

## EQUALITY SCREENING

Equality Impact Assessment guidance should be considered when completing this form.

POLICY/FUNCTION/ACTIVITY	LEAD OFFICER
Grant to be awarded to VSNS to deliver Befriending Service in Runnymede Borough. This will replace the temporary service provided by RBC during the covid pandemic that has now closed as staff who were redeployed to this service have returned to business as usual.	Jill Moody - Health & Wellbeing Manager

<p><b>A. What is the aim of this policy, function or activity? Why is it needed? What is it hoped to achieve and how will it be ensured it works as intended? Does it affect service users, employees or the wider community?</b></p>
<p>Befriending services offer supportive, reliable relationships through volunteer befrienders to people who would otherwise be socially isolated. Befriending services act as the broker between the individual who is socially isolated and the resident volunteer who is offering their time to befriend someone in need of support.</p> <p>Befriending is largely delivered by telephone or face-to-face, with regular contact at an agreed time. Contact can be as frequent as the person supported requires, or as frequent as the amount of time the volunteer is able to give.</p> <p>In March 2020, at the request of elected members, the Community Services Business Unit set up a befriending service to support lonely/isolated residents throughout the pandemic. This was delivered for almost a year by staff redeployed to provide this support, including a Social Prescribing Officer, a Day Centre Manager and a Community Alarms Officer.</p> <p>However, with the recovery and reopening of services and a return to business as usual Community Services with its current resources were not able to continue to manage and develop the current service.</p> <p>This clearly identified a requirement for a befriending service and highlighted its importance for the wellbeing of some of the most vulnerable residents in the borough. Therefore an alternative option to deliver befriending in Runnymede was sought.</p> <p>It was identified that an efficient and effective solution would be to enlist the experience of a partner organisation who already deliver befriending services and could replicate this model in Runnymede Borough and in early October Corporate Management Committee agreed to award a grant to Voluntary Support North Surrey (VSNS) to extend their existing befriending service model in Surrey Heath into Runnymede.</p> <p>By the very nature of the service and the residents it is aiming to support the befriending service will actively encourage the inclusion of all vulnerable adults regardless of protected characteristics and in doing so promote equality and diversity within the Borough.</p> <p>There will be a service level agreement between Runnymede Borough Council (RBC) and VSNS which will set out the Council's expectations with regard to service delivery, KPI's and monitoring requirements and will include regular meetings to discuss service progress and outcomes.</p> <p>It is planned that the new Befriending service in Runnymede will be in place by 1st March 2023.</p>

**B. Is this policy, function or activity relevant to equality?** Does the policy relate to an area in which there are known inequalities, or where different groups have different needs or experience? Remember, it may be relevant because there are opportunities to promote equality and greater access, not just potential for adverse impacts or unlawful discrimination.

Yes, the service is relevant to equality:

### Access to service

Age - the service will support those residents aged 18+ (adults) only. There is alternative provision in the Borough for residents aged under 18 to alleviate loneliness and social isolation. The Provider should signpost residents aged under 18 who request befriending to these services.

Disability - If an individual being supported by the service has a disability this may inhibit the number of social activities, they can attend with a befriender outside of their home. This will be considered as part of the risk assessment when matching a service user to a volunteer befriender and reasonable effort should be made by the Provider to put in place actions to overcome any negative impact for example, arranging suitable transport to and from an activity. These might be covered by the vulnerable individual's other support e.g. a Direct Payment.

Race (language), Religion or Belief, Gender, Sex – These will be considered when matching an individual to a befriender, hence if a suitable volunteer is unable to be found at the time this may mean a service user waiting until a suitable volunteer is found.

### Those most likely to benefit from the service

Some of the protected characteristics could be contributing factors to an increased risk of social isolation and therefore in these circumstances would mean that those individuals are the most likely to benefit from the befriending service, for example:

Age – Older adults may present with a variety of challenges associated with aging including hearing and/or sight impairments, mobility issues and memory loss, they may also live alone and may not have access to transport. These older adults represent some of the most isolated people in the Borough.

Disability - Adults with a disability or multiple issues that prevent them from getting out of their home easily and especially those who also live alone, may be at a higher risk of social isolation and would therefore be more likely to benefit from the befriending service.

Race – Non English-speaking residents may struggle to socially integrate and may benefit from support and guidance to increase confidence and/or accompany/interpret when visiting social groups to reduce loneliness and isolation.

There may also be individuals with any of the protected characteristics who feel isolated because they don't have friendships with others who have those shared protected characteristics.

### Service delivery

Each referral is assessed on a case-by-case basis and if it is deemed that the service user would be better supported in an alternative service an onward referral will be made.

The Provider is expected to ensure that promotion of the service will be targeted to ensure that those that are most at risk of being socially isolated will be able to access to the service. Protected characteristics should be considered when promoting the service – in line with the accessible information standard.

The Provider of the service will also be expected to promote the service to recruit potential volunteers that will enable a suitable match with those service users waiting for a befriender.

Although service user and volunteer matches might be made due to certain shared interests and/or characteristics the Provider will consider the opportunity for the befriending service to introduce people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not and to foster good relations between them.

Access to the service is not restricted to those who have a protected characteristic and will be promoted to ensure that all those suffering from social isolation can access the service. Volunteers will be recruited with due regard to advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

It is expected that the service provider will utilise equalities monitoring to monitor and highlight areas of under-representation so action can be put in place to alleviate this. The service provider will have robust policies in place that uphold and are compliant with the Equality Act 2010.

The Provider will ensure that all staff and volunteers related to the service have a current Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) certificate. The Provider is expected to have established appropriate arrangements to safeguard the involvement of participants, including service users, volunteers and staff in the service. The Provider is expected to fulfil its safeguarding obligations in line with the guidance set out in the RBC Safeguarding Policy and to provide a copy of its own safeguarding policy.

The Council expect that the safeguarding arrangements in place will ensure that concerns will be reported where a volunteer notices any unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equalities Act.

If the policy, function or activity is considered to be relevant to equality then a full Equality Impact Assessment must be carried out.

**C. If the policy, function or activity is not considered to be relevant to equality, what are the reasons for this conclusion? What evidence has been used to make this decision? A simple statement of 'no relevance' or 'no data' is not sufficient.**

The service is relevant to equality based on previous in-house service provision. Please see section B.

This screening assessment will need to be referred to the Equality Group for challenge before sign-off.

Date completed: 17/01/2023

Sign-off by senior manager:

