

## Response ID ANON-8H41-QXNK-7

Submitted to **A Connected Scotland: Tackling social isolation and loneliness and building stronger social connections**

Submitted on **2018-04-26 20:55:04**

### Key questions for everyone

#### 1 What needs to change in your community to reduce social isolation and loneliness and increase the range and quality of social connections?

**Input your answer here::**

As a national body we do not feel in the position to comment on what needs to change in particular communities for this to happen; this will depend on individual communities who are in the best position to comment on this. However we believe there are a few things that could make this difference and that there is no single thing that will reduce social isolation and loneliness and increase the range and quality of social connections.

- We think that local democracy and real community empowerment are key to creating the building blocks for people to feel more involved and a part of their community and give them to drive to participate in it.
- We think that some changes to funding needs to change to facilitate this: long term planning, change and sustainability are impossible with short-term funding. This is an issue across the wider sectors and we believe funding needs to be longer-term than annual to affect real change. Funding also needs to be more flexible and the bidding / spending process be more participatory – see what the Corra foundation for example are doing with a small % of their grant giving and some good participatory budgeting across Scotland too.
- More general support for people who want to do something in their community could help facilitate this change.

#### 2 Who is key at local level in driving this change, and what do you want to see them doing more (or less) of?

**Input answer here::**

- This will very much depend on individual communities and as a national body we do not feel in a position to comment what people or organisations should or should not be doing locally in relation to this agenda.
- We feel everyone (public sector, citizens, third sector) has a role to play here but needs to play it in collaboration and partnership with one another locally. Permission, freedom and support to do this from the centre needs to be there for it to work.

#### 3 What does Government need to do nationally to better empower communities and create the conditions to allow social connections to flourish?

**Input answer here::**

- The strategy already highlights a number of ways in which the Scottish Government can do to better empower communities and create the conditions to allow social connections to flourish.
- However we feel it is a fine line for the state to play a role in creating a nation / communities where making social connectivity is easy and accessible and being active 'pushers' of this and forcing increasing social connections.

We feel there are a number of approaches that are already working well but could be done in more places and mainstreamed rather than being initiatives:

- Something national like the Big Lunch could be great to spark off some ideas and initiate communicating between people. There is a role for employers in this to support this kind of event – see Q19.
- Something about social prescribing, community 'ambassadors', events, people being more connected to their home and community and to one another, being invested in your community, being involved more broadly and feel listened to, buildings and place and centres for activities are key.
- These environments need to be natural and organic not engineered.
- This is mentioned in a number of other responses (including Q1) but we think the Government has a role to play in changing funding arrangements in order to support the kind of change it wishes to see - funding that is longer-term than annual and is flexible and participatory.
- We do not feel that national bodies should be able to override local democracy - there is an important link between this and people's feelings of empowerment and future contribution to communities.

#### Do you want to answer any of the detailed questions?

### Detailed questions

#### 4 Do you agree or disagree with our definitions of (i) social isolation and (ii) loneliness? Please provide comments, particularly if you disagree.

**Input answer here::**

Broadly we agree with the definitions but the interchangeable notion of social isolation and loneliness is useful but inaccurate and can be unhelpful in other ways.

Some people may not mind being socially isolated so we feel some sensitivity is required here. In the same vein linking 'personal characteristics' to becoming social isolation and loneliness could be misconstrued and some sensitivity is required.

Although younger people are mentioned we feel the focus is too much on older people overall, particularly in the 'ages and stages' sections.

There is a known link between social isolation and loneliness and safer communities which could be given more prominence within the strategy.

## **5 Do you agree with the evidence sources we are drawing from? Are there other evidence sources you think we should be using?**

### **Input answer here::**

It is good to see such a wide range of sources used and we welcome this. A picture showing how all this data came together to get the key findings e.g. about significant life events, age etc would be good to see to make it more accessible for citizens.

We have a few points to explore the data in more depth as part of the strategy or more in depth follow-up research:

- It would be interesting to compare Scottish data with any comparable UK and further afield data to see if there are any particular 'quirks' to the Scottish picture.
- The data could be better represented pictorially to make it more accessible.
- BBC Radio 4 in conjunction with some UK Universities are conducting a large-scale study of loneliness in the UK 'BBC Loneliness Experiment' – it will be interesting to see how the findings compare with the evidence within the Scottish strategy. The survey is now closed but analysis will be presented on Radio 4's All in the Mind and in a special series called Anatomy of Loneliness, and on the BBC World Service in Health Check in due course.
- Finding out what people value to reduce and prevent loneliness and social isolation, not just understanding the drivers of the issue, is important and we feel this needs to be given more prominence within the strategy.

## **6 Are there examples of best practice outside Scotland (either elsewhere in the UK or overseas) focused on tackling social isolation and loneliness that you think we should be looking at?**

### **Input answer here::**

- We do not have any specific examples of projects tackling loneliness and social isolation however there are a number of programmes which do not set out to specifically tackle these issues but improving social connectedness and reducing loneliness is known or likely to be an additional outcome. For example programmes like LinkUp, Older People's Safety Project in Highland did not have tackling social isolation or loneliness as a primary objective but this was a natural outcome of these projects that bring people together and provides support.
- Badging a project as 'tackling loneliness or social isolation' may not be the most helpful way of going about it. Developing and supporting approaches that may aim to do something else but nurture the development of quality relationships would be a great approach.
- There are a number of potentially pertinent findings from the projects highlighted in the strategy from the examples outside Scotland on pages 7 and 8. For example the importance of quality of relationships, contentment, cultural facilities, volunteering, flexibility, consultation and partnerships but also things like transitional support, housing models and at risk groups too. If the data is comparable with Scotland's then there is a lot of learning contained within even this small set of examples from around the world.

## **7 Are you aware of any good practice in a local community to build social connections that you want to tell us about?**

### **Input answer here::**

- The Wheatley Group are doing some really interesting work and quickly becoming a leading housing, regeneration and care group.
- See Question 6 answer re LinkUp and some other work by Inspiring Scotland, work by the Rural wardens in Perth and Kinross as part of the Safer Communities team and projects such as the peer-led programme on Older People's safety in the Highlands. The latter have building social connections as a secondary (but very positive and welcome!) outcome.
- Some of the work by Can Do Places and work highlighted by groups such as Scotland's Town partnerships, Cooperative Development Scotland and the Plunkett Foundation is really interesting and relevant.
- Work supported by the Corra foundation, Inspiring Scotland, Carnegie UK, National lottery will also show some good practice.
- Projects which have all or an element of co-design and delivery and peer learning and support all show great results. This links to a number of other questions within this consultation.
- There has been some really interesting intergenerational work including having nurseries in care homes which has garnered some (rightly positive) attention. This links to a number of other questions within this consultation.
- Models of co-housing and 'estates' that have multi-generational occupants show some interesting potential.

## **8 How can we all work together challenge stigma around social isolation and loneliness, and raise awareness of it as an issue? Are there examples of people doing this well that you're aware of?**

### **Input answer here::**

Although unaware of any examples of people doing this well, we welcome the inclusion of the issue of stigma within this strategy and are sure this is the first step

to working together to challenge it and remove it as a barrier to people accessing support.

## **9 Using the Carnegie UK Trust's report as a starting point, what more should we be doing to promote kindness as a route to reducing social isolation and loneliness?**

### **Input answer here::**

- Inclusion of this within the strategy and within the work on the National Performance Framework is an important first step. Kindness is a fundamental concept that is at least understood by all, even if not practised by all. Inclusion of this is particularly important as it is well understood by children and young people.
- Within this concept there is something about kindness being a fundamental attribute or ethos in Scotland. Early years, teaching empathy, developing relationship, families and parenting sectors and programmes all have an important part to play here.
- We look forward to seeing how the work of the Kindness Innovation Network develops and links in with the strategy and they learn from one another

## **10 How can we ensure that those who experience both poverty and social isolation receive the right support?**

### **Input answer here::**

Highlighting poverty and inequality in relation to life stages and particular groups of people is welcome. Recognising that experiences can be different for different groups of people at different time in their lives is an important step in providing the right support for them. We don't feel that you can ensure they receive the right support until you undertake some work to further explore these complex issues.

We feel that the best people to answer this question are those who are currently experiencing loneliness and social isolation and who have previously experienced it to find out what worked for them and may work for others. Support and guidance being freely available and accessible and facilities and groups or initiatives are important pieces of the puzzle too.

- This links to Question 5 on evidence too but exploring whether people in more deprived areas or those living in poverty experience a disproportionate amount of loneliness would be interesting. Anecdotally areas like this have better social cohesion and more connected communities (in some ways) and it'd be interesting to see whether this is borne out in the data and experiences.
- It would be interesting to explore what, if any, UBI (universal basic income) has on social connectedness, social isolation and loneliness. This applies to Q11, Q17-18 and Q3 too.

## **11 What do we need to be doing more of (or less of) to ensure that we tackle social isolation and loneliness for the specific life stages and groups mentioned above?**

### **Input answer here::**

Highlighting inequality in relation to life stages and particular groups of people is welcome. Recognising that experiences can be different for different groups of people at different time in their lives is an important step in providing the right support for them. We don't feel that you can ensure they receive the right support until some work to further explore these complex issues is undertaken.

We feel that the best people to answer this question are those who are currently experiencing loneliness and social isolation and who have previously experienced it to find out what worked for them and may work for others. Having access to support and the availability of groups and facilities is an important part of the solution too.

- We would welcome specific mention of isolation as a result of geography within this section.
- We would welcome specific mention of isolation as a result of life experiences such as being a victim of crime or feeling unsafe and vulnerable within this section.
- The term 'hard to reach' can be quite excluding – see What Works Scotland report on this <http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/events/hard-to-reach-or-easy-to-ignore-a-review-of-evidence-about-equality-in-community-engagement/>
- See our response to Q7 for more information – on intergenerational projects, co-production for design and delivery and peer learning and support.

## **12 How can health services play their part in better reducing social isolation and loneliness?**

### **Input answer here::**

Similar to our responses on previous questions; highlighting the role the health services have to play in this is a positive first step, and there is clearly some good work already on-going within the sector.

We feel that the best people to answer this question are those who are currently experiencing loneliness and social isolation and who have previously experienced it to find out what worked for them and may work for others.

Rapidly mainstreaming approaches that are known to work (such as SDS and social prescribing) would be another way in which the health services can play their part. Investment in the services, allowing innovation and providing long-term funding for things that are working is essential. Allowing staff to spend more time with the people they care for and allow them to take time to understand their needs (beyond health) must be a key part of this.

Some of our partners as well as Audit Scotland have raised issues in relation to Self-directed support that it is not working effectively in all parts of the country and that it should be benefiting more people. Audit Scotland also had concerns about the lack of radical change needed to fully implement the scheme. Ensuring this transfer of power to individual (but allowing practitioners to support this) with this and other schemes such as social prescribing is one way in which the health services can play their part in better reducing social isolation and loneliness.

## **13 How can we ensure that the social care sector contributes to tackling social isolation and loneliness?**

### **Input answer here::**

Please see our response to Q12; but allowing staff to spend more time with the people they care for must be a key part of this.

## **14 What more can we do to encourage people to get involved in local groups that promote physical activity?**

**Input answer here::**

Understanding what motivates people to participate in physical activity and barriers to participation is an important first step and we hope this is something the strategy will take forward. Having safe communities in which people can undertake these activities is important and there is a clear link between the work of the Scottish Community Safety Network and our partners and this issue.

The strategy rightly identifies that the relationship between physical and mental health and wellbeing and social isolation and loneliness is complex. We feel that separating physical activity and cultural activities and their relationship with health and wellbeing and social isolation and loneliness is unhelpful and would be better looked at as one section / approach / solution.

Having a range of ways to access a varied range of physical activities within groups for all ages, abilities and locations is important. Grouping these issues and physical activity and cultural and creative activity would be helpful.

Co-production for design and delivery and peer learning and support has an important role to play in this – please see our response to Q7 for more information.

**15 How can we better equip people with the skills to establish and nurture strong and positive social connections?****Input answer here::**

We believe having the skills is important, but having the right environment and community and national culture of kindness is of equal importance – these attributes should be seen as interlinked and not be looked at separately.

We think that conducting some more work into what skills are required to establish and nurture social connections and what and where the deficits are is an important first step to developing solutions.

Early years and schooling, teaching empathy, developing relationship, families and parenting sectors and programmes all have a part to play here. See also our response to Q7 for more information – on intergenerational projects and peer learning and support.

**16 How can we better ensure that our services that support children and young people are better able to identify where someone may be socially isolated, and capable of offering the right support?****Input answer here::**

We think that the question oversimplifies a complex issue – the interplay of the young people, school, family and friends, home and services should be looked at as an interlinked picture.

Notwithstanding that, conducting some more work into what may identify when someone is socially isolated or lonely and what kind of support is required are required before one can better ensure they are equipped to deliver this.

Similar to our other responses we think that children and young people who are lonely or socially isolated will be in the best position to answer this question. Involving young people in designing these services and support and having them participate in delivering them will likely yield the best results. See our response to Q7 for more information – on intergenerational projects, co-production for design and delivery and peer learning and support. We also think that investment in the services, allowing innovation and providing long-term funding for things that are working is essential.

**17 How can the third sector and social enterprise play a stronger role in helping to tackle social isolation and loneliness in communities?****Input answer here::**

Again, highlighting the role the third sector and social enterprise can and do play is an important first step. Citizens and communities, and the sector themselves are best placed to answer this question and the answer may vary from community to community. There is a role for community councils within this too.

Government and other public sector and private sector investment in the services, allowing innovation and providing long-term funding for things that are working is essential. Perhaps putting something into agreements / outcomes / planning processes for third sector and social enterprise in relation to social isolation and loneliness would be helpful? Even in terms of measuring any (unintended) impact.

It would be interesting to explore what, if any, UBI (universal basic income) has on social enterprises and social connectedness, social isolation and loneliness further down the line.

**18 What more can the Scottish Government do to promote volunteering and help remove barriers to volunteering, particular for those who may be isolated?****Input answer here::**

- Exploring the facilitators and barriers to volunteering are an important next step – there have been some reports done by Volunteer Scotland on this [https://www.volunteerscotland.net/media/531334/young\\_people\\_and\\_volunteering\\_in\\_scotland\\_report\\_final.pdf](https://www.volunteerscotland.net/media/531334/young_people_and_volunteering_in_scotland_report_final.pdf) and <https://www.volunteerscotland.net/for-organisations/research-and-evaluation/publications/volunteering-in-scotland-survey/>.
- Promoting volunteering as a way of a) reducing your own isolation and/or loneliness AND b) reducing someone else's isolation and/or loneliness and bringing the two together would be really positive.
- Employers and schools have an important role to play in removing barriers and allowing people to volunteer more flexibly and understanding the value of volunteering and demonstrating that they view it as an important activity. This could include giving people an hour or two off work to volunteer.
- SG across all directorates partners could support Volunteers week more prominently and actively.
- We have seen some interesting digital link up websites which connect opportunities to people seeking those opportunities. Small schemes such as <https://www.odt.co.nz/news/dunedin/campus/university-of-otago/students-find-perfect-match> (there are many others too).

**19 How can employers and business play their part in reducing social isolation and loneliness?**

**Input answer here::**

We think employers and business have a part to play in reducing social isolation and loneliness. Some of this we covered in our response to Q18 – there is something around balancing work and community whether offering opportunities and/or time for volunteering as individuals or part of corporate social responsibility.

More broadly than this some businesses act as important local community 'anchor' organisations or the individuals that work within them are important community 'anchors'. What Works Scotland, SCDC, Scottish Community Alliance and others have done some interesting work on this:  
<http://whatworksscotland.ac.uk/publications/community-anchors/>.

This part of the delivery plan should be linked more closely with the parts of the strategy that look at other types of community anchors or hubs and take all these aspects of the community together rather than separating them. Employers and local businesses, social enterprises and the third sector, Scottish Government and the public sector, health services, cultural services etc must all come together with People and Places to work collaboratively.

**20 What are the barriers presented by the lived environment in terms of socially connecting? How can these be addressed?****Input answer here::**

The mention of planning and the Place standard is welcome and the link between social connections and Place are well documented in the strategy. However, we feel insufficient emphasis has been placed on housing and the home itself within this strategy. People spend a significant amount of their time in their home and housing has already been identified as a key component of living a safe and secure life and an important component of a person's wellbeing.

As detailed in our previous answers we feel that highlighting the relationship between the lived environment and social connections is important and welcome. The barriers presented will differ from community to community and person to person across their life stages but undertaking some additional work to explore this issue is essential to be able to address these issues.

**21 How can cultural services and agencies play their part in reducing social isolation and loneliness?****Input answer here::**

There is a clear role to play for these services. Outreach work by these services and agencies is very important but reducing social isolation and loneliness shouldn't be their only or primary role. There have been some interesting reports on social prescribing and the arts (by the Arts council of Wales in particular) which could be piloted in Scotland.

Access in terms of cost, location and allowances so everyone can participate is an important factor. Seeing cultural services and the creative sector as equally important to the physical activity and sports sector would also be welcomed as there is often an imbalance here. Facility opening hours and presence of facilities e.g. multiple 'community centre resources' are important.

**22 How can transport services play their part in reducing social isolation and loneliness?****Input answer here::**

- The strategy rightly identifies accessible transport as being vital for people to be able to meet face to face but it could also have a role as a tool for connection too e.g. the rural buses, the playbus in Edinburgh, the mobile banking buses, the library buses etc.
- There could be something about free or reduced travel if you're off to volunteer as a means of the transport services supporting other aspects of this strategy?
- Some interesting car share schemes have run in Scotland which are a solution to rural isolation – some way of encouraging this – but also sites like <https://liftshare.com/uk>.

**23 How best can we ensure that people have both access to digital technology and the ability to use it?****Input answer here::**

Whilst access to technology is one way of staying connected, a lot of research points to digital technology being a driver of loneliness and social isolation; particularly social media and particularly for young people. There is also a growing body of evidence of the impact technology can have on physical and mental wellbeing more broadly too. There is recognition of this earlier in the strategy but could do with an additional mention here. Some of our other answered have touched upon how technology could help – timebanking websites, volunteer matching, liftshare etc.

How to balance the benefits of and problems that arise with technology (particularly social media) and we think some additional work is required before this question can be answered.

As an organisation with limited expertise in digital technology we do not feel equipped to answer this question in more depth than above.

**Any other comments****24 Taking into account answers to questions elsewhere, is there anything else we should be doing that doesn't fall into any of these categories?****Input answer here::**

- A reference to the impact loneliness and lack of social connectedness can have on feelings on safety would be welcomed by the Scottish Community Safety Network and the sector. Further exploring the relationship (as found in the GoWell work on Page 7) between those who report high levels of ASB in their community and those who feel unsafe walking alone at night being more likely to report loneliness. The importance of safety and the lived environment (covered in Q20) ties into this too.

- The important role that partnerships including Community Planning Partnerships, safer communities and justice partnerships and the individual public sector partners are missing specific mention in this strategy.
- There are a few definitions of 'community' being used within Scottish Government strategies and frameworks. The definition of community within this strategy is quite specific and limiting – mention of 'sharing government' and 'often have a common cultural and historical heritage' in particular. It would be helpful to know why there is mention of 'shared government' having to be part of the definition of community.
- We would like to re-emphasise a couple of general points that we have made earlier in the consultation:
  - o Some of the more complex relationships between drivers, enablers and barriers and life stages, place and services need to be explored in more depth before any solutions can be designed.
  - o In most cases citizens will hold the key to 'what works' or what they need and the role of services is to support, enable and facilitate these. Co-design and delivery is key; as are partnerships and collaborative working practises. Flexibility of purposes is also important e.g. the more general and flexible role of LinkUp workers vs the specific role of some other staff.
  - o Longer-term, flexible funding is essential to drive the change (one of the case studies highlights this on Page 21).
  - o Peer support and delivery has shown some great results.

**25 Do you agree with the framework we have created to measure our progress in tackling social isolation and loneliness?**

**Input answer here::**

- A framework to measure progress is important, however because of the complex nature and relationships involved in social isolation and loneliness it is challenging to find measures of success and attributable indicators.
- As the vision doesn't specifically mention social isolation and loneliness – this frames it much more positively which is welcome – the positive implications of people having meaningful relationships and connected communities/individuals needs to be very clear.
- We support the outcomes, however there isn't a single outcome that says 'people are less lonely and less socially isolated'. Fewer causes, reduced harm and communities being more able to identify and respond to these issues doesn't necessarily mean people are less lonely and socially isolated. There should also be a measure somewhere within this framework which is: "fewer people reporting feelings of loneliness".

We have some comments on the specific outcomes, measures and indicators:

- We support the measures of success and indicators under the first outcome ('Improved understanding').
- Outcomes 2 & 3 ('fewer causes' and 'reduced harm'). Some of the measures of success and indicators could be risky to include as less of these does not necessarily mean less loneliness unless one fully understands how and to what degree these issues impact upon it. Attributing any change in these indicators to the work of the strategy will be challenging. For outcome 3 social isolation and loneliness are not the only things that impact upon these measures of success and indicators. For example loneliness and isolation isn't the only cause of elderly people admitted to hospital as a result of unintentional harm. Loneliness and isolation is also not necessarily the outcome of being admitted to hospital as a result of unintentional harm.
- Outcome 4 (communities are more empowered) – we support the measures of success and indicators here but it would be good to remove the ASB measure of success as it doesn't really apply under this outcome (better under outcome 2). Including a measure on volunteering under this outcome is essential. Including a measure on social cohesion and tolerance would also be worth considering here. A measure on whether 'communities feel more empowered to directly respond to...' is also worth considering rather than the proxy measures of cohesion, local amenity use, safety and social contact.

**26 Is there anything missing from this framework that you think is important for us to consider?**

**Input answer here::**

Please also see our response to Q25 which identifies a few areas we think are missing.

- There are some indicators missing in Outcome 2 (Fewer causes):
  - o Social spaces in towns and cities
  - o People's feelings of safety in their community and ASB)
  - o Closer and engaged communities
  - o An indicator on quality
- Outcome 3 – an indicator on people accessing services to reduce loneliness and that intervention / work having an impact on their loneliness or social isolation is essential.
- Including a measure on volunteering under this outcome is essential. Including a measure on social cohesion and tolerance would also be worth considering here. A measure on whether 'communities feel more empowered to directly respond to...' is also worth considering rather than the proxy measures of cohesion, local amenity use, safety and social contact.

**About you**

**What is your name?**

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**Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?**

Organisation

**What is your organisation?**

**Organisation:**

Scottish Community Safety Network

**Are you responding on behalf of a community discussion that has taken place?**

No

**If you used our facilitation guide, please upload the Event Registration form here.**

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**We will share your response internally with other Scottish Government policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for Scottish Government to contact you again in relation to this consultation exercise?**

Yes

**Evaluation**

**Please help us improve our consultations by answering the questions below. (Responses to the evaluation will not be published.)**

**Matrix 1 - How satisfied were you with this consultation?:**

Slightly satisfied

**Please enter comments here.:**

Good to be able to comment on so much, however there were a number of questions where it felt we were being asked to provide all the solutions and not much thought had gone into additional work that would provide some direction.

**Matrix 1 - How would you rate your satisfaction with using this platform (Citizen Space) to respond to this consultation?:**

Slightly satisfied

**Please enter comments here.:**