Community cohesion, social capital, social isolation and social action: summary of the evidence

1.   Introduction

1.1.   The purpose of this document is to summarise evidence such as local data and policy and practice elsewhere which may be of use to the Commission in their discussion of these topics. It is structured around the questions agreed by the Commission for this topic:

General questions	Specific questions for this topic
• What are we aiming for given the levers and influence we have? • What are we already doing well we can build on, and is there anything we should stop or do less of? • What works elsewhere and could it work in Camden too? • What is the role of partners, and how do we create the conditions for effective systems leadership to meet shared challenges?	• Why are community cohesion and social capital important to Camden i.e. what does it achieve? • How would we rate community cohesion and social capital in the borough? • What factors cause community cohesion and social capital? • How best for a local authority to promote community cohesion and social capital in the borough? • What is the impact of social isolation and loneliness, and how can this be reduced? • How can we maximise and mobilise the positive potential of social action, ensuring it is sustainable?

1.2.   There is some overlap between the general and specific questions so we have grouped them accordingly.

1.3.   It draws on the evidence base produced for the Commission's first meeting, and is underpinned by several supporting documents:

- a note of a community and stakeholder meeting on cohesion organised to inform the commission's work,
- a review of what the council currently does to support the community in these areas, and;
- a review of the available local data.

1.4.   The national public policy debate on community cohesion has tended to focus on ethnicity, and more recently immigration and religion, as causes of a lack of cohesion between what are assumed to be largely internally cohesive groups. This paper argues that this approach does not reflect the realities of a socially "super-diverse" place like Camden where the relationship between individuals and communities is more complex - many people have multiple identities and ethnicity and religion do not necessarily define communities. Other dimensions such as housing and income are equally as important to community cohesion.

1.5. The term **community cohesion** came to prominence in public policy in 2001 after riots in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley. It is used largely interchangeably with **social cohesion** in the UK public policy context. Professor Ted Cantle's report outlined the segregation of communities living 'parallel lives'. Since then, the Government has developed and updated a number of working definitions of cohesion. Some of the recurring key principles were:

- People from different backgrounds having similar opportunities

- An awareness of people's rights and responsibilities

- People trusting one another and trusting local institutions to act fairly

- A shared future and sense of belonging

- Valuing what communities have in common, alongside a recognition of the value of diversity

- Strong relationships between people from different backgrounds[1].

1.6. Since 2010 the public policy focus has shifted towards the term **integration**[2]. This culminated in 'The Casey Review: a review into opportunity and integration' Commissioned by the government at the end of 2015 and was published in December 2016. It dominates the current public debate on integration and cohesion in the UK and it cannot be ignored in the current climate. The author, Dame Louise Casey, stated her aim of looking at 'not just about how well we get on with each other but how well we all do compared to each other… what divides communities and gives rise to anxiety, prejudice, alienation and a sense of grievance' and how to 'build more cohesive communities'.

1.7. In the wake of the Casey Review, much of the current public discourse on cohesion and integration is either explicitly or implicitly about race, ethnicity and religion and increasingly immigration. The Casey Review was criticised in some quarters for focusing almost exclusively on ethnicity and religion[3]. Less attention is paid to other potential divisions in society such as social class/income and age, which are arguably just as relevant in Camden. In this context, a wider and more neutral term, **social integration**, appears to be gaining ground and has been adopted by the Mayor of London.

1.8. **Social capital** has been defined as "the collective value of all social networks (who people know), and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other (norms of reciprocity)"[4]. The term was popularised in public policy circles by Robert Putnam's 2000 book, *Bowling Alone*. Putnam identifies "two main components of the concept: *bonding* social capital and *bridging* social capital, the creation of which Putnam credits to Ross Gittell and Avis Vidal. Bonding refers to the value assigned to social networks between

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[1] DCLG guidance 2008,
[2] DCLG, creating the conditions for integration, 2012
[3] See https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/dec/04/social-integration-louise-casey-uk-report-condemns-failings
[4] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_capital

homeneous groups of people and bridging refers to that of social networks between socially heterogeneous groups"[5].

1.9. **Social isolation** is a state of complete or near-complete lack of contact between an individual and society. It differs from **loneliness**, which reflects a temporary lack of contact with other humans[6].

1.10. **Social action** is "about people coming together to help improve their lives and solve the problems that are important in their communities. It can broadly be defined as practical action in the service of others, which is (i) carried out by individuals or groups of people working together, (ii) not mandated and not for profit, (iii) done for the good of others – individuals, communities and/or society, and (iv) bringing about social change and or value"[7]. Social action focuses on means as well as ends or, more accurately, sees the means as an important influence on the ends. It is not just about providing services to people, it is about involving and empowering them, using what they already have and sustaining the impact beyond the period of intervention. This focus is typified in approaches such as asset-based community development and community organising. Needless to say, this is harder to do and evidence than the voluntary sector providing services in a traditional way.

2. **What are we aiming for given the levers and influence we have? What are we already doing well we can build on, and is there anything we should stop or do less of? What is the role of partners, and how do we create the conditions for effective systems leadership to meet shared challenges?**

2.1. This section summarises the key council and partner services that promote cohesion in Camden as set out in the overview paper of levers and activity in Camden. It finds that Camden deploys a wide range of activities and initiatives to foster cohesion in Camden, including a strong focus on resilience building within communities and families.

2.2. In keeping with the Camden Plan aim of *Investing in our communities to ensure sustainable neighbourhoods, k*ey outcomes of the council's cohesion work have been:
   - for Camden to be a place where everyone who lives, visits or works in the borough feels that they belong and can safely participate in local life
   - that the borough is a place where people support one another to increase resilience and improve the quality of community life.

2.3. The priority areas for the council's cohesion work have been identified as to:
   - create opportunities to bring people from different backgrounds together
   - create an environment that encourages and enables people who live work and study in the borough to participate in civic activity and social action

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[5] Ibid.

[6] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_isolation

[7] Cabinet Office. (2015). Social action: Harnessing the potential: A discussion paper

- work with our partners to make sure that people feel safe and part of the wider community
- work with community safety partners to mitigate hate crime
- encourage the reporting of hate crimes.

2.4. In broad terms, the approach of Camden for delivery of community cohesion outcomes has been in a range of ways including mainstream service delivery, targeted interventions, community-led solutions and through engagement activity. This work can be grouped in the following way:

   (1) **Convening.** Bringing together a network of social actors which contribute to social cohesion including work with the faith community and relevant VCS groups;

   (2) **Providing or facilitating congregational space** – sites of interaction/mixing for example events, community festivals and the use of community space through planning process as part of our approach to placeshaping;

   (3) **Preventative services** - in response to early indicators of a breakdown in community cohesion such as the Prevent agenda;

   (4) **Reactive services** - in response to tensions and breakdown in community cohesion such as our work through Community Safety;

   (5) **Wider strategic levers for mixed communities** – housing, education, employment and skills

3. Why are community cohesion and social capital important to Camden i.e. what does it achieve?

3.1. As noted above, the public policy debate, typified by the Casey Review, on community cohesion and integration tends to focus on ethnicity, religion and migration, in particular what ethnic minorities and migrants should do to integrate into "British" life. To some extent this "traditional" view of social cohesion is relevant to Camden. The borough is home to significant Bangladeshi and Somali communities who face many of the social challenges faced by minority ethnic and Muslim communities elsewhere in the UK. The Council has long taken steps to support social cohesion in this sense e.g. organising an inter-faith forum, funding local Bangladeshi and Somali voluntary organisations, participation in the Prevent programme etc.

3.2. However the traditional view does not fully capture the opportunities and challenges relating to social cohesion and social capital in Camden. In common with much of London, Camden is ethnically "super-diverse" [8] with no one minority ethnic group dominating in much of the borough. Our analysis below shows that the social make-up of Camden is complex. Social cleavages around class, income and housing tenure are as important if not more important than ethnicity. Indeed the stakeholder meeting on community cohesion identified housing as the greatest challenge to community cohesion in the borough, particularly the lack of affordable housing and the private rented sector where

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[8] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Superdiversity

population churn, spatial segregation from other tenures and a lack of access to community spaces works against community cohesion.

3.3. The relationship between population churn and social cohesion is important to Camden. Migration, both domestic and international, to and from Camden largely consists of students and young professionals so poses different challenges to other areas experiencing high migration which are largely typified by inflows of low-skilled workers from Eastern Europe. Alongside these migrants, there are nevertheless many long term residents of the borough, typically in social housing and owner occupiers, who may have strong social networks. Age and tenure are closely related as long term residents tend to be older. To some extent this is inevitable and almost axiomatic, but it is also related to tenure in that buying a house or securing a council tenancy was much easier to do in Camden in the past. However the RSA's Connected Communities report shows that older people tend to be at one or other extreme in terms of social capital – either well-connected in their local community or at the other extreme, very isolated[9]. The social isolation of older people will be a growing challenge for the borough as Camden's population ages over the coming years.

3.4. So what does this mean for social cohesion and social capital in Camden? Its super diversity means the insider/outsider assumptions that underpin much integration discourse do not reflect the social fabric of Camden where almost everyone is an "outsider" to some degree. In Camden social cohesion should be something that everyone can contribute to and benefit from, regardless of their income, age, tenure, ethnicity, religion, disability or sexuality. This could be described as a "universalist" view of social cohesion and social capital.

3.5. The Mayor of London has identified "social integration" as a priority for his administration and has appointed Matthew Ryder as his Deputy Mayor in this area. The Mayor's definition of social integration describes the Camden context well:

> Promoting social integration means ensuring that people of different faiths, ethnicities, social backgrounds and generations don't just tolerate one another or live side-by-side, but actually meet and mix with one another and forge relationships as friends and neighbours, as well as citizens. We know that when this happens, trust grows, communities flourish and become more productive, healthier and, ultimately, more prosperous for everyone[10].

3.6. As well as reinforcing the universal nature of social integration, this strongly implies that "bridging" social capital is what government should be seeking to promote rather than "bonding" social capital. Indeed the literature identifies bonding social capital as potentially harmful both to people within that social group e.g. restrictive of their freedom and to society more generally e.g. it can be exclusionary[11]. It is a constant dilemma for voluntary and community organisations (and their funders such as local authorities) to get the balance

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[9] https://www.thersa.org/action-and-research/rsa-projects/public-services-and-communities-folder/connected-communities-social-inclusion-and-mental-wellbeing p. 46
[10] https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/holds-social-integration-conference
[11] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_capital#Evaluation

right between inclusion and exclusion. Organisations like ethnic-based community groups or local residents' associations can easily be dominated by individuals who are not necessarily fully representative of the community they claim to represent. Camden does seek to promote bridging social capital but does also support groups which promote bonding social capital. While this is undoubtedly sometimes the right thing to do, particularly for disadvantaged groups, it could be argued that on occasions these groups have been exclusionary, albeit often inadvertently. The stakeholder meeting recognised the importance of building bridges between what was generally recognised as a strong infrastructure of voluntary sector, charities and faith groups.

3.7. Why should local authorities care about social cohesion and social capital given it is so difficult to measure and so difficult to influence? Ultimately social cohesion and social capital make an important contribution to what all residents want: well-being, quality of life or, in lay terms, happiness. Well-being has increasingly been a focus of public policy since Richard Layard's seminal book on the subject[12]. The RSA's report *Community Capital: the value of connected communities* provides evidence of the importance of feeling part of a community to subjective well-being – "relationships are the key to well-being – more so than social status or life circumstances"[13]. This is supported by a recent report by the Social Market Foundation which recommends that public policy should seek to "foster and cultivate strong, positive social networks provide channels that spread well-being"[14]. So if local authorities want to make a difference to people's well-being, then promoting social networks is something they should seek to do.

3.8. Alongside the benefits of social cohesion and social capital for well-being, they can also have preventative benefits. Approaches like asset-based community development and community organising can mobilise the community to act in a way which prevents the need for resource-intensive public services – the RSA's Connected Communities report describes how this worked in a deprived community in Littlehampton with focus on promoting healthy lifestyles[15]. This is a very different approach to how the "Big Society" agenda was interpreted by some namely harnessing social capital to allow disinvestment in some public services. While this may be justified in some cases and Camden has for example transferred libraries to the community, the preventative benefits of fostering social capital take longer to develop but potentially are much more beneficial for well-being.

4. How would we rate community cohesion, social capital, social isolation and social action in the borough?

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[12] https://www.penguin.co.uk/books/54928/happiness/
[13] https://www.thersa.org/globalassets/pdfs/reports/rsaj3718-connected-communities-report_web.pdf
[14] http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/economics/research/centres/cage/manage/news/cage_report_understanding_happiness.pdf
[15] https://www.thersa.org/action-and-research/rsa-projects/public-services-and-communities-folder/connected-communities-social-inclusion-and-mental-wellbeing pp 33-34

4.1. This section sets out of the key findings of the community cohesion data review accompanying this document.

- **Social capital and trust** Camden resident's surveys have been measuring social capital in terms of 'people of different backgrounds getting on well together' and a high proportion of respondents in Camden (86%) agreed this is true – and would tend to support that Camden is strongly cohesive.

- **Well-being** Well-being as measured by an ONS sample survey suggests that people in Camden are less 'satisfied with life', are less satisfied that 'life is worthwhile' and that they are less 'happy' than the national average, and slightly less than the London figure. It also points to higher levels of anxiety in Camden.

- **Social isolation** Census data points to sections of Camden's population that make them vulnerable to isolation, including the overall high proportion of people who live alone, and the high proportion of those who live alone and are aged 65 and over. A further analysis of census data by the charity Age UK finds in their *Risk of Loneliness* index that some areas of Camden have higher risk than others and produced a heat map to identify these locations which coincide with the more deprived parts of the borough including St Pancras and Somers Town and Kilburn wards.

- **Segregation** Camden is not segregated in a traditional sense, though some forms of segregation can be discerned from census data. By tenure, there are high concentrations Bangladeshi and Black African households in social housing compared to the general population. Other aspects include language, where Bangladeshi women stand out as having a higher proportion with poor English language skills and high levels of economic inactivity.

- **Participation** Social cohesion is synonymous with community participation. Measurement of participation might include, for example, levels of people volunteering which has shown to be increasing in Camden over the precious few years. Turnout in elections too shows that people are active, as does the breadth of community events undertaken across the borough.

- **Hate Crime** Despite an upsurge in reported racial and religious hate crime in the borough after the EU referendum in 2016, crime levels have now fallen back to normal levels, though they have never been a particular problem in the borough. However, two-fifths of respondents in Camden's most recent resident's survey were concerned that Brexit would negatively affect social cohesion.

- **Migration impacts** Despite Camden's very high population churn (the annual flows of in- and out- migration) some larger sections of the population are very settled, including some quarter of households in council accommodation with long average tenancies. A further large group of the population are university students – despite being a sizeable portion of the annual migration flows, these student groups makes a pretty stable section of the population, ever-present, ever-youthful and with approximately half being from overseas. These factors contribute to a diverse population.

- **Deprivation** Camden has a limited number of areas which display high levels of deprivation and although in general deprivation in Camden has lessened over time, some areas have become more deprived. Although there is data to display deprivation in various forms, there is a lack of

agreement amongst academics as to the relationship between higher levels of deprivation and weaker social cohesion.

- **Social action** 322 charitable organisations operate in Camden with an income in excess of £229m (includes £23.1m from Council commissioning) provide a wide range universal services and ones specifically targeted at particular client groups.

5. What factors cause community cohesion and social capital?

5.1. It is important to note that while these factors correlate in research with community cohesion, they do not determine it. Approaches like asset-based community development stress that even deprived and fragmented communities have strengths which can be built on. Indeed anecdotally in Camden, even the wealthiest areas of the borough can lack social cohesion if residents are too busy to participate in community activities or are frequently absent from the area. As noted elsewhere, the literature on community and social cohesion is very focused on ethnicity, religion and migration. With these caveats in mind, this section summarises evidence on the factors which are associated positively and negatively with community cohesion and social capital.

5.2. Positive factors

- According to the State of the English Cities reports published in the wake of the 2001 riots, there are five dimensions of social cohesion:
    - **Material conditions** – employment, income, health, education and housing
    - **Social order** and community safety or so-called "passive social relationships"
    - **Active relationships** – positive interactions, exchanges and networks between individuals and communities
    - Social integration into the mainstream institutions of **civil society**
    - **Social equality**[16]
- Academic research suggests that **direct contact and interaction** can reduce prejudice and intolerance[17].
- Among young people, **increased socio-economic mix** at schools has a positive influence on cohesion[18].
- Laurence and Heath found that **having friends from different backgrounds**, **ethnic diversity** (although note an exception below) and **community empowerment** were all positive predictors of perceptions of social cohesion[19].
- Although there has been a lot of political discussion about intergenerational tensions mainly resulting from access to the housing market, there is little evidence of this in opinion polling data[20].

[16] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Group_cohesiveness#Public_policy
[17] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community_cohesion
[18] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/181542/DFE-RR033.pdf
[19] Ibid.
[20] https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmworpen/59/5908.htm

5.3. Negative factors

- Evidence from the US suggests that increased diversity undermines social cohesion. On the other hand, evidence from Europe and the UK is more mixed – **income inequality** and **deprivation** may be more important determinants rather than diversity per se[21]. This was a particular finding of Laurence and Heath's work on social cohesion which found **disadvantage** was the biggest single negative predictor of social cohesion[22].
- According to researchers at the University of Manchester "high concentrations of minorities alone do not appear to be problematic for social cohesion between groups, but where this is accompanied by **segregation**, the research found higher levels of prejudice, greater perceived threat and fewer inter-ethnic friendships"[23]
- **Ethnic concentration** "reduces opportunities for 'bridging' social ties between minorities and the White British majority, which may also limit job opportunities – although segregated communities might benefit from bonding social ties which provide support and protection from psychological difficulties"[24]. Laurence and Heath found that while ethnic diversity is generally a positive predictor of social cohesion "living in an area with both a large White and a large Pakistani & Bangladeshi population (but no other significant minority ethnic population) was reported to be a negative predictor of cohesion"[25].
- **Diversity does not necessarily result in social integration** – "whilst London is more diverse than the rest of the country and Londoners are more likely to meet people who are different from them compared to people outside the capital, Londoners' friendship groups are in fact the least likely to properly reflect the age, income and ethnic mix of the community they live in"[26].
- "A **lack of social mixing** was felt to be a key barrier to getting on with people from different backgrounds, with 1 in 4 people who disagreed that they lived in a cohesive area citing lack of social contact and mixing as the reason"[27]
- Laurence and Heath found **crime** was another strong negative predictor of community cohesion[28].

6. What works elsewhere and could it work in Camden too?

6.1. This section has been split into three sections – community cohesion & social capital, social isolation & loneliness and social action – in line with the Commission's specific questions for this theme. It brings together

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[21] http://www.migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/briefings/immigration-diversity-and-social-cohesion/

[22] See https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/181542/DFE-RR033.pdf p. 14

[23] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/575973/The_Casey_Review_Report.pdf p. 55

[24] Ibid.

[25] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/181542/DFE-RR033.pdf p. 15

[26] http://socialintegrationcommission.org.uk/images/sic_kingdomunited.pdf

[27] Citizenship Survey for 2010-11 cited by Casey

[28] See https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/181542/DFE-RR033.pdf p. 14

recommendations from a range of sources from think tank reports to the local stakeholder meeting on cohesion.

a) How best for a local authority to promote community cohesion and social capital in the borough?

6.2. The recommendations of the recent **Social Integration Commission** chaired by Matthew Taylor include:

- Schools should reflect economic and ethnic diversity of their communities
- School and college buildings should be places where the community comes together
- Planning authorities should develop and preserve neighbourhoods which are not only diverse, but are organised to enable residents from different backgrounds to mix with one another
- People living in diverse areas should be encouraged to get to know their neighbours e.g. through play street schemes, street parties and "sharing economy" initiatives
- Public services should be designed and managed so as to bring together different groups of people e.g. co-locating services
- We should draw on the experience of parenthood to build understanding between people from different backgrounds e.g. through ante-natal programmes
- Retired people should be supported to invest their time and the benefits of their life experience in their communities[29]

6.3. The RSA's **Connected Communities** report found:

- A lack of diversity in networks can be damaging although shared identity or shared purpose are essential to successful community formation.
- There can be disadvantages to communities when certain people or assets are too central.
- Experimentation gets results – working with and through networks can be unpredictable and outcomes can be difficult to define in advance but there is value in creating networks per se rather than having a preconceived model of service to be imposed on a local area.
- Bringing different groups into contact with each other creates effective social networks i.e. promoting bridging social capital between bonded groups, as demonstrated in the project in Tipton.

6.4. The **local stakeholder meeting** identified the following opportunities:

- Building bridges between existing groups
- Skills sharing between well-off members of the community and those who are less well-off
- A council officer as a key contact for communities
- The importance of face-to-face contact in fostering community cohesion
- The need to protect and build social housing in the borough
- Expand Camden Living as a provider of intermediate housing

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[29] http://socialintegrationcommission.org.uk/images/sic_kingdomunited.pdf

6.5. The **Casey Review**, as noted above is very focused on the integration of immigrants and addressing segregation of minority ethnic groups, and its recommendations[30] are not always relevant to Camden. This is either because they do not necessarily address the reality of social cohesion in Camden or because they have already been implemented locally e.g. lack of ESOL provision is not an issue locally and we already have a programme to support BAME women into employment. It recommends collecting good practice on integration particularly on the role of housing, but this is not yet available.

6.6. Although now rather old, it may well still be worth looking at research commissioned by the **Commission on Integration and Cohesion** in the mid-2000s which found the following:
   - initiatives that encourage interaction (between young people) can have a significant impact upon cohesion
   - the development of a network of participants who have links within and between different communities within a neighbourhood
   - providing economic opportunities to support marginalised groups[31]

6.7. **ippr** recently carried out research on integration of isolated minorities in Bedford. It identifies "weak ties" as important to integration because "a weak tie between two people of different social or ethnic groups is not a trivial relationship but a link between two close-knit groups of different types of people"[32]. While the report recognises the benefits of a commissioning model as a way of local authorities funding the VCS, it notes that this approach also "reduces the opportunities for those organisations that provide the kind of one-off, or less programmatic, community work that helps build the necessary weak ties among people from different backgrounds and helps foster links through shared activities at the local level"[33].

6.8. "Social integration in Bedford has also been facilitated because many public service providers have made small, strategic and judicious adaptations aimed at easing the integration of hard-to-reach groups". Examples given include changing how parents' evenings at schools operate, inter-faith group and women-only swimming lessons. The latter was controversial but justified as follows "providing a bit of segregation won't make [these women] any more segregated', but not providing it would mean that they would just stay at home"[34].

7. What is the impact of social isolation and loneliness, and how can this be reduced?

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[30] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/575973/The_Casey_Review_Report.pdf pp 167-170

[31] http://www.tedcantle.co.uk/publications/025%20What%20works%20in%20community%20cohesion%20Commission%20on%20Integrati.pdf

[32] http://www.ippr.org/files/publications/pdf/come-together-lessons-from-Bedford_Feb2017.pdf?noredirect=1 p. 20

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid.

7.1. Social isolation and loneliness are viewed as separate and distinct concepts that can occur in tandem or separately. Someone can be socially isolated and not feel lonely; likewise, they may feel lonely regardless of how socially connected they are.

7.2. There is a broad range of evidence that demonstrate the impact of social isolation and loneliness on physical and mental health and wellbeing. This includes research that suggests that loneliness increases the likelihood of mortality by 26% [35] and a 64% increased chance of developing clinical dementia.[36]

7.3. The stakeholder meeting on Community Cohesion in Camden highlighted social isolation as one of the main challenges facing the borough with regards to community cohesion (2nd only to housing). Age UK's loneliness index found higher 'risk of loneliness' concentrations in areas of Kilburn, Camden Town, Haverstock, St Pancras and Somers Town, King's Cross and Regent's Park wards. These areas are also the most deprived areas in the borough.

7.4. In 2017 *The Cost of Loneliness to UK Employers* report was jointly launched by the Co-op and New Economic Foundation (in conjunction with the Jo Cox National Commission on Loneliness). It puts the cost of loneliness to employers at £2.5bn a year.[37] The report combined a number of factors including employee health outcomes impacted by loneliness, the cost of employees caring for people with loneliness, the impact on productivity and turnover in staff.

7.5. Loneliness is predominantly viewed through the lens of the older population but there is growing evidence that of the 18% of people who feel lonely often or all the time it is the younger generation who are more likely to feel chronic loneliness with 32% reporting they felt lonely often or all the time.[38] The reasons for this trend are not fully understood but there are hypotheses that the increased use of social media may be increasing the loneliness and isolation of young people. This view was supported by discussions at the Community Cohesion stakeholder event where it was felt that communications technology were having an impact and that "people's identities are becoming more 'global' and as a consequence de-localised.

7.6. A report from Relate found other groups who were more likely to feel lonely. Respondents who identified as lesbian, gay, bisexual or other sexualities were more likely to feel lonely and people with a disability or a long-term condition are twice as likely to report feeling lonely often or all the time (30% compared to 15%). These finding were reflected in discussions at the Community Cohesion

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[35] Holt-Lunstead, *Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality: A Meta-Analytic Review*, 2015 http://www.ahsw.org.uk/userfiles/Research/Perspectives%20on%20Psychological%20Science-2015-Holt-Lunstad-227-37.pdf

[36] Feelings of loneliness, but not social isolation, predict dementia onset: results from the Amsterdam Study of the Elderly (AMSTEL) http://jnnp.bmj.com/content/early/2012/11/06/jnnp-2012-302755

[37] The cost of loneliness to UK employers http://neweconomics.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/NEF_COST-OF-LONELINESS_DIGITAL-Final.pdf

[38] Relate *The Wat We Are Now,* 2017 https://www.relate.org.uk/sites/default/files/the_way_we_are_now_-_youre_not_alone.pdf

stakeholder event where there were concerns raised around elderly people lacking face-to-face interaction but also teenagers and young professionals in the private rented market.

7.7. It should be noted that data on loneliness is not that consistent, with the Cabinet Office's Community Life Survey putting the percentage of the population reporting they felt lonely often or all the time at 4.1%.[39]

7.8. The following are examples of initiatives elsewhere in the country and abroad which are designed to help reduce social isolation, either primarily or alongside other policy objectives. However it should be noted that measuring the impact of such initiatives on social isolation is not straightforward partly because it is so hard to measure, particularly with smaller projects.

7.9. The Nana Café in Clapton helped to re-engage older people on the cusp of social isolation back into the community and provide a welcoming environment for younger women with babies or young children but was closed following a disagreement with a preservation trust and the council[40].

7.10. In Camden the Age Concern project Men in Sheds is an attempt to reduce loneliness, specifically in men. Age Concern started the Camden Town Shed in 2011. The aim of this project was to 'reduce social isolation and provide an opportunity for older men to contribute to wider society'. The activities are targeted at men and although its aim is to address isolation and loneliness, it also acts as a gateway into other activities. This approach has been evidenced to improve older men's physical and mental health, and social and emotional wellbeing[41].

7.11. In High Barnet a group of women over fifty have created their own community in a purpose built block of flat as an alternative to living along. Inspired by similar projects in the Netherlands, Older Women's Co-housing (OWCH) was formed in 1998 and residents began moving in last year.[42] This approach is to housing is gaining traction in the UK as a way of maintaining a sense of community and reducing social isolation.

7.12. Homeshare and Shared Lives are approaches to shared housing that are increasingly being seen as a way of reducing pressure on housing and reducing social isolation and loneliness and improving outcomes for those involved.

7.13. Although these approaches have received a lot of recent media attention they have been established for a number of years both in the UK and other countries including the USA, Germany, Spain and Australia. The principle of Homeshare is that it enables "two unrelated people to share their lives for their mutual

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[39] Relate *The Way We Are Now,* 2017 https://www.relate.org.uk/sites/default/files/the_way_we_are_now_-_youre_not_alone.pdf
[40] The Guardian, *Nana cafe embraces the talents of grandmothers* (22 Jan 2014) https://www.theguardian.com/society/2014/jan/22/nana-cafe-embraces-talents-grandmothers
[41] Men's Sheds and other gendered interventions for older men: improving health and wellbeing through social activity http://sphr.nihr.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/SPHR-LIL-PH1-MIS-Age-UK-brief-report-FINAL.pdf
[42] Older Women's Co-housing (OWCH) http://www.owch.org.uk/

benefit. A homesharer provides support and companionship to a householder *in exchange* for free or low-cost accommodation. Homeshare is a flexible solution that can benefit many people with support or housing needs."[43]

7.14. Shared Lives provides the opportunity for family-based and small scale ways of supporting adults. This can involve Shared Lives carers open up their homes and family life to include an adult with support needs.[44] Although this approach is used across the country it has often lacked the level or support of profile to support the growth of the programme.

7.15. Developments in the provision of residential care also offer an opportunity to reduce social isolation for both the older and younger generation. An example that has been well publicised in recent years is the Humanitis retirement home in Deventer, the Netherlands. They allows university students to live rent free in return for spending at least 30 hours a month acting as 'good neighbours'.[45] Many older people suffer social isolation because of a lack of family and friends who live locally.[46]

7.16. Given the challenges around housing in the borough and the importance of housing to social cohesion identified by the stakeholder meeting, co-housing initiatives would seem particularly relevant to Camden.

7.17. Volunteering has been proved to have positive association with improvements in depression, quality of life, life satisfaction and social isolation. This is especially the case when people feel their activities are appreciated. Time banks and neighbourhood care schemes have been shown to mitigate loneliness, improve emotional well-being and supporting older volunteers to maintain their health and independence.[47]

7.18. Befriending schemes can offer lonely and isolated older people companionship and emotional support. Many of these traditional schemes are face-to-face programmes such as Oxfordshire Befriending at End of Life (OxBEL).[48] OxBEL is run by Age UK Oxfordshire and has 60 volunteers who provide one-to-one befirednings of adults of all ages.

7.19. Community Navigators are also an idea that is gaining growing support across the UK. They are usually volunteers and act as an interface between the community and public services and help individuals to find appropriate means of support. They offer home-based visits to discuss concerns with older people and help them to look for services or community provision that can provide support. People who have used Community Navigators have become less

[43] Homeshare International website http://homeshare.org/
[44] Shared Lives Plus http://sharedlivesplus.org.uk/
[45] Humanitis http://www.humanitasdeventer.nl/
[46] Community Care *Thousands of care home residents face social isolation* http://www.communitycare.co.uk/2010/11/10/thousands-of-care-home-residents-face-social-isolation/
[47] Centre for Ageing Better *The benefits of making a contribution to your community in later life* https://16881-presscdn-0-15-pagely.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/Evidence-Review-Community-Contributions.pdf
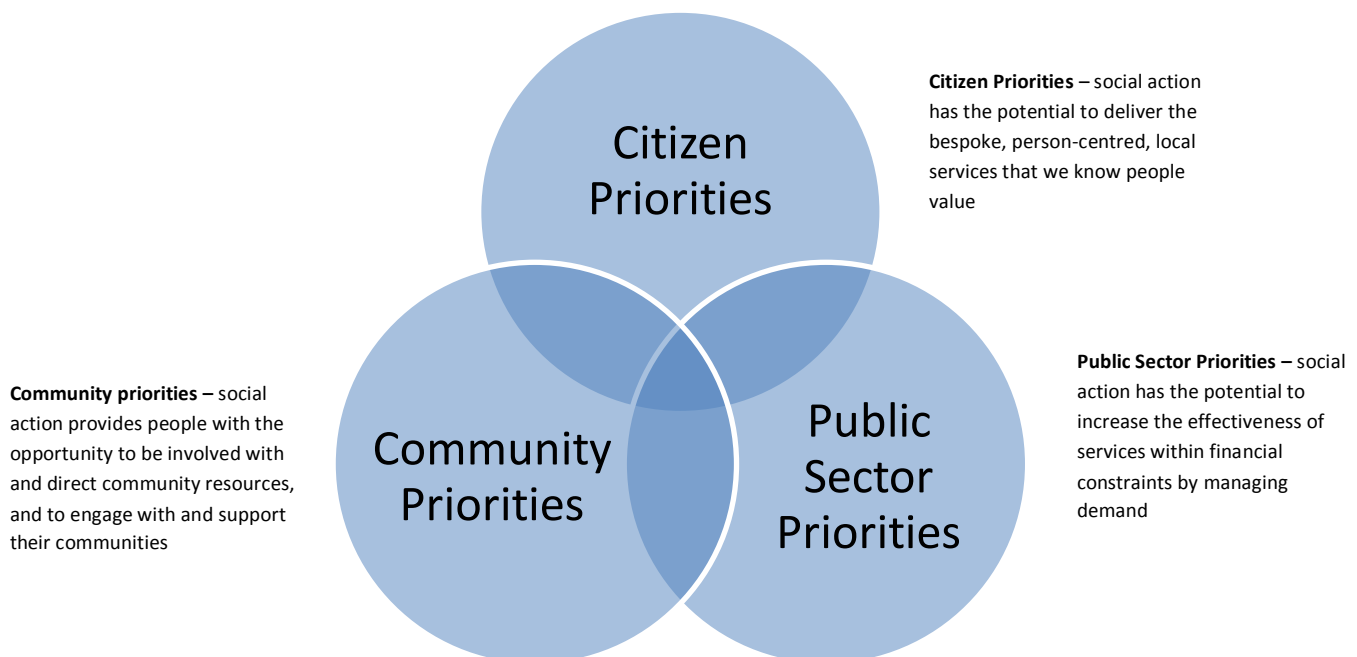[48] SCIE, *At a glance 60: Preventing loneliness and social isolation among older people* http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/ataglance/ataglance60.asp

lonely and socially isolated.[49] Camden had a range of provision and community support for older people but in an increasingly digital environment it is vital that awareness of these services is made available to those who need it most.

8.   How can we maximise and mobilise the positive potential of social action, ensuring it is sustainable?

8.1.   Social action is defined as "about people coming together to help improve their lives and solve important problems in their communities". Social action can occur at a number of scales and with varying levels of regulation and formal support. Social action encompasses a range of individual and community activity from individual formal volunteering programmes (such as individuals acting as volunteer advisors at their local Citizens Advice Bureau, which requires training and accreditation but which is not a paid activity) to befriending activity which can be an informal and ad hoc activity between neighbours.

8.2.   Developing and sustaining social action is a local and national priority. The Government identifies a nexus point at the centre of citizen priorities, community priorities and public sector priorities in which the positive potential of individual and community social action can have the most impact across the shared outcomes of all stakeholders[50].

Citizen Priorities – social action has the potential to deliver the bespoke, person-centred, local services that we know people value

Community priorities – social action provides people with the opportunity to be involved with and direct community resources, and to engage with and support their communities

Citizen Priorities

Community Priorities

Public Sector Priorities

Public Sector Priorities – social action has the potential to increase the effectiveness of services within financial constraints by managing demand

8.3.   Social action is a potential solution to the triple challenge in the public sector – increasing the effectiveness of services and managing demand within increasing financial constraints. This is why the positive potential of social action is seen as delivering decentralised, citizen directed and person-centred services, which lend themselves to preventative and early intervention activity.

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[49] ibid
[50] https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/591804/Creating_the_conditions_for_social_action.pdf

This helps to manages the demand for high-need and complex services and also encourages individual and community self-management.

8.4. A "wider determinants" approach to maintaining health and wellbeing across a population requires local government to consider and engage with a number of areas of public and community life that would normally be regarded as outside the remit of responsibility for a statutory body, for example - relationships and social networks, community cohesion and belonging. These issues have a significant impact on people's mental and physical wellbeing and as such are of interest to local government. Incentivising social action allows local government to prioritise and enable action in these areas, whilst maintaining a distinction between the citizen and the state that is in turn useful in maintaining personal and community responsibility. This is the "double benefit" of social action that occurs both across individuals and communities (also see Case Study 4 – Groundswell):

> "[there are] benefits to individuals taking part through their new skills and personal wellbeing, and to society by benefitting a cause, community or social problem, such as loneliness in old age, social care, educational underachievement, youth unemployment and social cohesion"[51].

8.5. The RSA argue that the development of support for social action within communities generates "community capital" that pays multiple dividends across multiple groups:

- **The wellbeing dividend** – social relationships and feeling part of a community are essential to subjective wellbeing and life satisfaction.

- **The citizenship dividend** – there is a latent power within communities that lies in the potential of relationships between people – in "active citizenry" – and in activating people's sense of personal empowerment there is higher levels of civic participation and individual and collective agency.

- **The capacity dividend** – concentrating resources on networks and relationships rather than on individuals as a "troubled end-user" can have positive community ripple effects, whilst also increasing the impact of activity.

- **The economic dividend** – the economic impact of social relationship-based interventions have notional savings to public finances, as well as wider contributions to the economy[52].

8.6. Nesta argue that local government and public services are not currently oriented around mobilising people to help each other[53]. They argue that alongside supporting and incentivising social action outside of community activity, the public sector should make individual voluntary contributions a regular part of the delivery of public sector services, and set up the structures needed to maintain and manage this (see Case Study 1 – King's College).

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[51] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/enabling-social-action-guidance

[52] https://www.thersa.org/discover/publications-and-articles/reports/community-capital-the-value-of-connected-communities

[53] http://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/people_helping_people_the_future_of_public_services_wv.pdf

8.7. Local government and social action can be argued to have a symbiotic relationship, with both representing an expression of local identity and priorities. However local government's statutory and fiscal role and responsibilities restrict its ability to be a truly community-driven organisation at all levels. Social action can be highly flexible and responsive to community need, but can benefit from the strategic investment, rigor and endorsement of local government to develop impactful, scalable and engaging services.

8.8. Camden has incorporated incentivising social action into a number of its strategic priorities. The Adult Social Care Transformation explicitly takes an asset-based approach, seeking to:

> "… start with the positive resources and skills found in individuals and communities, rather than with needs, deficits or problems"[54].

8.9. The Council has also sought to develop resiliency and peer-to-peer support within the voluntary and community sector as part of its Strategic Partners investment funding programme. By prioritising these approaches within the Council's policies, the Council is seeking to increase the scale and impact of social action within Camden. The Government[55] identify three approaches to supporting the development of social action to have meaningful impact on outcomes for residents:

- **Joining up local activities -** local government is capable of channelling and organising community energy and social action toward a set of outcomes. This does not increase the scale of any one social activity, but by coordinating social action can increase overall impact (see Case Study 3 – Kirklees).

- **Replicating a good idea -** local government can review and audit social action approaches to identify where they having a significant impact on outcomes, with a view to replicating effective models across different issues or sectors, or supporting a "franchise" model to increase the scale of social action whilst retaining flexibility and reducing risk (see Case Study 2 – Casserole Club).

- **Supporting a movement -** local government can use its "megaphone" to identify particular issues around which to galvanise community energy and stimulate activity, collaboration and innovation. By endorsing a diversity of approaches to tackle a single issue (e.g. dementia) local government can both take a trial-and-error approach to identifying what works, but also stimulate action through individual creativity.

8.10. The Third Sector Research Centre identified that the key galvanising element for social action is not the availability of support or resource but individual emotion – individuals must feel compelled to act either to address a challenge or to make best use of an opportunity. Local government is in a unique position to intelligence gather, arbitrate and respond to a range of community priorities, and to develop tools and resources to leverage this emotion into effective and

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[54] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/enabling-social-action-guidance
[55] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/enabling-social-action-guidance

sustained action. The Third Sector Research centre highlighted the importance of early and flexible provision of networking opportunities, physical space and seed funding in converting community emotion into social action.

8.11. Local government also has a strategic and important "megaphone" within communities that can lend important credibility to social action. In a system which is seeking to reduce inefficiencies and duplication, there is a key role for mapping the networks of provision, both public sector and community. Local government has identified the need for effective information gathering and sharing and signposting in its prioritisation of the "make every contact count" and "single front door" approaches. The aim within these programmes is to support front-line staff across the public sector to divert demand away from public services where they could be more effectively addressed by community provision. This approach has the two-fold beneficial outcome of reducing demand for the public sector, whilst also revealing demand for community support and incentivising activity.

8.12. Local government can support the sustainability of social action by co-developing with communities:

- A set of tools and resources for helping individuals and communities to respond to local priorities with social action;

- A shared set of criteria for what social action local government will seek to incentivise and support;

- A shared set of criteria for identifying what success looks like for social action, and what criteria exist for scalable models;

- Developing an approach to commissioning services that supports and does not financially penalise engagement by individual or consortia of community and voluntary organisations;

- An identified pathway and approach to supporting the development and social action groups to becoming more formalised and impactful organisations.

8.13. Local government is seeking through incentivising social action to avoid dependency on the public sector by individuals. In supporting individuals and communities to respond to this need through social action, local government should seek to avoid creating dependency and responsiveness to local government priorities in the sector. Local government can do this through channelling funding and support to the achievement of outcomes rather than the delivery of actions, as this supports innovation and diversification.

8.14. The following case studies are examples of how social action can help to enhance public services or reduce the need for them. The Kirklees case study is a good example of where there has been a focus on demonstrating impact on outcomes.

Case Study 1 - King's College Hospital Volunteers[56]

Volunteers at King's College Hospital are able to provide the "relational" elements of healthcare that specialists do not have the time (and it would not be effective for them) to do. This includes helping people move about buildings, sitting with patients whilst they are waiting for surgery, playing with children on inpatient wards and generally providing short moments of respite for parents and carers. The volunteers can also help gather important personal information and feedback about services, as patients have sometimes been reluctant to speak to health professionals.

Case Study 2 – Casserole Club[57]

Casserole Club is a local volunteer scheme supported by a web platform that helps people cook and share an extra portion of home-cooked food with others in their neighbourhood who might not be able to cook for themselves or who might be socially isolated. The platform "matches" volunteers with people in their area, and conducts background checks.

Case Study 3– Kirklees Community Partnerships[58]

Focusing on activities which support older and disabled people to maintain their wellbeing and independence, the community partnerships team has succeeded in linking small-scale social action initiatives into a system that enables them to have significant impact on local outcomes. Each year it provides small to medium grants to around 130 social action projects which help people stay healthy in the community. Around half of the projects are user led and have no paid members of staff. The investment totalled £1.5m in 2015/16 and was co-funded by the Council and two CCGs. The Council's partnerships team provide in kind development and administrative support.

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[56] http://www.nesta.org.uk/sites/default/files/people_helping_people_the_future_of_public_services_wv.pdf
[57] http://www.designcouncil.org.uk/resources/case-study/casserole
[58] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/enabling-social-action-guidance

Case Study 4 - Groundswell Homeless Health Peer Advocacy

Groundswell currently operates in Camden to provide peer support to people experiencing homelessness. The service engages people who have previously experienced homelessness who have successfully exited the Council's Adults Pathway to enter Council or supported private sector rented housing. These individuals are trained and volunteer to help people currently experiencing homelessness to understand their health diagnoses, their treatment programmes and to develop and to commit to personal goals as part of a wider care plan. The programme has had significant success, both in facilitating engagement with preventative and care services within a cohort that often has distrust of public sector services. The programme has also had significant success with supporting their peer volunteers to utilise their experiences to enter paid employment. Of the 52 peer advocates recruited (across seven London Boroughs) 21 have entered paid employment, with many of these seeking to enter the health profession and undertaking nursing training.

8.15. To conclude this section, there is clearly a case for local government to promote social action but the council needs to understand the impact of it compared to other types of intervention which could inform outcome-based decisions about priorities for investment.