

Scottish Government Social
Isolation and Loneliness
Consultation 2018

...OUR RESPONSE



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The Scottish Government have opened a '[A Connected Scotland](#)' consultation to ask what is needed to be done nationally to better empower communities and create the conditions to allow social connections to flourish.

THIS IS A FANTASTIC OPPORTUNITY!

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THEIR THREE KEY QUESTIONS ARE:

1. What needs to change in your community to reduce social isolation and loneliness and increase the range and quality of social connections?
2. Who is key at local level in driving this change, and what do you want to see them doing more (or less) of?
3. What does Government need to do nationally to better empower communities and create the conditions to allow social connections to flourish?





OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

The three questions outlined are interconnected and so we have included our combined recommendations in this document. These have been developed in collaboration between the staff, trustees, beneficiaries and stakeholders of [LifeCare](#) and [The Broomhouse Centre & Enterprises](#) as part of the [Vintage Vibes](#) charitable partnership.

Vintage Vibes is an award-winning fresh approach to tackling social isolation and loneliness in over 60s in Edinburgh (the UK's loneliest city for older people) through developing one-to-one friendships and groups.

PLEASE NOTE: We recognise that social isolation is an issue for many in Scotland, across a range of age brackets, however, our ideas have been led by, and are therefore primarily focused on, over 60s.

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OVERVIEW

Reducing isolation and increasing the range and quality of social connections does not have one single silver bullet. It is complicated, costly, and requires a combination of long and short term solutions that will change our communities for the better.



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SHORT TERM ACTIONS:

We have outlined a number of short term actions which could be implemented or piloted **within the next 18 months**. These harness, and make the best of, existing activities and opportunities which already exist across the country.

1. Spread the word about what's already happening

ISSUE: Small, local organisations do not have the funding or manpower to promote themselves fully in their community.

IDEA: We are not starting from scratch. Incredible organisations and groups have been working directly and indirectly to tackle social isolation for decades. We need to capitalise on these initiatives and ensure that every household is aware of what existing opportunities are available.

The Government should allocate budgets to enable the creation of toolkits and systems to allow communities to provide digital and non-digital signposting, making it easier for local activities to be submitted to one central community system and promoted to all.

Currently some areas are fortunate to have community magazines/newsletters which distribute this information, but these are reliant on the goodwill of their creators, or require paid advertising for a listing – more needs to be done to ensure that listings are available in every community. E.g. Within Edinburgh the LOOPS ([*Local Opportunities For Older People*](#)) is an example of an invaluable communication channel, not only for its phone line facility, but because it brings together a comprehensive list of all the local activities available for over 60s in the city.

2. Share what we know for the betterment of all

ISSUE: Important lessons on effective ways to tackle social isolation are not always being shared between initiatives.

IDEA: The Government needs to facilitate and celebrate shared learning across organisations and sectors in tackling this complex issue. This will help to avoid duplication/silo working, and encourages collaborative, partnership approaches based on the lessons of what works and what doesn't.

e.g. On a hyperlocal level there are examples of effective shared learning and decision making – such as 'Joining the Dots' in the Sighthill, Broomhouse and Parkhead Ward, and 'Living Well' in Wester Hails.

The Loneliness and Isolation Consultation provides an excellent opportunity to collate a list of groups who are active in related fields who, on a National Level, could regularly come together to share and learn from one another.



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3. Implement and test Social Prescribing

ISSUE: Individuals commonly access support through medical routes, when a non-medical approach could be part of the solution.

IDEA: A Social Prescribing model, incorporating both NHS and DWP practitioners as referrers to social connection activities, needs to be implemented, budgeted for, and tested.

Quality social connections play a preventative role, which can directly impact on health outcomes and in turn reduce health service costs. Increased investment from Health and Social Care is needed to embed social connection projects effectively and for the long term.

Social Prescribing requires not only a process, but a budget. It is not enough to simply prescribe a community referral; a system of person-centred budgeting is needed to allow funding to feed in to relevant third sector/other organisations to deliver the social “prescriptions”.

e.g. Frome in Somerset created a town-wide social referral and community engagement system. While across the whole of Somerset emergency hospital admissions rose by 29% during the three years of the study, in Frome they fell by 17%.

↳ Create locally based roles

ISSUE: Individuals may seek increased social interactions, but not have the confidence or knowledge to be able to access them.

IDEA: Alongside Social Prescribing, we need to invest in locally based resource, via a link worker model, to connect community services with those in need (or even as a means of preventative action).

e.g. HeadRoom Project – Community Activity Mentors, South West Edinburgh. This project provided members of staff to connect those in the community with local activities as part of a GP referral. This project recently reported a 3% reduction in GP referrals as a result of their pilot.



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5. Invest in projects for the long term

ISSUE: Short term funding pots restrict the progress that projects can make, and reduce the ability to invest in and retain a skilled workforce.

IDEA: Funding in Scotland needs to adapt to suit the long term preventative agenda surrounding tackling social isolation. We need to allow projects the time and financial foundation to flourish and create a long term impact.

Contracts and project funding should include more examples of longer term guaranteed funding, for example for 8-10 year periods. This commitment (with regular monitoring and assessment to ensure quality and delivery) would allow organisations to learn, innovate and invest in their staff, facilities and activities. Most importantly, this would allow them to truly embed within communities and learn from them, deliver real systemic change.

This would also reduce the high costs of funding application/processing both for funders and third sector organisations, and allow the retention of a highly skilled, professional third sector workforce. Long term activities committed to working with individuals throughout their journey would also reduce the likelihood of 'crisis care' situations i.e. A&E.

6. Fund what's already working

ISSUE: A constant demand from funders for 'the new' results in existing projects (that are delivering strong results) losing out, or having to reinvent unnecessarily.

IDEA: Additional funding commitment is needed to both 1) Pilot local projects and 2) Expand effective, innovative models that are already having an impact.

There is always a place for innovation, however, if an existing project is shown to be delivering and making a difference, then contributing to its core costs, expansion and existing staff should be seen as a positive act by funders – that way the community is benefitting from the experience and learnings of that project.



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7. Encourage Partnerships

ISSUE: Few funding processes allow for fully integrated partnership and consortia working.

IDEA: More strands of state funding surrounding social isolation should accommodate partnership working bids and collective working within communities. Partnership working is a positive, sustainable method of tackling isolation that should be encouraged.

e.g. In Edinburgh the Public Social Partnership for Mental Health and Wellbeing is a positive example of partnership working and distribution of funds, however, more can be done across a wider variety of communities to adopt a collective model.



LONG TERM INVESTMENT:

We have outlined fundamental infrastructural changes that could contribute long term to the creation of a kinder, more mentally healthy and socially active society in Scotland.

These are the big picture ideas that will take a visionary Government to implement, but, if successful, could become a roadmap for the rest of the world.

8. Help employers help communities

ISSUE: The majority of our citizens are too stretched to actively and consistently participate in their communities – formally or informally. Employers determine how we spend the majority of our time, yet there are few to no benefits to employers to encourage staff to contribute to their local community.

IDEA: We need to make it easier, and more culturally normal, to incorporate volunteering into our day to day lives. This will significantly contribute to building community resilience, bringing together members of different groups to support one another in a sustainable, long term way.

Although some employers have strong Corporate Social Responsibility processes to encourage staff to take part in their community, the Scottish Government should take a lead on incentivising large and small businesses to adopt this approach.

A variety of approaches can be adopted; from improving employment policies, to developing fiscal incentives for businesses who encourage workers to volunteer during their working week (“volunteering leave”), from developing nationally recognised accreditations to sharing best practice. With a top-led approach businesses can encourage and support staff to dedicate time to volunteering long term.

9. Nurture community responsibility in our kids

ISSUE: We have become a very atomised society, and our children are therefore not developing a sense of community responsibility.

IDEA: We need to integrate community focused and intergenerational programs into the curriculum in our schools to create positive habits from a young age.

Intergenerational programs are mutually beneficial, with many existing examples of isolated older people benefiting from sharing their skills and knowledge with the younger generation.



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10. Change the shape of working hours

ISSUE: A significant contributing factor for why individuals volunteer either formally and informally within their community is whether they have the time and flexibility to do so – and many currently feel they have neither.

IDEA: As a nation we need to research and test the core benefits of encouraging employers to introduce flexible working hours, condensed hours and even a 4 day working week. This may not only improve productivity, but have a fantastic additional benefit of allowing our population increased periods of time with their family and communities.

e.g. A Swedish study in 2016 highlighted that employees who worked six hour days instead of eight hour days took half as much sick time as those in the control group. Supporting the business sector to look at innovative ways to approach the working week can improve productivity, whilst benefitting communities and the health outputs of the workers.



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II. Don't rely on volunteering alone

ISSUE: Although we have discussed the value of, and need for, volunteering, and the essential need to build up opportunities for formal and informal volunteering within local communities – we cannot rely on volunteering and goodwill alone.

IDEA: A locally based, paid and recognised resource needs to be instated in communities in order to match volunteers to opportunities, as well as to safeguard, train and support volunteers. This is the key to encouraging long term, successful volunteering – as without signposting and support those members of the community who could potentially volunteer won't be able to access the right opportunity for them, and won't have the necessary support if something goes wrong.

e.g. Vintage Vibes has over 1000 volunteer visits to over 60s within the past 6 months, however, this figure would not be possible without the 2 members of staff who interview volunteers, interview VIPs, do PVG checks, run training and risk assessments, and, most importantly, support the VIP and volunteer as their relationship begins in order to ensure its longevity.

12. Make the transition into retirement better

ISSUE: Many older people become isolated post retirement due to a of lack of structure, activity and social connections.

IDEA: We could all better prepare for ageing, as a nation, as a workforce, as individuals. The Scottish Government can lead the way to creating a stronger, more socially networked and better prepared retired population of the future.

We need to research and test the benefits of a phased retirement system to encourage an active and positive retirement experience. Giving the opportunity for a phased retirement system (where sought by an individual) would allow for a more positive retirement experience to be built and those entering retirement to live more active, healthy and fulfilled lives.

e.g. City of Edinburgh Council already offer phased retirement for their staff, including seminars and support as you approach retirement. However, nation-wide support is required to assist small to medium businesses and organisations to do the same, where appropriate.

13. Give us spaces to come together

ISSUE: Communities are being built all the time, but shared community spaces are not.

IDEA: We need to ensure the long term availability of low/no cost accessible meetup spaces for community activities to take place. Where new developments are being built, those communities need spaces to meet and share together.

e.g. The Community Empowerment Bill has been a fantastic example of allowing communities to take over existing buildings within existing communities, however, planning policy on new community/housing developments has to emphasise the need for community hubs, incubator spaces and green spaces to bring communities together.



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14. Develop a transport system that works for all

ISSUE: Community activities do not always reach those most in need due to restrictions in mobility or transport.

IDEA: We need to ensure that affordable and accessible transport facilities are available for those in need. Maintaining our public bus services is a key part of this, however, we need to look to the future.

The popularity of highly personalised transport systems such as UBER demonstrate the way our transport needs as a society are moving. We need to think about door-to-door, flexible transport solutions that can aid those for whom getting to a bus would be a struggle, and we need to look at a combination of transport services and the effective and safe use of volunteer transport/shared vehicles.

e.g. Berwickshire have created a successful car sharing scheme called BAVS and fantastic projects such as Contact the Elderly rely on volunteer drivers to collect 'guests' from their homes to take them to social activities such as tea parties.

15. Take the taboo out of mental health

ISSUE: Mental Health can still be seen as a taboo, even in 2018, and it shouldn't be.

IDEA: This is the **BIG** idea. The one that costs the most and makes the biggest difference long term.

Our ideal would be that Scotland develops a comprehensive mental health and wellbeing support structure that parallels our GP services in every local community; in that it is free, locally based, easily accessible from birth to death, integrated with Social Prescribing and not stigmatised to access.

We need to make regular mental health check-ups the norm, akin to a visit to your local doctor. We all visit the doctor at key transition points in our lives and pro-actively go to them for help about our medical issues – the same needs to be instilled for local mental health and wellbeing services. By encouraging ongoing mental health 'check ups', we support individuals before a crisis intervention is needed.

E.g. Hospital to Home support should, in the future, incorporate support from your local mental health practitioner, who been your wellbeing practitioner for years and can recognise when you aren't coping. We know that many individuals suffer from extreme isolation when leaving hospital, and need additional support, and access to Social Prescribing, with this transition.



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16. Include more connections in Care provision

ISSUE: Mental Health can still be seen as a taboo, even in 2018, and it shouldn't be.

IDEA: We acknowledge that significant strides are currently being made in Scotland to champion and support the Care Sector and recognise the value of its skilled and hardworking staff.

However, we believe more investment is needed to support staff in early intervention and prevention care in order to reduce the threat of isolation before it starts. In addition, social isolation needs to be considered, and planned for, in a care setting (after immediate crisis care needs have been managed). This requires staff to be given budget, time and support in the long term.



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SUMMARY

This consultation is an opportunity to make a difference to thousands of our people, now and for the long term future.

Scotland should be leading the way in tackling social isolation, and by applying collaboration, time, and budget, we can make this change happen.

SUMMARY OF IDEAS:

Short term actions:

- Spread the word about what's already happening
- Share what we know for the betterment of all
- Implement and test Social Prescribing
- Create locally based roles
- Invest in projects for the long term
- Fund what's already working
- Encourage partnerships

Long term investment:

- Help employers help communities
- Nurture community responsibility in our kids
- Change the shape of working hours
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- Develop a transport system that works for all
- Take the taboo out of mental health
- Include more connections in Care provision

THANK YOU

Thank you for reading our recommendations. As you can see, we may be small, but we have big ideas!

Although we are new to this incredible sector, we have over 75 years charity work in Edinburgh as our heritage. The success of our project, and our two charity partners, can be attributed to our belief that we should always learn from those we support, to collaborate whenever possible and to embrace bold ideas.

We may not have all the answers, but we hope there's at least a little something in here that can contribute to long term, and much needed, change in Scotland.

STAY IN TOUCH

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