

Jenrick calls for community togetherness to combat loneliness

The government has announced a £7.5 million funding package to help tackle loneliness over the winter period, supporting sectors that are well known for bringing people and communities together such as the arts, libraries, charities and radio.

With millions of people now under the new Tier 4 COVID-19 restrictions due to the spread of a new variant, Communities Secretary Robert Jenrick has thanked those who are continuing to spread festive cheer and tackling loneliness, while urging us all to look out for our neighbours.

Two schemes have been highlighted as going that extra mile:

- Poole Housing Partnership which established a call service for older and vulnerable residents to enjoy regular chats with friendly volunteers.
- Your Homes Newcastle was also praised for delivering homemade Christmas meals to their older residents to spread the festive cheer.

These are just two examples of vital work by housing associations to tackle the social effects of COVID-19 across England since the government launched its 'Charter for Social Housing Residents' last month.

These landmark reforms will improve the lives of residents by giving them a much greater voice and more power to hold landlords to account, and help them to establish strong networks to combat social isolation and loneliness.

Communities Secretary Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP said:

None of us have never known a Christmas like this. While we may have had smaller and quieter Christmases than normal, for some people this Christmas will have been especially hard – and very lonely. That's why I'm encouraging people to find other ways to reach out virtually and help combat loneliness – by picking up the phone or writing a letter, for example.

Let's all do what we can to connect with our older neighbours – in a Covid-secure way – so they feel less alone and know how valuable they are to their communities at this difficult time.

The charity Age UK estimates that there are approximately 1.4 million chronically lonely older people in England.

The government has been working to tackle loneliness during the pandemic. Over £24 million of the £750 million charity funding package has gone directly towards reducing loneliness, and a further £45 million to organisations supporting people with their mental health.

In June the government relaunched its long-running campaign, Let's Talk Loneliness. If you're lonely or looking to help others, there is lots of helpful advice and support on the [Let's Talk Loneliness website](#).

The government has also announced it will launch a new campaign to highlight the Charter for Social Housing Residents in February 2021. The campaign will highlight what the changes will mean for residents and how they can access support.

Poole Housing Partnership

Poole Housing Partnership (PHP) has been working to support their residents through the pandemic.

They put in place a call service in which vulnerable residents received regular phone calls to check in on their wellbeing and signpost them to supporting agencies such as the council volunteer service or onto the NHS.

One resident named Chris asked whether they could call other people rather than just receiving a call from PHP. Other residents agreed it was a great idea and that it would hopefully lead to new friendships. PHP now has 25 befrienders who each call between 5 to 10 people a week, and the numbers keep growing.

PHP has a long-standing relationship with Fareshare which operates out of 13 PHP hubs across Poole. Run by residents for residents, Fareshare ran a café service that had to close last March due to social distancing requirements.

With support from PHP to source equipment, the Fareshare service transformed itself into a food delivery service and has been creating food parcels and meals for over 150 households each week. PHP residents cook the food and PHP staff and other residents deliver it to those who normally attended the café service or to those we had been identified on the calls as in need.

This has gone some way to tackling loneliness with residents increasingly involved in leading or supporting the food services.

Your Homes Newcastle

Food Nation, a food charity based in Newcastle, applied to YHN's Community Investment Fund to deliver group cooking sessions to help bring people together who were socially isolated so they could spend time in company and develop new skills.

The pandemic meant that couldn't go ahead in person, so their volunteers are cooking meals themselves and delivering them along with a socially distanced chat.

Additionally, one of YHN's Board member's children and their classmates wanted to write cards for older people who might not receive one otherwise. The Board member contacted YHN's housing manager, Helen, and her staff identified double the number of people to the cards available.

Helen contacted her daughter's school, and her class made cards for the remaining half. YHN staff are going to support the older people to write thank you letters to the children, as they don't often have people to write to either.