

**ITEM No ...7.....**

**REPORT TO: POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE - 4 JUNE 2018**

**REPORT ON: A CONNECTED SCOTLAND: TACKLING SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS AND BUILDING STRONGER SOCIAL CONNECTIONS**

**REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

**REPORT NO: 169-2018**

**1. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1.1 To inform members of the Scottish Government's consultation on tackling social isolation and the response which was submitted.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS**

2.1 It is recommended that Committee:

- i) notes that the Scottish Government issued a consultation document on tackling social isolation as part of the process of developing a national strategy on this issue.
- ii) notes the response which was submitted by officers following consultation with the Lord Provost and leaders of each political group.

**3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

3.1 There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report.

**4. BACKGROUND**

4.1 In 2017, the Equal Opportunities Committee of the Scottish Parliament produced a report on social isolation. The Committee found that social isolation and loneliness was a problem in Scotland, and recommended that the Scottish Government develop a national strategy to tackle it.

4.2 To begin the process of developing a strategy, the Scottish Government issued a consultation document called "A Connected Scotland: Tackling Social Isolation and Loneliness and Building Stronger Social Connections". The consultation document described the mental and physical health implications of social isolation and loneliness and said the Scottish Government wanted a Scotland where individuals and communities are more connected. Comments on a number of consultation questions were invited, to help shape the direction of a national strategy to tackle this issue. These questions included what needs to change and who is key in driving this, and the consultation paper also asked for examples of good practice in building social connections.

4.3 Following consultation with Council services, key partners and the Building Stronger Communities Group of the Dundee Partnership, officers drafted the attached response. In view of the deadline for submitting the response, this was consulted on with the leaders of the political groups and is now submitted to all members for information.

4.4 Members will continue to be kept informed as the national strategy on this issue develops.

## **5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 This report has been screened for any impacts on Equality and Diversity, Fairness and Poverty, Environment and Corporate Risk. There are no major issues.
- 5.2 Should a national strategy be developed to build stronger social connections, this would have a positive impact on those experiencing poor health due to social isolation and loneliness.

## **6. CONSULTATIONS**

The Council Management Team and Leisure & Culture Dundee were consulted in the preparation of this report and agrees with its contents.

## **7. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

Scottish Government Consultation Paper "A Connected Scotland: Tackling Social Isolation and Loneliness and Building Stronger Social Connections".

David R Martin  
Chief Executive

22 May 2018

## **A Connected Scotland: Tackling Social Isolation and Loneliness and Building Stronger Social Connections**

**Response from Dundee City Council, April 2018**

### **Question 1:**

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

More opportunities and increased awareness for people to come together socially in their community eg community groups, activities, events. These need to be accessible, affordable and welcoming for all. Existing facilities such as community centres and sheltered housing facilities could be highlighted more as places which provide this for people.

A community environment that fosters connections eg parks, park benches, safe streets, good and affordable transport links.

A work environment that encourages the workforce to connect in and out of working hours, particularly for employees who are lone workers or work flexibly with across offices.

Promotion of a society that values kindness and connections, and that celebrates and embraces diversity in all settings, including the community, workplaces and schools.

Reduction of stigma associated with being lonely and support for isolated people to integrate into society.

A recognition that volunteers have a valuable role to play in linking service delivery with communities and also addressing the social isolation of the volunteers themselves.

### **Question 2:**

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

All partners need to come together for this agenda. There is a role for local authorities, health and social care partnerships, the third sector and local people themselves. Service providers should be assessing their clients' vulnerability to social isolation and signposting and in some cases taking them to community groups/activities/service providers that could help. Workers may need to take a more holistic approach and be aware of the wider range of supports into which they can connect individuals they are working with on specific issues. Community Learning and Development services and the third sector are skilled at providing social activities and opportunities for people to connect as well as offering opportunities for volunteering and community leadership in local programmes. Local people themselves can help create connections and support the most vulnerable and isolated, who can often be the most disadvantaged people in society.

Local libraries provide a natural meeting place for people experiencing social isolation. Libraries are a non-threatening, welcoming space where people can spend all day without feeling they need to leave. In Dundee, partnerships with local and national health providers ensure that those requiring additional support are identified at an early stage. Group activities aimed at addressing social inclusion alongside specific learning needs are provided, including digital support, reading and craft.

### **Question 3:**

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

A national strategy should help in terms of laying out ambitions, providing guidance for partners and linking work on isolation to other agendas. Protecting funding for Councils' Community Learning and Development provision and the third sector in particular may help to ensure that an adequate range of local programmes exist in communities to foster social connections. Notwithstanding the fact that anyone can find themselves lonely, proper consideration should be given to the provision of targeted activities for those most at risk as well as overarching population wide guidance.

Government action on benefits and employment will also help. Changes to the benefits system could help people afford to participate in community and social life as unemployment can lead to a decrease in social connections.

Evaluation of how well existing provision is addressing social inclusion would be valuable, so that evidence of good practice can be used to inform future planning. For example, Dundee's Library Service is working closely with volunteers to deliver digital support and the recently implemented Macmillan Information Service. Case studies from both volunteers and participants would illustrate impact.

### **Question 4:**

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

Yes, although perhaps some reference should be made to solitude and the fact that people may enjoy being on their own for much of the time. There may be some value in recognising that social isolation can be a fact of life at times, and helping to embrace solitude and build resilience to it can be a helpful life skill for people. Addressing stigma may be an important part of this. Loneliness can be well hidden so we need better ways to identify it

### **Question 5:**

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

None.

### **Question 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?**

There is a great deal of best practice elsewhere on very similar themes and projects to those being delivered in Dundee and across Scotland currently. There is likely to be some other innovative and well evidenced practice from other parts of the UK that might be of benefit and our suggestion would be a gathering of this, perhaps be facilitated between COSLA and Local Government Association in England and other equivalents.

### Question 7:

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

There is much good practice to be found in Dundee:

The My Wellbeing website ([www.dundee.gov.uk/my-wellbeing](http://www.dundee.gov.uk/my-wellbeing)) is a good starting place for both our citizens and service providers to find out about a wide range relevant agencies and services across the City that can support citizen's wellbeing.

The Main Street Café in Coldside Parish Church was developed as a direct response to a local wellbeing survey that found that many people in surrounding streets were socially isolated. A steering group accessed funding for a co-ordinator and established a successful community café operating two days a week currently on a donation only basis. Volunteers help run the café and a partnership with Fairshare means that food parcels and other items from a local supermarket are available for those present to take away free of charge. A rota of services provides access to information, advice and support on issues such as benefits, housing, literacy and community activities. Additional funding was secured for a development worker post to complement the café sessions with a wide range of activities aimed at isolated and marginalised individuals. The café is busy every week and has the acronym W.A.R.M (Wellbeing, Acceptance, Respect, Meaning) which embodies the ethos of this development. The café steering group won the Community Spirit award from a local newspaper in 2017 in recognition of its work.

The development of Community Growing projects in Dundee has been very effective at bringing people together, with gardening work giving them a purpose while connecting to others and other community activities.

The Council has worked with partners to establish community hubs at The Crescent in Whitfield and in Lochee which provide opportunities to link users of specific services into wider provision or community activities eg GPs can refer patients to local walking groups or healthy cooking classes. Having a range of services 'under one roof' helps make connections. Even where such 'one stop' hubs have still to be developed, community libraries can often act as focal points for building social connections.

Several **Mens Shed** projects are up and running in the Lochee, Maryfield and Broughty Ferry areas of Dundee bringing men together to work on practical projects, socialise and share skills.

Libraries are one of the few places in today's society where people excluded from mainstream society can enjoy equality of provision regardless of their financial, social, age, gender, ethnicity, addictions or health circumstances. As the majority of services are free, customers can come in to read papers, use computers, borrow books, talk with staff or attend group sessions whatever their personal circumstances. This makes an invaluable contribution to inclusion and to the lives of individuals. Examples of particular initiatives in Dundee include:

- The **Outreach Service** focuses on providing services to those who are unable to access library buildings, some of whom have mobility difficulties or mental health issues. Library staff are often one of the few visitors the customer receives. The visit provides social interaction as well as the opportunity for wider issues to be raised, where library staff can signpost other agencies to provide support.
- The **Connections Service** addresses the barriers to access experienced by individuals and groups who are experiencing exclusion, including the delivery of specialist sessions tailored to meet specific needs. Working with third sector providers and members of the Health and Social Care Partnership, library staff provide a welcoming, supportive experience to people who may encounter a less positive approach in other areas of their lives.

- The **Opportunities Project** provides bespoke learning opportunities for digitally excluded citizens. Library staff and volunteers offer employability and welfare reform support, drop-in digital assistance, targeted training sessions and access to new technologies in a non-threatening, positive environment. The digital skills that participants gain impact positively on the quality of their life and help to unlock new opportunities.
- **Macmillan@Dundee Libraries** focuses on the challenges facing individuals and their families who are affected by a cancer diagnosis and is provided by a network of volunteers supported by library staff. The emphasis is on signposting and support away from a clinical environment. This forms part of the city-wide project to improve the experiences of people with cancer. The project recognises need for financial, digital, social and wellbeing support which is accessible in a welcoming, local space.
- All libraries across the City are now registered as **Keep Safe places**. Keep Safe is an initiative developed in partnership with Police Scotland and Advocating Together to help people with a disability feel safe within their communities. The initiative ensures that disabled, elderly and vulnerable people know that if they are in distress a designated Keep Safe Place will provide the assistance they require.

The **Community Companions** project provides adults in Dundee with the opportunity to meet and interact socially with others, either with a single companion or as part of a small group at one of its community cafés. Community companion volunteers befriend people by visiting them in their own home, accompanying them to a social activity, shopping trips, or a visit to a local café.

The **DIAL-OP** initiative offers three services - the local information helpline offers easy-to-access information to adults and their carers in Dundee; **Blether Buddies** offers friendship to isolated and lonely people in Dundee through weekly calls from trained and supported volunteers; and the **Morning Call** free outreach telephone service aims to provide reassurance and connectivity to people who are vulnerable and/or isolated by volunteers offering a short, scheduled, morning call to check on their wellbeing and welfare.

Through the **Making Recovery Real** initiative there are currently a range of peer recovery support roles being developed to help people with mental health issues feel less isolated, feel more connected with their communities.

The befriending service at **Amina MWRC** supports Muslim and minority ethnic women in Dundee through group as well as 1:1 befriending. Their outcomes relate to reducing isolation and loneliness by supporting women to stay well connected and improving health and wellbeing.

In April 2018, Dundee City Council has launched '**The Blether Bus**', a new bus service aimed at connecting older and disabled people in the Dryburgh/Lochee and Clepington/Stobswell areas. Two Council minibuses will deliver a hail and ride service which means that as well as being able get on and off at any of the bus stops along the route, the driver will also pick up and drop off from streets where there are no bus stops. 'Blether Bus' has a friendly and welcoming team of drivers who are happy to chat with and encourage passengers to have a blether.

**Dundee Money Action**, a new initiative in Dundee, are looking at removing debt as a barrier to getting involved. Their assessment takes a holistic approach and could identify the lack of a support network for an individual (and the associated loneliness) and help to connect people to appropriate agencies and groups.

A number of Dundee's new **Local Community Plans** include actions to tackle social isolation, including:

- Increased inter-generational community learning and development
- Using existing infrastructure such as community centres and churches to increase social connections
- Developing activities for families with young children

### **Question 8:**

**How can we all work together to 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?**

The Community Health Team in Dundee offers a range of training sessions focused on tackling stigma; Poverty Sensitive Practice, Mind Yer Heid (mental wellbeing), Substance Misuse and Recovery, Health Inequalities and Prevention. Social isolation as a result of stigma is threaded through these. Using "increased social contact" as a valid outcome from a range of initiatives would help validate work that brings people together without necessarily having an additional outcome.

Dundee's annual citizens' surveys, which use the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale to measure aspects of wellbeing, show that those who can turn to friends or relatives in their neighbourhoods for support have higher scores for wellbeing.

### **Question 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?**

Education with regard to social responsibility (eg neighbourliness) is needed for future generations. This needs to be instilled at an early age. Suspicion and fear are issues to be addressed.

Ensure that as part of the recruitment process, staff and volunteers who provide services have genuine empathy and a commitment to helping people whatever their circumstances. If our staff demonstrate kindness as a matter of course in their day to day working lives, this should result in a positive experience for customers.

### **Question 10:**

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

Dundee's Fairness Strategy identifies poverty alongside social and community based outcomes. Low incomes can be a cause and consequence of a range of health and social issues and an effective response to poverty will include opportunities and, if necessary, support to be able to participate in community life that will enhance social connections.

Social prescribing is a good approach to link people with negative life circumstances, often identified as lonely, to a wide range of services and activities that can help. Dundee has a well evidenced social prescribing scheme in GP practices as part of the Scottish Government community link worker programme, which has shown the social and mental wellbeing benefits of linking people to support. Social prescribing can be used as an approach by all frontline staff to link isolated people to activities in their communities.

The local advice project, Dundee Money Action, is looking at removing debt as a barrier to getting involved. Their assessment takes a holistic approach and could identify the lack of a support network for an individual (and the associated loneliness) and help to connect people to appropriate agencies and groups.

Ensure that all front line services are equipped with training and awareness to identify people who may be experiencing poverty and social isolation. Ensure that sufficient and efficient signposting is in place to refer people to the most appropriate support for their circumstances.

**Question 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?**

Identifying people in transition is a useful way of tackling the potential for social isolation eg the parent when a child starts school, a person who is leaving school and is not going into employment or training, when someone becomes a carer and/or has lost their job, at the retirement stage, following bereavement, etc. This can be done by a range of people eg employers, DWP, education, clinical staff. As stated previously, adopting a social prescribing approach to link people to social, meaningful activities can help address the potential for loneliness.

Similarly, community participation in all its guises, from leisure, sport and recreation through to campaigning and empowerment, can be a connecting process that promotes wellbeing. This includes Community Festivals but these need to include opportunities for making connections and finding out information as well as being 'fun' events.

**Question 12:**

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

See question 11.

**Question 13:**

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

See question 11.

**Question 14:**

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

For disadvantaged people, these opportunities and groups should be low cost or free, available locally, informal and fun, offered at various levels of ability, and involve a social element eg a cup of tea and chat afterwards. Physical activity needs to be promoted as accessible, achievable and beneficial for everyone, not as something that only fit and able people can do. It needs to be non-stigmatising and involve minimal special equipment/ clothing. Walking groups are a great way of getting people active in a social way.

However, experience in Dundee has demonstrated that there may be hidden factors limiting participation in physical activity including transportation, clothing and equipment and broader cultural factors.

A good example of a successful initiative in Dundee is the Family Fresh Air Club, a partnership between the Countryside Rangers and Community Learning and Development which supports young 'hard to reach' families in deprived areas to visit local green spaces, enhancing social connections as well as promoting physical activity outdoors. This project is also a good example of how children can be good social connectors.

Our Health and Wellbeing team has created more opportunities for young people to engage in physical activity and broken down many barriers preventing access. Programmes involving children in Kinship placements, the Paediatric Obesity Service, Early Years Parenting, Family Active, Play Rangers, etc have seen excellent outcomes being achieved, with children maintaining their involvement with Leisure and Culture Dundee classes and clubs.



Active Schools has increased the emphasis on tackling inequality and, in particular, extending the reach of sport to inactive groups of young people ensuring that children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds have the same opportunity to participate in club sport as their peers. The introduction of a citywide Active Schools Co-ordinator role for equalities and inclusion has resulted in supporting and engaging with more children with disabilities, children from disadvantaged backgrounds and inactive girls. The Active Schools Co-ordinator has been working with local schools and partners to identify children and young people who would benefit from more input from Active Schools. Inactive girls' focus groups have been established in some of the secondary schools in an effort to develop action plans to increase teenage girls' participation in a range of school sports activity.

As well as specific programmes for target groups, great effort has been made to provide activities that suit everyone's needs and ability levels, bringing together diverse groups and ages in a fun, open atmosphere.

On 30 April 2018, Dundee became the first place in Scotland to launch a **Physical Activity Strategy**. The strategy aims to help everyone connected to the City lead healthier and more active lives and is a partnership between the Council and a number of other agencies. As part of that strategy the Council is supporting The Daily Mile - an initiative to get everyone walking more to improve their health. Our schools across Dundee are already taking part in The Daily Mile, encouraging pupils to get more active and walk, jog or run a mile each day and we now want the whole Council to follow in their footsteps. Dundee is one of the first local authority workplaces to sign up for The Daily Mile.

#### **Question 15:**

**How can we better equip people with the skills to establish and nurture strong and positive social connections?**

This needs to start at a young age, in schools and nurseries and by supporting parents, particularly those who are disadvantaged, with the skills and resources to support positive, pro-social behaviours in their children. The Stay and Play Project offers an excellent model in the voluntary sector that nurtures parents and their children. Older adults and people who find themselves isolated can lose the social skills and confidence to interact with others. A wide range of positive, accessible and affordable opportunities to encourage social interaction would help.

A good example is Scotland's Early Years Book Gifting Programme (Bookbug) through which libraries encourage parents and carers to enjoy the experience of sharing books with their children from babies onwards. In Dundee, in partnership with NHS Tayside and Education, Bookbug bags are distributed to every child on 4 occasions from birth to age 5. Bookbug sessions of stories, songs and rhymes are held in libraries for pre-school children and their parents/carers. These sessions help build vocabulary whilst language and listening skills support child development.

#### **Question 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?**

Increased resource and focus within early years' education, health visiting, social work and schools. Perhaps a simple needs assessment tool could be developed to investigate where social isolation might be an issue. This should recognise that isolation can be caused or exacerbated by poverty and measures should be in place to support people on a low income to participate fully in society.

It would be helpful to equip staff, who engage with the public across a wide range of services, with the training and information to enable them to help identify people who may benefit from support.

**Question 17:**

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

These sectors already do a meaningful job in providing social opportunities eg through volunteering opportunities, local groups and activities etc. More sustainable longer-term funding for this type of provision would help alongside a recognition that social and wellbeing outcomes are as valid and important as health and economic outcomes.

**Question 18:**

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

Society as a whole, voluntary groups, communities and parents need to balance the need to carefully protect vulnerable groups with over-suspicious and risk averse attitudes that limit the level of volunteering. This is especially important when attempting to support those in recovery into positive volunteering opportunities. Guidance and policy on this sensitive area might be useful.

Experience with the Opportunities Project in Dundee's libraries has shown the benefits to volunteers themselves from helping to support others.

**Question 19:**

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

Provision and design of a working environment that encourages the workforce to connect in and out of working hours, particularly in a culture of agile and home working/hot desking. Policies on managing stress and promoting mental wellbeing will also support employees.

**Question 20:**

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

There needs to be more opportunities for people to come together socially in their community eg community groups, activities, events. These need to be accessible and affordable for all. There also needs to be a community environment that fosters connections eg parks, park benches, safe streets, good transport links. Libraries are free at the point of contact and already used by people who come in knowing that there will be someone to speak to.

Reduction of stigma associated with being lonely and support for isolated people to integrate into society.

**Question 21:**

**How can cultural services and agencies play their part in reducing social isolation and loneliness?**

Dundee' Cultural Strategy 2015-2015 sets out a number of ambitions around the role of culture in creating social opportunities and promoting wellbeing.

We will find imaginative ways - such as Open Dundee events, and free exhibition spaces - to minimise barriers to accessing cultural activity, whether financial, transport, social support, or other.

We will build the confidence and self-esteem of our individuals and communities in their abilities and:

- Deliver a series of cultural entitlements for our citizens that ensure opportunities are made available equally to participate, experience and work in creative activity. These will begin in early years but be viewed as establishing a lifetime commitment.
- Renew areas of the city centre's retail and public space through a focus on environmental design, cultural activity and retailing, to raise the self-esteem of the City for its citizens and improve its offer for visitors.
- Connect areas within the City more effectively to the centre and to each other by maintaining an ongoing programme of communal civic events, such as largescale community plays, exhibitions and film projects.

In our latest Citizen Survey, participants were shown a list of cultural activities and events such as films, exhibitions, plays, museums and classes and asked whether they had taken part in or visited any of these activities in Dundee in the last 12 months. The vast majority of participants (91%) said they had taken part in or visited at least one of these activities or events in the last 12 months.

**Question 22:**

**How can transport services play their part in reducing social isolation and loneliness?**

See question 20.

**Question 23:**

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

At the core of the Dundee's digital strategy is the need to develop everyone to become 'digital people'. This covers a range of people across Dundee from citizens to businesses, visitors to Council employees and councillors. We aim to ensure that people from all walks of life, ages and reasons for needing to interact digitally can do so through the right infrastructure and systems, but more importantly because they have the confidence and skills to do so and that services have been designed with them in mind.

Digital skills may also help people connect and stay in touch with others even if they can't meet physically. For example, our Community Learning and Development service has been running groups in sheltered housing to help people become more digitally aware and stay in touch with friends and family. Providing access to IT/Wi-Fi at low or no cost is also important.

Through Dundee's libraries, digital training sessions are provided by volunteers to anyone, free of charge. People may need digital skills to address their universal credit claimant commitment requirements, for job seeking, to use price comparison websites to reduce fuel bills, or to keep in touch with family and friends who live further afield. As such, it is a key element of addressing isolation. Drop in sessions for people who have their own device but need support in getting started are also available. The emphasis is on a friendly, low key approach with barriers removed.

**Question 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?**

None.

**Question 25:**

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

Greater reference could be made to links with other national strategies and indicators including A Fairer Scotland.

**Question 26:**

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

None.



Respondent Information Form

**Please Note** this form **must** be completed and returned with your response.

Are you responding as an individual or an organisation?

- Individual  
 Organisation

Full name or organisation's name

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The Scottish Government would like your permission to publish your consultation response. Please indicate your publishing preference:

- Publish response with name  
 Publish response only (without name)  
 Do not publish response

**Information for organisations:**

The option 'Publish response only (without name)' is available for individual respondents only. If this option is selected, the organisation name will still be published.

If you choose the option 'Do not publish response', your organisation name may still be listed as having responded to the consultation in, for example, the analysis report.

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  
 No

