

Annex 1 - Consultation Response Form

Please return this form to reach the Welsh Government no later than **15 January 2019**.

The email address for responses or queries is:

lonelinessandisolation@gov.wales

Postal responses should be sent to:

Loneliness and Social Isolation Team
Welsh Government
Cathays Park
Cardiff
CF10 3NQ

Your name:	David Cook
Organisation (if applicable):	Wales Council for Voluntary Action
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Responses to consultations may be made public on the internet or in a report. If you would prefer your response to be anonymised, please tick here:

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

YES x NO.....

Comments:

WCVA would agree with this definition, but, as the consultation highlights, it is important to note that loneliness and isolation can happen to anyone, not just those groups that people may stereotypically associate with these conditions, such as older people.

Loneliness and isolation are both factors which leave an individual vulnerable to abuse; trapped in unsatisfactory or abusive relationships, exploited by so-called 'friends' and at risk of financial abuse, fraud, scams, crime, presenting significant safeguarding concerns. All categories of abuse are more likely to go unchallenged if the victim is isolated from any network of support.

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?

Comments:

The school curriculum should enable children and young people to develop emotional intelligence, personal resilience and robust mental health and well-being and to understand not to fear asking for help, friendship and support.

Additional support could come from a variety of people who work in specific settings, including teachers, pharmacists, registrars, hairdressers and more – wherever and with whoever the person feels comfortable.

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

Comments:

The many and varied activities of the third sector contribute enormously to the wellbeing of Wales. Welsh Government recognition and support of this is vital for this work to continue. Our [Shape Your Future](#) reports identified a number of shifts in the economy, environment, policy, technology and society. There is scope for the sector, with Welsh Government backing, to use these shifts to build resilient communities – for example, working more closely with the younger 'self-organised, digitally-enabled' generation, supporting migrants, maintaining local environments and helping older people bring their experience to volunteering.

WCVA has recently published [a report](#) on Empowering Communities. In it, we describe empowerment as ‘the essential ingredient for improving community wellbeing’. This means allowing communities to exercise control or influence over the use of their key environmental and community assets and ensuring that at least part of the benefits are realised locally. Service providers must also work co-productively with those receiving their services. People, not government or statutory bodies, must lead the change to become empowered and create resilient communities.

The report sets out a number of actions Welsh Government could take to create empowered communities:

- Promote Community Anchor Organisations by reserving part of the Community Facilities Programme, making Wellbeing Funds available for core costs and ensuring funds for providing social care activities are available to CAOs.
- Developing a multi-agency approach to ensuring good practice in commissioning, promoting social value and local economic impact
- Explore models to promote investment in local communities
- Recognise the importance of and attachment to place to many communities and retain an emphasis on place-based approaches in programmes and policy
- Presume collective ownership of assets as a preferred model; strengthening guidelines on asset transfer from the public sector and introduce guidelines to allow community enterprises access to the public estate to manage sustainable social enterprises which generate resources for local benefit.

Welsh Government should also take every opportunity to highlight the [National Principles for Public Engagement in Wales](#) to local authorities, other service providers, and communities.

Please see Q17 for more on community assets.

Question 4: How can children and young people be better equipped with the skills to establish and maintain meaningful social connections?

Comments:

The development of the new curriculum for Wales presents a timely opportunity to emphasise the importance of healthy relationships through both formal learning and pupil enrichment activities, such as participation in specific programmes for young people such as Guides and Scouts, Duke of Edinburgh Awards, and sporting activities, as well as volunteering more generally. Starting volunteering at an early age can lead to a habit which lasts for a lifetime, providing valuable opportunities for social connections. Third Sector Support Wales partners host the [Volunteering Wales](#) website, a national database of volunteering opportunities, designed to connect volunteers with opportunities that are appropriate to their location, skills and interests. Additional support is provided by volunteer centres to match volunteers with suitable placements.

Council for Wales Voluntary Youth Services note that youth work has an important role to play in this area. The nature of youth work - i.e. that it is based on a voluntary engagement principle which exists between a young person and a trusted adult - lends itself to reducing isolation and loneliness. The added value provided by open access, universal youth work

means that young people can be signposted to services beyond youth work if needed (e.g. specialist mental health support) notwithstanding the pressures on those support services and increasing thresholds which have to be navigated by young people and their youth workers. The [‘Mind Over Matter’](#) report by the Children, Young People and Education Committee has a significant entry about youth work. Within this, NYAS Cymru; Volunteering Matters and KPC Youth gave evidence relating directly to issues faced by young people in terms of their emotional health and wellbeing. The contributory factors associated with mental health issues included isolation, loneliness and the positive contribution of youth work in supporting young people. It was positive that £2.5m was announced in Welsh Government’s budget towards youth service provision to assist with mental health services for young people via youth work.

Children in Wales noted the need to ensure children are shown and receive respect by all from an early age. Children and young people need to have opportunities to socialise, supported by parents from an early age, such as the Flying Start programme. All families need to be able to access such support - it should not be only available to those who can afford it.

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

Comments:

Children in Wales commented that schools should consider the needs of the whole child. They also need to tackle the issue of bullying - they have heard from younger people who say that schools often denied there was bullying in their particular school. After school clubs and activities can help address this issue.

Schools could offer volunteering, mentoring and befriending schemes where teenagers, young adults and older adults spend time in schools taking part in activities.

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

Comments:

We anticipate that Housing Associations will respond to this question with examples of tenant support, participation and partnership with local charities and community groups.



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

Comments:

Community Transport Association Cymru highlight the importance of community transport services, which are run for a social purpose and community benefit, often where the market has failed to provide services that can cater for the full range of needs within a community. Community transport operators across Wales work with some of the most isolated communities in the country. Their footprint tends to be rural, and the demographic of service users tends to be older people and people with disabilities. Without community transport, many of the people in these isolated areas would not be able to access vital services that are essential to their health and wellbeing. Often community transport provides the first and last mile of journeys to otherwise inaccessible stations or stops on a commercial route.

To support community transport services, Welsh Government could:

Facilitate voluntary work:

Discounted/free parking for volunteer drivers and specialist parking and set-down points for community minibuses would help to improve the accessibility of high streets, enabling community transport operators to better assist passengers closer to their destinations.

Improve commissioning

People should have a say in shaping their local transport and creating community led solutions where they can - Community Transport Association refer to this as 'transport localism'. A more integrated passenger transport network that meets more needs has to be built from the ground up, building on existing assets and capacity within communities so that the 'ground-up' part is authentic and rooted in the experiences of people who know the patch and the priorities.

Better integration is not about more money or new rules, rather it is about better use of resources already in place. Often services are commissioned in isolation, or without reference to the wider public need. All services when commissioned need to show how they will integrate with existing service and help provide a greater plurality of provision. Quality in commissioning should not just be considered in terms of routes offered, fares or frequency of service. Rather, accessibility for the greatest number of passengers must be placed at the heart of quality service commissioning practice.

Impact measurement

The majority of the challenges faced by community transport organisations, in terms of

public policy, external relationships and funding, are rooted in the undervaluing of community transport. To tackle this issue, Welsh Government should look to create a way of consistently measuring the social and economic value that community transport brings, particularly in the arena of health and social care. Developing an impact framework would help to encourage financial support, in the process facilitating ties with health bodies and local authorities.

Physical access to coordinated transport remains vitally important.

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

People, especially in areas where digital exclusion is more common such as rural and remote areas, should be encouraged further to attend digital lessons at libraries and community centres. Organisations should be encouraged to sign up to the [Digital Inclusion Charter](#) and help communities develop skills in this area.

The Wales Co-operative Centre delivers the Digital Communities Wales project on behalf of Welsh Government. For more than a decade the Centre has been helping people to gain fundamental digital skills so that they can access information, services and jobs and to become more connected, digitally, with their communities, including through the use of digital volunteers. With 15% of adults in Wales not online, supporting them to do so is the responsibility of organisations across the sector. Working closely with DCW we all need to promote the positive benefits of being online, distribute information on where support is available and consider delivering support to clients and customers where appropriate. Doing this safely is crucial. There are many resources already available online for organisations, but maybe this could be brought together centrally so people are more aware of what is available and it is easier to access.

Guidance on safe and secure internet use for parents, carers and staff who work with younger and older people should be highlighted.

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

Comments:

County Voluntary Councils, charities and community groups have a variety of experience of services that are currently provided, have been withdrawn, or are struggling – all that either directly or indirectly address loneliness and isolation.



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

Comments:

In short, the social care sector and the third sector need to develop better partnerships.

The scope and scale of the role envisaged for third sector service providers in *a Healthier Wales* and the Social Services and Wellbeing Act (Wales) is not matched in terms of the resources the sector receives to tackle the complexities of individual loneliness and social isolation and the care and support services needed to address these. The direction outlined on *a Healthier Wales* works on the premise that services will be delivered at local/community level with less demand on primary and secondary health care. However, if community activities, services and facilities are to realise their potential to contribute fully to health and wellbeing, investment through the Transformation Fund is needed and the third sector needs a fairer and more transparent opportunity to promote their innovative and creative practice in the spirit of Section 16 of the SSWBA. Moreover, the commissioning of services must happen co-productively, with guidance issued to commissioners to embed co-producing with citizens; users of services and their carers across the age range. Regulation 31 of the Social Services and Well-being Wales Act provides procurement the means to be flexible where social value care and support services, which are seen to be innovative, and where such a service is not provided, can be commissioned, This needs to be more widely promoted and actioned to develop sustainable well-being services.

The development of Social Value Forums are advocated by the Welsh Government through the SSWBA and, if given a more comprehensive mandate from Welsh Government, should be the mechanism to influence the way care and support services are developed and delivered in the future and develop alternative transformational models to reduce loneliness and social isolation within the community. The third sector (social value organisations) traditionally have been and continue to be the early responders to meet the needs of the community, especially for those who require specialist support. Many third sector organisations receive a referral for a primary need, but as a consequence co-morbidities transpire and loneliness and social isolation are key factors in poor well-being outcomes. Social Value Forums need to be co-productive. They need to listen to the voice of citizen and the third sector is essential to translate that voice and work with stakeholders to create services which not only addresses loneliness and isolation, but more broadly in terms of people's overall well-being. Sector resources are not infinite, it cannot keep picking up the bottom of funding pots. Focus must be given to the wealth of expertise within the sector to support people to access community services, to reduce their feeling of loneliness and social isolation, but those assets need resourcing alongside ensuring that what works well is considered and upscaled through the Transformation Fund and the ICF.

Welsh Government and the sector could do more to promote [Infoengine](#), the directory of third sector services, managed by Third Sector Support Wales partners (WCVA and the 19 CVCs in Wales), highlighting community services around the country.

Providing information and services in Welsh for Welsh speakers is essential, as is ensuring information and services are provided in accessible formats.

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?

Welsh Sports Association provided us with comments on this area.

Joint working between Welsh Government, statutory bodies and the third sector

It is well known that physical activity [can positively impact on loneliness](#). In England, following the launch of the Westminster Government's Loneliness Strategy, the ministerial portfolio at the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) was expanded to include loneliness. While it is a positive step that the issue of loneliness is being recognised at this high level, we believe that it is a cross-sector problem which should be considered across all portfolios. We are fortunate in Wales that the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act provides an opportunity to both tackle the causes of loneliness and isolation and offer solutions through integration, involvement and collaboration.

In this instance, better joint working between government Health and Sport policy departments and their relevant statutory bodies is critical. For people at risk of becoming lonely and isolated to get involved in local groups promoting physical activity, fundamental requirements are

- the mapping of existing and potential activities to which people can be referred or signposted
- supporting our frontline healthcare professionals in their awareness of a resource which can signpost to these activities within their locality.

Sport Wales has commissioned an open data mapping exercise of Local Authority facilities in Wales, which could provide an ideal platform for a national repository of activity - although the data contained within it will be dependent on the goodwill of the deliverers and facilities in ensuring that it is relevant and up to date.

Improved resources for physical activity

Another factor is that having had little capital investment over many years, combined with Sport Wales' income and Lottery funding having reduced considerably in real terms since 2011, recent cuts to local authority investment mean that the sport and active recreation facility infrastructure in Wales is now under considerable threat. This will have a significant impact on the types of activity available and whether it meets the needs of an individual's specific health concerns. As leisure provision is not a statutory obligation, it is often the first port of call when Local Authorities face funding shortfalls, and many of those who with the greatest need, such as older people on fixed incomes, will be unable to afford the costs if the financial burden is then placed on them. Given the known costs of physical inactivity on the National Health Service, reducing investment in physical activity will prove more costly to the public purse in the long term.

Case Studies - How Sport can help with Social Isolation

There are great numbers of activities taking place across the country, such as the partnership between Welsh Netball and the Glamorgan Federation of the women's Institute which developed a [Walking Netball Club in Rhondda Cynon Taf](#). The Club has seen a fantastic response from older women in the area who were dealing with social isolation.

Other programmes making an impact include the partnership between Wales Golf and the Stroke Association which has enabled stroke survivors to go back to playing a sport they never thought they would again. The overwhelmingly positive feedback refers to improved social interaction, camaraderie and friendly competition that have, in turn, improved the health and wellbeing of participants and their families. A video explaining this partnership can be found [here](#).

Social prescribing

Social prescribing models in Wales are growing in importance throughout our health and community services and within the third sector, which is well-placed to improve the loneliness and social isolation people find difficult to address without support.

Social prescribing is seen as one of the panaceas to reduce the public's reliance on primary and secondary care and on social services. The model recognises that the approach needs to be multidimensional and that loneliness and social isolation are two dimensions people highlight as a concern to well-being. However, to address such issues will place pressure on community and resources, which may have a detrimental effect on third sector organisations. [Evidence suggests](#) that social prescribing, on average, reduces the reliance on GP services by 28% following referral to a social prescribing scheme/services and a reduction of 24% in post-referral clients attending A&E. The Wales Social Prescribing Network (WSPRN) over the last year has, through its members across sectors and academia, developed a research platform to build the critical evidence for social prescribing in Wales and has established three communities of practice. The WSPRN is ideally placed to work with Welsh Government to progress the implementation of social prescribing in Wales based upon the evidence base to address issues of loneliness and social isolation.

[Exercise referral schemes have shown promise](#) in targeting inactive patients at risk of developing chronic disease, but this sort of intensive intervention is not always necessary for those with other health issues such as mental health problems or a need to lose weight. Improvements to social prescribing practices, such as the ability to signpost to interactions like the case studies above, will be pivotal in making any inroads to addressing our increasing obesity crisis and costly mental ill-health burden.

[A recent study](#) found that most GPs are failing to give patients basic advice to exercise, despite significant evidence that it can halve the risk of major diseases. The research found that 80% of GPs too failed to raise the topic because they were ignorant of the benefits of exercise or were not sure how to bring it up. Resources such as [Motivate 2 Move](#) and [Moving Medicine](#), developed to encourage medical professionals to understand the benefits of prescribing activity and exercise are incredibly useful, but fall short if the health care practitioner is not able to signpost opportunities to be active.

More awareness of the options

Historically, health and sport have largely operated in siloed parallel, with little interaction or collaborative working, despite an appetite from sport to do so. Sport is an effective health intervention, and senior health officials need to understand the broad spectrum of sport and active recreation - from yoga and dance, Parkrun, to Olympic sports. Welsh Sports Association believes this has contributed to a culture within government, and particularly health, which fails to recognise the significant impact that sport and active recreation can have on tackling some of Wales biggest societal problems, including loneliness and isolation.

While the challenge of creating a more connected society sits with each of us - in our families, neighbourhoods and workplaces, government has a social responsibility to do all that it can to engender the behavioural change necessary to allow this to happen, and this starts with their officials.

There will be little legacy from the Healthy and Active Fund unless Public Health, Local Authorities and other government bodies take seriously the role of sport and active recreation in improving the health of the nation and invest in preventative measures - such as improved access to and awareness of physical activity, so that avoidable issues such as social isolation and mental ill-health can be properly addressed.

BME Sports Cymru ask Welsh Government to:

- Highlight and shout louder about the wider benefits of social interaction sport can have on mental wellbeing, especially via the club/group setting
- Explore a sport and physical activity offer alongside traditional groups that exist in local communities e.g. Bingo/Coffee Mornings, etc, to allow people to develop an initial interest in a place where they already feel safe
- Identify individual barriers rather than focussing only on the traditional (e.g. transport, session costs, etc), as even when these have been removed there are deeper and more complex issues in terms of why people are not participating.
- Support various organisations in catering for those from asylum and refugee communities to take part in sport and physical activity. This will aid those from being too isolated and being at risk loneliness.
- Subsidise costs to access mainstream sport, leisure and recreational activities, in particular for those from deprived areas and low-income backgrounds.
- Offer more financial support towards creating sporting facilities/venues in key BME and highly populated areas. This would take away the barriers of transport.

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

Comments:

An infrastructure for social prescribing, particularly in the primary care sector, has been growing over recent years, such as 'community connector' initiatives delivered by some CVCs, and the mental health social prescribing pilots, recently commissioned by Welsh

Government and delivered by British Red Cross and Mind Cymru. WCVA is lead partner, working alongside the University of South Wales, for the Wales Social Prescribing Research Network, which brings together a network of academics, public sector bodies and practitioners, with a shared interest in building a stronger evidence base, on which future policy might be made.

The third sector is also involved in a range of 'home from hospital' schemes, which provide vital support, particularly for older people, to move back into their own homes and to have a regular connection with a member of staff or volunteer to support the transition and help to connect the individual more permanently with the support they need from family, friends and neighbours. Such schemes should be rolled out more widely across Wales, to become the 'norm' rather than the exception.

Providing information and services in Welsh for Welsh speakers is essential, as is ensuring information and services are provided in accessible formats.

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

Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil supplied us with comments on Public Service Boards, highlighting volunteering and active citizenship as local priorities, recognizing the significant contribution that is being made, and could be strengthened further with the support of Welsh Government. With this in mind, Welsh Government should:

Make it easier to volunteer

- Encourage 'in work' volunteering via Employee Volunteering Schemes - this could be individual or group activities
- Encourage more employers to allow time off work for volunteering, including for charity trustees.
- Encourage pre-retirement courses to include 'volunteering awareness'. This could include taster placements for those approaching retirement.
- Do more to recognise the difference that volunteers make to their communities and celebrate their contribution.
- Strengthen volunteer development and management, to ensure volunteers have the right skills and support to make a bigger difference.
- Make it easier for volunteers to support our public services. Volunteers make a unique contribution that enhances public services, helping staff to do more and improving the experience of the people that use them.
- Make it easier for people to build their skills and get a good job through volunteering.

Address barriers to volunteering

Volunteering can play a meaningful role in helping people to develop the skills and experience they need to get a job. However, confusion about the rules and a lack of awareness about the role genuine volunteering can play in supporting people back into work is still a barrier. We should address these barriers by:

- Getting rid of red tape and clarifying any confusion about the rules.
- Ensure that Jobcentre Plus (JCP) staff on the ground understand the potential benefits of volunteering and know the rules about eligibility to volunteer and that these are being applied consistently.

Recognise that much volunteering is informal

A volunteer might not even see their work as volunteering. Many people already help their older neighbours for instance or litter pick their roads and parks without any incentive and without ever seeing this as volunteering. Community action events to help encourage and target this kind of informal support at specific local issues should be introduced. Avoiding the word 'volunteering' can help to engage more people who have a stereotypical view of what a 'volunteer' looks like.

Understand and communicate the benefits of volunteering to the volunteer

There is an obvious benefit in encouraging people to engage in their communities in various ways, including volunteering. Building social networks and engaging in purposeful activity in this way is likely to bring personal benefits such as increased wellbeing and prevention or mitigation of loneliness.

A review of published evidence [Volunteering, health and wellbeing](#) from Volunteer Scotland in November 2018 notes the positive impact of volunteering, especially on older people, saying: 'In serving their communities volunteers found that it is a 'choice' that helps to ward off the 'void' that retirement can bring. It provides stimulation, company and companionship, thus buffering isolation and loneliness.'

The report explores some of the 'facilitators', such as frequency and intensity of volunteering, altruistic motives and recognition of volunteers' contribution and some adverse impacts, such as role strain, burnout, emotional and physical challenge.

In order for volunteering opportunities to be widely available and accessible across all social groups and communities Welsh Government could invest resources to build a strong and professional volunteering infrastructure - i.e. leaders of volunteering who can envision, advocate for and develop volunteering opportunities which are safe, well managed, co-produced, purposeful and rewarding. Such expertise and dedicated resource is needed in local infrastructure bodies and also within statutory and third sector organisations where volunteering takes place.

Without this investment,

- volunteering may flourish in more advantaged communities but exclude many who might benefit the most from participation
- poor management practice may lead to under or over-involvement and disillusion
- organisational culture (especially in large organisations where staff predominate) may not fully embrace, support and harness the potential of volunteers' contributions

Understand and communicate the impact of volunteering on loneliness

Volunteers can also contribute to tackling the loneliness of others, and this is well-explored in the recent review [Volunteering approaches to tackling loneliness amongst older people](#) .

Once again, investment by Welsh Government in developing trained, professional leaders of volunteering would, in our view, bring ample benefits.

Evidence submitted to WCVA from the [Volunteering for Wellbeing project in Monmouthshire](#) reinforces this point and demonstrates the changing dynamic between 'giving' and 'receiving' through active participation in volunteering projects.

- the majority of people state that they want to 'give back to the community' or help others. What VfW sees, however, is often people who are isolated or lonely who want to get involved with things in a positive way to meet new people and feel that they belong to something have often been through a change in circumstance such as a move, a loss, illness, trauma etc. They feel the need to do something to prevent their own depression or loneliness - this is a hard thing to admit to or talk about.
- volunteers are of all ages, but VfW particularly see the benefit of volunteering for older people as many have found themselves alone after caring for someone, losing a partner or retiring from a life of work and caring for others. Volunteering is such a help to many of our older these people.
- As time goes on we often also witness these people transition gently from 'giving' to 'receiving' from our services, for example joining the Car Scheme which is there for people when they have to stop driving.
- Volunteering doesn't 'just happen'; these projects only work so well because they have skilled workers to carefully engage individuals and get them on board. They also 'match' and look after volunteers. VfW has many volunteers who are more in need of company and support than the 'beneficiaries' we support.
- These are inexpensive services but do have cost, which is that of employing the coordinators to ensure safety and inclusion. It is an 'invest to save' model of work, keeping people well in the community and taking pressure of statutory services. The recent evaluation of Community Connections found that [for every £1 spent, £3.80 is generated](#).
- Volunteering for Wellbeing is a project that works in partnership with Monmouthshire County Council. This local authority is investing in supporting volunteering because they have seen, through projects such as Community Connections, that it can play a vital role in supporting people to stay well and active and away from statutory care services for longer.

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?

Comments:

Increase resources

Short-term funding risks damaging relationships between the third sector and the communities they serve, when funding ends. Closure of services can sever the tenuous friendships generated by supported activities, plunging the individuals back into isolation and loneliness. We have noted the former Cabinet Secretary for Local Government and Public Service's comments regarding short-term funding cycles being a product of the need to balance budgeting commitments against 'sensible and realistic planning assumptions' in the face of uncertainty caused by Brexit and austerity. However, we stress again that many third sector organisations need more stability in order to survive and that Welsh Government must look at instigating multi-year funding cycles wherever possible.

Get behind the role of social capital

The third sector and Welsh Government have a key role to play in the development of social capital, which can help prevent loneliness and isolation. [Numerous studies](#) have demonstrated the positive impacts that volunteering has on health and well-being through its role in increasing social connections, helping to combat isolation and loneliness, building trust and improving community cohesion. These are all factors that benefit individuals but they also help to build social capital - the term that is given to the social networks and relationships, and the shared values and behaviours, that help society to function effectively.

Social capital is recognised as a [driver for economic growth and sustainability](#) as well as for individual and community well-being. It is essential for a productive and cohesive society that has the resilience and capacity to respond to existing problems or prevent them getting worse. The Early Action Taskforce has highlighted that 'building relationships is central for effective early action, be that better connecting communities or increasing trust among services and the people who use them.' Many third sector groups contribute to this work and their local and specialist knowledge, their ability to act as a trusted intermediary, and the social networks that they facilitate, represent a huge resource that can enable more integrated, collaborative and preventative actions to be taken.

WCVA believes that preventing the decline of social capital should be a key priority for Welsh Government as part of the overall prevention agenda, including of course the tackling of loneliness and isolation. Clearly the presence of an active and thriving third sector is part of this.

Don't over-regulate

Cytun commented that much of the third sector's role (e.g. faith groups, but also many other informal community organisations) is best if it is not systematised or regulated. Local third sector bodies are often very effective at picking up those who have 'slipped through the cracks' of statutory and formal third sector provision and offering low-key but hugely valuable friendship, companionship, support and opportunities to contribute to the community.

Informal clubs and societies tend not to make a rigid distinction between 'helpers' and 'clients'. Those who are being helped out of loneliness and isolation are, by their very presence, in turn helping others. Formal service provisions, and requirements of grant funding, often require distinctions to be made and measured, and - however carefully this is done - this creates an ethos which may itself be off-putting. Informality can be helped by not being part of any kind of 'programme' and not being in receipt of any external funding.

Welsh Government should also:

- Support Community Broker/Coordinator roles to facilitate citizens to link to community support or peer support in their communities
- Support capacity-building work in communities where community support is lacking
- Increase support for volunteer befriending services, which need to be more sustainable and less reliant on short-term funding streams

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

Comments:

We note our interest in working with employers and businesses to jointly consider employer-supported volunteering and corporate social responsibility programmes.

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

Welsh Government could work with specialist agencies to encourage joined-up approaches wherever possible and tap into any specific research that charities, including Citizen's Advice and Age Cymru, might have access to.

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

Develop support for community assets

Comments from Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil note that we should look to develop further

community support and community assets. However, a shared understanding of what this means is required for investing in and developing community support. This could include:

- A network of information points in every community where there is access to face to face and online information on what is available in relation to community activities, groups, services and facilities. This includes public, third sector and private provision - for example, the post office, local café, community hub and library.
- Every community should have access to community referral (community coordination, social prescribing and exercise referral) that can help coordinate localised framework for the provision of information, advice and guidance in all settings within the community to people of all ages and abilities.
- Community coordination, which helps identify, engage and support people who might be lonely and isolated into community activities. Map and connect community activities, groups, services and facilities; and develop volunteering opportunities, especially in health and social care.
- A 'community curriculum' to help develop the understanding and skills of service users, families, carers, volunteers and other helpers to provide relevant information, advice and guidance in a safe and supported environment.
- More collaboration and integration with a shared geographical place-based approach, with regular meetings of stakeholders, community leaders and service providers demonstrating the five ways of working as 'one public service' under the umbrella of a 'Neighbourhood Network' with shared boundaries with Primary Care Clusters and School Clusters.
- All public and commissioned services are required to contribute to community support and provide information, advice and guidance in addition to service delivery.
- People who need increased levels of support to access services, for example people who are not mobile, have a disability or are lonely and/or isolated, are identified and supported to access and connect with community activities, services and facilities.
- There are clear links to and pathways between community support and statutory services.

Resource organisations offering community services

On the subject of social prescribing: this clearly has enormous value in helping those who are lonely or isolated. However, [last year](#) we noted that third sector organisations taking social prescribing referrals are seeing a large increase in demand but are finding it hard to deal with this influx due to funding cuts, leading to the closure of critical services and a lack of provision for families and individuals in need. This problem is no closer to being resolved. Resources in this area are often spent on the services that refer into community support, rather than the support providers themselves, so organisations have to close their doors when they cannot afford to pay their bills. Further, there is still often little collaborative discussion around what works in social prescribing and the sector often finds itself asked to deliver services that it has had little or no say in the design of.

Improve government messaging to create positive impacts

Cytun have highlighted how the messaging of government can be important in helping individuals within communities feel a responsibility towards one another. A strong emphasis on safeguarding vulnerable people (i.e. avoiding any intervention that could harm them), on privacy (e.g. by strong messaging around GDPR) and on the dangers of opening the door to strangers can have unintended harmful consequences. There is a tendency to believe that only 'the authorities' or those with particular training or standing can reach out to someone who is struggling, as there is an (often exaggerated) fear of possible legal

repercussions if neighbours do so without 'authority' or invitation. While safeguarding, privacy and security are all important, so is community support, friendship and neighbourliness. Ensuring that messaging across Government around the former matters does not inadvertently harm the latter is important.

It would be good to see joint public-third sector campaigns promoting positive neighbourliness. These are often seen at times of crisis (encouraging people to check on neighbours during heavy snow, flooding, public service strikes, etc.) but could be promoted at 'normal' times as well.

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

Comments:

More detail will be needed on the actions within the strategy before we can give a definite opinion; however, we agree that preventative measures that intervene before loneliness and isolation set in are better for the individual and are more cost-effective.

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

Comments:

A number of former Communities First funded projects were effective at tackling loneliness and isolation. While not necessarily tackling financial poverty, they often tackled the poverty of loneliness and isolation very effectively.

[Penrhys Partnership](#) has continued the Communities First model of partnership between local community groups, local statutory authorities, the church, education providers and many others to support a community which, while having many problems, has very little loneliness and isolation, because people are easily drawn in to a huge variety of community activities. The Partnership now operates with low levels of public funding, relying on - and encouraging and developing - local skills and talents.

Another example is the [Dusty Forge](#), taken over by ACE in Ely, Cardiff, as part of a wider programme of work stemming originally from Communities First. A rural example is that of [Llanbadarn Fynydd Community Council](#) in Powys, whose determination to save the community shop, cafe and petrol station has created a close and co-operative community in a very sparsely populated rural area.

The [Ffrind I Mi \(Friend of Mine\)](#) initiative in Gwent, celebrated at the NHS Wales Awards in 2018, involves a range of statutory and third sector partners, including the Gwent Association of Voluntary Organisations. It has proven effective in tackling loneliness and isolation and the approach could be considered for adaptation in other parts of Wales.

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

Comments:

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.

What effects do you think there would be? How could positive effects be increased, or negative effects be mitigated?

The comments below have been provided to us by Menter Iaith.

It is disappointing that there is no mention of Welsh language provision, or the Welsh Government's own policy on the Welsh Language, in this consultation document. All planning from this moment onwards should have the Welsh language as an overarching consideration and should be noted explicitly in each planning document.

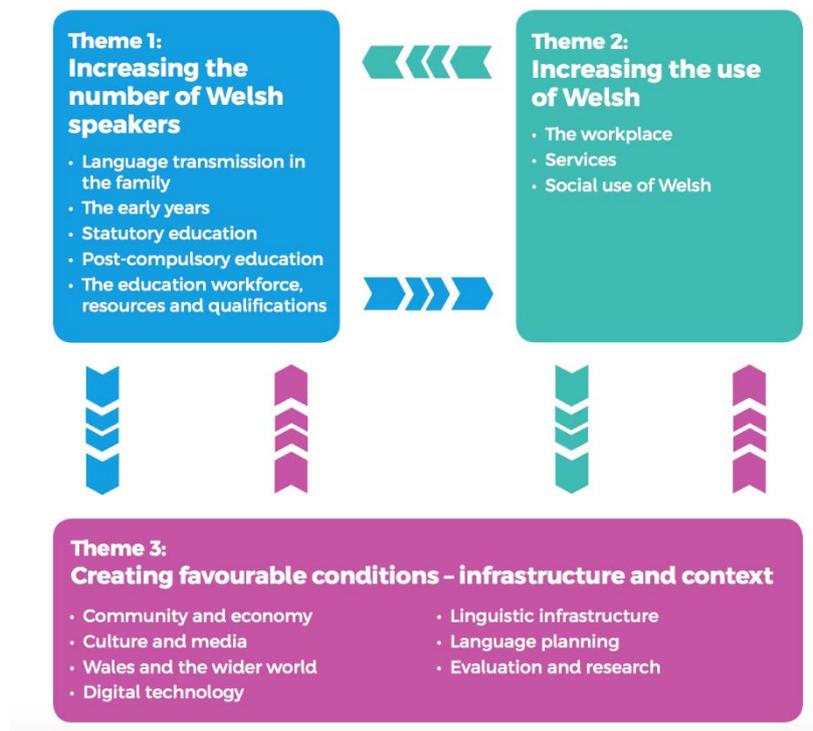
The Cymraeg 2050: A million Welsh speakers strategy begins:

'The challenge of achieving a million Welsh speakers by 2050 calls for far reaching changes. Boundaries need to be pushed and ambitious action taken to enable more people to learn and use Welsh. This strategy builds on existing foundations and moves us on to the next stage in our language journey. We have identified three strategic themes to achieve this vision.

- 1. Increasing the number of Welsh speakers*
- 2. Increasing the use of Welsh*
- 3. Creating favourable conditions - infrastructure and context*

In order to realise the vision, we will need to take action under the three themes and also understand the interdependencies between them.'

All three themes have sub-themes that are relevant to this consultation as we see in the image below.



'If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.': Nelson Mandela.

In essence, this is what needs to not only be achieved but, more importantly, to be facilitated. A person's ability to communicate in the language of their choice should be considered a physical need and be central in assessing the needs of any individual when accessing services within our various communities in Wales.

Planning for the Welsh language from the beginning

Section 6.1 of the research document [Welsh-medium primary care services research 2014](#), by Beaufort Research for the Welsh Language Commissioner, notes the following:

6.1 'The link between language and care is evidenced in literature, with examples which imply that the quality of care for vulnerable service users is sometimes compromised because of failures to communicate in their first language.'

Therefore the importance of the 'active offer' being available at the point of access is essential - i.e. when a service is available in Wales, that service should be offered in both Welsh and English. The above document goes on to note why this is essential and how it makes a difference to the service user when the active offer is in place.

Language can be a barrier to an individual being able to take part fully within the

community. We therefore need to take away the barrier and not prevent or make access difficult because of the lack of language provision from the onset.

The main effort should happen during the planning of any project and not an afterthought once the service is in place.

Questions should be asked very early on within the planning of any project:

- Who will be delivering this project and can those deliver in both Welsh and English?
- If not, what training / new posts for bilingual service deliverers do we need in place in order to be ready on day one?
- Are line managers in place to support the bilingual service?
- If not, what training / new posts for bilingual service managers do we need in place in order to be ready on day one?

This planning should also be an integrated aspect within financial planning of any project and sufficient resources should be made available to ensure the need to plan for a fully bilingual service - however that may look in the various communities of Wales.

Looking at Welsh speaker data on ward level and local knowledge of potential Welsh speaking volunteers from local CVCs should indicate whether a service could be delivered bilingually. It would also feed information on what actions should be needed to ensure a bilingual service would be available - e.g language awareness training, Welsh for Adult lessons, Language confidence building sessions. Partnerships with the regional centres for Welsh for Adults and the Mentrau Iaith should be established early on when looking at intervention projects where knowledge and capacity in the delivery of Welsh language projects is unsure or not available.

Ensuring the geographical and demographic spread of Welsh language services.

The active offer should be available in all communities across Wales - where the density of Welsh speakers is low to where it is high. There is no area in Wales where there are no Welsh speakers. There should, therefore, be no area in Wales where a service is not available in Welsh. A demand based approach, where language is concerned, should no longer be a consideration. Instead, efforts should be centered on ensuring that the support is as available in Gwynedd as it is in Monmouthshire.

Please refer back to WCVA's response to questions 10 and 12.

Question 22: Please also explain how you believe the proposed approach could be formulated or changed so as to have positive effects or increased positive effects on opportunities for people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language, and no adverse effects on opportunities for

people to use the Welsh language and on treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language.

Comments:

Again, we thank Menter Iaith for these comments

Effects on the Welsh Language and treating the Welsh language no less favourably than English

Without early planning there are many implications. If a body comes under the Welsh Language standards, they could face a formal complaint and an investigation from the Welsh language Commissioner. Language Impact Assessments should be carried out on each project at planning stage to ensure all risks are mitigated and should be part of regular meaningful monitoring.

Effects on opportunities to use Welsh

By proactive and careful linguistic planning from the outset, the effects on confidence in all services should become evident. Increased confidence will no doubt contribute to other aspects of the Cymraeg 2050: a million speakers themes.

Question 23: We have asked a number of specific questions. If you have any related issues which we have not specifically addressed, please use this space to report them:

Comments:

We would like to thank the following for their contributions to our response:

- Council for Wales Voluntary Youth Services
- BME Sport Cymru
- Welsh Sports Association
- Voluntary Action Merthyr Tydfil
- Cytun
- Community Transport Association
- The Volunteering for Wellbeing Project
- Menter Iaith
- Digital Communities Wales

We would be happy to discuss this issue further with officials and/or committees if helpful.