



**Comisiynydd Pobl Hŷn Cymru**  
**Older People's Commissioner for Wales**

**Response from the Older People's  
Commissioner for Wales**

**to the**

**Welsh Government Connected  
Communities - Tackling Loneliness and  
Social Isolation consultation**

**January 2019**

For more information regarding this response please contact:

Older People's Commissioner for Wales,  
Cambrian Buildings,  
Mount Stuart Square,  
Cardiff, CF10 5FL

03442 640 670

## **About the Commissioner**

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales is an independent voice and champion for older people across Wales, standing up and speaking out on their behalf. She works to ensure that those who are vulnerable and at risk are kept safe and ensures that all older people have a voice that is heard, that they have choice and control, that they don't feel isolated or discriminated against and that they receive the support and services they need. The Commissioner's work is driven by what older people say matters most to them and their voices are at the heart of all that she does.

The Older People's Commissioner for Wales:

- Promotes awareness of the rights and interests of older people in Wales.
- Challenges discrimination against older people in Wales.
- Encourages best practice in the treatment of older people in Wales.
- Reviews the law affecting the interests of older people in Wales.

## **Welsh Government Connected Communities - Tackling Loneliness and Social Isolation consultation**

As the Older People's Commissioner for Wales I welcome the opportunity to respond to the Welsh Government's Connected Communities - Tackling Loneliness and Social Isolation consultation.

Loneliness can affect anyone and whilst it is a perfectly natural emotional reaction, often triggered by particular life events, there is a stigma attached to it that often makes acknowledging it difficult for the individual and tackling it an even bigger challenge.

There is much to celebrate already going on in our communities that enable many older people to engage with and take part in activities and groups that help to prevent and combat loneliness and isolation. However, funding for these initiatives can be short-term and insecure.

Issues around the built environment and diminishing local services present barriers to older people. Lack of transport, centralised amenities and closure of public toilets can combine to isolate older people in their homes and sap their confidence.

Poverty, non-take up of financial entitlements and digital exclusion can further trap older people in their homes and prevent them from volunteering or taking part in their local community.

Enabling and supporting older people to get out and about and to take part in community activities requires the involvement and commitment of a wide range of stakeholders and services. Social Prescribers and community connectors can help to identify groups and activities and provide friendly support or a buddy to help older people take the initial steps that are sometimes needed in order to join in.

Welsh Government, local authorities, the third sector, health and social care and community and town councils all have a role to play in helping older people build their confidence and resilience and avoid loneliness and isolation.

**Question 1: Do you agree with our definitions of loneliness and social isolation? If not, what would you propose instead?**

The proposed definition uses the term ‘connections’ rather than the term used by other established UK organisations, such as the Campaign to End Loneliness and the Jo Cox Foundation, which use the term ‘companionship’.

I suggest that companionship is important in our lives and speaks to the mutual support and sense of purpose we feel through those special relationships that give meaning and shape to our daily lives.

I would also suggest that the definition needs to achieve an understanding of the similarities and the differences between emotional and social loneliness, as identified by Weiss in *Loneliness - The Experience of Emotional and Social Isolation*<sup>1</sup>.

The prevalence of loneliness and isolation has been measured through questions in the National Survey for several years. It raises the question whether everyone had a common understanding or definition of loneliness or isolation when they were responding to the survey.

It is likely that there are some differences between a young person’s lived experience of searching or struggling to establish friendships, find companionship and make social connections and the experience of an older person trying to deal with life after the death of a lifelong companion and/or the shrinking of a previously established peer group or circles of colleagues and friends.

Following the launch of ‘A connected society: a strategy for tackling loneliness’ in England<sup>2</sup>, the Office of National Statistics was tasked with developing national indicators of loneliness suitable for use on major studies to inform future policy in England.

I recommend that Welsh Government reviews and harmonises both the definition and the indicators and measurements used by the ONS<sup>3</sup> with the work of developing a strategy to tackle loneliness and isolation in Wales.

**Question 2: How can we help people to understand the trigger points for loneliness and social isolation and to build emotional and psychological resilience to enable them to take steps to avoid or reduce these feelings?**

I suggest that Welsh Government should revisit and review the insights into loneliness achieved in the report 'Safeguarding the Convoy'<sup>4</sup> which led to the setting up of the Campaign to End Loneliness. The report identifies the challenges surrounding tackling loneliness as well as providing an evidence base-line from a UK perspective.

The National Assembly's Health, Social Care and Sport Committee 'Inquiry into loneliness and isolation' report, published in December 2017, recommended that the Welsh Government - 'embark on an awareness raising campaign to change attitudes towards loneliness and isolation and address the stigma associated with it.'  
(Senedd.assembly.wales, 2019)

To build emotional and psychological resilience, there is a need to take positive steps to de-stigmatise loneliness and to encourage a better understanding of its causes and its effects.

Loneliness needs to be presented as being a normal emotional reaction to missing the companionship of a particular person, or a network or group of friends, and that everyone will feel lonely, at some time and at some stage in their life.

In developing a better understanding of the potential causes there is a need to open up the discussion around the known 'trigger points' that can lead to situations of loneliness and isolation. These trigger points can include bereavement, divorce or separation, becoming a new mum, going to college or university, retirement, or having a mobility or health issue.

It is also important to identify external factors that can impact on an individual's vulnerability to becoming lonely or isolated, such as location, environment, access to transport, availability (or lack of) community facilities such as public toilets, and a scarcity of community groups and activities.

The Centre for Ageing & Dementia Research (CADR) in partnership with the Commissioner's Ageing Well in Wales programme developed a practical guide containing advice and support for individuals who are experiencing loneliness<sup>5</sup> which could be of use to Welsh Government in developing the strategy.

### **Question 3: How can the Welsh Government foster the right environment and create the right conditions to build resilient communities?**

I would recommend that Welsh Government reviews Social Care Wales' recent report 'Approaches to community resilience'<sup>6</sup> which identifies Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) principles as being highly regarded, widely used and effective in engaging and empowering communities.

The principles of age-friendly development are closely associated with those of co-production and asset-based community development, which are central features of Prudent Healthcare, the Social Services & Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015.

The aspiration of age-friendly communities is to enable people of all ages to actively participate in community activities<sup>7</sup> and making Wales a nation of age-friendly communities is the overarching strategic aim of Ageing Well in Wales<sup>8</sup>, which is hosted by my office.

The Dublin Declaration supports the World Health Organisation's Global Age-Friendly Cities Programme and is a commitment from local or regional government and authorities to support the development of age-friendly communities. Every local authority in Wales has produced a local Ageing Well Plan<sup>9</sup>, which details their commitments to achieving the Ageing Well in Wales objectives locally, including that of developing age-friendly communities.

RNIB Cymru has led a campaign on improvement of the built environment to make it more age-friendly, based on their Visibly Better standards<sup>10</sup>. They have also put emphasis on making transport more age-friendly / accessible through their Get on Board campaign<sup>11</sup>.

Many older people will not leave their homes without the assurance of being able to access a public toilet in their village, town or city when the need arises, leading to older people becoming more susceptible to loneliness and social isolation and requiring costly packages of health and social care.<sup>12</sup>

Community or public spaces are essential for older people and do much to encourage intergenerational activity and reduce loneliness. Research suggests, however, that older people face a number of barriers to using such spaces, including the fear of crime, inadequate facilities/transport and a lack of relevant or interesting activities that consider older people. More positive initiatives are required by local authorities and businesses

to ensure that older people use, and feel welcome in, community spaces<sup>13</sup>

Community and day centres are important for older people and others. These are places where older people can socialise, carry out activities, take up learning opportunities and volunteer. They play a vital role in combating social isolation and loneliness amongst older people.

Day services are sometimes seen as an out-dated model of service provision<sup>14</sup>. The challenge is to ensure that new approaches and models - such as Age Friendly Communities, which lead to more personalised, community-based services or hubs - adequately address the needs of older people and contribute towards their health, independence and wellbeing. The 'Me, Myself and I' Community Friendship Club in Briton Ferry is an example of how successful and impactful this kind of model can be<sup>15</sup>

### **Question 5: How do we ensure that schools can better support children and young people who may be lonely and socially isolated?**

Schools have an important role in combatting loneliness for children and young people. More broadly learning provides mental stimulation, and an appetite to acquire new knowledge and skills, as well as opportunities for social interaction and engaging in different activities with others. Being involved in learning, especially in a class or club environment, helps older people to maintain a sense of identity following retirement and helps to combat loneliness and isolation.

The need to keep up-to-date with modern technologies – in order to access information and advice through digital learning, acquire new skills for employment and modernise working practices – is incredibly important. For many older people, learning offers something substantial and worthwhile to do and can assist in combatting loneliness.

The scarcity of funding for adult learning hinders the development of a curriculum for later life, preventing older people from receiving key information and new skills, such as managing finances, using digital technologies and keeping healthy through exercise and nutrition.

The number of older people engaged in community learning fell from 6,580 in 2012/13 to 2895 in 2014/15<sup>16</sup>. This inevitably had a detrimental effect on the lives of older people.

I welcome that the Welsh Government has stated it will support the provision of social engagement courses through clubs and self-directed

learning groups, enabling people to continue to participate in learning in an informal way whilst having a positive effect on their health and well-being<sup>17</sup>

The Ageing Well in Wales 'Guide'<sup>18</sup> to setting up a community learning club' provides some helpful tips and recommendations on how to establish community-based learning opportunities and may be of use to the Welsh Government in promoting such provision.

### **Recommendation**

**The Welsh Government should ensure that Adult Learning and the known positive impact it has on the lives of older people is made both accessible and available.**

### **Question 6: What more can the housing sector do to reduce loneliness and social isolation? How can the Welsh Government support this?**

Housing plays a crucial role in health and well-being. Given older people can spend up to 90% of their time in their home, where it is, how warm and supportive it is, and how easy it is to move around are fundamental to quality of life and combatting loneliness and isolation.

There is a need to ensure that our housing stock in Wales is fit for the future, by responding to the needs and aspirations of current and future older people. Lifetime Homes standards need to be adopted in new buildings to modernise housing stock, and adaptations and new builds must be dementia supportive and sensory loss aware.

Adaptations play a significant role in supporting older people to maintain their independence, but the adaptations system is complex and difficult to navigate. Continuing to streamline delivery, remove complexities and improve the performance measurement systems to reflect their impact and effectiveness should therefore be a priority.

Older people also need good quality information, advice and guidance about what assistive technology is available and how it can help them to maintain their independence. It is important to remember, however, that technology is not a replacement for human contact, relationships and the need for connection.

### **Recommendation**

**The Welsh Government should implement the recommendations of the Expert Group on Housing an Ageing Population.**



## **Question 7: What more can the Welsh Government do to support the improvement of transport services across Wales?**

Public transport is often seen as a lifeline to being able to access key services and amenities, especially for those living in rural communities. With the population of those aged 65 and over predicted to increase by a further 232,000 (36.6%) by 2041,<sup>19</sup> the need for public transport that meets older people's needs becomes ever greater.

However, it must also be recognised that providing bus and community transport services for older people is not enough: bus stops, for example, must be safe and accessible places, with shelter from the elements and accessible information for those with sensory loss; bus vehicles must be accessible for older people to get on and off safely, with adequate seating, age-friendly and disability aware drivers, and spacing for those with wheelchairs or walking aids.

Reductions to bus services are a concern in rural areas, particularly as the need for effective rural connectivity has been intensified by the closure of local banks, shops and other services, meaning older people often have to travel further to access these services and other vital amenities.

Lower levels of car ownership and car use amongst older people can also lead to them becoming marginalised and unable to access community services in rural areas, leading to significant impacts on their sense of well-being, loneliness and isolation.

Community transport makes a significant contribution to older people's health and wellbeing, helping them to maintain their independence for longer and participate in community life. Community transport services 'plug gaps' in the public transport network and are particularly important for older people and those living in isolated communities and rural areas. Many community transport services use specialist vehicles that are essential for older people with mobility issues.

### **Recommendation**

**The Welsh Government should ensure that any future transport strategy fully integrates and supports the critical role played by community transport. The strategy should ensure that the planning and development of adequate and appropriate public transport is age friendly.**

## **Question 8: How can we try to ensure that people have access to digital technology and the ability to use it safely?**

‘Delivering Digital Inclusion: A Strategic Framework for Wales’, published by the Welsh Government in 2016 prioritised older people and included the commitment of ensuring that all older people, who want to be, are online by 2020<sup>20</sup>.

The Welsh Government’s ‘Delivering a Digital Wales’ Framework for Action (2010) recognised that technology itself can be a barrier as much as an enabler for older people<sup>21</sup>

The Framework also identifies that over a third of people aged 50+ in Wales are digitally excluded and do not use online services. Levels of IT literacy amongst older people in Wales are critically low: only 17% of people aged over 70 have access to the internet at home, whilst 309,000 people aged over 65 have never used the internet. This has meant that older people are increasingly unable to access information and services, or benefit from discounted online prices that are often available.

There are some areas of Wales that are still unable to access broadband, and true ‘superfast’ broadband is still some way in the future. Research on rural poverty in Wales, undertaken in 2016, found that a significant urban-rural digital divide exists, with a high percentage of rural residents unable to secure an effective internet connection<sup>22</sup>

The continuing rise of digital technologies means that the world is rapidly changing. We often take for granted the opportunities we have to bank or shop online, or to use the internet to speak to a relative on the other side of the world.

With an increasing number of financial and other services only being delivered digitally, it is crucial that older people are digitally literate and are able to use digital technologies to help with their daily lives.

### **Recommendation**

**The Welsh Government should deliver on its commitment of ensuring that all older people, who want to be, are online by 2020.**

### **Question 9: What experience do you have of the impact of social services on addressing loneliness and isolation**

My casework team report that it is unusual for enquirers to contact them primarily regarding loneliness and isolation; it is often the case that they do not identify themselves as being lonely or isolated.

The team does, however, receive many enquiries where the individual is looking for social or befriending activities that they can access in their local area. One recent enquirer, for example, identified the weekend as a time of need, as day centres/voluntary services are mainly open from Mondays to Fridays.

Public service spending cuts are having an impact on many older people, often specifically with regards to loneliness and isolation. Many enquirers report that services upon which they rely are being cut and the team frequently hear from older people about proposed cuts to transport services and a reduction of voluntary transport schemes, which make it more difficult for them to access those groups/services where they are still operating.

Closure of day centres, cuts to additional activities in places like sheltered accommodation and a lack of funding for community groups is also being reported to the casework team. The team has some examples of enquirers reporting that local authorities had increased their charges for communal hall hire, which led to the termination of some local groups. Similarly, they also hear of the loss and closure of informal community meeting places such as the Post Office or local banks.

The increasing requirement to use online services has also been reported to the team, which minimises the need for contact with the wider community and isolates those older people not confident with the internet. Older people also share their concerns with the casework team that they are losing services that they are reliant upon, thus placing them at risk of loneliness and isolation.

### **Question 10: What more can the social care sector do to tackle loneliness and isolation?**

The Social care sector has an important role to play in de-stigmatising loneliness and isolation: as a trusted third party, a social care professional is in a prime position to introduce loneliness and/or isolation into everyday conversations.

Shared information about community connectors, social prescribers and local third sector initiatives, supported by a shared referral route and

clarity around data sharing, would further enable social care professionals to initiate a 'warm hand over' or 'step-down' service that would ensure that an individual is not left to fend for themselves.

The information portal Dewis Cymru is a valuable source of local information and should be utilised further.

### **Recommendation**

**The Welsh Government should ensure that access to information sources such as Dewis, regarding local initiatives and services are maintained and are accessible to social care professionals and others.**

### **Question 11: What more can we do to encourage people who are at risk of becoming lonely and isolated to get involved in local groups that promote physical activity?**

An innovative approach taken to encourage older people to engage with physical activity can be seen through the work of the Sporting Memories Network<sup>23</sup>, which brings together older people around shared sporting passions. The clubs provide opportunities for reminiscence, socialising as well as physical activity.

Another example is 'Walking Rugby'<sup>24</sup> which is a social and enjoyable form of touch rugby which aims to get people, mainly over 50 years old, physically and mentally active. There are currently groups in Pontypridd, Cambrian and Cwmbran with individuals being referred to the groups by their GPs.

Social prescribing projects enable people to be referred to a range of services that offer support for social, emotional or practical needs and has been successful where it has been introduced, coordinated and supported; successful examples include Torfaen<sup>25</sup> and Arts and Health in Wales<sup>26</sup>.

However, lack of confidence can be a major factor in preventing older people from getting involved and the introduction of a buddying or befriending relationship along the lines of the Camau Cadarn<sup>27</sup> community connectors, with someone available to accompany the individual to the group or activity can be highly effective.

### **Recommendation**

**The Welsh Government should further encourage the development of tailored activities that meet older people's needs and interests and deliver a programme to encourage involvement and take up.**

## **Question 12: In what other ways can health services play their part in reducing loneliness and social isolation?**

Public Health Wales has an important role to play in tackling the stigma around loneliness and isolation and in promoting the routes to services and activities

Furthermore, as more than 90% of people's contact with the NHS in Wales takes place within primary care<sup>28</sup>, which includes a range of health services such as GP services, pharmacy, dentistry and optometry, frontline health professionals are ideally placed to identify and encourage people who are at risk of becoming lonely and isolated to get involved in local groups.

The Royal College of General Practitioners (RCGP)<sup>29</sup> recently published community action plans to tackle loneliness and isolation in Wales calling for a range of actions to be taken to ensure GPs and their teams are able to work with the wider community to provide the most appropriate care to lonely patients, specifically:

- longer appointment times;
- social prescribers in each surgery;
- development and upkeep of Dewis Cymru;
- better education and awareness of loneliness and isolation;
- and improved links to the voluntary sector

Unpaid carers can be particularly vulnerable to loneliness and isolation and far more carers deal with health services than with social care as part of their caring role. Following the repeal of the Carers Strategy (Wales) Measure, health services must continue to focus on identifying and delivering for the needs of carers. Awareness, identification and responsiveness to carers from health services is critical in supporting carers to continue caring and to maintain their own well-being.

## **Question 13: What more can the Welsh Government do to encourage people to volunteer?**

The Centre for Ageing Better commissioned work in 2018 under the title 'Age-friendly and inclusive volunteering'<sup>30</sup>.

The data in the report suggests that poorer older people and those with health conditions are most likely to face barriers to volunteering with formal organisations. It also found that there is a gap in representation of people from BAME communities.

Amongst the practical barriers that can stop people from volunteering are costs, transport needs, physical access and language. The structural barriers which can stop people from volunteering can include the inflexibility of the offers, the lack of neutral spaces, lack of resources, bureaucracy and the digital divide.

The report identifies significant emotional barriers that can stop older people from getting involved. A fear of ageism or a fear of rejection can stop some older people from volunteering. Concerns about being overcommitted can also stop some older people from taking part and a lack of confidence was also found to be a barrier as was a fear of not being welcomed or valued.

In order to support people to volunteer there is a need to ensure that a range of integrated support measures are put in place in the community to assist volunteers and support organisations. For individuals these could include:

**Recognition:** publicly recognising the contribution that individual volunteers and voluntary schemes make to tackling loneliness in their communities (and the savings they help to realise for health and social care provision).

**Training:** provision of practical training that provides people with the necessary skills and confidence to both volunteer and support local voluntary groups and activities. Practical guidance to support volunteers has been developed by Rural Wisdom<sup>31</sup>.

**Employer-led schemes:** encouraging widespread adoption of voluntary release schemes by public, private and third sector organisations. Particular benefits could be achieved by linking such schemes to forms of mid-life career review / 'MOTs', pre-retirement planning and planning for later life programmes, encouraging increased levels of community participation and personal resilience in workers approaching retirement.

Whilst for organisations, support measures could include:

**Administrative support:** administrative and bureaucratic burdens can be a big barrier to volunteering, and for the sustainability of local and community voluntary groups. The support should aid with:

- identifying and completing funding applications;
- providing simple mechanisms to evaluate impact and benefits of their projects and groups;
- administrative and technical support (handling annual accounts, photocopying, printing, creating posters and

- flyers, setting up websites, email lists, social media presences, promoting activities, etc; and
- support to establish constitutions, bank accounts, charitable status and insurance etc.

**Financial:** long-term, sustainable and predictable funding for third sector and County Voluntary Councils is key to enabling these agencies to plan and deliver meaningful voluntary programmes and support for volunteers in communities. For local and community voluntary groups, easy access to small-scale funding is often critical to their ongoing operations.

**Infrastructure:** adequate, adaptable, affordable and accessible community spaces are critical for voluntary groups to thrive and that public and/or community transport is available at the time of the activity.

### **Recommendation**

**The Welsh Government should draw on best practice from the work of the Centre for Ageing Better’.**

**Question 14: How can the Third sector play a stronger role in helping to tackle loneliness and social isolation? What can the Welsh Government and other public bodies do to support this?**

Third sector organisations are often at the front line of delivering and engaging individuals in locally-based preventative services and activities and encouraging participation at a range of levels.

Community participation is the process by which an individual engages with locally-based activities that may benefit them and their community; effective forms of community participation rely on people being aware of the opportunities available within their communities.

Participation also requires people to be empowered and enabled to actively engage with their community and influence things that impact them and the places they live in a way that is meaningful to them.

Communities that are supported and encourage high levels of participation can benefit from positive social, health and well-being outcomes. These can include improved social cohesion and inclusion, better community resilience, a reduction in potential causes of loneliness and unwanted isolation, and improved social relations and opportunities<sup>32</sup>.

Enabling older people to participate in community engagement requires the support and involvement of a wide range of stakeholders including the Third Sector, National Government and Local Authorities.

Furthermore, engagement of health and social care, public transport services, and support for volunteers is also needed to ensure the sustainability of community led activity.

Older people in particular may lack the confidence to engage in community activities, or face barriers in accessing information. This can be exacerbated in communities which have lost traditional key community services such as banks, shops, post offices and community centres which previously acted as community hubs.

Financial support for the Third Sector in support of community activity and participation interventions through commissioned services is essential. However, these initiatives can only be successful if there is continuity of funding; short-term funding will not build resilient communities that can help with tackling loneliness and isolation.

Older people need assurance that the support that helps them to maintain and sustain their independence, as well as the interdependent relations essential for them to stay in their own home whilst not feeling lonely or isolated, will not be removed because of the withdrawal of funding.

### **Recommendation**

**The Welsh Government should identify examples of good practice and sources of sustainable funding. The Ageing Well Networks may serve as a mechanism to identify good practice.**

### **Question 15: How can employers and businesses play their part in reducing loneliness and social isolation?**

As previously identified carers are particularly vulnerable to loneliness and isolation.

Employers and businesses can do a great deal to support their employees who are carers by offering flexible working arrangements and allowing carers to take time off work to deal with emergencies involving the person they are caring for. Employers and businesses also need to be supportive when there is a change in the condition of the person their employee is caring for.

For example the UK Civil Service launched the Carer's Passport<sup>33</sup> which enable those civil servants who are carers and their managers to



discuss and record agreements around the flexibilities needed to combine caring and work, the record or passport then stays with the individual if they move departments or change managers.

Work currently being developed by the Welsh Government for the 'Framework for an Ageing Society' (Strategy for Older People) by the 'Planning for the Future' Ministerial Advisory Forum on Ageing (MAFA) sub-group has identified that from an early age people are encouraged to save for their future, but consideration should also be given to the wider range of social and environmental factors that can support people to live and age well.

Longitudinal evidence<sup>34</sup> has shown that, following retirement, people who have joined the most social groups have a better quality of life. Planning for the future can support people to look forward to growing older and feel confident that they have the resources in place to enjoy later life. It can also build the financial and emotional resilience needed to cope well with negative life events.

Following the recommendation for a 'mid-life MOT', outlined in the Cridland Review of State Pension age, four organisations – Aviva, Legal & General (L&G), the Pensions Advisory Service (TPAS) and Mercer – developed and tested how the concept could be delivered in practice. A report, compiled by the Centre for Ageing Better, summarised the actions taken, and the lessons learnt<sup>35</sup>.

The idea of a mid-life check-up – or 'MOT' – could provide people with holistic information, advice and guidance in a timely manner that would help them to prepare for later life and could cover areas such as health, career, finance, and managing major life changes.<sup>36</sup> These 'check ups' could also incorporate awareness sessions on loneliness and isolation, trigger points, coping strategies and signposting to advice and assistance.

## **Recommendation**

**The Welsh Government should adopt the carers' passport amongst its staff and champion it with other employers in Wales. It should similarly seek to develop/pilot a model of mid-life MOT/reviews.**

## **Question 16: What more can the Welsh Government do to support those who experience poverty alongside loneliness and social isolation?**

It is estimated that £168m of Pension Credit goes unclaimed and is returned to HM Treasury each year<sup>37</sup>.

In 2017, Age Cymru research found that 112,500 older people were living in poverty, and both single older people and older couples had the lowest average incomes in the UK<sup>38</sup>.

Poverty amongst older people in Wales has been increasing over the past five years reaching 20% by 2016/17<sup>39</sup>. Improving the uptake of financial entitlements amongst older people is a key way of tackling poverty and loneliness and isolation. Investing in measures to improve take-up - such as a public awareness-raising programme and resources for third sector information and advice providers – could have an in-year impact on poverty levels and bring money into local economies.

Research in England suggests that for every £1 invested in financial entitlements uptake schemes, between £4-8 is generated for local economies<sup>40</sup>.

Advice on debt management and financial inclusion strategies is needed in order to assist older people in these situations from slipping into poverty and becoming more vulnerable to loneliness and isolation

Engaging with older people and helping them to better manage their finances and increase their incomes will, for some, ensure greater opportunities for participation, which are essential to combat loneliness and isolation.

### **Recommendation**

**The Welsh Government should invest in increasing the take up of entitlements which would increase income for the individual and bring money into the local economy.**

**Question 17: What more can we do to build community resilience and support communities to combat loneliness and social isolation?**

The Independent Review of Community and Town Councils in Wales<sup>41</sup> recommended that they should be further supported and could be in a position to lead on the development of age-friendly communities, empowering the voice of people of all ages and supporting a range of intergenerational and multigenerational projects and schemes that bring together people of different ages to bond around shared interests.

I believe that Town and Community Councils have an important role to play in building community resilience and supporting community initiatives to combat loneliness and isolation.

**Question 18: Do you agree with our proposed approach? If not, what would you otherwise suggest?**

I welcome an approach that aims to reduce the risk for individuals and seeks to prevent someone from becoming lonely through early intervention. I welcome the fact that the proposed approach aims to help people to have a better understanding and awareness of when and how loneliness and isolation are most likely to affect them.

Dispelling the perceived stigma of weakness and failure that has been associated with loneliness and isolation in the past, especially amongst older people, is a positive way forward as is developing and promoting strategies that assist individuals to plan ahead to try and avoid situations of loneliness and isolation.

Identifying those who are already chronically lonely is also important and the use of social prescribing from a General Practitioner or other medical professional is helpful in those circumstances.

I would wish to see other routes to a Social Prescriber also being enabled so that individuals or community groups who may not wish to access support through the medical route are able to gain access.

**Question 19: Are you aware of examples of successful interventions within Wales, or beyond, that you think we should be looking at?**

There are a number of examples of successful interventions that are underway in Wales that could be looked at as the strategy is developed. A number of these initiatives are referenced below.

## Library-based services

**Reading Friends** is a scheme funded by the Big Lottery Fund, in collaboration with The Reading Agency; in Wales, the scheme is coordinated by Literature Wales. Conwy Libraries have been selected as the first test site for the programme, which uses shared interests around the written word to bring people together and combat loneliness. The scheme provides a low-cost intervention based around well-known and trusted existing community assets and services, which has the potential to reach a very wide potential audience, incorporating multi-generational activities. More information is available at : [www.literaturewales.org/our-projects/reading-friends/](http://www.literaturewales.org/our-projects/reading-friends/).

Similar volunteer reading schemes are in operation at a number of Welsh Library services, including Torfaen and Monmouthshire, which run the 'Read to Me' Service. The library service matches volunteers to people who may be experiencing loneliness or who are unable to read themselves. More information is available at: [www.torfaen.gov.uk/en/Libraries/SupportingReaders/Read-to-Me-Service/Read-to-Me-Service.aspx](http://www.torfaen.gov.uk/en/Libraries/SupportingReaders/Read-to-Me-Service/Read-to-Me-Service.aspx)

**Reading Well Books on Prescription** is a project funded by the Welsh Government and delivered by the Reading Agency in partnership with the Society of Chief Librarians Cymru. The project is endorsed by health professionals and makes a range of high-quality books available to support people with mental and physical health conditions, including dementia, which have been approved by health professionals and can be prescribed by GPs. The scheme could be expanded to incorporate evidence-based books and resources to support people experiencing loneliness and isolation. More information is available at <https://readingagency.org.uk/news/media/books-prescribed-to-help-tackle-dementia-in-wales.html>.

## Town and Community Council-led initiatives

**Solva Care** is an initiative led by Solva Community Council in Pembrokeshire. The scheme provides support to local residents, including those experiencing loneliness. The scheme relies upon the contribution of volunteers to provide practical and everyday support to other residents in the area. The scheme has received funding from the Welsh Government, the Sustainable Development Fund, Pembrokeshire Coast National Park and Dyfed-Powys Police & Crime Commissioner. Key to the scheme's success has been a paid, part-time support worker who coordinates the scheme and takes away any administrative or

bureaucratic burdens from the volunteers. More information can be found at <https://solvacare.co.uk/>

**Leeswood Community Council** has worked with residents to make the North Wales community of Leeswood and Pontblyddyn more inclusive and tackle issues of loneliness and isolation through adopting an age-friendly model. The scheme is part of the Rural Wisdom project, funded through the Big Lottery and delivered in Wales by Volunteering Matters. A paid community development officer has worked closely with community members to help assess local requirements and support the establishment of community activities and groups. More information can be found at <http://ruralwisdom.org/>.

### **Third Sector-led initiatives**

The Sporting Memories Network is working with Ospreys Rugby Club in Swansea to establish a Sporting Memories Club that brings people together over a shared love of sport. The clubs provide a way for people to make new friends and also build up the confidence and independence of participants. Existing clubs in England and Scotland have proved very effective in engaging with older men, who can prove a difficult target audience for services and interventions. More information can be found at [www.sportingmemoriesnetwork.com/how-it-works](http://www.sportingmemoriesnetwork.com/how-it-works)

Dementia-friendly communities is a programme led by Alzheimer's Society that encourages voluntary action in communities to make them more inclusive and supportive for people affected by dementia. The programme has proved to be hugely successful, with communities and individuals getting involved across Wales. By increasing awareness and understanding of dementia and making communities more inclusive, dementia-friendly communities also combat loneliness and isolation that may otherwise be experienced by those living with dementia as well as those who care for them. For more information, visit [www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-involved/dementia-friendly-communities](http://www.alzheimers.org.uk/get-involved/dementia-friendly-communities).

**Tempo Time Credits** supports a range of volunteer-led initiatives and activities across Wales. As well as supporting schemes that provide interventions directly combatting loneliness, they also encourage increased social and community participation from volunteers, which can increase personal resilience and reduce the risk of volunteers themselves becoming lonely. Critical to the success of the time credits initiative in Wales has been investment in community development officers who have ensured that volunteering is integrated into local needs and desires. More information can be found at [www.wearetempo.org](http://www.wearetempo.org)

**Camau Cadarn / Positive Steps** is a scheme run jointly by British Red Cross and Royal Voluntary Service, funded by the Welsh Government and Big Lottery. The scheme provides structured support for older people to help them gain confidence and connect with their communities. The scheme builds upon the previous work of both agencies in combatting loneliness and shows the benefits of partnership working. More information is available at [www.redcross.org.uk/get-help/get-support-at-home](http://www.redcross.org.uk/get-help/get-support-at-home).

### **Community-led initiatives**

**Men's Sheds** provide a safe space for groups of men (and women) to get together in their communities. The sheds are social enterprises that are self-governed, self-supported and managed by a small committee in each shed. The development and establishment of new sheds is supported by paid regional development workers employed by Men's Shed Cymru. More information can be found at [www.mensshedscymru.co.uk](http://www.mensshedscymru.co.uk) and

**Prestatyn Artisans Collective** is a volunteer-led social enterprise that runs an arts and crafts centre in Prestatyn's old library. The scheme supports a wide variety of community services and activities in Prestatyn, including Dementia-Friendly Prestatyn (in collaboration with Prestatyn Town Council) and Prestatyn Men's Shed. Prestatyn Artisans Collective also works closely with Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board in enabling an effective form of social prescribing and community signposting that has benefited hugely from Prestatyn's new health centre being located next door to the Old Library. This has encouraged a high level of interaction between the volunteers and users in the Old Library and health professionals, who cross-refer and signpost to each other's services. More Information can be found at <https://artisans-collective.org.uk/> and

### **Health Board-led initiatives**

**Ffrind i Mi** is a partnership initiative led by Aneurin Bevan University Health Board to support people to reconnect with their communities. The initiative provides support for a wide variety of activities, as well as training for volunteers. Funded through the Health Technology Wales Scheme and 1,000 Lives, it works closely with partners from the public, private and third sectors. Ffrind i Mi incorporates innovative intergenerational approaches in combatting loneliness and a person-centred focus on supporting people who feel lonely in ways that are helpful and meaningful to them. The initiative is also interesting in that it aligns its aims with existing Welsh Government policy goals, including

those of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act and the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act. For more information, visit [www.ffrindimi.co.uk](http://www.ffrindimi.co.uk).

### **Local Authority-led initiatives**

**Community connectors** (also referred to as Community Navigators in some areas) support isolated people to reconnect with their communities, helping them to engage with a variety of community activities and groups. Connectors have been established in a variety of Welsh communities, employed by local authorities, County Voluntary Councils and the third sector. Community Connectors can be a very effective mechanism of providing high-levels of support to reconnect people with their communities. However, the need to build up very high levels of knowledge about, and the trust of, communities mean that connectors work best at a very local level.

**Pembrokeshire Good Neighbours** is a scheme led by Pembrokeshire County Council that supports and encourages neighbours to provide a helping hand to each other. Support to residents is provided voluntarily by other residents, based around simple tasks such as giving a lift, picking up shopping or changing a light bulb, which, although simple, can make a huge difference in people's ability to continue to live independently, helping to tackle potential isolation and loneliness. More information can be found at <https://www.pembrokeshire.gov.uk/search?q=good-neighbour-schemes>.

### **Public Health Board-led initiatives**

Public Health Wales' Making Every Contact Count was successfully introduced to DWP staff as a joint venture by Abertawe Bro Morgannwg (ABM), Cwm Taf and Hywel Dda Public Health Teams, and the 1000 Lives Plus. The aim was to ensure that Job Centre staff felt empowered and confident to raise the issues of healthy lifestyles and through discussion with the client find appropriate services to change their behaviour. The events were practical and interactive, and tailored for staff working with people when they are unemployed. The events involved training, reflection and networking with healthy lifestyle services. More information can be found at <https://mecc.publichealthnetwork.cymru/en/your-area/abertawe-bro-morganwg/abertawe-bro-morganwg>

**Question 20: Are there other ways in which we can measure loneliness and social isolation?**

The Campaign to End Loneliness has produced a Loneliness Measurement Tool<sup>42</sup> which it presents alongside both the De Jong and the UCLA Loneliness Scales.

Within the tool it raises the issue of needing to prepare interviewers for asking direct questions about loneliness or painful experiences in a way that enables the respondent to answer accurately.

A recent review of how the data around loneliness and isolation was gathered for the National Survey found that the interviewers attempted to hand over the laptop to the respondents in order for them to self-complete, reportedly due to the sensitive nature of the questions. Around half of those aged over 65 were unwilling to operate the laptop.

I have previously mentioned that the Office of National Statistics (ONS) has undertaken work to refine the indicators and measurement of loneliness and isolation and have recommended reviewing the outcomes of that work.

**Question 21: We would like to know your views on the effects that our proposed approach to tackling loneliness and social isolation would have on the Welsh language, specifically on opportunities for people to use Welsh and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English.**

The Welsh language plays a prominent part in the lives of many older people across Wales. It is therefore vitally important that services and support to older people is offered in the language of their choice.

I would expect that any engagement, consultation or awareness raising around the Loneliness and Isolation Strategy is carried out bilingually and that older people have the choice to engage in Welsh or English. I would also expect this to be reflected in any interventions identified by the strategy.

For older people living with dementia and for whom Welsh is their first language, Welsh language provision is crucial and encourages them to use facilities, improve confidence and take up community-based opportunities.



## Bibliography

---

- <sup>1</sup> Weiss, R. and Bowlby, J. (1973). *Loneliness: the experience of emotional and social isolation*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press
- <sup>2</sup> GOV.UK. (2019). *A connected society: a strategy for tackling loneliness*. [online] Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-connected-society-a-strategy-for-tackling-loneliness> [Accessed 11 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>3</sup> Ons.gov.uk. (2019). *Recommended national indicators of loneliness - Office for National Statistics*. [online] Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/compendium/nationalmeasurementofloneliness/2018/recommendednationalindicatorsof loneliness> [Accessed 11 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>4</sup> Campaigntoendloneliness.org. (2019). [online] Available at: [https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2011/07/safeguarding-the-convey\\_-\\_a-call-to-action-from-the-campaign-to-end-loneliness.pdf](https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/wp-content/uploads/downloads/2011/07/safeguarding-the-convey_-_a-call-to-action-from-the-campaign-to-end-loneliness.pdf) [Accessed 9 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>5</sup> Assembly.wales. (2019). [online] Available at: <http://www.assembly.wales/laid%20documents/cr-ld11310/cr-ld11310-e.pdf> [Accessed 9 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>6</sup> Socialcare.wales. (2019). [online] Available at: [https://socialcare.wales/cms\\_assets/file-uploads/SCW-Approaches-Report-ENG02.pdf](https://socialcare.wales/cms_assets/file-uploads/SCW-Approaches-Report-ENG02.pdf) [Accessed 11 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>7</sup> Ageingwellinwales.com. (2019). *Ageing Well: Loneliness & Isolation*. [online] Available at: <http://www.ageingwellinwales.com/en/resource-hub/li-resources> [Accessed 9 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>8</sup> Ageingwellinwales.com. (2019). [online] Available at: <http://www.ageingwellinwales.com/Libraries/Documents/AWFinalEnglish.pdf> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>9</sup> Ageingwellinwales.com. (2019). *Ageing Well*. [online] Available at: <http://www.ageingwellinwales.com/en/localplans> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>10</sup> RNIB - See differently. (2019). *Visibly Better - Designing accessible housing and buildings*. [online] Available at: <https://www.rnib.org.uk/wales-cymru-how-we-can-help/designing-accessible-housing-and-buildings> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>11</sup> Rnib.org.uk. (2019). [online] Available at: <https://www.rnib.org.uk/sites/default/files/Get%20On%20Board.pdf> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>12</sup> ITV News. (2019). *Older People's Commissioner: Public toilet closures in Wales "short sighted"*. [online] Available at: <https://www.itv.com/news/wales/2014-06-30/public-toilet-closures-in-wales-shortsighted/> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>13</sup> JRF. (2019). *The social value of public spaces*. [online] Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/social-value-public-spaces> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>14</sup> Pitt, V. (2019). *Are day centres outdated in the personalisation era? - Community Care*. [online] Community Care. Available at: <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2010/12/03/are-day-centres-outdated-in-the-personalisation-era/> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>15</sup> Me-myself-and-i-club.co.uk. (2019). - *Home*. [online] Available at: <https://www.me-myself-and-i-club.co.uk/> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>16</sup> Welsh Government (2016b) Lifelong Learning Wales Record. Unpublished

- 
- <sup>17</sup> Gov.wales. (2019). [online] Available at: <https://gov.wales/docs/dcells/publications/170712-adult-learning-policy-statement-en.pdf> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>18</sup> Ageingwellinwales.com. (2019). [online] Available at: <http://www.ageingwellinwales.com/Libraries/Documents/Learning-Club-Guide-eng.pdf> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>19</sup> Gov.wales. (2019). *Welsh Government/National population projections*. [online] Available at: <https://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/national-population-projections/?lang=en> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>20</sup> Gov.wales. (2019). [online] Available at: <https://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/comm/160316-digital-inclusion-strategic-framework-en.pdf> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>21</sup> Gov.wales. (2019). [online] Available at: <https://gov.wales/docs/det/publications/101208digitalwalesen.pdf> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>22</sup> Ppiw.org.uk. (2019). [online] Available at: <http://ppiw.org.uk/files/2016/06/An-introduction-to-Rural-Poverty.pdf> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>23</sup> The Sporting Memories Foundation. (2019). *How it works*. [online] Available at: <https://www.sportingmemoriesnetwork.com/how-it-works> [Accessed 11 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>24</sup> Wru.co.uk. (2019). *These boots are made for walkin'*. [online] Available at: <http://wru.co.uk/eng/news/41794.php#.XDIXAKlCfIU> [Accessed 11 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>25</sup> Primarycareone.wales.nhs.uk. (2019). *Primary Care One | Social Prescribing in Torfaen*. [online] Available at: <http://www.primarycareone.wales.nhs.uk/document/309878> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>26</sup> Arts.wales. (2019). [online] Available at: <http://www.arts.wales/138854.file.dld> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>27</sup> Steps, C. (2019). *Camau Cadarn/Positive Steps*. [online] Housingcare.Org. Available at: <http://www.housingcare.org/service/ser-info-8945-gofal.aspx> [Accessed 11 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>28</sup> Olderpeoplewales.com. (2019). [online] Available at: [http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/Libraries/Uploads/GP\\_Services\\_in\\_Wales\\_-\\_The\\_Perspective\\_of\\_Older\\_People.sflb.ashx](http://www.olderpeoplewales.com/Libraries/Uploads/GP_Services_in_Wales_-_The_Perspective_of_Older_People.sflb.ashx) [Accessed 10 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>29</sup> Rcgp.org.uk. (2019). [online] Available at: <http://www.rcgp.org.uk/-/media/Files/Policy/A-Z-policy/2018/RCGP-loneliness-manifesto-wales-2018.ashx?la=en> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>30</sup> Ageing-better.org.uk. (2019). [online] Available at: <https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/sites/default/files/2018-11/Age-friendly-and-inclusive-volunteering-review-2018.pdf> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>31</sup> Ruralwisdom.org. (2019). [online] Available at: <http://ruralwisdom.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Tipsforgettingpeopleinvolvedfinal.pdf> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>32</sup> Social Capital Research & Training. (2019). *Importance of Participation - Social Capital Research & Training*. [online] Available at: <https://www.socialcapitalresearch.com/designing-social-capital-sensitive-participation-methodologies/importance-participation/> [Accessed 10 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>33</sup> Rupert McNeil, G. (2019). *New carers' charter and carer's passport for civil servants - Civil Service*. [online] Civilservice.blog.gov.uk. Available at: <https://civilservice.blog.gov.uk/2018/06/13/new-carers-charter-and-carers-passport-for-civil-servants/> [Accessed 11 Jan. 2019].

- 
- <sup>34</sup> Steffens NK, Cruwys T, Haslam C, *et al* Social group memberships in retirement are associated with reduced risk of premature death: evidence from a longitudinal cohort study *BMJ Open* 2016;**6**:e010164. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2015-010164
- <sup>35</sup> Ageing-better.org.uk. (2019). *Search | Centre for Ageing Better*. [online] Available at: [https://www.ageingbetter.org.uk/search?keyword=mid+life+mot&topic=All&sort\\_by\\_combine=created+DESC](https://www.ageingbetter.org.uk/search?keyword=mid+life+mot&topic=All&sort_by_combine=created+DESC) [Accessed 11 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>36</sup> Centre for Ageing Better. (2019). *Managing major life changes*. [online] Available at: <https://www.ageing-better.org.uk/our-work/managing-major-life-changes> [Accessed 11 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>37</sup> Ageuk.org.uk. (2019). [online] Available at <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/pagefiles/52140/Life%20on%20a%20low%20income%20-%20FINAL%20-%20E.pdf?epslanguage=en-GB-CY?dtrk=true> [Accessed 11 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>38</sup> Ageuk.org.uk. (2019). *Search*. [online] Available at: <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru/search/?q=poverty> [Accessed 11 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>39</sup> Gov.wales. (2019). *Welsh Government|Poverty statistics*. [online] Available at: <https://gov.wales/statistics-and-research/households-below-average-income/?lang=en> [Accessed 11 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>40</sup> Usir.salford.ac.uk. (2019). [online] Available at: [http://usir.salford.ac.uk/19311/3/Final\\_technical\\_report.pdf](http://usir.salford.ac.uk/19311/3/Final_technical_report.pdf) [Accessed 11 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>41</sup> Gov.wales. (2019). [online] Available at: <https://gov.wales/docs/dsjlg/publications/localgov/181003-independent-panel-report%20-en.pdf> [Accessed 11 Jan. 2019].
- <sup>42</sup> Campaigntoendloneliness.org. (2019). [online] Available at: <https://www.campaigntoendloneliness.org/wp-content/uploads/Loneliness-Measurement-Guidance1.pdf> [Accessed 13 Jan. 2019].