more about how they were feeling. The discussion focussed on what more could be done to tackle loneliness and social isolation in Barnsley.

We asked two key questions:

**WHAT ARE THE MAJOR ISSUES CONTRIBUTING TO SOCIAL ISOLATION IN OLDER PEOPLE?**

**WHAT COULD WE DO TO MAKE IT EASIER FOR OLDER PEOPLE TO ENGAGE WITH OTHERS AND SOCIAL ACTIVITIES?**

“  
**THERE ARE CLIQUES AND I WOULDN'T KNOW ANYBODY.**”

“  
**TAKING THE FIRST STEP TO GET OUT IS HARD BUT I'VE DONE IT TODAY.**”

## TRANSPORT AND GEOGRAPHY

Transport and geography was the most common answer. Many of the participants explained that poor public transport prevented them getting involved with local activities and events. The majority of the residents involved in the focus groups had journeyed to the activities by a lift in a car or by organised transport. The vast geographical spread of Barnsley, coupled with poor transport in some areas, is an obstacle for older people. Furthermore, in relation to travel and transport, residents with a disability have an additional barrier to overcome.

## AWARENESS AND INFORMATION

A lack of awareness about activities and events was mentioned countless times. Residents reported that they did not know about the social activities happening in their local area and that they don't always see things advertised. Word of mouth is a popular form of promotion for this age group.

## CONFIDENCE AND REASSURANCE

Some of the older people explained that they often felt nervous about going out on their own. The majority of people who attended the focus groups had not come on their own. Women in particular said that if they did not have anybody to go with they would not attend, as they did not feel confident to attend new things on their own.

When asked why some people don't attend these types of activities, several participants explained that often older people just get used to being on their own at home and don't like going out.

From these discussions it became clear that the need for reassurance or a friendly face made the difference between people getting out of the house and staying home alone. Having reassurance or familiarity increases their confidence to participate.

## TECHNOLOGY

Some of the participants believed that technology is making people become more isolated.

“We are constantly told to do it online or go to the self-service machine. I used to like to go out and enjoy the little conversations with people working in the shops and banks but we no longer get that. We don't even get the chance to speak to the bus driver as our bus passes are electronic.”

## FRIENDLY FACE

Encouragement to attend activities was also discussed as a positive enabler. Some of the older people, especially women would appreciate a friendly face or a buddy to accompany them to events. They were clear that if a person 'buddied' them to an activity it would not be forever; just for the first couple of sessions until they felt more confident to attend on their own. Positive family encouragement and good neighbours were also considered helpful.



## 5. EXAMPLES OF KEEPING CONNECTED IN BARNLSLEY

Our engagement with residents highlighted a number of projects and initiatives across the borough which tackling social isolation and loneliness. Here are just a few...

**KeyRing**  
... We're Life Changing



Pictured are KeyRing Barnsley Members

KeyRing was established in London in 1990 to support people with Learning Disabilities to live the lives they want including a home where they are safe and an income to support themselves. KeyRing's Living Support Network creates the opportunity for its Members, volunteers and people in the community to use their skills and experiences to help each other.

The KeyRing network in Honeywell, Barnsley was established in 2000 and was the first network outside of London.

Through commitment to its vision, KeyRing has helped around 60 residents in Barnsley to achieve great things and have helped people become more independent.

The Hub is a place for Members to meet, talk about what's happening, share interests and discuss and arrange social events and activities. It's also a place to learn new skills and connect with other community groups.

"As a support worker I used to meet one of the Members in a café in Wombwell. After several weeks, other Members had heard about this and started to come along and soon there was a group of about 8 people meeting every week for lunch. The café was across from a Barber shop and one day, a member wanted a haircut so a group of Members decided to go together. Several of them still use this barber.

**Steve Pritchard**

Support Manager, KeyRing Barnsley

“  
DEVELOPING YOUR PLACE IN THE COMMUNITY IS ABOUT CONNECTIONS. KEYRING DO THIS IN BARNLSLEY THROUGH I-I TIME SPENT WITH MEMBERS, SUPPORT PLANNING, ENCOURAGING AND FACILITATING MUTUAL SUPPORT AND WEEKLY HUBS. ”

Support Manager,  
KeyRing Barnsley

“  
WE'VE MADE A FACEBOOK PAGE AND ALL THE KEYRING MEMBERS FROM ACROSS YORKSHIRE USE THIS TO KEEP IN TOUCH AND SHARE PHOTOS OF OUR TRIPS OUT. ”

Member, Keyring Barnsley

## DIAL-A-RIDE

Dial-a-Ride service is provided by Travel South Yorkshire representing a number of organisations and operators that work in partnership to provide residents with access to public transport.

The service provides accessible transport to residents who are disabled and elderly; helping them to lead an independent life. Residents are collected from their home in fully accessible vehicles and driven to destinations around Barnsley; making their travel experience as easy and convenient as possible.

Dial-a-Ride operates on weekdays, and customers are asked to ring two days in advance of the day they would like to travel to secure their booking. Journeys start from £2.50 per single journey.



**Barnsley Dial-a-Ride:  
01226 732096**

Pictured is Joan being picked up from her home by Dial-a-Ride driver, Fred

“

I like how the drivers collect you from your front door. They are kind, patient and help me walk to the bus. The drivers will even help with seat belts if needed. Fred is my favourite driver but he's retiring soon. I don't want him to leave. He's very helpful, carries my shopping bags and make sure I get in safe.

**Joan is 82 and a frequent user of Dial a Ride**

“

All the drivers have cheerful smiles and are always very helpful and obliging. They are friendly, they have a laugh with you, and they make me smile. The drivers really pay attention to older people. I think the service is value for money, the bus is always full.

“

Dial a ride helps older people get out and about. Without it I'd be stuck in the house going crazy, home alone. If Dial a Ride didn't exist I wouldn't be able to get out. I wouldn't get to meet people or socialise. I'd miss luncheon club. Without it I wouldn't be able to talk to the friends I've made on the bus. I use the service every week and have done for 7 years, ever since moving to Silkstone. I like the social aspect of it.

## COMMUNITY GARDEN AT SPRINGVILLE, PENISTONE

Springvale Community Garden is a vibrant community asset which is becoming increasingly well known for the opportunities for volunteering as well as excellent seasonal vegetables, fruit and plants. It is a 4 acre site on 2 sides of the River Don in Springvale, Penistone.

Springvale Community Garden has an aim of providing:

- Education about healthy eating, growing and wildlife
- Conservation of the 4 acre site for the benefit of the community and wildlife
- Purposeful recreation. Springvale Community Garden is run entirely by volunteers. The act of volunteering as beneficial not just to the garden but also to themselves and visitors.

The community garden is now growing into a place where the whole community can find something that gives them a better quality of life. The garden has been supported by Penistone Ward Alliance funding which has helped with materials for renovations and equipment. Local businesses have helped too. The garden is run entirely by volunteers who look after the site and grow the plants and vegetables.

Volunteers have many different reasons for being involved. Some enjoy getting stuck into physical tasks others play a role with administration. Some enjoy being part of a group and a worthwhile cause, or just coming to the garden for relaxation.

You don't need expertise or experience; just be willing to give it a go. There is always someone to support or guide and everyone can join in.

GPs are now able to signpost to Springvale Community Garden through the social prescribing service, My Best Life, and people can volunteer as much or as little time as they like.



“

**I LOVE BEING PART OF A PROJECT THAT IS DOING SOMETHING WORTHWHILE FOR THE COMMUNITY.”**

**For this annual report, we asked volunteers at the Community Garden how their involvement had affected their mental wellbeing. Here are the key words they used to describe their experience:**

- Relaxing
- Laughing is the best tonic
- Camaraderie, friendship, social connection, supportive
- You are not alone
- Positivity
- Mental agility, problem solving
- Having a purpose
- Rewarding
- Meeting likeminded people
- Mindful
- Builds your confidence

Springvale  
Community Garden

One volunteer, Lyn, said: “...no one judges and when you are doing purposeful tasks there's no room in your head for all the rubbish. It fills up your senses. People tolerate your quirks. It should be prescribed by the doctor.”

Another volunteer, Anne said: “there's something fundamental about growing that connects you to what's real.”

Volunteer, Margaret said: “it's so positive and satisfying to see seeds become something you can eat.”

Maureen commented that for her the garden has been a lifeline. Feeling useful even in a small way has built her self-esteem after illness.

Adam commented that he noticed a “great sense of belonging” and a “warm family feel.”

[springvalecommunitygarden@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:springvalecommunitygarden@yahoo.co.uk)



“

**I LIKE TO BE PART OF A TEAM. IT'S A SOCIAL THING AND IT'S GREAT WHEN WE ACHIEVE TASKS TOGETHER.”**

## MEN IN SHEDS

Men in Sheds is a place where like-minded older men can come together and have a chat over a cup of tea whilst learning new skills such as woodworking, IT, art and much more...

It is a safe, supportive and friendly place to meet, where men can socialise, do a bit of light work or busy themselves doing a hobby or learn new skills. 'Shedders' will have access to facilities and workshop space where they can share and learn skills.

We received this following letter from a relative of a member of Age UK Barnsley Men in Sheds which speaks volumes about the impact of schemes like this which aim to grow new connections.



For more information please contact Malcolm Poskitt on 01226 730412 or by email: [m.poskitt@ageukbarnsley.org.uk](mailto:m.poskitt@ageukbarnsley.org.uk)

“

I feel Peter has been much happier since he has been going to the Barnsley Men in Sheds. Peter really enjoys going and always comes home with a big smile on his face.

Right from the very first day, Peter has thoroughly enjoyed going to the Barnsley Men in Sheds. Peter loves the happy atmosphere where he can relax, have a good chat, share jokes and funny stories, have a good laugh and have fun. Peter has made new friends who have made him feel very included in everything. It is very important to Peter that he has that level of social interaction.

I feel going to Men in Sheds has been very beneficial for Peter. Following retirement, he has needed that level of companionship and friendship which he has found there. He feels he has found somewhere where he can be happy and have that sense of being included in everything. The feedback I get from Peter is always very positive. Peter is always telling other people about Men in Sheds and how much he enjoys going there.

I feel Peter has really improved since going to Men in Sheds. I can see the difference it has made to him. Peter is now much happier and more relaxed. As I said, he always comes home with a big smile on his face. For this I would like to say a big thank you to Men in Sheds. ”

\*Names have been changed to protect anonymity

# BARNSLEY ARMED FORCES AND VETERANS BREAKFAST CLUB

Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Clubs are free. There are no subscription or joining fees. All any veteran or service personnel will ever have to pay for is their own breakfast. Involvement aims to end isolation, giving veterans particularly a sense of belonging.

The original concept started in 2007 based on a 'brew' and a 'butty' and has since expanded with more than one new breakfast club starting every week. There are now over 260 clubs and 26,000 members worldwide.

The breakfast clubs are having huge benefit on the lives of many veterans and their families. The mutual support they offer and the connections they are making is incredible.

Ray was a Royal Engineer and at aged 60, he joined the Barnsley Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Club 18 months ago which has helped him to reconnect with colleagues he had not seen for almost 30 years.

Between 30 and 40 veterans attend the breakfast club every week and in addition to fund raising, the group organise lots of other social activities including museum trips, meals, nights out and boat trips.

Ray described how he didn't have much of a social life before joining the breakfast club but now told us "I'm happier now; I have more things to occupy myself. I don't want to be sat at home doing a jigsaw. I don't know what I'd be doing if I had not found the club. We meet up and have a laugh; it's great. With all the eating and drinking we do the club isn't doing my waistline any good but it's certainly helping my mental health!"

The Barnsley Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Club is held every Saturday, starting at 9.30am, at The Joseph Bramah, 15 Market Hill, Barnsley, S70 2PX.

For further information visit the AFVBC website:

[www.afvbc.net](http://www.afvbc.net)



Here is what some veterans from across the country have to say about the Armed Forces and Veterans Breakfast Clubs they attend across the country...

“

**THE AFVB IS A GREAT PLACE TO MEET UP WITH OTHER EX-MILITARY PERSONNEL (AND THEIR OTHER HALVES) FROM ALL SERVICES. I LOOK FORWARD TO ATTENDING WHEN I CAN BUT THERE IS NO COMMITMENT TO ATTEND EVERY TIME.**

”

“

**I ENJOY GOING TO THE BREAKFAST CLUB AS IT GIVES ME CHANCE TO MEET UP WITH LIKE-MINDED PEOPLE. WE HAVE A LAUGH AND CHAT ALL OVER A GOOD BREAKFAST.**

”

“

**GREAT WAY TO SPEND A MORNING WITH OLD FRIENDS, GOOD FOOD AND REMEMBERING GOOD TIMES. THE BREAKFAST CLUB IS AN EXCELLENT WAY TO BRING US TOGETHER AFTER MANY YEARS.**

”

## 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

**Our aim for this year's annual report was to examine how we can help everyone who lives, works or studies in Barnsley to support and grow our connections with other people. We all have a role to play and as a borough I believe we can be very proud of everything that our communities and volunteers are already doing.**

Personal support networks are so important for our quality of life and wellbeing. Knowing someone you can ask for advice or practical help, being involved in a group or community association and feeling that you can make your views heard and influence local decisions are all indicators of health and happiness (Think Local Act Personal, 2011).

Live Well Barnsley is a place where you can find information about help and support services within the borough. The website contains information and contact details about all types of services and activities that can help you look after yourself, stay independent and get involved in your community, including making connections with other people.

**Barnsley**  
**LiveWell**

[www.livewellbarnsley.co.uk](http://www.livewellbarnsley.co.uk)

### WHAT WE WILL DO

A connected society: a strategy for tackling loneliness recognises that nationally, while we increasingly understand the impact of loneliness; there is less certainty about its drivers and what works to reduce it (HM Government, 2018). We recognise this in Barnsley which is why I have not recommended we set a target to reduce loneliness and social isolation locally; although we must continue to work extremely hard to do so. Instead, using what we do know and proposals within the new Government strategy, I recommend the following:

- That we work with the Government to establish a clearer picture of the prevalence of loneliness through the development of a new national measure that we monitor locally and set a target to reduce.
- Ensure local social prescribing service My Best Life helps residents to connect with community support to restore social contact in their lives.
- That any evaluations from the many projects established to improve our connections with others within Area Councils are shared for future learning and to help build our local knowledge around what works.
- We will develop a local campaign which aims to reduce stigma and raise awareness of the importance of our connections with others, on our physical and mental health and wellbeing, for example it costs nothing to say 'hello'.
- We will work with local employers to develop business champions who can tackle loneliness in the workplace.
- We will consider how tackling loneliness can be embedded in all our strategic plans and decision making through the Health and Wellbeing Board.
- Ensure that the Health and Wellbeing Board is fully sighted on loneliness locally and the steps we need to take to improve our connections.
- Step up our public health support to Area Councils to continue growing community spaces to encourage social connections including chatty cafes and gardens.
- Develop the evidence-base around the impact of different initiatives in tackling loneliness, across all ages and within all communities

In addition to asking for your views on why so many people feel lonely and isolated, we also asked for your ideas on how we can work together to tackle this public health issue. As always, I was overwhelmed by your interest, enthusiasm and ideas for us to take forward as a community. These included:

“  
We need to create space to encourage people to interact.”

“  
We need to work with young people who might spend too much of their time gaming.”

“  
Running activities like family picnics would be good. If everybody brought some food to contribute that would be nice. Perhaps at Locke Park. This would help people to mix, make friends and spend time together. It would help with people's knowledge, understanding and respect.”

# 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

# Town Spirit

Working together for a better Barnsley

## WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- Connect with Live Well Barnsley to find out how you can meet new people and make connections with others.
- Be Happy to Chat - each of us can tackle loneliness by starting a conversation whether with a neighbour or in the supermarket queue. As Jo Cox said, we can all help by “Looking in on a neighbour, visiting an elderly relative, or making that call or visit we’ve been promising to a friend we haven’t seen in a long time.”
- Volunteer; there’s good evidence that volunteering helps both the person who volunteers as well as the people and cause they support.
- Advise; if you or someone you know is experiencing loneliness, take a look at the advice from The Campaign to End Loneliness [www.campaigntoendloneliness.org](http://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org) or log onto [www.livewellbarnsley.co.uk](http://www.livewellbarnsley.co.uk)

**If we work together we can achieve so much more and build a brighter future and a better Barnsley. Through Town Spirit, we have introduced a new way of connecting with our communities, customers and businesses.**

#LiveIt helps us to support the most vulnerable people, making sure they can access support at the earliest possible stage. Own it by keeping your employees’, your own and your family’s health at its best, asking for support when you need it and looking out for your friends and neighbours.

<p><b>Buildit</b></p> <p>Building a better Barnsley</p>	<p><b>Loveit</b></p> <p>Having pride in where you live</p>	<p><b>Achieveit</b></p> <p>Helping you realise your potential</p>	<p><b>Changeit</b></p> <p>Having your say on things that matter</p>
<p><b>Developit</b></p> <p>Helping businesses to thrive</p>	<p><b>Protectit</b></p> <p>Protecting our wonderful borough</p>	<p><b>Liveit</b></p> <p>Looking after yourself and others</p>	<p><b>Imagineit</b></p> <p>Creating a brighter future</p>

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