

December 2018

Pockets and Prospects:

Loneliness, social isolation and social enterprise





Background

The Scottish Government is committed to developing a national strategy to address loneliness. The proposed strategy aims to reduce social isolation – partly by encouraging the development of networks and developing new connections in communities across Scotland. The strategy also has a strong focus on challenging the social and economic determinants that cause people to become isolated – and eventually lonely.

Social Enterprise Network (SEN) members expressed an interest in coming together on this in 2017. Senscot subsequently hosted a SEN meeting to discuss social enterprise and social isolation – followed by a Community Learning Exchange visit to ROAR – Connections for Life. Based in Renfrewshire, ROAR is a social enterprise which provides of preventative, health and wellbeing services for older people through the development of community opportunities to connect people.

Further work with SEN members in this area included a Briefing Paper, ***Loneliness and Social Isolation: the Role of Social Enterprise***, which looks at the contribution social enterprises are making at a community level to reduce the most acute causes and symptoms of social isolation. The Briefing includes case studies of five SEN members – CFINE; Lingo Flamingo; ROAR; The No.1 Befriending Agency; and Badenoch & Strathspey Community Transport Company.

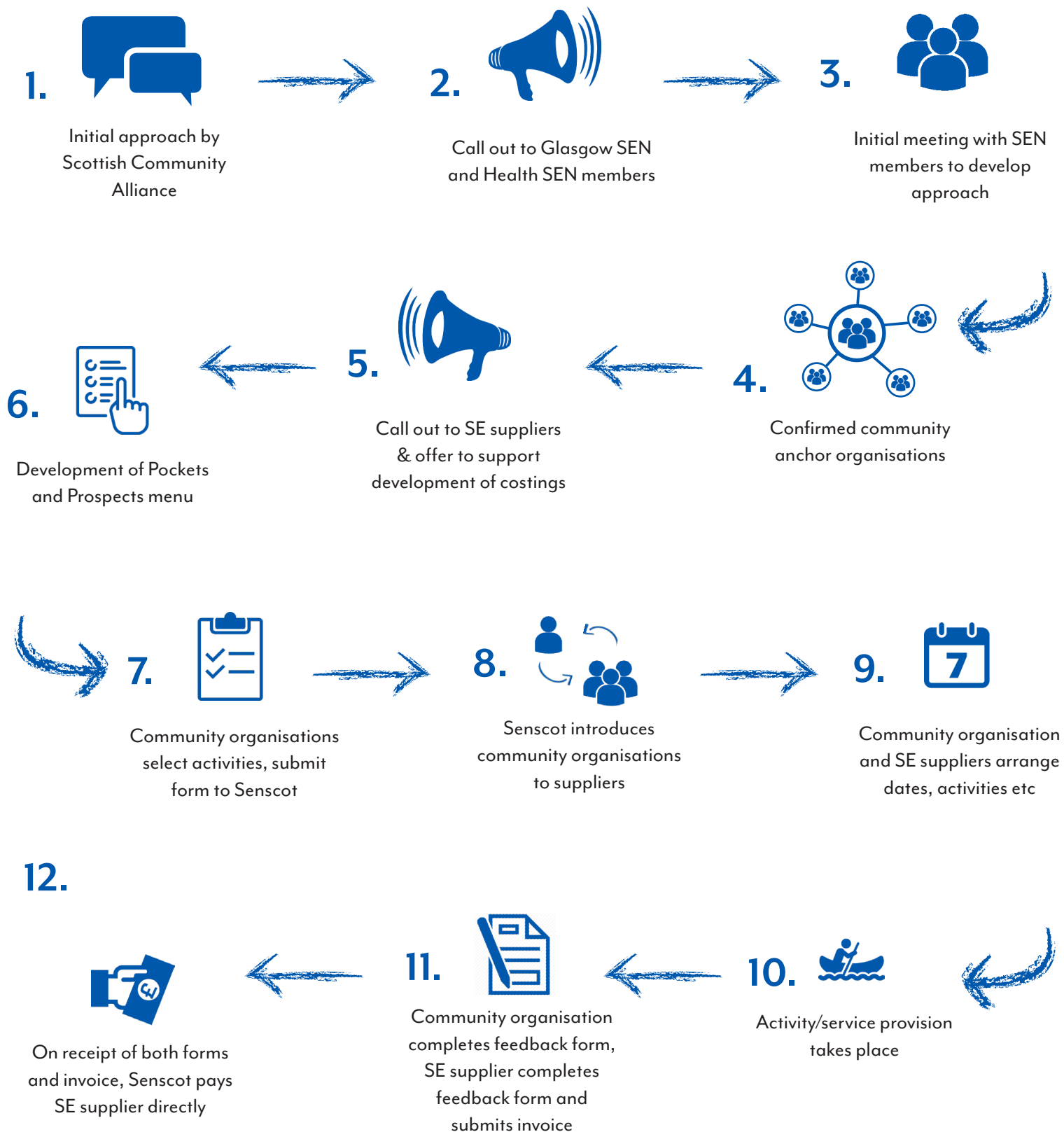
The Pockets and Prospects project follows on from this work. Initially approached by Scottish Communities Alliance (SCA) to delve further into this, we were funded by the Scottish Government via SCA's community capacity and resilience programme.

This enabled us to work with SEN members to explore and develop an approach that would maximise the contribution of social enterprise in this area.

Recognising the value in connecting with Glasgow's Campaign to End Loneliness (Scottish pilot of the UK Campaign) and ensuring we met the fund criteria, we partnered with Glasgow SEN to develop this work.

Senscot and GSEN then worked with SEN members to coordinate a 'programme of activities' that would be available for community anchor organisations to purchase and offer to their local community. This developed in to a 'pick and mix' programme offering a diverse range of activities and provided an opportunity for social enterprises to develop a collaborative approach to tackling loneliness and social isolation – and to mitigate the impact of welfare reform.

Developing the project



Project participants



13 social enterprises have participated in the project.



6 of these being community-based organisations that had access to a budget of £2000 to buy in activities and services from a range of suppliers.



2 of the community-based anchor organisations were also offering activities.



7 social enterprises came forward to participate as suppliers.



350 We have estimated that at least 350 individuals have benefited from the activities provided.

Community-based organisations

Ardenglen HA
Cranhill Development Trust
GAMH
MsMissMrs
The Seniors Centre
The Women's Centre

Social enterprise suppliers

GAMH
Jangling Space
Lingo Flamingo
MsMissMrs
Pinkston Glasgow Water Sports
Rags to Riches, Govanhill Community Baths
The Village Storytelling Centre
Theatre Nemo
Weekday WOW Factor

The six community-based organisations bought in activities for a range of people connected with their organisation. The range of individuals who have been mentioned when activities are being requested include:

- **People over 65 who have experienced mental health issues**
- **Unpaid mental health carers**
- **Low income families**
- **People experiencing unemployment**
- **Glasgow residents living in the 10% of most deprived areas**
- **Women suffering from isolation and anxiety**
- **Women of all ages**
- **Men over 50 years**
- **Older people**
- **Young people**
- **Young women aged 20-40 years**
- **Parents**
- **An Intergenerational group including older people, volunteers & secondary pupils**
- **Volunteers**
- **Local lunch club participants**
- **Residents from a local care residence**

Issues faced

The six community-based organisations highlighted that the need they sought to address by providing these activities included:



Social isolation



Stress



Trying to improve health and wellbeing



Loneliness



Low self-esteem



Anxiety



Feel like they don't have much to offer community

They also made reference to a range of contributory factors resulting in these needs, including:



Lack of place or opportunity to interact



Unemployed or on sickness benefits



Stigma and lack of understanding around mental health



Family members don't have time to spend with them



Pressure to spend during gift giving seasons



Lack of access to food



Low income, benefit cuts, impact of sanctioning and universal credit



Caring roles



Living alone

Project Activities

A wide range of activities from the Pockets & Prospects Menu were supplied during the project, including:

- Complimentary therapies
- Mindfulness and awareness group sessions
- Massage therapies and gentle yoga
- Seated massage treatments for individuals
- Bespoke storytelling sessions
- Making Place Based Products workshop
- Creating Dreamcatchers workshop
- Range of upcycling workshops (Bottle Top Mosaic, Tea Light Holders, Tote Bags, Textile Hemming, Trash Instrument Making and Bangles)
- Taiko drumming taster sessions
- Drama taster sessions
- Art workshops
- Spanish language classes
- Interactive language taster classes
- Kayaking session
- Reminiscence storytelling sessions
- Raft building team-building session
- Murder mystery lunch events
- Daytime discos
- Golf session at Paradise Golf

During the project, some of the community-based organisations highlighted that it would be beneficial to have community transport and childcare services available to buy in from the menu, as this was something currently acts as a barrier to people being able to participate in activities.



Addressing loneliness & social isolation

How the Pockets & Prospects activities have addressed loneliness & social isolation.

1. Providing an opportunity for people to leave their homes.
2. Bringing people together to participate in a whole range of activities, ranging from small groups to larger social events.
3. Spending time with peers, participating in an enjoyable activity, strengthened connections and created a natural peer support environment.
4. Having others listen to them and enjoy their stories made people feel valued and helped them recognise that they have a lot to contribute to society, rather than 'sitting on the side-lines looking in' - as is regularly described.

Allowed people to experience real laughter and joy for a couple of hours when they never would have done something like this otherwise.

5. Coming together with other people, participants enjoyed one another's company. This helped them to recognise that they share a lot of things in common, giving them a sense of belonging.

Everyone plays their part, this fostered the feeling of acceptance and inclusion. Being able to take part in something that encouraged everyone to work as one but was fun and bolstered confidence, meaning that everyone left on a high and feeling great.

6. Taking part in activities gave people something new to discuss with family, friends, carers etc as many advised they don't feel they have anything new or interesting to talk about, which in turn increases feelings of loneliness.
7. Activities give people something to look forward to, often adding structure to their day - providing a sense of purpose for some.
8. Friendships and friendship circles have developed through engaging in activities, with this being especially important for people who live on their own.
9. Encouraging people to engage in more activities and meet new people in the community.
10. Providing opportunities to get more involved and participate in the local community.

Getting people out and having a positive experience bonds the group and encourages them to attend more activities out of the norm.



Mitigating the impact of welfare reform

Organisations outlined that welfare reform has caused great amounts of stress and anxiety over financial situations. There were a range of ways reported that the project activities helped to address this.

1. Learning and developing new techniques and coping mechanisms to deal with stress was an important aspect of many activities.

2. Developing new skills or revisiting lost skills to mend clothes and make gifts was important in shifting from a reliance on purchasing and the pressure to spend money. There's also a sense of achievement in making something for a loved one or yourself without it having cost anything.

3. Connecting with others and having the opportunity to have fun, a chat and a laugh enabled people to forget about worries and problems for a while.

4. Connecting with people experiencing similar situations was reported to help people deal with changes in a more effective and positive manner.

5. Learning about how women can work together to achieve positive change was an inspiring experience for many participants.

6. Providing an opportunity for people to participate in an enjoyable activity that has no cost implication for them. People wouldn't otherwise have been able to afford to take part as they face financial hardship daily.

7. Participating in the activities also enabled people to find out about other free events and activities - and other support available.

8. Participating activities that take place in a centre that's warm, safe and friendly helps people save on home utility costs.

Most of the social enterprise suppliers prior to participating in the project had already considered the role that they play in mitigating the negative impacts of welfare reform. They referred to the existing work that they do in this area, including:

- **Working in partnership with other organisations to mitigate the impacts of welfare reform and its associated effects on communities and individuals.**
- **Trying to make activities as financially accessible as possible, but at the same trying to remain sustainable.**
- **Developing activities that encourage self-management to cope with the negative impact of stress, which is often high because of welfare reform.**
- **Highlighting that for individuals who already experience poor mental health, this can have a profound and damaging impact.**



Social enterprise supplier feedback

Suppliers reported that participating in the project was a positive experience and that the process was easy to understand and engage with. Suppliers also appreciated the opportunity to connect and build relationships with other organisations.

Great experience. Thank you for this fantastic opportunity to build relationships with other organisations. As a start-up social enterprise, this was extremely beneficial.

There was, however, some confusion with the process. In a couple of instances, suppliers sent invoices directly to the community-based organisation rather than directly to Senscot. On other occasions, community-based organisations missed out the approval process and directly approached the supplier to request an activity or service. This appears to have happened when more than one person within a community-based organisation or supplier was involved in the project. As such, it was an issue easily addressed.

Fairly easy, thanks to being contact with the organisation from start to finish. We treated it in the same way as any other booking.

The process was seamless, with excellent communication between our organisations and the coordinator. The project has been very beneficial as we connected with other organisations which might not have been able to take on our services and provisions.

In what ways, if any, has participating in Pockets & Prospects benefited your social enterprise?

Suppliers have outlined several ways in which their social enterprise has benefited from participating in the project including:

- **Widening their network and connections.**
- **Raising awareness of their social enterprise and the activities and/or services they offer.**
- **Providing an opportunity to engage in conversations about how we can work with the local community.**
- **Playing an important part in building trust with other organisations.**
- **Enabling them to reach out to different groups in the community and widening their reach.**
- **Helping establish new contacts and hopefully future collaborations.**
- **Generating further bookings and bringing in new customers.**
- **Generating new income for the social enterprise.**
- **Enabling social enterprise to provide an income for tutors who deliver outreach service.**
- **Developing the ability to plan and deliver a 'pop up' project and feeling more confident about doing this again in the future.**
- **Supporting other social enterprise to become more sustainable.**