

A Connected Scotland - Loneliness and Isolation Consultation

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 On the 16th of January, the Scottish Government announced its consultation on Loneliness and Isolation¹. The draft strategy has been developed following the Scottish Parliament's Equal Opportunities Inquiry into Age and Social Isolation². One of the recommendations from the inquiry was to produce a national strategy to tackle social isolation and loneliness. From this, there was then a commitment by the Government to take this work forward within the Programme for Government³.

1.2 The consultation outlines definitions for both Social Isolation and Loneliness:

- **Social Isolation** – Refers to the quality and quantity of the social relationships a person has at individual, group, community and societal levels.
- **Loneliness** – is a subjective feeling experienced when there is a difference between an individual's felt and ideal levels of social relationships.

1.3 The consultation states that Government has an important role in creating the conditions for change to happen, and that everyone has a responsibility to help tackle loneliness and social isolation. With the view to empower communities to lead in this area.

1.4 The ability to access transport plays a large role in people's lives, and is vital for access to health services, employment, education and it enables many to remain socially active.

2. QUESTIONS RAISED BY THE CONSULTATION

2.1 The document outlines three broad questions to form the basis of the consultation:

- What needs to change in your community to reduce social isolation and loneliness and increase the range and quality of social connections?
- Who is key at local, and regional level in driving this change, and what do you want to see them doing more (or less) of?

¹ https://consult.gov.scot/equality-unit/connected-scotland/user_uploads/a-connected-scotland---tackling-social-isolation-and-loneliness-3.pdf

² http://www.parliament.scot/S4_EqualOpportunitiesCommittee/Reports/FINAL_Report.pdf

³ <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0052/00524214.pdf>

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

2.2 In addition to these three questions, the consultation goes into further detail by posing a number of specific questions throughout the document (appendix 1). Consultees are asked to provide input to each of these headings. However, SEStran will seek to provide input where appropriate.

3. CONSIDERATIONS FOR A SESTRAN RESPONSE

3.1 SEStran agrees with the definitions as outlined in the document and acknowledges that social isolation and loneliness can affect anyone at any point within their life. Therefore, this issue will need to cut across various service providers and Public Sector bodies.

3.2 The Scottish Government's socio-economic duty, asks public authorities to do more to tackle the inequalities and isolation caused by socio-economic disadvantage. This aligns with SEStran RTS policies on accessibility. SEStran seeks to support communities with low car ownership/high deprivation and peripheral areas less well served by public transport, helping to address the issue of social isolation.

3.3 Such support is integral to the delivery of SEStran's statutory Equality Outcomes 2017-2021 and actions to increase participation in public life of currently under-represented groups such as Children and Young People as part of its Public Sector Equality Duties. As mentioned within the document, 2018 marks the 'Year of Young People'. SEStran has actively participated in co-designing active travel projects with communities through partnership with Young Scot and Sustrans. SEStran has found that working with Young Scot on a project called X-Route⁴ and co-design a useful method to support and collaborate with children and young people in planning of policies and proposals.

3.4 A concerning result of the X-Route survey was that 75% of respondents had not heard of the term "active travel", which highlighted the need to manage communications with young people better when seeking to initiate behaviour change and deliver long-term place-based solutions which lead to habitual behaviour and use of space. The consultation states that physical activity interventions have a number of benefits to a person's health and wellbeing. SEStran will highlight that interventions to increase active travel provide valuable opportunities for people who are socially isolated or lonely to meet new people and build their social network.

3.5 Falling bus patronage is also of increasing concern, and many fear that essential services (specifically in rural areas) may be curtailed. Further raising the issue of 'forced car ownership', where those on a lower household

⁴ http://www.sestran.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/XRoute_document_2016_Final_2.pdf

income must spend an increasing proportion of their earnings on running a vehicle. In the recent consultation on Concessionary Travel⁵, SEStran welcomed the Scottish Government's proposal to expand the scheme to Modern Apprentices. Initiatives like these could limit the impact social isolation, or stop it from happening in the first instance.

3.6 As part of the Loneliness and Insolation consultation response, SEStran will also highlight its own initiatives that remove barriers to public transport use. With regards to giving passengers confidence when using public transport, SEStran looks to its Equalities Forum and wider stakeholder groups for participation. Informed by the SEStran Equalities Forum, the SEStran Thistle Assistance Card (and app) was developed. Members of the group believed that the card was essential for helping people with all types of disability to access and use public transport. To date, SEStran has successfully distributed over 42,000 cards throughout the region, and has been adopted by transport operators and other RTPs across Scotland.

3.7 In addition to the Thistle Card, SEStran will also highlight the impact that real-time bus information has on the traveling public. The benefits of live bus information are not just economic; they also have direct psychological benefits and deliver positive change in overall satisfaction, due to increased confidence in the transport system. Live bus information not only reduces actual waiting times, but it also reduces anxiety when at a bus stop providing users with the perceived benefit of increased safety. This is supported by Ferris et al (2010)⁶, who found that feelings of increased personal safety play an important role in using public transport, and that RTPs can help alleviate these concerns in the minds of the travelling public

3.8 Perception of safety, and instances of hate crime on public transport can deter some from accessing public transport altogether, thus leading to further social isolation and loneliness. Within Transport Scotland's Accessible Travel Framework Action Plan⁷, 'Hate Crime and Negative Behaviours' was identified as a key work package. SEStran is contributing to Transport Scotland's Hate Crime Working Group and following the City of Edinburgh Council's successful launch of the Hate Crime Charter for Public Transport, SEStran, Police Scotland, Transport Scotland and Disability Equality Scotland will be piloting a regional hate crime transport charter for 3 local authorities (West Lothian, Fife, Clackmannanshire).

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 The report invites comment from the Chief Officers on the consultation, which will be incorporated into a response from SEStran and signed off by the Chair under delegated powers.

⁵ <https://consult.gov.scot/partnerships-and-concessionary-travel/national-concessionary-travel-scheme/>

⁶

http://courses.washington.edu/cee500e/Files/Watkins_BusDriverRealTime_Edited_ChangesAccepted%5B1%5D.pdf

⁷ <http://accessibletravel.scot/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Going-Further-Scotlands-Accessible-Travel-Framework-Full-Report.pdf>

4.2 It is requested that any comments are to be sent SEStran officers by the 20th of April 2018 for collation.

Lisa Freeman
Projects & Strategy Officer
1st February 2018

Appendix 1 – A Connected Scotland - Consultation Questions

Policy Implications	Topics addressed relate to SEStran's Socio-Economic duties and statutory Equality Outcomes 2017-2021 and may indicate the need for further policy development or review
Financial Implications	Potential for further policy development or review
Equalities Implications	Topics addressed relate to SEStran's Socio-Economic duties and statutory Equality Outcomes 2017-2021 and may indicate the need for further policy development or review
Climate Change Implications	

Appendix 1. A Connected Scotland - Consultation Questions

1. What needs to change in your community to reduce social isolation and loneliness and increase the range and quality of social connections?
2. Who is key at local level in driving this change, and what do you want to see them doing more (or less) of?
3. What does Government need to do nationally to better empower communities and create the conditions to allow social connections to flourish?
4. Do you agree or disagree with our definitions of (i) social isolation and (ii) loneliness? Please provide comments, particularly if you disagree.
5. Do you agree with the evidence sources we are drawing from? Are there other evidence sources you think we should be using?
6. Are there examples of best practice outside Scotland (either elsewhere in the UK or overseas) focused on tackling social isolation and loneliness that you think we should be looking at?
7. Are you aware of any good practice in a local community to build social connections that you want to tell us about?
8. How can we all work together to challenge stigma around social isolation and loneliness, and raise awareness of it as an issue? Are there examples of people doing this well that you're aware of?
9. Using the Carnegie UK Trust's report as a starting point, what more should we be doing to promote kindness as a route to reducing social isolation and loneliness?
10. How can we ensure that those who experience both poverty and social isolation receive the right support?
11. What do we need to be doing more of (or less of) to ensure that we tackle social isolation and loneliness for the specific life stages and groups mentioned above?
12. How can health services play their part in better reducing social isolation and loneliness?
13. How can we ensure that the social care sector contributes to tackling social isolation and loneliness?
14. What more can we do to encourage people to get involved in local groups that promote physical activity?

- 15.**How can we better equip people with the skills to establish and nurture strong and positive social connections?
- 16.**How can we better ensure that our services that support children and young people are better able to identify where someone may be socially isolated, and capable of offering the right support?
- 17.**How can the third sector and social enterprise play a stronger role in helping to tackle social isolation and loneliness in communities?
- 18.**What more can the Scottish Government do to promote volunteering and help remove barriers to volunteering, particularly for those who may be isolated?
- 19.**How can employers and business' play their part in reducing social isolation and loneliness?
- 20.**What are the barriers presented by the lived environment in terms of socially connecting? How can these be addressed?
- 21.**How can cultural services and agencies play their part in reducing social isolation and loneliness?
- 22.**How can transport services play their part in reducing social isolation and loneliness?
- 23.**How best can we ensure that people have both access to digital technology and the ability to use it?