

Senscot Response to A CONNECTED SCOTLAND: Tackling social isolation and loneliness and building stronger social connections

Introduction

Senscot welcomes this draft strategy, particularly the Scottish Government's recognition of the crucial role that communities have in tackling social isolation and loneliness and the acknowledgment of the need to address this within a broader policy context.

There are numerous social enterprises across the Social Enterprise Networks providing a valuable contribution to tackling social isolation and loneliness through a wide range of activities and services. SEN members have outlined a need for a whole system approach that addresses the many factors that contribute to this complex issue, highlighting the importance of comprehensive and integrated solutions.

Consultation Questions

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

There is a need to recognise and acknowledge the existing effective and valuable activities and services currently provided within local communities. There is however an ongoing need to connect existing activities to ensure comprehensive and integrated solutions and ensure they are appropriately resourced to have the capacity to meet demand, respond to changes and develop solutions to identified gaps.

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

A more joined up approach between funders and commissioners of activities and services (both at a local and national level) is required to enable appropriate resourcing of comprehensive and integrated solutions. An increased understanding amongst funders and commissioners of the current and potential future contribution of community based and community anchor organisations in improving health and wellbeing through a wide range of social and community activities is central to this.

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

These definitions are a useful starting point for initial understanding and discussion of the issues. Considering the wide-ranging contributory factors and how these interact with one another at different stages of life in various contexts would provide more in-depth understanding required to consider how best to address the issues.

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

Useful evidence sources are provided and this could be added to by input from existing local and community based organisations to tap into their knowledge from which they have developed a wide variety of activities and different approaches to tackle social isolation and loneliness based on community involvement.

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

The emphasis on community empowerment and public service reform is very much welcomed, along with the acknowledgement of the need for Scotland's public services to work closely with community and other sectors.

We are encouraged by the recognition on the potential benefits of collaborative working in the draft strategy and recommend continued and increased support for third sector and social enterprise to further develop this. This plays a crucial part in connecting communities and essential activities & services and maximising the impact of resources invested.

Please refer to examples of good practice in building social connections provided in the following Sencot Briefings:

- [Loneliness & Isolation: the role of social enterprise](#)
- [Social Prescribing: the role of social enterprise](#)
- [Dementia: the role of social enterprise](#)

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?

Embedding awareness and consideration of loneliness in the wider work undertaken, regardless of services focus e.g. transport, community food etc is an essential approach for many social enterprises. This enables them to identify and address interrelated issues through a holistic and person-centred approach, rather than highlighting loneliness as a separate issue and the often-associated stigma.

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

Whilst the promotion of kindness is useful in raising awareness of this issue, we would suggest that other values and associated behaviours are of equal importance and should also be considered, including fairness, compassion and transparency.

These are key to social enterprise and are required throughout all sectors.

Senscot believe that social justice can be measured in the gap between rich and poor in Scotland, and the mission of many social enterprise is to reduce the associated inequalities e.g. health, housing, employment, etc that exist consequently.

Whilst there is an ongoing need to increase activity to reduce inequalities and to mitigate the negative impacts of welfare reform, there is also a fundamental need to reduce poverty levels in Scotland.

[Cfine](#) and [Centrestage](#) are just two of many social enterprises active in this area.

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?

Embedding awareness and consideration of loneliness in the wider work undertaken, regardless of services focus e.g. transport, community food etc is an essential approach for many social enterprises. This enables them to identify and address interrelated issues through a holistic and person-centred approach.

SEN members have highlighted the need for a whole system approach that addresses the many factors that contribute to this complex issue, highlighting the importance of comprehensive and integrated solutions.

Again, please refer to examples provided in the following Senscot Briefing - [Loneliness & Isolation: the role of social enterprise](#) on how this is currently happening.

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

Improving their connections and working in partnership with social enterprise and third sector, alongside increased awareness of social prescribing activity that exists beyond formal link worker programmes.

Frontline staff having the flexibility and authority to engage with social enterprise and third sector, identify suitable activities & services and to purchase these where appropriate would both address the unmet need and provide a cost-effective solution in many instances.

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

Improving their connections and working in partnership with social enterprise and third sector, alongside increased awareness of social prescribing activity that exists beyond formal link worker programmes.

Frontline staff having the flexibility and authority to engage with third sector and social enterprise, identify suitable activities & services and to purchase these where appropriate. One example of this is where care homes have bought in services from social enterprise [Lingo Flamingo](#).

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

Increased understanding of the barriers that prevent people engaging in physical activity and tap in to the expertise of social enterprise and third sector organisations that have developed approaches to overcome these issues.

An important aspect of SEs work in this area is identifying and connecting activities and services, ensuring that they meet the needs of the individuals, families and communities involved. This focus requires an awareness of interrelated issues impacting upon people's lives, and a subsequent need to consider and understand a range of relevant policy areas and strategies.

Some examples are included in the Senscot Briefing [Diet, Activity & Health Weight – the role of social enterprise](#), with additional examples including: [Active Communities](#), [Healthy n Happy](#), [Lorn & Oban Healthy Options](#) and [Roar Connections for Life](#).

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

There are an increasing number of social enterprise developing activities and services with a social mission that addresses these issues and we suggest that there would be real value in learning from these organisations, working in partnership or accessing their services where appropriate. A few examples of social enterprise active in this area include: [Crisis Counselling](#), [MsMissMrs](#), [Potential in Me](#) and [Wellbeing Scotland](#).

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

Last year, 39% of SEN members indicated that they are currently active in addressing loneliness. Following on from this, SEN members came together to discuss their contribution to tackle loneliness. Their meeting revealed that a wide range of activities and approaches have been implemented by SEs in Scotland, with variation in terms of the type of intervention, beneficiaries and whether the focus was specifically on social isolation or loneliness or part of the wider work they do.

Subsequently, Senscot developed the Briefing Paper on Loneliness & Social Isolation to provide insight to how these interventions can be enacted using a social enterprise model. The paper includes five SEN member case studies which outline the activities undertaken, the social impact achieved and the enterprising approach adopted by each case study.

Committed to supporting social enterprise, Scottish Government published its Social Enterprise Strategy in December 2016. The supporting three-year Acton Plan, published March 2017, supports the government's Economic Strategy and highlights social enterprise's role in delivering inclusive growth. One of the key actions within the Acton Plan is to realise market opportunities in health and social care. This includes working with public partners to highlight the benefits that social enterprise brings for choice and sustainability in local communities and to realise associated opportunities.

We would welcome further discussion between the Social Enterprise Health & Wellbeing Roundtable and relevant Scottish Government departments to progress this.

Question 18: What more can the Scottish Government do to promote volunteering and help remove barriers to volunteering, particularly for those who may be isolated?

Increased awareness and understanding is required across all sectors of the resources required to engage volunteers and provide meaningful volunteering opportunities. Volunteer recruitment, management, support and development places an additional demand on organisation's often limited capacity and needs to be appropriately resourced.

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

Employers have an important role to play in reducing social isolation and loneliness by ensuring they have good terms and conditions (including living wage), the appropriate policies and support are in place and ensuring everyone at work has positive opportunities for interacting with others. Employers are also encouraged to be aware of and be skilled up in Mental Health First Aid, with [MHScot Workplace Wellbeing CIC](#) and [Health in Mind](#) being examples of social enterprise providing Scotland's Mental Health First Aid Course.

Social firms also have a specific role here. Individuals with barriers to employment are often incredibly socially isolated. The Social Firm model – a social enterprise with a specific aim of creating employment and meaningful work for these individuals within a supportive and inclusive business environment, leading to increased social networks and improved health and wellbeing. Further information on social firms and the valuable role they play is available from [Social Firms Scotland](#).

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

Local community based and community anchor organisations will have valuable insight to the existing barriers presented by the lived environment and should be involved in developing solutions. Valuable learning will be available from [DTAS](#) and their work with development trusts in Scotland.

Question 21: How can cultural services and agencies play their part in reducing social isolation and loneliness?

Participation and attendance in cultural, creative and heritage activities have positive benefits to health and wellbeing. Community led initiatives in the arts can promote social cohesion, reduce isolation and loneliness and improve community connections.

Local authority cultural services connecting more and supporting social enterprise to develop opportunities for individuals to come together to focus on creativity, means that the activity takes place in the very heart of that community with long term connections being made.

The Senscot Briefing [Cinema & Community Regeneration – the role of social enterprise](#) provides useful examples of where this is currently taking place.

Question 22: How can transport services play their part in reducing social isolation and loneliness?

Community Transport is key to this and needs to connect or be joined up within existing activities to ensure comprehensive and integrated solutions. This also needs to be appropriately resourced to have the capacity to meet demand, respond to changes and develop solutions to identified gaps.

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

Local community based and community anchor organisations will have valuable insight to access issues and user ability levels and are well placed to connect with people to raise awareness on the benefits of access and connecting people to develop and share relevant skills. This also needs to connect with existing activities to ensure comprehensive and integrated solutions

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?**Question 25: Do you agree with the framework we have created to measure our progress in tackling social isolation and loneliness?****Question 26: Is there anything missing from this framework that you think is important for us to consider?****Contact**

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About Senscot

We work to ensure that social enterprises in Scotland have the support they need to deliver positive outcomes in their communities.

Acting on behalf of front line social enterprises, we liaise with the Scottish Government to ensure that policy creation is both fair and effective.

Our main activities involve informing, connecting and developing our social enterprise community:

We inform via a popular weekly bulletin and other newsletters as well as a supporting website.

We connect through the encouragement and support of for 18 local and 6 thematic Social Enterprise Networks (SENs) – independent forums of peer support, collective action and market development for Scotland's social enterprises.

We develop by working with others to identify gaps in support and seek to develop and incubate new services designed to strengthen Scotland's social economy. In time, these services float off as independent bodies.