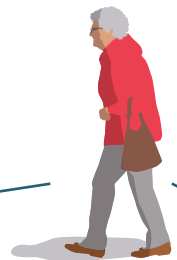# A CONNECTED SCOTLAND

Our strategy for tackling social isolation and loneliness and building stronger social connections

Scottish Government
Riaghaltas na h-Alba
gov.scot

Young or old, loneliness doesn't discriminate... it is something many of us could easily help with.

Jo Cox MP (1974 – 2016)

Contents

Ministerial foreword

That's why I am delighted to present the Scottish Government's first strategy to tackle social isolation and loneliness, and build stronger social connections.

Earlier this year, we were proud to be leading the way internationally by publishing a draft strategy for consultation. Since then, the Scottish Government has hosted community-based events the length and breadth of Scotland, to hear about what matters to you. A number of organisations facilitated their own events, for which I am grateful. We received well over 400 responses to the consultation – a sign of your appetite for and interest in seeing real and meaningful change.

Let me be clear from the outset that the Scottish Government has an important role in tackling these issues, and we want to do more to create the right conditions for change and support communities to flourish. So we're using the Strategy to bring together the different parts of Government that can make a real difference in this area.

But the biggest impact can only be delivered if we enable communities themselves to play their part. This is a key aspect of our approach to community empowerment and public service reform, which recognises that people and communities know what is best for them. We've listened carefully to what you have to say, and have committed to a way forward and a series of early actions that I hope will help us build a more connected Scotland.
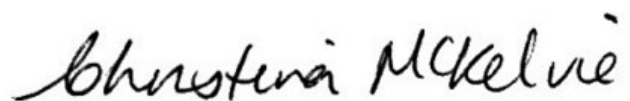
Social isolation and loneliness can affect anyone – at all ages and stages of life. As our society changes, there is increasing recognition of social isolation and loneliness as major public health issues that can have a significant impact on a person's physical and mental wellbeing.

We know that getting support into local communities can make a difference. Our previous social isolation and loneliness funding demonstrated that grassroots initiatives, run by organisations firmly rooted within communities, can have a hugely positive impact on people who are socially isolated, or experience regular feelings of loneliness.

That's why this Strategy includes a commitment to look across our investment into communities and consider how it can be aligned with the ambitions of this Strategy. I'm also committing an additional £1 million of investment over the next two years to build our collective capacity to implement the Strategy, and to try out innovative approaches that could make a real difference. The Strategy contains a number of early commitments, but I am keen to go further. So we will lead work to strengthen a cross-governmental approach to this issue, and work in collaboration with key partners through an implementation group to ensure that we have clear plans in place for delivering on our ambitions.

But this is about more than money or projects. The reality is that we all have a responsibility to ensure that our communities are more connected and cohesive, and that principles like kindness have greater traction in society. Whether it is saying hello to your neighbour, taking the time to get to know a regular customer at work, reaching out to someone you haven't seen in a while, or just a small act of kindness that can make a stranger's day – all of this can go a long way to helping everyone feel part of their community.

I hope that you will take the time to read this strategy, that it resonates with you and that it inspires you to play your part in helping tackle social isolation and loneliness. These are important issues and together I believe that we can build a more connected Scotland where all of us feel welcome, connected within our communities, and valued as an important part of society.

Christina McKelvie
Minister for Older People and Equalities

Strategic Framework

VISION

A Scotland where individuals and communities are more connected, and everyone has the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships regardless of age, stage, circumstances or identity

PRIMARY VALUES

We are a society which treats all our people with kindness, dignity and compassion

PRIMARY NATIONAL OUTCOMES

We are healthy and active	We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe	We grow up loved, safe and protected so that we realise our full potential	We respect, protect and fulfil human rights and live free from discrimination

PRIMARY NATIONAL INDICATORS

Places to interact	Loneliness	Child wellbeing and happiness	Children have positive relationships
Mental wellbeing	Participation in cultural activity	Confidence of children and young people	Physical activity

STRATEGIC OUTCOMES

Understanding increases around social isolation and loneliness and causes/impacts, along with understanding of what works to reduce it	Social isolation and loneliness are reduced	Harm resulting from the effects of social isolation and loneliness is reduced	The conditions which help to reduce social isolation and loneliness are increasingly widespread

Executive Summary

A Connected Scotland is the Scottish Government's national strategy for tackling social isolation and loneliness and building social connections. It establishes a clear and compelling vision of the type of Scotland we want to be when it comes to our relationships; defines what we mean when we talk about social isolation and loneliness; sets out our key priorities in seeking to tackle social isolation and loneliness; and lays out a clear roadmap for implementing the strategy in a cross-cutting and collaborative way.

Our vision states that we want a Scotland where individuals and communities are more connected, and that everyone has the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships regardless of age, status, circumstances or identity.

We define social isolation as *"when an individual has an objective lack of social relationships (in terms of quality and/or quantity) at individual group, community and societal levels"*, and loneliness as *"a subjective feeling experienced when there is a difference between the social relationships we would like to have and those we have".*

We already have a significant evidence base that tells us that social isolation and loneliness are experienced across the population. The Our Voice Citizens' Panel indicated that 1 in 10 people in Scotland often feel lonely[1], and there are other sources of information that help us understand the scale of this problem. The evidence review which was completed by NHS Health Scotland[2] provides further information, and there are a range of other evidence sources drawing on stakeholder research and academic findings. We expect that this evidence base will continue to develop over the lifetime of the strategy and that it will continue to inform our approach.

The Scottish Government is clear that we can't do this alone – that's why we're using the launch of this Strategy as a clear call to action for everyone – individuals; communities; local authorities, health boards and other community planning partners; third sector and social enterprise;

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1 Our Voice Citizen's Panel (2017). *Survey on relationships with health and social care professionals, shared decision-making, how loneliness affects people in Scotland, and how well services are working locally.* p.46. URL: https://www.ourvoice.scot/697/documents/1058 (Last Accessed: 04/01/18).

2 Teuton, J. *Social isolation and loneliness in Scotland: a review of prevalence and trends.* NHS Health Scotland; 2017.

and business – to play their part in reducing social isolation and loneliness. Not just because it's the right thing to do – but because it will help to improve the health and wellbeing of our nation.

We know that there's a great deal of passion, expertise and good work all across Scotland that stands ready to play a part. When our consultation on the initial draft closed at the end of April, we had received over 400 responses. At our well attended community engagement events all across Scotland – 17 in total, from Galashiels to Lerwick – there was a real appetite for change. They told us many things that mattered to people in building social connections and in supporting others to do so – from transport, housing and public spaces to digital technology. They told us that Government has an important role in tackling social isolation and loneliness, but so do others. We're immensely grateful to those who took the time to engage and look forward to building on that engagement in the future.

To provide a clear focus to our future work, we will establish a Ministerial Steering Group to maintain oversight of activity, drive forward progress and tackle emerging issues; and a National Implementation Group, to drive forward progress in embedding a cross-sectoral approach through the development and implementation of a shared delivery plan for the Strategy along with a shared performance framework to understand the difference we're making. To underpin this work, we've established 4 priorities and set out some early actions to help make progress.

Priority 1:
Empower communities and build shared ownership

We're working to ensure that communities can make a difference on their own terms, and that means devolving more power to them. Embedding public service reform principles and a relational, person-centred approach to delivering change is vital and will help to contribute to the delivery of national outcomes. As well as creating the right conditions nationally and working across the whole population, we want to focus on different ages, stages and walks of life to ensure that we address the barriers and inequalities that impact on different groups. From looking at the opportunities and challenges in urban and rural communities, to supporting older people and young people, to identifying risks where people go through life transitions, to taking an intersectional approach that recognises issues facing different groups under equality law – we want to make sure that approaches are tailored to suit individual circumstance and local need. And we want everyone to play their part – recognising that alongside government, communities and public services, the private sector has an important role to play.

Early actions we will take under this priority:

- Consider what more we can do to devolve decision-making locally through the work of the local governance review, and look at how future work in this area could potentially allow communities to reduce social isolation and loneliness.

- Work with third sector partners to scope out the development of a resource which supports greater embedding of considerations around social isolation, loneliness and social connectivity within policy and decision-making.

- Take the opportunity of our commitment to publishing an Older People's Framework in early 2019 to highlight the positive contribution of older people, tackle negative perceptions and challenge the barriers people face as they age, all of which will support our ambitions under this Strategy.

- Ensure that all relevant parts of Government consider how best they align their investments in communities with the ambitions of this strategy.

- Commission research to support greater understanding of how social isolation and loneliness interacts with key life transitions from 'cradle to grave', which will inform the development of future actions.

- Convene a roundtable of representatives from the business community to explore further what more the private sector can do to tackle social isolation and loneliness in their communities.

- Encourage businesses to consider using the Workplace Equality Fund to explore ways in which employment inequality can be reduced through greater social connectivity at work.
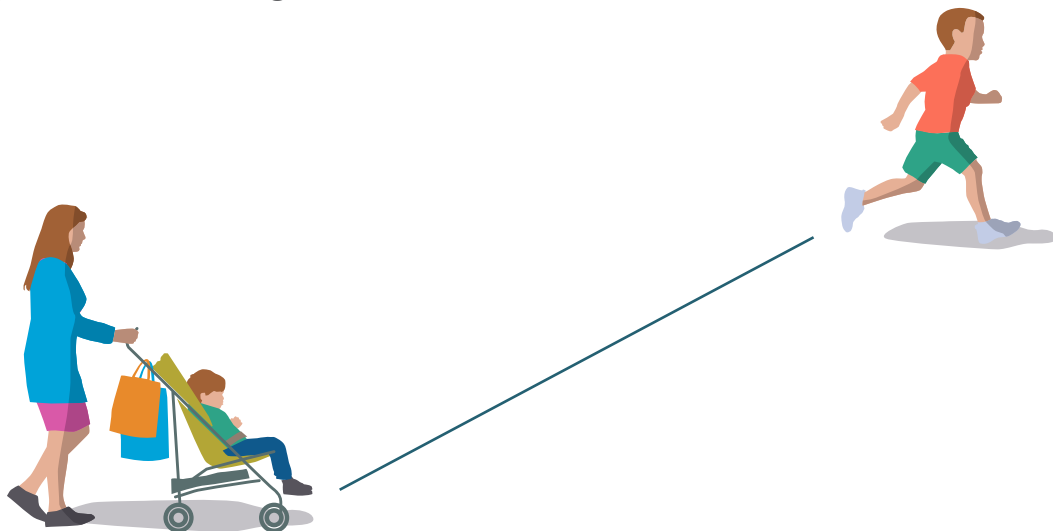
Priority 2:
Promote positive attitudes and tackle stigma

Building an understanding of what constitutes positive and healthy relationships at the outset of life is important in ensuring that everyone can establish and nurture social connections. Kindness is at the heart of this, and we want to build on the early conversations kick started by the Carnegie Trust UK to look at what works in building kinder communities and services. There continues to be a stigma that prevents people from admitting that they may be isolated or lonely, and we want to do more to raise the profile of this issue and develop innovative solutions to tackling the stigma around it. Our ambitions to improve mental wellbeing and deliver parity with physical health can make an important contribution, as can creating the conditions for intergenerational dialogue to flourish.

Early actions we will take under this priority:

- Following expected publication at the end of 2018, implement the recommendations of the review of Personal and Social Education, to support positive and healthy relationships.

- Work with stakeholders to better understand what works in reducing the stigma around social isolation and loneliness.

- Consider with partners what more we can do to promote intergenerational dialogue, as part of the legacy of the Year of Young People.
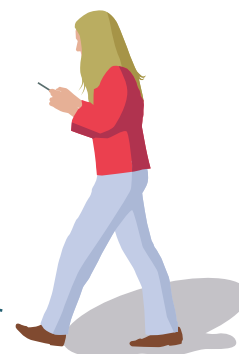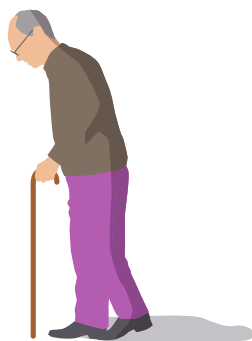
Priority 3:
Create opportunities for people to connect

Opportunities for people to connect exist in their communities, and we want people to have an awareness of what's out there. We recognise that investment from the Scottish Government can help communities to thrive, and we want to make sure that our investments help to reduce social isolation and loneliness as well as to pilot innovative approaches to doing so. For those who may be experiencing or at risk of chronic social isolation and loneliness, befriending can be a vital lifeline. Physical activity and volunteering within communities are two powerful methods of making social connections and building meaningful social relationships. We also know that technology and digital solutions have the transformational power to make a substantial difference, and we want to ensure that we continue to support the change made in this area.

Early actions we will take under this priority:

- Consider existing good practice in supporting people to know what's happening in their local area, and look at whether this can be rolled out further.

- Work with key partners to raise awareness of the value of befriending and support work to build capacity within the sector.

- Take the opportunity of our new National Volunteering Outcomes Framework to set out a coherent and compelling vision for volunteering and identify the key evidence and data which will be used to drive an increase in participation for all.

- Work with older age groups to understand how digital technology can add value to their lives in a way that is meaningful to them, and link this to our ongoing work to delivering our Digital Strategy for Scotland.

Priority 4:
Support an infrastructure that fosters connections

Government has an important role in supporting and developing the wider conditions that enable communities to thrive and individuals to be able to build and develop social connections. Person-centred health and social care can make a real difference in alleviating chronic social isolation and loneliness and helping to address the underlying issues, as can a growing third sector and a vibrant social economy where businesses trade for the common good and seek to strengthen social capital within their communities. The extent to which people interact is heavily determined by their lived environment – housing solutions that place personal need at the centre, a planning system that gives communities a stronger voice, and building safer communities can help to make a real difference here. Building and sustaining Scotland's culture and historic environment creates a landscape of opportunities for people to socially connect, whilst the physical thread that binds communities together – our transport network – makes a huge difference to how, when and where people spend their time.

Early actions we will take under this priority:

- Work with health and social care integration authorities to consider their role in addressing social isolation and loneliness and how best to share good practice.

- Publish a National Implementation Plan to embed self-directed support in social care nationally and locally, so that people can make the decisions that matter to them in terms of being supported to maintain their social connections.

- Pilot innovative housing solutions for older people, testing intergenerational and other co-living arrangements to meet housing needs and reduce social isolation and loneliness.

- Commence a review of Scotland's National Planning Framework, and consider in that how local development plans can better support vibrant communities with opportunities for greater social interaction.

- Deliver an online hub focused on reducing unintentional harm that includes a number of examples that can help reduce social isolation and loneliness.

- Review our National Transport Strategy, with accessibility identified as a key theme.

- Modernise our Accessible Travel Framework to speed up implementation and seek to make journeys easier for people with accessibility issues.

- Make improvements to the transport system through the provisions in our wide-ranging Transport Bill.

- Through our culture strategy, work to increase access to culture and ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to participate.

- Through our first strategy for public libraries, work to build on what libraries already offer as community hubs with a role in tackling these issues.

Implementation and Reporting

But as we've said, Government can't do this alone – so we'll build mechanisms to embed a truly cross cutting and collaborative approach to delivering the ambitions of this strategy. The National Implementation Group will commence work to develop a shared delivery plan containing priority actions alongside a performance framework to help us understand and evaluate the difference that we're making, and take this forward through wider engagement with stakeholders including initiatives like the recently established Action Group on Isolation and Loneliness. We have committed up to £1 million over the next two years to help build capacity and pilot innovative approaches to tackling social isolation and loneliness. We'll develop a communications plan to maximise public awareness of and engagement with the Strategy, and report on progress every two years on how we're moving forward in building a Connected Scotland.

Setting the scene

Who is the Strategy for?

Everyone. We know specific groups within the population will be at greater risk of experiencing social isolation or loneliness. We also know that it can potentially impact everyone at every age and stage of life.
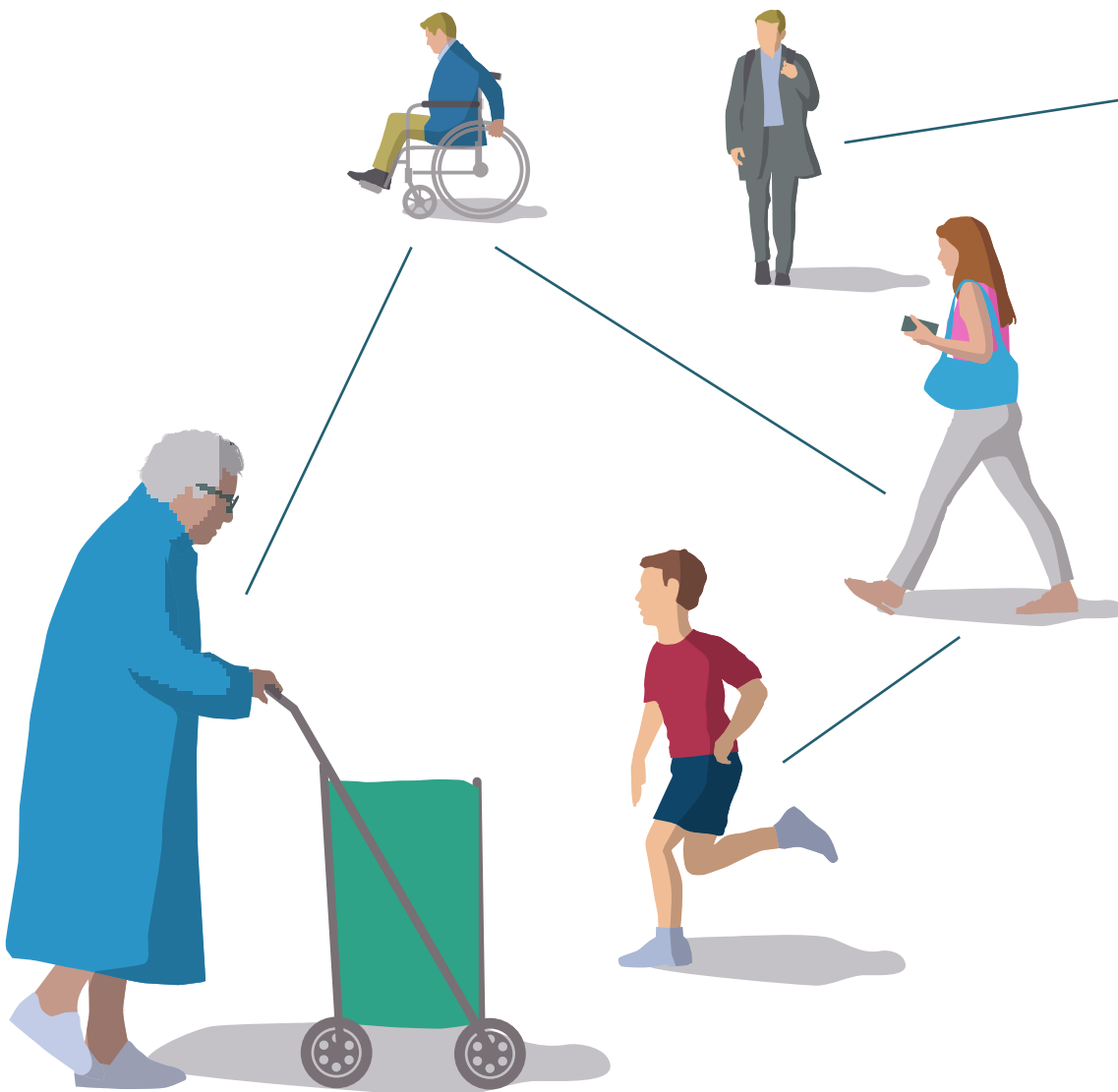
What does the Strategy do?

The Strategy does the following things:

- Sets out a vision of the kind of Scotland we want to see, where community connections are increased and no one is excluded from participating in society for any reason.

- Defines what we mean when we talk about social isolation and loneliness, and states some of the evidence that shows it's a problem in Scotland.

- States what our key priorities will be to tackle social isolation and loneliness, and build a more connected Scotland – along with the action we'll take to try and make this happen.

- Sets out how we want to empower communities to lead efforts to tackle social isolation and loneliness.

- Sets out a way to measure whether or not we're making a difference.

- Sets out how we're going to take forward the implementation of the Strategy.

Why have a Strategy?

The last Scottish Parliament's Equal Opportunities Committee Inquiry into Age and Social Isolation[3] set out a number of findings and recommendations. One of the recommendations was to produce a national strategy to tackle social isolation and loneliness. The most recent Programme for Government[4] said that:

" by the end of this year we will publish a national strategy to tackle social isolation and loneliness, taking account of what we heard from communities when we consulted earlier this year. We are one of the first in the world to develop a national strategy to tackle one of the crucial social issues our society faces. In the coming year this strategy will help to raise awareness about what we can all do to reduce social isolation and loneliness; deliver resources to community groups who need a helping hand to foster social connections in their area; and ensure that every part of government is focused on how we empower communities to build a connected Scotland. "

3 Equal Opportunities Committee. Age and Social Isolation. Scottish Parliament, 2015. URL: http://www.parliament.scot/ S4_EqualOpportunitiesCommittee/Reports/ EOS042015R05.pdf (Last Accessed: 04/01/18).

4 Delivering for today, investing for tomorrow: the Government's programme for Scotland 2018-2019. URL: https://beta.gov.scot/publications/delivering-today-investing-tomorrow-governments-programme-scotland-2018-19/

Who is responsible for realising the ambitions of the Strategy?

Everyone. Government has an important role, but it can't do this alone. So, we're determined to show leadership and establish a genuinely collaborative and cross-societal approach to tackling social isolation and loneliness.

We think that the role of the Scottish Government in reducing social isolation and loneliness is to foster the right environment and create the conditions for people and communities to design and deliver the solutions that best meet their needs. We're taking forward work across a range of areas – including improving health, supporting the third sector, and improving digital participation – that helps to make a difference. We want to continue this work and to establish a clear link between progress across these fields and reducing social isolation and loneliness. In order to do that, we need to be thinking about how policy and practice helps to foster – or may act as a barrier to – socially connecting. To help people do this, we'll work with third sector organisations to develop a resource that will provide support to those thinking about policy and service delivery in the context of tackling social isolation and loneliness and fostering social connectivity.

We also need to ensure that Government's approach to this issue is truly cross-cutting and that every part of the Scottish Government is playing a role in reducing social isolation and loneliness and fostering social connectivity. So we'll establish a Ministerial Steering Group, chaired by the Minister for Older People and Equalities, to take high level ownership of this strategy and oversee long term implementation.

And it is vital that we take this work forward in partnership. That's why we want to work closely with local government, health and social care services, and the third sector to ensure that we bring our collective strengths and responsibilities to tackling social isolation and loneliness. In order to embed a genuine partnership, we'll establish a National Implementation Group chaired by the Minister for Older People and Equalities, and comprising implementation partners from the public, private and third sectors. As part of its work, that group will consider how to reach a wide range of views and voices.

We know that local authorities can and do make a distinctive contribution on this agenda – in terms of local community planning; contributing to placemaking and regeneration; as guardians of substantial local assets and community spaces; as major employers in their localities; as

direct providers of a range of services, often to those most vulnerable to social isolation and loneliness; and as a key funder of pivotal third sector services. So we want to work with COSLA (Convention of Scottish Local Authorities) going forward as a key partner in this agenda to maximise alignment between the different spheres of government.

We also recognise the important role that the private sector plays in society. Whether as employers of staff, providers of goods and services or quite simply entities that come into contact with people as they live their lives – it is increasingly understood that business has an important role to play in helping to build a better society. To develop this further, we'll bring together leaders from the private sector across Scotland for a Ministerial roundtable to explore what more can be done and aim to secure commitments from businesses to help tackle social isolation and loneliness within their workforces and within society more generally.

How did we develop the Strategy?

We started by speaking to a number of stakeholders about what they consider important. We hosted an event in March 2017 which a range of organisations attended to tell us what they thought a Strategy on these issues should contain and what we should be focusing on. Based on this, we published a draft Strategy for public consultation in January 2018, so we could ask everyone what they think.

We hosted community events in different parts of Scotland so that people could come along and speak to us, and tell us what mattered to them.

When the consultation closed at the end of April 2018, we had received over 400 responses from individuals and organisations as well as written summaries from the 17 engagement events held across Scotland. We asked a company to analyse these responses and draw out the key themes in order to understand what people and organisations had told us. We published a report[5] on these findings at the end of October 2018, and continued to discuss key issues with stakeholders.

We're immensely grateful to everyone who took the time to tell us what matters to them, what needs to change and how we can all work together to achieve that. We hope that this Strategy will build on the excellent work that has gone before it and help take us forward. This is just the start of important work over the months and years ahead to build our understanding, strengthen our responses to social isolation and loneliness, and ensure we're taking the steps necessary to build a truly connected Scotland.

5 Analysing Responses to 'A Connected Scotland'
URL: https://www.gov.scot/publications/analysing-responses-connected-scotland-scottish-governments-draft-strategy-tackle-social-isolation-loneliness/

Context

Our vision for a Connected Scotland

We want a Scotland where individuals and communities are more connected and everyone has the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships regardless of age, status, circumstances or identity.

Scotland is a country which aspires to be inclusive in all areas of life. We want to build a modern, welcoming nation where everyone has the opportunity to flourish and live a high quality life. The strength of our social relationships and connections has a central role in determining our quality of life. Because of this, we want to help create a Scotland where individuals and communities are more connected, in which everyone has the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships regardless of age, status, circumstance or identity.

Ultimately, change happens on the ground. The Scottish Government has an important role to play in helping create the conditions for change to happen through supporting wellbeing, investing resources in communities, building the infrastructure that enables people to connect, raising awareness and leading debate around

the issue, and showing leadership. But we also recognise the power of communities locally to effect change and support individuals, and create a climate where people come together. So we want communities to feel that they can do those things, that they have the tools at their disposal to do so and that any unnecessary barriers preventing them from doing so are removed. Creating and sustaining connected and social communities is the business of everyone – whether you're an individual, a community group or delivering a public service. We are taking steps to tackle social isolation and loneliness not only because it's the right thing to do but because it can help us towards becoming the Scotland we want to be: a more successful country, with opportunities for all to flourish, and a society which treats everyone with kindness, dignity and compassion.

Definitions

Social Isolation and Loneliness – our definitions[6]

Social isolation refers to when an individual has an objective lack of social relationships (in terms of quality and/or quantity) at individual group, community and societal levels.

Loneliness is a subjective feeling experienced when there is a difference between the social relationships we would like to have and those we have.

" Loneliness is particularly difficult as a young parent when you don't necessarily have the support network that older parents do… I struggle to fit in with both my peers (because I have a baby) and older mums at toddler groups (because I am a lot younger than most of them).[7] "

– young parent

" When I started caring, I had lots of friends and a busy social life. I was active in my community, had great work colleagues; I felt part of the world…Over the years of caring, most of my friends gave up on me always pulling out at the last minute… After my caring role ended a year ago, I realised just how isolated I've become and how little social confidence I have now. "

– carer

6   These definitions are drawn from the review of social isolation and loneliness prevalence and trends undertaken by NHS Health Scotland.

7   https://young.scot/ping/campaign-articles/loneliness-and-isolation/

Social isolation and loneliness can be experienced independently from one another. It is possible for people who appear well connected socially to feel lonely – and for people who live in solitude or with few connections to be content. Temporary loneliness is something that many people feel from time to time, for different reasons. Chronic loneliness is more serious and, again, can come about for different reasons. Our Strategy looks to tackle social isolation among those for whom it is not a choice, and it also seeks to address the broader systemic, structural and cultural issues that create the conditions for social isolation and loneliness to occur in the first place.

What we know – the evidence base

Social isolation and loneliness is an issue that can affect anyone at any point in their life – in youth or in adulthood. Different factors can place individuals at greater risk, including major life transitions, personal characteristics and health conditions. The broad nature of social isolation and loneliness makes them challenging problems to tackle, as they cut across many different issues and effect people differently.

The reality is that social isolation and loneliness permeates all ages, stages and groups in our society. Children and young people increasingly report feelings of loneliness, and far from it being the 'best days of their lives', students entering further or higher education can often find building and maintaining their first social networks as adults challenging. We know that significant life events such as becoming a parent for the first time, retirement from employment or loss of family and friends can leave many in a place where they feel alone and isolated. Moreover, traumatic events – for example abuse, a period of imprisonment, homelessness or addiction – can lead to a situation where isolation compounds the challenges of recovery and/or reintegration into society.

Globally, we are more connected than ever before – with greater access to information and technological resources that enable us to keep in touch across time zones and continents. Yet, despite the prospects it holds for social progress, technology has also presented significant challenges. Those who do not utilise technology or feel less comfortable doing so can be left feeling excluded in a world where online communication and digital services are quickly becoming the norm. However, many people increasingly feel that digital convenience has overtaken face-to-face contact, and technology can actually become a factor in increasing isolation[8]. For those who are fully engaged with digital forms of communications, the concern that social media can undermine wellbeing and lead to increased mental health issues in vulnerable people has been widely publicised in recent years[9]. In order to embrace the transformative potential of technology, and to realise Scotland's full potential in a digital world, we need to develop the online resilience of our citizens to lessen the impact technology can have on social exclusion and feelings of loneliness.

Social isolation and loneliness can affect people in a number of ways. There are well documented mental health impacts, including becoming more susceptible to depression, and a greater likelihood of developing clinical dementia for older people who are lonely. There are also significant physical health impacts that are comparable to obesity or smoking[10].

We also recognise that there are a series of complex needs that human beings have. We know if we focus our Strategy on any single group or need, then we will be limiting the effectiveness of our interventions. In order to make a tangible difference to people who are socially isolated or lonely, our approach has to take the full spectrum of needs into consideration. One of the starting points for developing this draft strategy was therefore gaining a comprehensive understanding of the prevalence of social isolation and loneliness in Scotland.

8 Lin, L. et al. (2016), *Association Between Social Media Use And Depression Among U.S. Young Adults.* Depress Anxiety, 33: 323–331.
URL, http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/ggi.12711/full (Last Accessed: 04/01/18); Kross E. et al. (2013) *Facebook Use Predicts Declines in Subjective Well-Being in Young Adults.*
URL, http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0069841 (Last Accessed: 04/01/18).

9 *Ibid.*

10 Campaign to End Loneliness. *Threat to Health.* URL: https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/threat-to-health/ (Last Accessed: 04/01/18).

The Our Voice Citizens' Panel indicated that 1 in 10 people in Scotland often feel lonely[11]. However, there are other sources of information that help us understand the scale of this problem. Acting on the recommendations of the Equal Opportunities Committee report, the Scottish Government commissioned an evidence review which was completed by NHS Health Scotland[12] and provided some of the following key statistics[13]:

6% of adults have contact with family, friends or neighbours less than once or twice a week (Scottish Health Survey, 2017).

18% of people have limited regular social contact in their neighbourhoods (Scottish Social Attitudes survey, 2013).

21% feel that they don't have a strong sense of belonging to their local community (Scottish Household Survey, 2017).

48% of people exhibit a degree of social mistrust, which is connected to their level of social contact and feelings of belonging to the local community (Scottish Social Attitudes survey, 2015).

28% of people volunteer (Scottish Household Survey 2017), and **46%** have been involved in some kind of community action to help improve their local area (Scottish Social Attitudes survey, 2015).

A significant minority of children are vulnerable to social isolation because of poor peer support or bullying (Health Behaviours in School Age Children, 2014).

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11   Our Voice Citizen's Panel (2017). *Survey on relationships with health and social care professionals, shared decision-making, how loneliness affects people in Scotland, and how well services are working locally.* p.46. URL: https://www.ourvoice.scot/697/documents/1058 (Last Accessed: 04/01/18).

12   Teuton, J. *Social isolation and loneliness in Scotland: a review of prevalence and trends.* NHS Health Scotland; 2017.

13   These statistics have been updated since they were published in the original (Teuton, 2017) NHS report

There is a range of other evidence sources:

- Particular groups of people may be at increased risk of social isolation and loneliness – including those with socio-economic disadvantage, those with poor physical and mental health, disabled people, children with few friends or who are LGBTI, those living alone, those who have been bereaved, men over 50, minority ethnic groups, and those from LGBTI communities[14].

- 11% of adults in Scotland often feel lonely, and 34% feel lonely sometimes (Mental Health Foundation 2010)[15].

- Over a third of people in Scotland live alone, and 40% of adults who live alone were of pensionable age in 2017 (Scottish Household Survey 2017)[16].

- Research suggesting that "8 out of 10 carers have felt lonely or socially isolated as a result of looking after a loved one"[17].

- Figures from Childline revealed that last year there were 295,202 counselling sessions (2016-17), of which 4,063 were about loneliness. The majority of the sessions concerning loneliness (73%) were with girls.

- In the first half of 2016, 31% of the 16,000 calls received to Silver Line Scotland included loneliness as a key theme.

- In the second half of 2016, 33% of calls to the National LGBT Helpline were from people experiencing loneliness and social isolation.

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14 The British Red Cross and the Co-op (2016). *Trapped in a Bubble: An Investigation into Triggers for Loneliness in the UK;* Antrobus, S. et. al. (2014). *Alone in the Crowd: Loneliness and Diversity.* The Campaign to End Loneliness and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation.

15 The Mental Health Foundation (2010). *The Lonely Society.* Griffin, J. URL: https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/sites/default/files/the_lonely_society_report.pdf

16 Scottish Household Survey 2017. Scotland's People Annual Report. URL: https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/statistics-publication/2018/09/scotlands-people-annual-report-results-2017-scottish-household-survey/documents/scotlands-people-annual-report-2017/scotlands-people-annual-report-2017/govscot%3Adocument

17 Carers UK. *No one Should Have to Care Alone: Break Isolation.* https://www.carersuk.org/breaking-isolation (Last accessed: 04/01/18).

- In 2010, Samaritans commissioned a UK-wide evaluation of its emotional support services (telephone and email)[18]. It found that 6% of respondents cited loneliness and/or isolation as their main reason for contacting Samaritans. Some callers describe themselves as either having no access to informal support networks or considering the other people in their life to be unsupportive. Poor social relationships and/or relationship breakdown were often cited as the start of their problems, for example, in not feeling like they had someone to talk to and feeling lonely.

- GoWell carried out a study of loneliness in deprived areas of Glasgow which found that 31.5% of working-age adults who were disabled or off work for long periods due to illness were "frequently lonely"; people who reported high levels of anti-social behaviour in their community and those who did not feel safe walking alone at night "were more likely to report loneliness by between 30 and 50%"; and 17% of men and 15% of women living in deprived areas reported "frequent loneliness"[19].

Stakeholders have published a number of reports which reflect upon the impact of social isolation and loneliness on communities, along with what matters in seeking to address these issues. These include:

- Voluntary Health Scotland's paper on the lived experience of loneliness and social isolation in Scotland, which reflects on a wide range of issues[20];

- Research by the Royal Blind and Scottish War Blinded into links between vision impairment and loneliness[21];

- Volunteer Scotland's report on volunteering, health and wellbeing and how volunteering helps reduce social isolation and loneliness[22].

- Scottish Public Health Network's report on loneliness and the role of public health[23]; and

- Sensscot's briefing on the role of social enterprises in tackling social isolation and loneliness[24].

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18 Samaritans. (2010) *Evaluation of Samaritans Emotional Support Services January 2008-January 2010.* URL: https://www.samaritans.org/about-us/our-research/research-report-evaluation-samaritans-emotional-support-services (Last accessed: 04/01/18).

19 Kearns, A. *Loneliness in Glasgow's Deprived Communities.* GoWell, 2015. URL, http://www.gowellonline.com/assets/0000/3722/GoWell_Briefing_Paper_BP_22_Loneliness.pdf (Last Accessed: 04/01/18).

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20 https://vhscotland.org.uk/the-zubairi-report/
21 https://www.royalblind.org/campaigns/loneliness
22 https://www.volunteerscotland.net/media/1436178/volunteering__health__wellbeing_-_full_report.pdf
23 https://www.scotphn.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/2017_05_16-Loneliness-Scoping-Note-Final-formatted.pdf
24 https://senscot.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/SenscotBriefingLonelinessSmall.pdf

The refreshed National Performance Framework[25] published earlier this year included for the first time a new national indicator on loneliness, which sits under a new national outcome that *"We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe".* To help measure this, a new question on loneliness has been included in the Scottish Household Survey from 2018, with the first results available in September 2019.

In developing this Strategy, we are conscious that, whilst the Equal Opportunities Committee's Inquiry was the first of its kind in the world, there are distinctive approaches to tackling social isolation being taken both elsewhere in the UK and in other parts of the world. Examples include:

• The UK Government published their first loneliness strategy on 15 October 2018, which recognises that loneliness is a major public health issue. The strategy seeks to build a cross-governmental approach to tackling loneliness with a range of initiatives including greater social prescribing, working with business, developing a loneliness policy test, and supporting flexible and inclusive volunteering.

• In Wales, the Health, Social Care and Sports Committee conducted an inquiry into loneliness. It highlighted a number of issues, including the benefits of social prescribing, transitional support for retirement, exploring different housing models, and the potential for legislation to make a difference. The Committee's report sets out a number of recommendations for the Welsh Government to take forward[26]. On 22 October 2018, the Welsh Government launched a national conversation on what can be done to combat loneliness and social isolation in Wales.

• In Northern Ireland, the then Executive published a framework to tackle rural poverty and social isolation in 2016. This focuses on promoting positive mental wellbeing, increasing opportunities for social engagement and supporting at risk groups (including farmers and disengaged young people).

• In the Republic of Ireland, Respond! Housing Association undertook research into how to combat social isolation and loneliness within social housing. It emphasised the importance of consultation, flexibility in devising solutions, partnership working and human contact.

25   http://nationalperformance.gov.scot/

26   Health, Social Care and Sport Committee. *Inquiry into Loneliness and Isolation.* National Assembly for Wales, 2017. URL: http://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld11310/cr-ld11310-e.pdf (Last Accessed: 04/01/18).

- In Japan, social isolation and loneliness are recognised as an increasing issue, and strategies focus primarily on older people. Promoting 'worry free living environments', community-based activities, and access to cultural facilities like libraries are all seen as important.

- In New Zealand, research has highlighted the importance of volunteering, quality of relationships (as opposed to quantity) and contentment with life. Befriending was also recognised to be valuable following an evaluation by the Minister of Health.

Considering best practice in other jurisdictions is important, so we'll continue to engage with the UK and Welsh Governments as they develop their work, and monitor emerging work in Europe and elsewhere to ensure that we capture learning to inform our own approach as well as share lessons learned from work in Scotland.

What we've heard through consultation

The Equal Opportunities Committee of the last Parliament made an important contribution to kick-starting this work. The evidence it received during its inquiry led it to conclude that social isolation and loneliness are significant problems in Scotland and that individual citizens, public services and the Scottish Government should take collective responsibility for improving the situation. The Committee stated that social isolation and loneliness is everyone's issue; it should not be ignored or tolerated; and that a change in attitude is needed to consider it as part of the public health agenda in Scotland alongside issues such as poverty and poor housing.

In 2016, Befriending Networks held a national summit on loneliness, and Voluntary Health Scotland organised a conference Loneliness: A Threat to Health[27], which focused on loneliness as a public health issue. On 15 December 2017, the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness published a call to action[28] for Governments and society to tackle loneliness.

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27   https://vhscotland.org.uk/key-messages-from-our-annual-conference-2016-loneliness-a-threat-to-scotlands-health/

28   Jopling, K. *Combatting Loneliness One Conversation at a Time.* The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness, 2017. URL: https://www.jocoxloneliness.org/pdf/a_call_to_action.pdf (Last Accessed: 04/01/18).

Perspective: Voluntary Health Scotland

There is no X-Ray for loneliness and no blood test for social isolation, but it is increasingly recognised that a lack of connectedness can damage health throughout the life course and in communities, making loneliness and social isolation a public health issue as well as a social one. We have consistently put forward evidence to show how social isolation and loneliness are a distinctive feature of health inequalities, highlighting the role health charities and other voluntary, community and faith organisations play in supporting the most socially disconnected and isolated individuals and communities, by building social capital, individual resilience and community cohesion. In 2018, we investigated the loneliness and social isolation experienced by a number of "voices less heard", including black and ethnic minority women and carers, which is reflected in the recently published Zubairi Report. Creating a more connected Scotland requires us all to take a whole system approach encompassing health, education, inclusive growth, social security, digital, transport, planning, human rights, community empowerment and democracy.

Claire Stevens, Chief Executive

The Scottish Government held an event in April 2017 to ask stakeholders what they thought a National Strategy on social isolation and loneliness should contain and, in January 2018, we published our draft strategy for consultation. The consultation asked for views about how the strategy could be improved in terms of the definitions of social isolation and loneliness, and the actions required to address these, and who needs to be involved. In addition to inviting people and organisations to write to us, we also invited them to come to events in different parts of Scotland. In total, we held 17 community engagement events from across Scotland to hear from people about what matters to them.

When it closed at the end of April 2018, the consultation had received 419 responses from individuals and organisations. We commissioned an organisation to carry out independent analysis of the consultation findings and a report was published at the end of 2018 setting out the findings. The consultation analysis presented four prominent factors that were thought to contribute to social isolation and loneliness including transportation, housing, public spaces, and digital technology. It also presented five 'features of support': policies and regulation, sustainable funding, education and training, designing support, and delivering support. The report concluded that there is not going to be a 'quick-fix' solution – and that tackling social isolation and loneliness will require investment in public and social services that support community life and social connectivity.

Priority 1:
Empower communities and build shared ownership

Community: a social group of any size whose members may reside in a specific locality and are considered collectively, especially in the context of social values and responsibilities.

Community cohesion and empowerment

We know that building cohesive, resilient and supportive communities requires strong social networks. Communities, and the people within them, need to be protected and feel safe; they need to have strong networks; there must be good access to appropriate community facilities and places to meet; towns and high streets should act as a focal point for social and economic interactions, and communities need to be fair and inclusive, where everyone has a voice and can participate. That's why we are working to promote inclusive growth, champion community participation and ownership, ensure stability and flexibility of funding for third sector organisations, and support integrated working through community planning partnerships.

Our ongoing work to improve health and wellbeing, the lived and built environment and accessibility of transport demonstrate the importance of a relational, person-centred approach that tackles the root causes of poor outcomes like social isolation and loneliness. This kind of approach is crucial if we are to improve wellbeing and life chances for people across Scotland and successfully contribute to the delivery of national outcomes. We will continue to focus on embedding these principles and ensuring that local communities have the tools at their disposal to shape what happens in their areas.

We're working to ensure that communities can make a difference on their own terms. The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 gives communities more opportunities here, and by creating new rights for community bodies and placing new duties on public authorities, the Act strengthens the voices of communities in the decisions that matter to them and makes it easier for communities to take on public sector land and buildings.

Spotlight: Bridgend Farmhouse

Bridgend Farmhouse is a community owned and run charitable organisation in south Edinburgh with a mission to ensure their now renovated farmhouse exists as a sustainable community-owned centre for learning, eating and exercise, where all can learn, work and grow together to develop a flourishing community and place. The Farmhouse was one of the first urban assets to be transferred under community empowerment legislation. Volunteers are central to everything it initiates, develops and delivers. Activities include practical activities (cooking, arts, crafts, upcycling and outdoor pursuits), an oral history project, a community cafe and an Acorn Fund for local people to develop their own projects. The Farmhouse provides a place for people of all ages to come together and connect through shared pursuits and a common interest in their community.

Ensuring that communities can take forward this agenda means devolving more power to them. Our comprehensive review of local governance launched jointly with COSLA involves a conversation with communities called Democracy Matters. We want people to tell us if there are decisions which, if taken by communities themselves, could lead to better outcomes. A future where people increasingly come together at community level to shape a shared future could, in itself, help to combat social isolation. To realise this important benefit, any new decision-making arrangements will need to be inclusive and accessible to all. The Review will also consider what powers public sector partners need to improve outcomes in the place they serve. Our response will include legislative change should that be required to transform local democracy in Scotland. Community planning is also important in supporting this agenda, so over 2019 we'll carry out a review of community planning to ensure local communities can shape decision-making in their areas, and we'll also engage with Community Planning Partners to raise awareness of this strategy and encourage them to consider local solutions to tackling social isolation and loneliness.

Giving communities more control over resources means they can make decisions that are right for them, including investment in community activities that bring people together. Participatory Budgeting, which is a way for people to have a direct say in how local money is spent, can help individuals feel connected to each other and to their communities and can instil a sense of ownership, trust and connectivity. It helps to bring people together to start conversations, leading to relationships that make communities stronger, building skills and confidence to become more engaged. This can build better social connections where all parts of community can benefit, especially those most at risk of being marginalised in society. Through our Community Choices Fund, we will continue to work in partnership with COSLA to help local authorities reach the target of having at least 1% of their budget subject to participatory budgeting by 2021, giving tens of thousands of people a say in how almost £100 million will be spent.

Spotlight: Shetland Community Choices Fund

Shetland Community Choices is a Participatory Budgeting project that involved residents in prioritising how they'd like to see £100,000 spent on local projects and services. Among others, one project the community decided to fund in March 2017 was *Shetland Autism Awareness Raising Project*.

With their funding, artist Vivian Ross-Smith and filmmaker Stephen Mercer ran a 10 week animation workshop open to anyone in Shetland with autism. Following on from these workshops, the group is continuing under the name *Autism Friendly Shetland* and meets weekly to offer a space for anyone with autism, plus their friends and family.

Invest resources in communities

We've already invested significant resources in local community-based projects. Our £500,000 Social Isolation and Loneliness Fund (2016/17)[29] supported a wide variety of local initiatives across Scotland, ranging from basic life skills to creative activities, friendship groups and support for vulnerable communities. The projects that received grants from this fund demonstrated that small grassroots projects located within communities can have a profoundly positive impact on people's lives[30].

Spotlight: PLUS Perth and Kinross

PLUS received just over £17,000 through the Social Isolation and Loneliness Fund and aimed at supporting people experiencing mental health problems in rural areas of Perthshire. The project organised a variety of events, including poetry appreciation sessions, lunch clubs and a gardening project. Interviewees stated that the flexibility and focus of equality between organisers and attendees was an encouraging attribute of the PLUS events, making service users feel more comfortable participating. The evaluation of the project demonstrated a total increase in the social connections of participants of 960%, rising from 20 to 212 for the entire group.
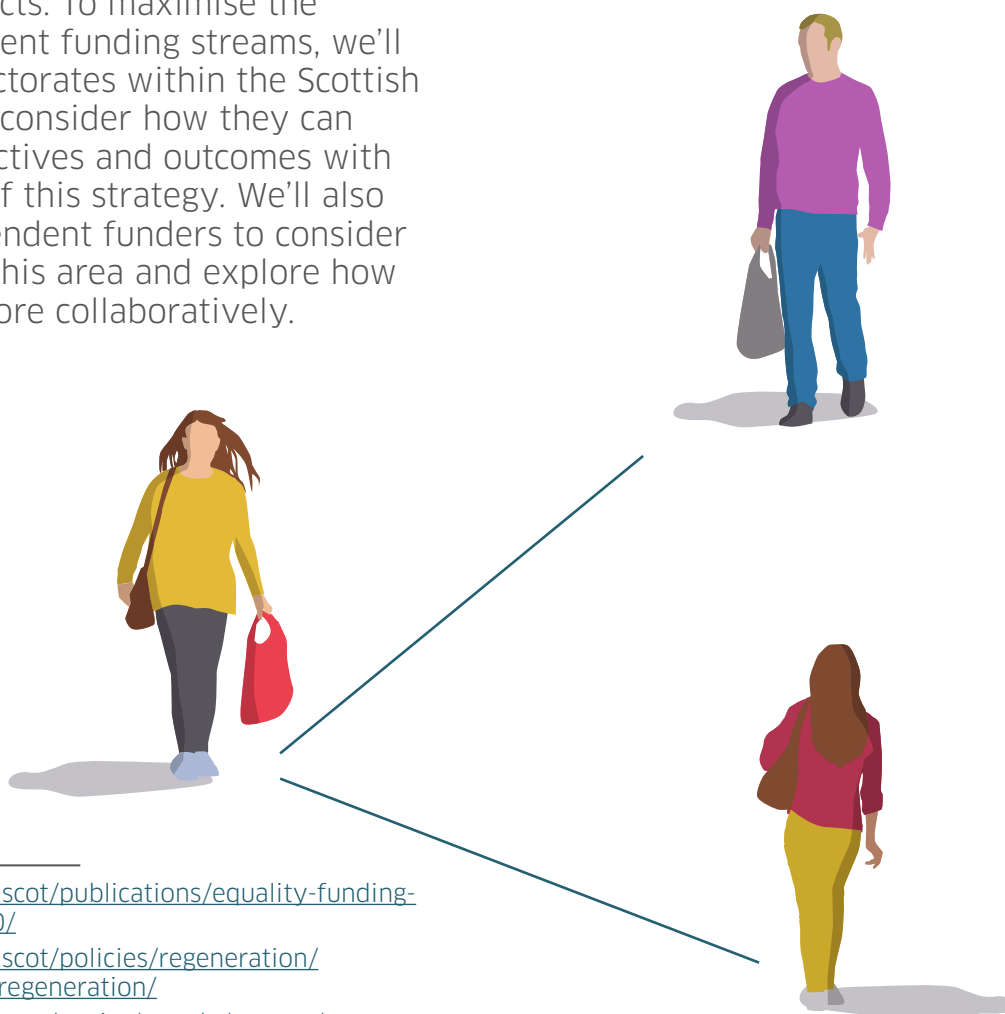
29   Voluntary Action Fund (2017) *Social Isolation and Loneliness Fund 2016-17* (Voluntary Action Fund), URL: http://www.voluntaryactionfund.org.uk/ funding-and-support/social-isolation-and-loneliness- fund/ (Last Accessed: 04/01/18).

30   Voluntary Action Fund, *Social Isolation and Loneliness Fund 2016–2017: End of year report,* forthcoming.

Other funding streams also support work to build social connections, including the Promoting Equality and Cohesion Fund[31], the People and Communities Fund[32] and the Community Choices Fund[33]. But this is about more than just money. Especially in a challenging financial climate, we have to ensure we work closely with the range of independent funders operating in Scotland to focus on what works whilst avoiding duplication, as well as making funding more accessible to smaller organisations with a greater emphasis on promoting the sustainability of funded projects. To maximise the impact of different funding streams, we'll encourage Directorates within the Scottish Government to consider how they can align their objectives and outcomes with the ambitions of this strategy. We'll also convene independent funders to consider what works in this area and explore how we can work more collaboratively.

We also recognise there is a need to build capacity in relation to tackling social isolation and loneliness, and to pilot innovative approaches that could help to make a real difference in this area. So we'll make up to £1 million available over the next two years to do this, and work with the new implementation group to consider how it can best be used. We'll also use the funding to support some of the early actions outlined in this strategy.

31 https://beta.gov.scot/publications/equality-funding-pecf-2017-2020/
32 https://beta.gov.scot/policies/regeneration/community-led-regeneration/
33 http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/engage/CommunityChoicesFund

Every age, stage and walk of life

As well as creating the right conditions nationally and empowering communities to reduce social isolation across the whole population, we will seek to address the barriers and inequalities that impact at different stages of people's lives and on particular groups of people within society. We will work to ensure that our approach takes account of different identities and characteristics, addressing the specific barriers faced by groups protected under equality legislation[34]. We believe that an intersectional approach that recognises the multitude of characteristics and experiences of different people is vital.

We know that social isolation and loneliness manifest themselves in different ways in urban and rural communities. We want to develop our understanding of the differences in rural communities, and will therefore look to explore this further through engagement with bodies like Scottish Rural Action and Scotland's National Rural Mental Health Forum. Following the passage of the historic Islands (Scotland) Act in May 2018 to address the particular opportunities and challenges for island communities, we will seek to develop close links with the developing national islands plan and consider how relevant commitments in this Strategy can be 'Island-proofed' to ensure their effectiveness in those communities.

34   https://beta.gov.scot/policies/equality/mainstreaming-equality

We will also seek to ensure that work to identify and roll out good practice approaches to address social isolation and loneliness explicitly reflects the rural dimension and acknowledges that different solutions may be required in rural and island settings.

Spotlight: The Royal Scottish Agricultural Benevolent Institution
RSABI provide emotional, practical and financial support to individuals and their families across the agricultural sector including farming, crofting and growing. They provide financial, practical support and friendship to over 600 individuals and their families across a range of occupations which have the common theme of working on the land in Scotland. They run a helpline, which is available from 7am to 11pm, 365 days a year (0300 111 4166).

We recognise that people of all ages can be at risk for different reasons, and that long-term physical and/or mental health conditions, can also play a significant part. To ensure that we improve support for older people, we will publish an Older People's Framework in March 2019. The Framework will focus on highlighting the positive contributions made by older people – whether that is through the (often unpaid) provision of caring responsibilities of family members or volunteering in their local community; tackling the negative perceptions of older people, often perpetuated in the media, that they are a burden or drain on society and the root cause of problems that young people now face; and challenging the barriers people face as they age, whether that is accessing health and social care services, transport, appropriate housing or employment. We will continue to work with and support key stakeholders as well as take forward our work across government to identify areas where we can deliver better outcomes for people as they age to ensure that they do not become socially isolated. Significant events such as ill-health, retirement or a bereavement can have a significant impact, and we will work to ensure that barriers are identified and targeted. Dementia can also have a significant impact. People with dementia and their families have traditionally been at risk of losing touch with wider family, friends and community connections as a result of the illness – and are potentially at risk of other mental health problems such as depression and anxiety. We will continue to implement our National Dementia Strategy (2017-2020) to improve the quality of life for people with dementia, including addressing social

isolation and loneliness. This includes key work to support implementation of our national post-diagnostic commitment, to ensure that people with dementia retain social connections, access to leisure, cultural and other activities and wider civic participation.

Spotlight: Knowing Me, Knowing You – Alzheimer Scotland

Knowing me, knowing you is a volunteer buddying scheme across Lanarkshire and funded by the Life Changes Trust to help people through reminiscence therapy within their own homes. Reminiscence activities encompass a range of topics including sport, local heritage, working life and culture. Memories are gathered in a life-story book completed by the volunteer alongside the person with dementia and their families. The service gives carers the opportunity for added respite and time to pursue activities and relationships which in turn reduces their sense of social isolation and loneliness. It supports people living with dementia to build their confidence, make more social connections, take up activities that they previously enjoyed and try new activities.

For children and young people (and indeed all of Scotland), 2018 marked the Year of Young People, and has provided an opportunity to celebrate the contribution young people make to society in Scotland. Children and young people can experience social isolation and loneliness, and we want to make sure our efforts are inclusive of them – so we have published a draft Child Rights and Wellbeing Assessment alongside this strategy and will use this to develop our approach further. The Year of Young People has seen us redouble our efforts to create a climate in which our young people can succeed and to tackle the issues that inhibit them from fulfilling their true potential – one of those is their experience of loneliness and social isolation. We are working with partners in the public and third sector to develop a 10-year Child and Adolescent Health and Wellbeing Action Plan which will cover both physical and mental wellbeing. We know that relationships are at the centre of children and young people's health and wellbeing and are key to building resilience throughout life, and this will therefore be a key focus of the Action Plan. Recognising the value of youth work in delivering better outcomes for young people, we will seek to make links between this Strategy and the next iteration of the National Youth Work strategy.

We know that bullying can lead to children becoming isolated, which is one of the reasons we updated our National Approach to Anti-Bullying for Scotland's Children and Young People[35]. Respect for All has been written for everyone who works with children and young people and provides a holistic framework to address all aspects of bullying.

The implementation of Respect for All is delivered through respect*me*, the national anti-bullying service, who provide support to local authorities youth groups and all those working with children and young people, to build confidence and capacity to address bullying effectively. respect*me* also produce a number of resources for schools and parents on managing and responding to incidents of bullying. These resources include the potential signs to look out for if there is concern that a child is being bullied, including the child withdrawing. Respect*me*'s website contains a full suite of resources and contact details that are available to everyone[36].

There is growing recognition that Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), including abuse, neglect and household adversities (e.g. parental substance misuse, parental imprisonment) can impact on the healthy development of children and young people and can potentially lead to significant, long-term consequences in adulthood. Such adversity and trauma can also impact significantly on a person's ability to form and maintain relationships. This is why it is so important to ensure people, young and old, have positive relationship experiences and that they have the opportunity to have their voices heard. Evidence shows that supporting people affected by adversity and trauma to establish safe and trusted relationships supports their resilience and improved health and wellbeing. In particular, a supportive relationship between a child and at least one trusted-adult has been found to be key to helping people overcome early life adversity or trauma. The 2018-19 Programme for Government reiterates our commitment to tackling ACEs and is part of our long-standing, national approach of Getting it right for every child, which is about families and services working together to address the needs of children and young people to support their wellbeing and improve outcomes.

35   http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0052/00527674.pdf
36   https://respectme.org.uk/

Looking beyond age, anyone may be at greater risk when they have gone through a significant life transition and find themselves in a new situation with a changed social network. Examples are common to many and include changing school; starting and ending further/higher education; entering work or changing career; becoming unemployed; parenthood; retirement; the end of an intimate relationship; and bereavement. In order to effectively tackle social isolation, we want to better understand key life stages and consider how to best support those affected, so we will commission research to help us improve our understanding with a view to developing this strategy further.

Beyond age and stage, we also need to look at social isolation and loneliness through an equality lens. For example, we want to better understand how experiences and manifestations of social isolation and loneliness are gendered. Gender inequality continues to permeate society, and women continue to shoulder the bulk of caring responsibilities, have less access to power and resources, and continue to be overwhelmingly at risk of and subject to gender-based violence. All of this inhibits their space for action and may lead to them becoming more isolated. Men can also be impacted because they are men, and because gendered roles and stereotypes continue to persist. Older men in particular may experience difficulties when they stop working or lose their partner. Initiatives like Men's Sheds, where people (typically older men, but often younger men and women too) meet regularly for company and camaraderie, are strong examples of community-led projects which help to foster relationships and contribute to building local communities. Their positive mental and physical health benefits are backed up by evidence, so we'll continue to work with partners to develop this important health intervention nationally, including providing support to the Scottish Men's Sheds Association.

Minority groups also face impacts that relate to their experiences of prejudice, stigma and wider structural discrimination which again inhibits their space for action. We have published a draft Equality Impact Assessment alongside this strategy and will use the evidence in that to develop this approach further. We will work to build an intersectional approach to this work through developing links with programmes of work around race, disability, and improving the lives of Gypsy/Travellers. Through the BSL (British Sign Language) National Plan 2017-2023, we are committed to ensuring that D/deaf and Deafblind BSL users can be fully involved in daily and public life in Scotland, as active, healthy citizens. And for LGBTI people, we'll continue to build links with wider mental health policy and support work to tackle health inequalities.
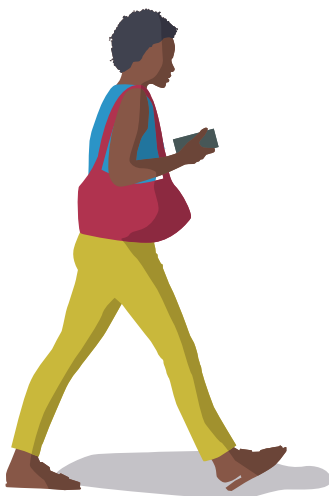
Spotlight:
Barrhead Men's Shed
Barrhead Men's Shed is a mixed shed that recognises that tackling loneliness and isolation is a significant driver in their formation, operation and purpose. This is why they are open four days a week, 52 weeks a year and hope to extend their opening hours. *"All of our members are delighted to be part of our big family unit where we can enjoy the daily banter and help one another carry out the various tasks in our workshop. Our members are proud and delighted to help the local community, schools and nurseries and retirement homes, but most importantly take time to share, help and listen to our members who are living in social isolation. As one of our widowed members said, 'loneliness is a disease'. Let's all help to eradicate this disease in our society."*
**– Alex Storrie, Chairman**

There are groups in society that go above and beyond what is expected, sometimes at the expense of their own immediate needs and wellbeing. Scotland's carers deserve to be able to live a full life, which includes time for socially connecting. We'll continue to promote the Carer Positive scheme, encouraging employers to adopt flexible employment policies and make it easier for carers to balance work and caring; and we'll work to embed the recently established rights for Scotland's 790,000 unpaid carers under the Carers (Scotland) Act – this includes carer's rights to a plan to identify their own needs and the outcomes that are important to them. Some members of the Armed Forces transitioning back to the civilian world from a close knit military community may find themselves experiencing social isolation or loneliness. To help combat this, we will work with stakeholders to tackle the stigma associated in admitting the need for help, which can be particularly prevalent in a community that has historically emphasised self-help. We will work alongside the UK Government and others to take forward the '*Strategy for our Veterans*[37]' to help ensure that, over the next decade, we respond to the changing needs of our veterans by setting the right conditions for society to empower and support them. In taking this work forward, we'll engage with a range of veterans and veterans' organisations, both large and small, to better identify how we can support the Armed Forces community to strengthen social connections.

Autistic people and people with learning disabilities – and their families – are at risk of experiencing social isolation throughout their lives. They may require practical support, including befriender groups for both family members and the individual, more free-of-charge social opportunities, the provision of more inclusive play equipment in play parks, autism friendly community access and easily accessible information. We will ensure that this Strategy links to our recently refreshed priorities for people with autism and the updated Keys to Life strategy for people with learning disabilities, which are working to ensure that they live healthier lives, have choice and control over the services they use, and are supported to be independent and active citizens.

We will also consider other vulnerable groups – including unemployed people, survivors of abuse, homeless people, those with addictions, and offenders. There are a number of relevant strategies we'll look to build closer links with, including our first homelessness action plan, revised alcohol and drugs strategy, and our Equally Safe strategy to prevent and eradicate violence against women and girls. As part of supporting offenders to reintegrate into society, we will consider how best to engage with community justice organisations in order to distribute information about relevant support services that help to improve social connections for offenders.

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37 https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ strategy-for-our-veterans

We know that young parents are particularly vulnerable to social isolation and loneliness[38]. Through funding from the Scottish Government's CYPEIF and ALEC Fund, Young Scot have been working with young parents in Scotland to develop online resources for the 'Ping' website. The young parents have identified peer support groups as important for providing friendships, support and an opportunity to share experiences with someone in the same situation as them. We'll continue to build links between this strategy and the Pregnancy and Parenthood strategy to ensure that social isolation and loneliness are considered as part of a holistic approach to supporting young parents. Wider work on pregnancy and maternity discrimination in the workplace is emphasising the importance of 'keeping in touch' days for pregnant women and new mothers through websites such as Ready Steady Baby, NHS Inform and The Parent Club, and we have also worked with YoungScot to tailor a Top Ten Tips guide specifically for young mums.
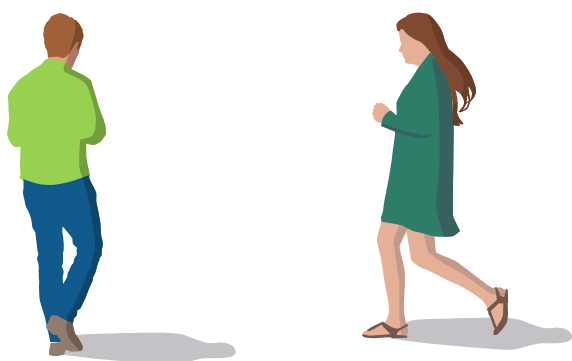
Spotlight: Rachel and Amelia at Fife Gingerbread

Rachel was referred to the Fife Teen Parent Project by the Family Nurse Partnership when her daughter Amelia was born. She was isolated and experiencing domestic abuse. However, after splitting from her partner and moving to a new area, Rachel contacted the Teen Parent Workers via Facebook to say she was ready and keen to access support services. Rachel met directly with a support worker once a week to build up a relationship – this included attending a Bookbug session at the local library, meeting for a coffee and a blether, and taking Amelia to the local park to get used to their new local community. After six weeks of building this rapport with her support worker, Rachel felt she was ready to start attending groups with other Mums. Rachel was able to build and maintain positive friendships with other Mums in the group, helping build her confidence and self-esteem. Since, Rachel and Amelia have gone from strength to strength. With a bit of support, Rachel's determination to succeed has helped her build a peer-support network, secure a part-time job and become a self-sufficient provider for her family.

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38   https://www.co-operative.coop/media/news-releases/shocking-extent-of-loneliness-faced-by-young-mothers-revealed

Recent studies have suggested that social isolation can interact with socio-economic status[39]. Living in poverty can lead to feelings of loneliness and social isolation, but it is also true that people suffering from social isolation are at risk of experiencing poverty. We remain committed to tackling poverty and inequality, and our Fairer Scotland Action Plan sets out 50 concrete actions that we will take in this Parliamentary term. We're making considerable progress on delivery of these actions, including having recently launched the Financial Health Check to provide personalised advice to help with the poverty premium people on low incomes face, and strengthening the referral pathways to money and welfare advice services for pregnant women and young families through Healthier, Wealthier Children. In April 2018, we introduced the Fairer Scotland Duty, a new responsibility on government and public bodies in Scotland to actively consider how they can reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage, when making strategic decisions. We will work with the Equality and Human Rights Commission over the three-year implementation phase to ensure the duty does as it is intended, and have appointed a national coordinator who will support public bodies to help implement the duty successfully.

The Child Poverty (Scotland) Act, as well as setting ambitious statutory income targets to reduce child poverty by 2030, places a duty on Ministers to publish child poverty delivery plans. Our first Tackling Child Poverty Delivery Plan *"Every Child, Every Chance"*, published in March 2018, committed us to a range of actions including investment in an intensive parental employment support programme to support parents on low incomes to work and earn more, delivering the Best Start Grant to provide additional resource to families on low incomes for each of their children at birth and at key points in their early years, and development of a new income supplement to provide additional financial support for low income families. We have already made progress on a number of commitments, including the introduction of a new national minimum school clothing grant of £100 per child, expanding access to free sanitary products across Scotland, and investing £1 million in Carnegie UK Trust's Affordable Credit Fund to provide genuine alternatives to high cost credit and to help tackle the poverty premium. The Poverty and Inequality Commission will move onto a statutory footing in 2019 which will help hold us to account for the progress we are making towards meeting our ambitious child poverty targets, and we are working with a number of Poverty Truth Commissions across the country to engage with people with lived experience of poverty which will help inform the ways in which tackling social isolation can contribute to tackling poverty and inequality.

39 Payne, S. *Mental Health, Poverty and Social Exclusion*. PSE UK, 2012. URL, http://www.poverty.ac.uk/sites/default/files/attachments/Conceptual%20note%20No.%209%20-%20Mental%20Health%20%28Payne%20Dec2012%29.pdf (Last Accessed: 04/01/18).

Encouraging everyone to play their part

Social isolation and loneliness won't be solved by the actions of Government alone. Everyone has a part to play – whether they're delivering a service, running a business or working to improve their communities.

Reforming public services is at the heart of delivering against Scotland's Purpose and National Outcomes, with high-quality and person-centred services considered crucial to improving the wellbeing of people and communities. Grounded in the recommendations set out in the Christie Commission report of 2011, with its four key principles of prevention, partnership, people and performance, Scotland's ambitious programme of Public Service Reform particularly harnesses the local power of individuals, communities, places and frontline knowledge. Accordingly, the reform journey is a partnership with local government and the third sector that helps ensure our public services are sustainable, meet the needs of citizens and improve the lives of Scotland's people. To help public services better understand the role they can play in reducing social isolation and loneliness, we'll work with local government and the third sector to develop guidance and resources which will help to support integrating these considerations within wider reform of public services. We'll also work with the third sector and public services to better understand what a holistic pathway of support for someone experiencing chronic social isolation looks like, and how such a pathway could be embedded within wider systems.

Scotland's faith communities play a significant role in supporting many of our most vulnerable and disadvantaged communities. We greatly value and appreciate our relationships with our diverse faith communities and welcome their contribution to communities throughout Scotland, and we believe that people of all faiths, and none, must be supported to follow their way of life. To achieve this, we will continue to work very closely with a number of faith community organisations, including those representing older people, women and other vulnerable groups who belong to minority faith communities. We also support Interfaith Scotland to promote interfaith dialogue and support faith and belief communities across the country. We believe that good interfaith dialogue helps to strengthen and enhance connections across communities, helping to lower barriers, eliminate fear and increase understanding.
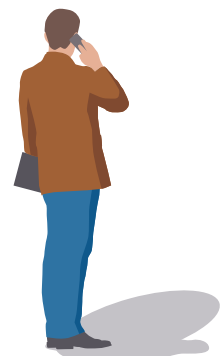
Spotlight: AMINA Befriending Project, Dundee

The aim of the befriending project in Dundee is to address the increasing social isolation of Muslim and Minority Ethnic women over the age of 50, to support them to build their own social networks, live better quality lives and help them to make better decisions about their physical health. *"I was depressed and lonely and became very ill. When I joined the group I started feeling better I am so grateful I got to join the group I didn't go out anywhere before. Nobody really organised activities like this before. Now I have something to look forward to and enjoy."*

 – individual

People spend a significant amount of time at work, and we see the role of employers and business as important. Our Fair Work Framework[40] sets out our vision for a Scotland where fair work drives success, wellbeing and prosperity and offers employees an effective voice, opportunity, security, fulfilment and respect. By adopting these principles, employers can begin creating the very best type of workplace culture that will aid the building of strong relationships with colleagues and provide rewarding work. Developing this culture is a crucial step towards ensuring individuals can take a balanced approach to work and no one becomes isolated in the workplace. This is good for employers too – it is estimated that social isolation and loneliness leads to an estimated annual cost of £2.5 billion to employers through absence, caring activity, reduced productivity and staff turnover[41]. Businesses can be a place where some experience the bulk of their social interactions. Research has shown that those who use local amenities regularly are less likely to experience social isolation[42]. The Joseph Rowntree foundation's report, *Between Kith and Kin and Formal Services*, also highlights some examples of people going above and beyond their job role to help people who are at risk of becoming socially isolated[43].

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40   http://www.fairworkconvention.scot/framework/FairWorkConventionFrameworkFull.pdf

41   Co-op & New Economics Foundation. *The Cost of Loneliness to UK Employers*. New Economics Foundation, 2017. p. v.

42   Kearns, A. *Loneliness in Glasgow's Deprived Communities*. p. 7.

43   Anderson, S. *Between Kith and Kin and Formal Services*. Joseph Rowntree Foundation.

To strengthen the contribution of business to this agenda, we'll build links between this Strategy and the Fair Work agenda, and engage with key stakeholders in the business community to promote our ambitions in this area. Noting the importance of effective retirement planning, we'll encourage businesses to have pre-retirement conversations and explore alternative retirement options with their workers, to ensure that employees are supported. We'll also encourage businesses to consider using the Workplace Equality Fund to explore ways in which employment inequality can be reduced through greater social connectivity at work.

Spotlight: Tesco Maryhill
The Maryhill branch of Tesco has become a well cited example of people going the extra mile to help tackle social isolation and loneliness. Research has shown that supermarket staff can play a huge role in promoting community cohesion simply by spending a little time to get to know the people that regularly visit the store. There is also a part-time community champion employed by the company to understand issues in the community and use the resources of the supermarket to help.
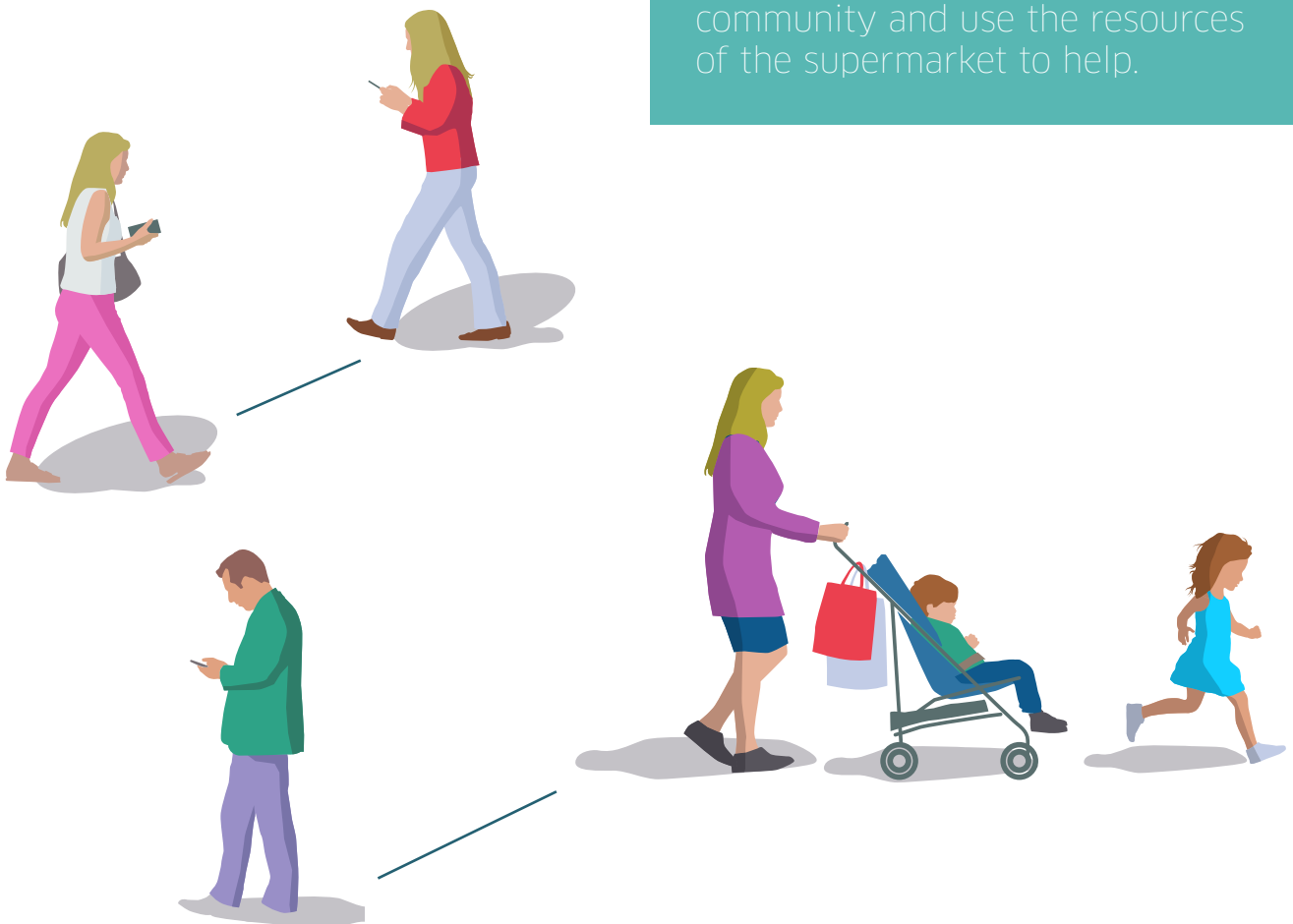
Priority 2:
Promote positive attitudes and tackle stigma

Build positive and healthy relationships

At the heart of the Scottish education policy landscape and curriculum is a focus on wellbeing and the importance of relationships in shaping outcomes. Embedded within this is an understanding of how early and later experiences can impact on children and young people's behaviour and the need to ensure that we take this into account when supporting them. Supporting the development of strong and positive relationships is important, so that as people move through life they're better able to establish and nurture their social connections. To support our young people as they move through the levels of education, we have placed health and wellbeing as a core element of Curriculum for Excellence. Health and wellbeing, along with literacy and numeracy, is the responsibility of all staff in the school. Making sure children and

young people are included, engaged, and involved in their education is fundamental to achievement and attainment in school. An important element of Health and Wellbeing in our schools is Personal and Social Education (PSE). We want to ensure that all of our pupils are engaging and developing as they move through education, not just academically, but with the important life skills and experiences they need to build positive and healthy relationships. We have recently undertaken a review of PSE delivery in our schools and will implement the recommendations of this review with key partners and stakeholders over the course of this parliamentary term.

Relationship based approaches such as a nurturing approach help schools to develop an awareness of early adversity and trauma and are therefore a pivotal part of realising the Scottish Government's aim of preventing and mitigating the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences. There is a long established evidence base for the use of Nurture Groups as a targeted approach to support children and young people but schools and local authorities are also increasingly seeing the benefits of using a nurturing approach at the whole school level. Education Scotland has developed two national professional learning resources. The first – Nurturing Approaches in the primary school – explores attachment and nurture in the Early Years. The second – a whole school Nurturing Approach – promotes school connectedness, resilience and the development of social and emotional competences all of which are key aspects of promoting mental wellbeing. We will

continue to roll this out to schools through the demonstration of good practice and supporting resources that teachers and staff can access and utilise to meet the needs of their individual pupils.

Reduce stigma

Reducing stigma starts with working to raise the profile of the issues of social isolation and loneliness across Scotland. We know that stigma continues to attach itself to these issues and people are generally reluctant to admit that they experience loneliness, or that they may be socially isolated.

We also know that promoting positive attitudes and reducing stigma are interlinked. This strategy is a step in the right direction in addressing this, but we need to do more. So we will engage with See Me, Scotland's campaign to end stigma around mental health, to better understand the learning from the development and impact of their work, and work with partners to better understand what would work to reduce the stigma around social isolation and loneliness.

Encourage kindness

Kindness is at the heart of the new National Performance Framework (NPF). This completely revised NPF has been developed with the people of Scotland to reflect our values as a nation and the aspirations we hold for our future. Ongoing work by the Carnegie UK Trust[44] has identified that kindness can go a long way to reducing social isolation and loneliness, and has also identified what contributes to creating kinder communities and challenged policy makers to think about what the role of kindness is in developing public policy and delivering public services. This challenging work has helped to kick start a radical and meaningful conversation about the importance of kindness, and we want to ensure that the ambitions of this Strategy are rooted in this conversation as it progresses. The Scottish Government is participating fully in the ongoing work,

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44   https://d1ssu070pg2v9i.cloudfront.net/pex/ carnegie_uk_trust/2016/10/Kinder-Communities.pdf

led by Carnegie, to improve our approach to developing and delivering policies and services that are genuinely kind, which treat people with kindness, dignity and compassion and which create the conditions for improving the well being of people, families and communities across Scotland. We are watching the kindness related work underway in North Ayrshire with great interest and have already ensured that our new responsibilities around Social Security have these principles at their heart.

Our most recent campaign for St Andrew's Day encouraged people to #belikeStAndrew and perform an action of kindness, and we will continue to look for ways in which to embed kindness across our work and promote it as a value central to delivering for the people of Scotland.

Improve mental wellbeing

In addition to the opportunities presented in the Public Service Reform programme, actions in the Government's Mental Health Strategy to improve mental health and wellbeing will be important. Social isolation and loneliness can be a feature of mental ill-health and measures to promote good mental well-being can help to address these. For example, the Mental Health Strategy recognises distinctive experiences of isolation within rural communities and commits to supporting the further development of the National Rural Mental Health Forum to reflect the unique challenges presented by rural isolation.

We want to create a Scotland where we have good mental wellbeing and where all people can thrive across their lifespan. Our guiding ambition for mental health is simple but, if realised, will change and save lives – that we must prevent and treat mental health problems with the same commitment, passion and drive as we do with physical health problems. We will continue to support and develop front line initiatives such as Breathing Space, a telephone and web service for people experiencing anxiety or low mood. We will also continue to support the innovative Distress Brief Intervention (DBI) pilot programme, in which connected, compassionate support is offered to people who present in distress to frontline services . The pilot is being evaluated, with the evaluation report expected in 2021, and we will explore further the extent to which social isolation and loneliness manifests itself within those who access this programme.

Prevention and early intervention is a theme of the Mental Health Strategy. We want every child and young person to have appropriate access to emotional and mental well-being support in school, and the Mental Health Strategy sets out clearly the actions we are taking to improve early intervention, and ensure better access to services. We have built on this positive action through the commitments within this year's Programme for Government which included measures for radical reform of our response to mental ill-health and support for good mental health. This included a commitment to invest in access to school counselling services, mental health first aid training for local authority staff and access to counselling in further and higher education.

A complex range of factors can contribute to people contemplating suicide. Many are not to do with mental ill-health and can instead relate to stressful life circumstances, events or changes in a person's life, where there are prevention opportunities for public bodies and communities. Social isolation is recognised as a factor known to contribute to raised suicide risk. Our recently published Suicide Prevention Action Plan "Every Life Matters" sets out a range of actions designed to continue the long-term downward trend in the suicide rate in Scotland, and these will in turn help with issues of social isolation and loneliness. We envisage a Scotland where suicide is preventable; where help and support is available to anyone contemplating suicide and to those who have lost a loved one to suicide. Healthcare settings will continue to be important for supporting prevention and interventions. The National Suicide Prevention Leadership Group will also give consideration to wider settings where at-risk individuals can be supported – such as Jobcentres, Citizens' Advice Bureaus and solicitors' offices.

We want every child and young person to have appropriate access to emotional and mental wellbeing support in school, and the aforementioned mental health strategy sets out clearly how we can improve early intervention, and ensure better access to services. We have built on this positive action through the commitments within this year's Programme for Government which included measures for radical reform of our response to mental ill-health and support for good mental health. This included a commitment to invest in access to school counselling services, mental health first aid training for local authority staff and counselling in further and higher education.

Promote intergenerational dialogue

Intergenerational dialogue has a vital role in ensuring that different generations talk to each other in order to tackle shared challenges and prevent exclusion and isolation. As part of the legacy of the Year of Young People, we'll also look at what more we can do to develop intergenerational practice and encourage contact between people of all ages. This will help to challenge ageism and discrimination and ensure that people of all ages are more included in their communities.

Spotlight: Hanover Scotland Housing Association – Linkwood View, Elgin

Linkwood View is a 32 home social housing development in the North East of Scotland which offers a new model for better integration of health, social care and housing policy. To encourage intergenerational interactions, Hanover has gifted a small part of the large garden area of Linkwood View to the bordering Magic Roundabout nursery. This allows the children to grow their own plants and flowers and maintain the garden. Not only has this assisted with outdoor educational activity for the children, it has fostered an intergenerational understanding between the residents and the nursery children.

Priority 3:
Create opportunities for people to connect

Perspective: Befriending Networks

In order to tackle social isolation and loneliness, it's vital that a range of options exists to meet the differing needs of those living in our communities, across all ages and stages. At Befriending Networks, our members are a key resource, with volunteers and befrienders often at the frontline in local communities. Befriending often supports those who are most marginalised and excluded in our society and who may be living with chronic isolation and loneliness. Providing that more formalised support to help them engage with their community, after first having the opportunity to build relationships, self-esteem and confidence, can make all the difference. But it's not all one way – the mutuality of the relationship between befriender and befriendee is often what's most valued and becoming a volunteer befriender provides significant benefits for the volunteers themselves.

– Sarah Van Putten, Chief Executive

Raise awareness of opportunities

People have told us that one of the barriers to them socially connecting is a lack of awareness about the opportunities in communities to take part in activities that are enjoyable and that create opportunities to build meaningful relationships through the pursuit of shared interests. We know that many organisations work hard to make information on community activity available, but that lack of awareness nevertheless remains an issue. Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs) play an important role in the third sector landscape, and there is a TSI based in each of the 32 local authority areas across Scotland. They are a key point of intelligence about local third sector organisations and are well positioned to identify support needs for local community groups, voluntary organisations, social enterprises and

around volunteering. TSIs also have a key role in ensuring the third sector within their area has a voice, both locally and nationally, and that the local sector is well connected through partnership and collaboration. TSIs therefore occupy an ideal point for people to link into services and find out more about what's happening in their communities. For example, the TSI within South Lanarkshire, Voluntary Action South Lanarkshire, operate a 'Locator' tool which enables anyone in South Lanarkshire to find out what's going on in their local area. This is one of a host of good practice examples across TSIs and we will continue to work with the TSI network to develop and share these examples. We also know that organisations such as the Scottish Council of Voluntary Organisations (SCVO) and the Health and Social Care Alliance have taken forward the development of online information platforms, and we will consider the learning from these in informing our future approach.

Promote befriending

Befriending offers supportive, reliable relationships through volunteer befrienders to people who may otherwise be socially isolated. Across the country, there are befriending projects which organise effective support for many different people. Impact can be significant – befriending often provides people with a new direction in life, opens up a range of activities and leads to increased self-esteem and self-confidence. To help support befriending in Scotland, we'll provide funding to Befriending Networks over at least the next two years to build capacity and share best practice within the sector, raise awareness of befriending as a high-quality volunteering opportunity and link the developing evidence base on befriending into 'what works' to tackle social isolation and loneliness.

Spotlight: Epilepsy Connections
Steven and Michael both live with epilepsy. Steven volunteers with Epilepsy Connections as a befriender and has been matched with Michael since June 2018. They meet fortnightly to enjoy some fun social time together.

Steven: *'One of the most inspiring experiences as a befriender with Epilepsy Connections is watching my befriendee, Michael happy and satisfied as a result of engaging in regular one-to-one social interaction, whilst undertaking activities that previously was just impossible for him. The change in Michael's life in the space of a few months has been extraordinary.'*

Michael: `'`*Some time ago I moved from Shetland to Glasgow and as you can imagine that is isolating in itself, but having epilepsy presents specific challenges. Meeting Steven has made me realise I am not alone and he has given me the confidence, to make choices that I just would not have been able to without meeting him. My life is quite different now I have a befriender, I feel less isolated, more confident about both myself and my health, and also that I take part fully in opportunities in my community.'*

Promote physical activity

Participating in sport and physical activity can improve the quality of life of individuals and communities, promote social inclusion, improve health, raise individual self-esteem and confidence, and widen horizons. In conjunction with other factors, sport has the potential to contribute positively to society in general, and aspects of community planning in particular. Physical activity has strong physical and mental health benefits – in particular, it can help older adults to maintain mobility and reduce the risk of ill-health. This can help them maintain their independence and self sufficiency. Sport and group activities also provide a social space where people can interact. This, in turn, decreases the risk of social isolation. We know that being active brings about positive changes beyond participation and can impact positively on people in communities being better connected and socially cohesive. Working in partnership, sporting and non-sporting organisations can intentionally and proactively use sport and physical activity as a tool, not only to achieve increased participation but address wider individual and community needs such as social isolation and loneliness. The power of sport and physical activity has the potential to bring about positive, often interrelated changes and its impact cannot be underestimated.

We know that older people who are physically inactive have reduced mobility and muscle strength, leading to increased falls and poorer wellbeing and quality of life. This can be a particular issue for older people in care, and lead to a loss of confidence in going out into the community. To address this, the Scottish Government have provided more than £1.6 million since 2016 to the Care Inspectorate to expand their "Care About… Physical Activity (CAPA)[45]" Programme throughout Scotland and improve support for older adults experiencing care to move more.

We are committed to creating the conditions for sport and physical activity to flourish. We're already investing £50 million in the sportscotland Active Schools programme, and we'll leverage our additional investment in Scottish Sports Governing Bodies to encourage them to support efforts to reduce social isolation and loneliness. We'll continue to build on the legacy of the 2014 Commonwealth Games through funding streams to improve sports facilities and encourage community sports hubs to establish new sport or physical activity sessions for those who are most inactive in their communities.

We will also consider barriers to participating in sport and physical activity which may include a loss of confidence as a result of being socially isolated. We need to help people overcome these issues and enjoy the clear benefits that sport and physical activity can bring. In partnership with sportscotland, the Robertson Trust and Spirit 2012 we have already invested £1 million in community-based sport and physical activity projects in Scotland in a new Changing Lives Through Sport & Physical Activity Fund managed by Spirit 2012 aimed at changing lives and creating a more inclusive and healthier nation. Seventeen partnerships have recently been allocated a total of £1 million, of which at least six projects seek to address social isolation in the community. We will continue to fund Paths for All to develop and deliver an action plan for *Let's Get Scotland Walking – the National Walking Strategy,* and to ensure that their broader activities deliver against other national policy imperatives relating to physical activity, including the Active Scotland Outcomes. We will also continue to support the rollout of the Cycling Without Age Scotland project which provides older adults with the opportunity to cycle outdoors on specially designed trishaws.

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45   http://www.capa.scot/

Promote and enable volunteering

Volunteering, in all its forms, is central to ensuring that Scotland successfully achieves ambitious and meaningful change for those facing social isolation and loneliness. We recognise that volunteering has wide ranging benefits for the individuals involved, both those who give their time to help and people who use services. But it also has a positive impact on communities, and can go a long way to help building the connected Scotland we want to see.

Spotlight: 1st Step Café, Linlithgow
Supported by the Scottish Government Volunteer Support Fund, 1st Step Café is a community volunteering organisation that helps people affected by addiction to recover and reach their potential. Nearly all the volunteers involved in 1st Step projects suffer from isolation and the lack of confidence that this creates; most have lost contact with supportive friends and family because of past challenging behaviours. For them, volunteering with 1st Step is a bridge to building new relationships, replacing negative influences with new friendships, allowing them to share their skills and inspire each other to become the people they really want to be.

'After many years of living alongside addiction, volunteering has played a major part in helping me regain a sense of myself and control over my own life. It has given me a purpose and provides a community in which I feel valued and understood. After years of isolation and shame I can now walk around the town I have lived in for over 40 years with my head held high.'

– Current volunteer at 1st Step

Levels of volunteering in Scotland have been relatively stable since 2009 for adults, and increasing in younger people. However there remains a challenge in engaging people who are disadvantaged, with areas of deprivation consistently having lower levels of volunteering than more affluent areas[46]. A 2016 report by the Charities Aid Foundation found that many older people (73%) recognise that choosing to volunteer would have positive impacts for them, yet less than half report to have volunteered in the last year[47].

The Programme for Government 2018-19 recognises that we've made progress on our drive to increase participation in volunteering across society, building on the growth of youth volunteering during the Year of Young People by investing in the establishment of a National Youth Volunteering Design Team who will make recommendations to the Scottish Government early next year on actions required to grow participation rates. We have also invested in the development of our volunteering evidence base and maintained our funding to support third sector organisations to engage with those facing barriers to participation, providing £3.8 million over 2017-20 through our Volunteer Support Fund[48].

This seeks to improve the diversity of volunteers, and in 2016-17, resulted in 3,505 new volunteers being recruited from disadvantaged backgrounds[49]. In the coming year, we will publish a National Volunteering Outcomes Framework that will set out a coherent and compelling vision for volunteering and identify the key evidence and data to drive an increase in participation for all.

46   Scottish Household Survey *Annual Report 2017.* Scottish Government, 4th September 2018 p.189, URL, https://www.gov.scot/publications/scotlands-people-annual-report-results-2017-scottish-household-survey/

47   Charities Aid Foundation (2016), A *Post-careers Advice Service: Giving People the Tools to Go On Giving,* p.10. URL: https://www.cafonline.org/docs/default-source/about-us-publications/a-post-careers-advice-service-giving-people-the-tools-to-go-on-giving.pdf (Last Accessed: 04/01/18).

48   http://www.gov.scot/Topics/People/15300/Localism/VolunteerSupportFund

49   532 of these volunteers came from a low-income household, 432 were older people, and 231 suffered from mental ill-health.

Utilise technology and digital

Access to digital technology for people clearly has a role to play in building social connections, and technology provides new and innovative opportunities to support people who may be isolated. Our aim is to ensure that everybody has the opportunity to participate in the digital world and to use the power of the internet to enable social mobility and tackle persistent inequalities. This starts with basic digital skills. We know the majority of people who do not use the internet at all or who have a lower level of confidence in their skills are older, have a disability or chronic health condition and are on low incomes. They are very often the same people who, due to circumstances, are more vulnerable to social isolation and loneliness. Whilst it is true that digital technologies can reinforce such feelings, we are clear they can also be a force for good by increasing independence, allowing people to renew old connections, make new friends, and provide access to services and information. The recently published Living Digitally report[50] clearly establishes the wellbeing benefits of digital participation, and a two-year project by Care and Repair providing access to digital skills learning for older people in their own homes successfully increased independence, skills and feelings of family connectedness[51].

But we know there remains more to do, and the 2017 Digital Strategy for Scotland committed to reassessing how we engage with vulnerable groups. As a consequence, a number of projects to improve digital skills and access are working specifically with young parents, people experiencing homelessness and young care leavers. The next step is to work with older age groups to understand how digital technologies can add value to their lives in a way that is meaningful to them. In addition to the provision of digital skills, we're well aware of the costs associated with getting online, and we're exploring how we can introduce affordable broadband for people on low incomes. We also recognise that the digital world poses challenges and risks – that's why we're investing in a number of programmes and initiatives that promote internet safety for children and young people, including Police Scotland's Choices for Life Online Peer Mentoring Programme and the Mentors in Violence Prevention Programme.

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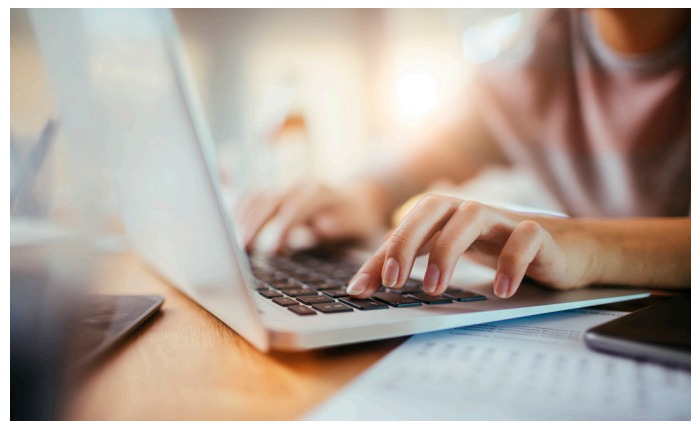
50   Living Digitally, An evaluation of the Clever Cogs digital care and support system, Carnegie UK, October 2018.

51   Digital inclusion services for older people, Care and Repair, August 2018.

Priority 4:
Support an infrastructure that fosters connections

Perspective – Jeane Freeman MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Health and Sport

I was delighted to lead the Scottish Government's early work on social isolation and loneliness in Scotland when we launched our draft strategy in January 2018 – one of the first of its kind in the world. As we move forward, I look forward to championing these important issues across the health and sport portfolio and helping contribute to building a more connected Scotland. Health and social care has a critically important role to play in this space – and as a major public health issue, tackling social isolation and loneliness will help us to improve the health and wellbeing of the people of Scotland.

Person-centred health and social care

We know that social isolation and loneliness can contribute to poor health and wellbeing and, conversely, people with poor physical and/or mental health may become more isolated due to the barriers their conditions present. That's why the Health and Social Care Standards[52] take a human rights based approach to ensure that care services are tailored to the needs and choices of the individual experiencing care. The Standards are not only about inspection and scrutiny of services, but will help to continually improve the quality of services, social work and community justice. They are underpinned by five principles: dignity and respect; compassion; be included; responsive care and support; and wellbeing. They are complemented by a series of example statements explaining what these personal outcomes look like in practice. For example, in terms of helping to reduce social isolation and loneliness, the following descriptors may apply:

1.10 I am supported to participate fully as a citizen in my local community in the way that I want.

5.8 I experience a service as near as possible to people who are important to me and my home area if I want this and if it is safe.

52   https://beta.gov.scot/publications/health-social-care-standards-support-life/

The new Integration Authorities have an important role in ensuring that people in the community are supported to improve health and wellbeing, and we want to work with them to consider how they might address these issues in their localities. We know that some Authorities have included explicit references to social isolation and loneliness within their strategic plan and that other Authorities are supporting activity that helps to reduce social isolation and loneliness.

The Public Health Priorities for Scotland, published earlier this year, provide an important focus for the whole system on the things which will have the greatest potential to improve the health of the nation: healthy places and communities; the early years; mental wellbeing; harmful substances; poverty and inequality; and healthy weight and physical activity. The inclusion of place and mental wellbeing as two of our priorities are of particular relevance to addressing social isolation and loneliness, especially in terms of recognising how we build and support local communities and create the conditions that engender a sense of belonging and foster greater social connectivity.

The changing landscape around health and social care, as well as an ever greater focus on initiatives like Realistic Medicine[53] and Social Prescribing, presents an opportunity to consider how community-based care can play a part in reducing social isolation and loneliness. It also both reflects, and creates more impetus for, health and social care

support more broadly changing to take a holistic approach to improving health and wellbeing that recognises the social conditions of an individual's life. There are many different models for social prescribing, but most involve a link worker or navigator who works with people to access local sources of support. We funded a pilot community links worker programme[54] in Glasgow and Dundee and have committed to introducing 250 link workers by the end of this Parliament. Following initial piloting, the first stage of recruitment began with 56 'early adopters' and Integration Authorities are now recruiting towards the overall target of 250. Nationally, implementation is focused on prioritising areas of greatest deprivation, some Integration Authorities are also exploring the possibility of extending the model to those vulnerable groups who may be most at risk of social isolation. We will work with Integration Authorities to explore what further support they may require to ensure that community link workers have access to relevant information regarding social isolation, including identification and signposting.

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53   https://www2.gov.scot/Resource/0053/00534374.pdf

54   NHS Health Scotland. *Evaluation of the Links Worker Programme in 'Deep End' general practices in Glasgow.* NHS Health Scotland, 2016. URL: http://www.healthscotland.scot/media/1201/27362-evaluation-of-the-links-worker-programme-in-deep-end-general-practices-in-glasgow-07-16.pdf (Last Accessed: 04/01/18).

Spotlight: Community Link Workers in Inverclyde

Frank was struggling with low mood and becoming isolated in his home as a result. He also had worries about his finances and, in spending a lot of money heating his home, he had very little money to be able to travel to support services, access help or socialise. Frank was referred to the Community Link Worker by his Community Psychiatric Nurse. After a discussion with him, the Community Link Worker referred Frank to a local men's group in Inverclyde where he could meet new people and begin to socialise more. He was also directed to a benefits advice service who were able to support him in improving his financial situation, meaning he could afford to heat his home and still have money to get out and about. *"…things are definitely on the up…I feel sunny again"* – **Frank**

We know that the fear of falling is extremely common and can in itself lead to people becoming socially isolated. The Scottish Government-sponsored National Falls Programme has had a focus on falls prevention since 2010, and it aims to aid the prevention of falls and put in place a support network for older people who have fallen and been identified as being at risk of further unintentional harm. We are currently developing Scotland's first Falls and Fracture Prevention Strategy, which will build on previous work and will aim to create the conditions for delivering a collaborative approach across the community, primary care and secondary care to prevent harm from falls. The Strategy, due to be published in early 2019, will highlight the relationship between falls, fear of falling and keeping connected, and will align with this Strategy.

Good quality, person-centred social care can go a long way to alleviating social isolation and loneliness by enabling people to continue living independently within their communities and participate in society in a full and meaningful way[55]. The Social Care (Self-directed Support) (Scotland) Act 2013 enshrines in law that people who are eligible for social care support must be involved in decisions about what their support looks like and how it is delivered. This re-balancing of power between the practitioner and the individual seeks to ensure that the supported person can direct their care in a way that focuses on the aspects of life that matter to them. Maintaining social relationships and contributing to their community are strong drivers for many people as they consider the outcomes they wish to achieve.

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55   Sense. "Someone cares if I'm not there": *Addressing loneliness in disabled people.* The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness, 2017. p.34.

Scotland is working towards this self-directed approach becoming the mainstream way in which Scotland delivers social care. This requires change across a range of partners, and a renewed focus on the assets and potential within our communities to complement formal social care provision. In 2019, after extensive discussion with a wide range of stakeholders, we will publish a new National Implementation Plan to drive the changes we wish to see at national and local level. The refreshed Implementation Plan is part of a national programme of work to support local reform of adult social care that is being developed collectively with people who use social care support, local organisations, Health and Social Care partnerships, COSLA and Scottish Government. This work will allow us to together create and realise a vision for social care which focuses on the whole person, which supports people to live as independently as possible, and enables them to participate in society in a full and meaningful way.

Building safer communities

Through our ambition to build safer communities we recognise the connection between social isolation and loneliness and community safety. The fear and risk of intentional and unintentional harm both in our homes and in our communities can impact on how willing and able people are to engage with others and with their local area. Through our ambition to reduce unintentional harm we are working with key stakeholders to share messages and support initiatives and approaches that focus on reducing unintentional harm. Looking ahead, we are working in partnership to develop and deliver an unintentional harm online hub that will gather and share examples of local activity that is directly reducing unintentional harm. This online tool is due to be launched in 2019 and will be available to partnerships in the first instance. In recognising the link between social isolation and loneliness and in keeping safe, the hub will provide a number of examples that can help reduce isolation.
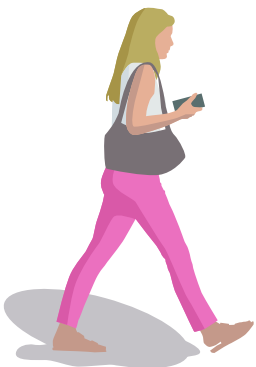
As part of its Service Transformation programme, the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service are moving towards delivering Safe & Well visits across Scotland. These build upon the success of the Service's prevention based Home Fire Safety Visit programme, which has contributed to a significant reduction of fires in the home, and fire related casualties. Various aspects of wellbeing are being considered, including how such visits can recognise the signs of loneliness and isolation, how visits can include referrals on to local health professionals to provide appropriate support, and enhancing referral pathways to support access to local community groups and initiatives working to tackle social isolation and loneliness.

A growing third sector and social economy

The third sector has an important dual role to play in tackling social isolation and loneliness. Third sector organisations are generally rooted within their communities and are well positioned to offer interventions and support in a different way to statutory services. They also help to ensure that the voices of individuals and communities are heard in the design and development of services. We continue to protect our core investment into the third sector to support organisations in their work with individuals and communities. This funding also supports our work to provide the third sector with greater funding stability and the opportunity for longer term planning and development

of its role in supporting communities and tackling inequality.

Social enterprises, as businesses that trade for the common good, provide support to people traditional sectors can struggle to reach. Because of this, social enterprises have a key role to play in strengthening social capital in our local communities and tackling social isolation and loneliness. To ensure that social enterprises continue to play an increasingly significant role, the Scottish Government has developed a world-leading eco-system of support for social enterprise: developing a ten-year national strategy[56] and action plan[57], and providing free business support for individual social entrepreneurs.

Spotlight: Lingo Flamingo

Lingo Flamingo is a social enterprise that delivers professional-standard foreign language classes to older adults in care homes and day centres to increase well-being, stimulate the brain and slow the progress of dementia. Their projects bring people who might normally be socially isolated into a fun, lively class atmosphere, providing a platform to build a social network.

56   http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2016/12/4404
57   http://www.gov.scot/Publications/2017/04/8804/0

Placemaking

The extent to which people interact is heavily determined by their lived environment. Living in the right home with the right advice and support can enable people to live safely and independently for as long as they choose to do so. We know that Registered Social Landlords already do a lot of work with tenants to ensure their wellbeing. Community Connectors in Glasgow can link older people and their carers to activities, services and support in their local community thereby reducing social isolation and loneliness.

In August 2018, Scottish Government and COSLA jointly published Age, Home and Community – The Next Phase. This is a refresh of the original strategy published in 2011 and has been updated with input from partners in health, housing and third sectors. The refreshed strategy continues to highlight the importance of housing in the lives of older people not least its impact on social isolation. We recognise that the majority of older people live in ordinary homes in their local communities. As part of the refreshed strategy we will explore various housing options to meet the needs of a broader range of purchasers including alternative models such as self-build, co-housing and intergenerational living. The Programme for Government 2018-19 reaffirms this commitment stating that in the coming year we will pilot innovative housing solutions for older people, testing intergenerational and other co-living arrangements to meet housing needs and reduce loneliness.

Many of the housing issues that impact on older people are also particularly relevant to disabled people. A Fairer Scotland for Disabled People – Our Delivery Plan to 2021 set out our commitment to increasing the supply of wheelchair accessible housing across all tenures by requiring all authorities to set a realistic target for delivery within its Local Housing Strategy and reporting annually on progress. This was reaffirmed in Programme for Government along with a commitment to bring forward guidance in 2019.

The planning system also has a vital role to play in delivering high-quality places for Scotland. Delivering high-quality buildings, infrastructure and spaces in the right locations helps provide choice over where to live, style of home, access to amenities and services, and choice to live more active, engaged, independent and healthy lifestyles. We have undertaken a review of the planning system and are proposing a range of measures to give communities a stronger voice in decisions about the future of their places through our 2017 Planning Bill. We will commence a review of Scotland's National Planning Framework following the Planning Bill's passage through Parliament. The National Planning Framework has a critical role to play in bringing together national policies and programmes, such as this one, to provide a coherent, long-term plan for Scotland as a place. We will therefore consider this strategy as we develop NPF4 (National Planning Framework 4) to see how national planning policy can also encourage local development plans to consider how our future places can better support vibrant communities with opportunities for greater social interaction for people of all ages.

We've also developed the Place Standard tool in partnership with NHS Health Scotland and Architecture & Design Scotland which allows communities to work together constructively to assess the quality of their place and to prioritise areas for action. The tool is structured around 14 themes which focus on physical and social issues. It encourages users to consider whether a place provides a variety of spaces to meet, either formally or informally, and contains specific themes looking at Social Contact and Feeling Safe within neighbourhoods. The Place Standard is already being used widely across Scotland as well as internationally, and we have committed to scale up the use of the tool in Scotland, investigating how it can help to reduce inequalities, build social capital, and encourage active participation in community life from all parts of the community. We will look to roll out this initiative further, as well as develop our thinking on how the lived environment both helps and hinders efforts to socially connect.
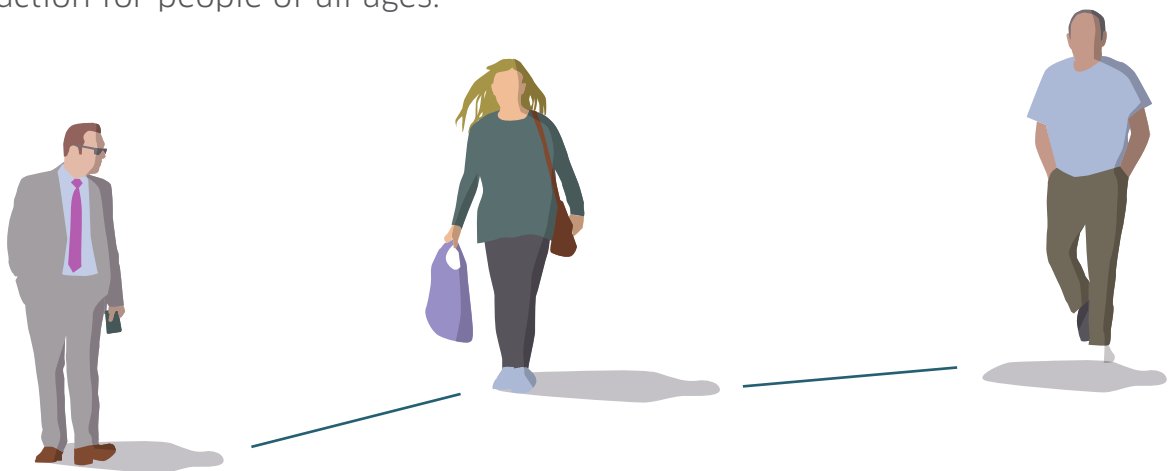
Spotlight: Digital Scotland Superfast Broadband

Silver City Surfers is an innovative charity bringing digital skills to people aged over 55 in Aberdeen and the North East of Scotland. The organisation runs five free sessions a week in the city, where people can gain confidence in using IT, with one to one tuition from instructors at their own pace, all in a relaxed, social setting. Silver City Surfers are now benefiting from a high speed fibre connection at the Salvation Army Citadel in Aberdeen, where hundreds of people attend their sessions each year.

Digital infrastructure

We're investing heavily to extend superfast broadband access to all premises in Scotland by the end of 2021, and over that period we will be developing prototype affordable internet access at home and in other trusted settings. Emerging technology presents both opportunities and challenges, and we will look at how to harness different opportunities that allow people to connect with each other.

Transport

Accessible transport is vital to people being able to meet face-to-face and stay socially active, particularly for those in rural areas or later in life. We're taking forward a review of our National Transport Strategy, with accessibility identified early on as an important theme an important theme of national stakeholder groups charged with producing policy proposals to underpin the new strategy. We'll also bring forward a new Transport Bill to lock in improvements to the system. We're investing in bus services to keep fares affordable, and are continuing to support the National Concessionary Travel Scheme to allow older and disabled people improved access to services, facilities and social networks by free scheduled bus services. We're also supporting local community transport in Scotland, and this includes funding for the Community Transport Association

Scotland to support the sector and provide help and advice to community transport groups across the country.

In rural areas and the Islands, we recognise that high air fares pose a challenge and we are committed to addressing this through the Air Discounts Scheme. We've also introduced Road Equivalent Tariff fares on Clyde and Hebrides which includes discounts for those with mobility needs.

We are also modernising our Accessible Travel Framework to speed up delivery by moving to an annual delivery programme. The Framework will continue to make journeys easier for disabled people and those with accessibility issues whether temporary or permanent.

The provisions within our wide-ranging Transport Bill aim to ensure Scotland's transport network operates with greater efficiency, better accessibility and with improved air quality in its towns and cities. These legislative measures will help to empower Scotland's local authorities and establish consistent standards to make transport easier, cleaner and smarter than ever before, therefore supporting the Scottish Government's aspirations to deliver a safe, efficient, cost-effective and sustainable transport system for the benefit of the people of Scotland. These measures will also support tackling social isolation, as improvements to transport provision benefit everyone.

Culture and historic environment

Scotland's culture and heritage provides an opportunity for people to come together, appreciate the arts and connect through shared interests. To make the most of our assets, we're developing a culture strategy for Scotland to build on the existing strengths of the cultural and creative sectors, highlighting the intrinsic value these areas have in promoting societal cohesion and aiding integration. We want to look at increasing access to culture and making sure everyone has an equal opportunity to take part in or contribute to culture in Scotland.

Spotlight: Danderhall Library Film Club Danderhall Library Film Club started in 2016, using equipment and licences secured through a successful funding bid to the Film Education in Libraries project, administered by Creative Scotland and the Scottish Library and Information Council. The club was set up specifically to address loneliness amongst older men living by themselves in the community. The club has screenings monthly and shows a range of films with an emphasis on westerns, thrillers and war movies, with a mixture of classics and modern productions. It is still going strong two years on. The cup of tea and chat before and after the film is an important part of the experience, with discussion of the stars in the film, and often a reminiscence about the first time they saw it in their youth.

Voluntary Arts Scotland, one of the network of Creative Scotland Regularly Funded organisations, is increasingly focusing on social isolation and loneliness as part of their core work. The National Performing Companies have education and outreach projects which strive to bring communities together, and we are providing the National Galleries of Scotland, National Library of Scotland and National Museums Scotland with funding to enable them to maintain free access to the permanent collections for people to enjoy at their leisure.

Our historic environment has the power to change lives for the better – to make us feel happier, more informed and better connected, to encourage us to get outdoors and get active, to feel that we belong, and to speak to the wide diversity of our nation. Scotland's historic environment sector has made a commitment to grow the number of volunteers, and at the same time to increasing diversity. Evidence suggests that visiting sites of cultural interest as a form of cultural engagement can positively contribute to life satisfaction and examples of work to remove barriers to access by tailoring provision to meet the specific needs of, for example, people with dementia or autism is helping to address issues of social isolation and loneliness. The historic environment is also key to reclaiming a sense of place and belonging which is seen as a potential solution to social isolation. Historic places, as cultural assets, can be used to bring people together for therapeutic or other social purposes, providing a common point of interest or experience that can contribute towards social cohesion.

In recognising the importance of libraries, we're investing in the Public Library Improvement Fund to support innovative ways for people to use public libraries, and are also taking forward the implementation of the first strategy for public libraries in Scotland. We will work to ensure that our approach to increasing access includes hard to reach groups, and considers further how to build on what libraries already offer as community hubs with a role in tackling these issues.

Implementation

Working towards a Connected Scotland

At the beginning of this strategy, we set out a clear vision which is underpinned by core values of kindness, dignity and compassion. This is complemented by clear links to the most relevant of Scotland's National Outcomes and associated National Indicators. The specific strategic outcomes that we'll work towards realising in this context are:

- Understanding increases around social isolation and loneliness and its causes/impacts, along with an understanding of what works to reduce it.

- Social isolation and loneliness is reduced.

- Harm resulting from the effects of social isolation and loneliness is reduced.

- The conditions which help to reduce social isolation and loneliness are increasingly widespread.

There are two important steps that we need to take if we're to support implementation with clear actions, and build an understanding of how we're making a difference. In early 2019, we'll begin work to shape a prioritised delivery plan for the Strategy, and in tandem with that build a performance framework with clear and measureable indicators so that we can understand and report on progress in subsequent years.

Taking a collaborative approach

We've already said that all parts of Government need to be working together to realise the ambitions of this strategy, and that Government can't deliver these ambitions on its own. So in order to build and maintain an effective cross-cutting collaborative approach, we will:

- Establish a Ministerial Steering Group, chaired by the Minister for Older People and Equalities and comprising Ministers from key portfolios to maintain oversight of activity, drive forward progress and tackle emerging issues; and

- Establish a National Implementation Group, chaired by the Minister for Older People and Equalities and comprising key organisations with a role in driving progress to embed a cross-sectoral approach through the development and implementation of a shared delivery plan for the strategy along with a shared performance framework to understand the difference we're making. Part of the Implementation Group's work will be to consider how best to reach and take account of a range of views and voices in shaping plans for implementation, including engagement with initiatives like the Action Group on Isolation and Loneliness which comprises a range of third sector organisations. We will announce the remit of the Implementation Group and the membership early in 2019.

Timescales and reporting on progress

Recognising the importance of a long-term approach, this first strategy will run from 2018 to 2026, after which it will be reviewed and updated to reflect progress and the current climate. We will provide updates on progress every two years (in 2020, 2022 and 2024). In the meantime – recognising the need to ensure that everyone takes ownership of this agenda – we will develop a communications plan for the strategy to create the widest possible awareness of it across Scotland and encourage every individual and every community to think about the part they can play in building A Connected Scotland.