

# Cheshire West & Chester Council

# Media Release



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## **WEST CHESHIRE PARTNERSHIP GETS £5.2MILLION TO COMBAT SOCIAL LONELINESS SCOURGE**

A public, private and voluntary sector partnership were today (Monday) celebrating a £5.2m grant that will help them work together to combat the 21st Century scourge of social loneliness in West Cheshire.

Part of the Big Lottery's Ageing Better programme, the cash will fund a 5-year partnership programme designed to identify, design and implement innovative solutions to the problems affecting older people across the Borough.

Led by Age UK Cheshire and managed by a partnership steering group, the 'BrightLife' project spent seven months interviewing over 760 older people and 22 organisations gathering information to inform its successful funding bid.

The next stage for the eleven-strong partnership will be to develop a delivery plan for submission to the Big Lottery Fund by December this year for delivery in April 2015.

Proposals will mainly focus on 'hard to reach', older people and local issues and include ambitious proposals for befriending, peer monitoring, inter generational activities and the use of new technology to address isolation.

Said Ken Clements Chief Executive of Age UK Cheshire: "This is wonderful news. This is a fantastic opportunity to make a real and tangible shift in the culture around attitudes towards later life in Cheshire.... and to put in place practical and proven measures that will combat loneliness and isolation.

“We know the difference that can be made to older people’s lives by introducing a number of simple interventions and developing more innovative services is hugely significant. Our aim is to create a better life for older people by giving them a sense of purpose and fulfilment.”

Research has revealed that 19% of Borough residents over 85 years have problems seeing friends and neighbours; 33% of the same age group do not have a valued regular activity; 36% of residents over 65 live alone and 12% of that group have three or more long term conditions.

Said Councillor Brenda Dowding, CWAC Executive Member for Adult Social Care and Health: “Loneliness and social isolation can have a disastrous effect on mind and body – as harmful to victims as smoking 15 cigarettes daily and even putting them at risk of premature death.

“The grant will enable partners to work together to improve quality of life for many who would otherwise be facing a harsh alternative which can so often lead to ill-health and despair.”

‘BrightLife’ will work with older people to develop a greater number of sociable services by utilising existing assets and potential of the local communities and increasing the range of choice available.

A social pharmacy will prescribe a social script for older people. Enabling them to access new social services, providing tailored support and more choice, the script will complement medical care and help prevent the need for more expensive NHS services.

The project will also create community hubs linking older people in primary care – and their carers – with non-medical sources of support and develop ‘best practice toolkits’ to provide systems of support for those with particular needs like dementia.

West Cheshire Older People’s Network Secretary, Margaret Yorke, said: “This is wonderful news. The Older People’s Network has been working for a long time to reach all older residents throughout West Cheshire and listen to their views and needs.

“This money will ensure that their voices are heard and will help to tackle loneliness and isolation through different means. One possibility we are looking at is helping older people with their IT and computer skills.”

**NOTE TO EDITORS:**

The BrightLife partnership includes: Age UK Cheshire, Older People’s Network, Cheshire and Warrington Social Enterprise Partnership, Cheshire West and Chester Council, Chester University, Chester Voluntary Action, Deafness Support Network, Rural Community Services, Sanctuary Housing, National Health Service and West Cheshire Inter Faith Forum.