NEWS RELEASE

Loneliness 'maps' needed to find the most lonely, according to new report.

Loneliness 'maps' are needed to help local charities and public services find and support those experiencing, or most at risk of, loneliness, according to a new report published today.

Hidden Citizens: how can we identify the most lonely older adults?, published by the Campaign to End Loneliness and University of Kent says local services and councils should use existing data to predict where the most lonely and isolated residents live – allowing limited resources to be targeted at the people and places that need them most.

The report highlights that a number of councils are leading the way by identifying people experiencing loneliness, including Gloucestershire County Council, who have created a 'map' of factors that could cause it. The map highlights households with just one occupant, a head of household who is aged 65+, situated in a low income area, or do not own a car, amongst other indicators.

Neil Dixon, Joint Strategic Needs Analysis Manager at Gloucestershire County Council says: "Targeting local people who need our help the most is a priority for us in Gloucestershire and we are always looking at new ways to reach them. The map we've adapted from a model by Essex County Council means that we can work out how many people could be lonely and where those people need us most."

Hidden Citizens outlines other ways services have reached people experiencing loneliness including local press, mail outs and good partnership working with health professionals.

Brenda Dacres, aged 77 from Nottingham, was experiencing loneliness and taking anti-depressants until her GP referred her to [Nottingham Circle](), an organisation established to support people to make new friendships and social connections. Brenda was living by herself, and before finding the service, had no contact with her neighbours and hardly saw her family. Brenda said "I wasn't bothered whether I lived or died. Sometimes I'd put my coat on, get to the front door but couldn't go any further." Since being referred, Brenda has quit smoking and has stopped taking her anti-depressants and says she feels "optimistic" about the future.

The Campaign to End Loneliness [warns]() that loneliness and isolation are as harmful to our long-term health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day and that people experiencing severe loneliness may visit their GP more often, and enter residential care earlier.

Hidden Citizens finds that loneliness can be experienced because of a variety of reasons, from the loss of a loved one to becoming a carer, to living in an urban area with high population turnover or an area with little transport.

Councils now have the responsibility in the [Care Act](#) to address loneliness and isolation to help prevent people needing care and support, which came into force a week ago today (April 1st).

Laura Alcock-Ferguson, Director for the Campaign to End Loneliness, says: "Loneliness and isolation in older age is a serious public health issue and increases the risk of conditions including dementia, high blood pressure and depression.

 "Finding people who are experiencing loneliness can be challenging, as they are often also some of the most hidden people in our communities. However, it is encouraging that, across the country, there are excellent examples of councils that are employing different strategies to identify residents most at risk of loneliness.

"Approximately ten per cent of the older population experience loneliness all or most of the time, however, without greater efforts to reach people lacking social support networks, public services, charities and other organisations will be unable to support those with the greatest need.

"If local councils and services do not act now to find the people experiencing severe loneliness, we are likely to see the consequences in our hospitals and social care services."

Co-author of the report, Dr Hannah J. Swift at the University of Kent says "Our research has identified a number strategies that can help identify where people may be at risk of experiencing loneliness and it also highlights approaches organisations can take for promoting services to a community of older people who experiences circumstances that put them at risk of loneliness.

"In particular we found that addressing loneliness requires better understanding of, and engagement with, local communities as well as better communication, collaboration and cooperation between services if they are to identify, reach and support the most lonely older people."

-ENDs-

NOTES TO EDITORS

[1] The Campaign to End Loneliness inspires thousands of organisations and people to do more to tackle the health threat of loneliness in older age through community action, good practice and evidence. Age UK Oxfordshire, Independent Age, Manchester City Council, Royal Voluntary Service and Sense provide governance and strategic direction for Campaign. More information can be found at www.campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk

[2] *Hidden Citizens: how can we identify the most lonely older adults?* was written by Anna Goodman, Learning and Research Manager at the Campaign to End Loneliness, and Dr Adrian Adams and Dr Hannah J Swift from the University of Kent.

[3] An Executive Summary and embargoed copy of *Hidden Citizens* is available on request from the Campaign to End Loneliness, and will be published at www.campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk/hidden-citizens/ on Wednesday 8th April.