Consultation Response Form

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

YES…x….. NO…….

Comments:

Whilst these definitions are adequate they are rather passive and underplay the complexity of the issues involved. We would prefer if a widely used definition of Loneliness is (J De Jong Gierveld 1998) was utilised:

Loneliness is a situation experienced by the individual where there is an unpleasant or inadmissible lack of quantity or (quality of) certain relationships. This includes situations in which the number of existing relationships is smaller than is considered desirable or admissible, as well as situations where the intimacy one wishes for has not been realised. '

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:

Better understanding of how transitions, triggers and life experiences impact on quality of life for older people in challenging situations as a result of their high care needs (and the greater likelihood that they will be caring for others) is needed. We need this under researched issue to be explored before any policy is developed. The sort of solutions that could be examined would be in adapting existing current arrangements rather than developing new ones. Community facilities, development of networks of older people, availability of independent professional advocacy etc would be an obvious place to start. Better Information, Advice and Assistance at key points of transition and trigger points – with referral to "talking services" – including through the 3rd sector would be beneficial

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

Comments:

See below re Age Friendly Communities

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

Comments:

Support and funding could be provided for inter-generational activities in an organised and structured programme. Recent publicity of this in respect of care homes have highlighted the benefits. Welsh Government published and funded an intergenerational strategy for Wales in 2005 which was successfully implemented by Councils as part of the older people's strategy. Published reports highlighted the excellent outcomes. Funding has dwindled significantly so the impact this has had in creating resilient communities has been

negated. Many care homes have links with their local schools but while this should be applauded it is not all that could be achieved with relatively small amounts of funding, particularly for older people living on their own in the community. Schools could be encouraged to welcome suitable older people into school to carry out one-to-one reading and to build individual relationships with children.

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

Comments:

N/a

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

Comments:

Housing should be fit for all older people whatever their circumstances but for people living alone in particular. The recommendations in the Expert Group Report on Housing for an Ageing Population in Wales must be effectively implemented as well as expansion of "Help to Stay, Help to Move" service and aids and adaptations schemes. We want to see introduction of more viable and innovative accommodation options for older people as they age. Extra Care schemes should be available in all areas of Wales which are known to combat isolation and loneliness. Private sector sheltered housing for age-restricted sale should be encouraged as many owner-occupiers wish to retain the value of their properties to pass on to their families.

There is solid research about the impact of isolation and loneliness for older men living alone and the future consequences for pressures on social services, housing etc. This is an area that has been ignored in policy making at national and local levels. Homelessness and its consequences needs to shift towards social services responses.

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

Comments:

Develop an integrated transport system for Wales that works well for older people – and therefore for the rest of the population too. Transport is essential to many older people who cannot or no longer drive a car. An effective, safe, reliable, accessible and integrated transport system is needed across bus and rail services, especially in rural areas, which allows older people to lead the lives they want to live with out restrictions. Community Transport has a vital role to play within a transport system that works well for older people and must be improved and support the role of voluntary drivers. The Free Bus Pass for

over 60s must continue. It helps combat isolation and loneliness.

The role of local taxi services should not be ignored as these are often used to convey groups of pensioners to meetings etc. Training and accreditation schemes in age-awareness for drivers could be implemented.

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

Comments:

Over 40% of people over 75 do not have or use a computer. Improvement of Digital inclusion of Older People through learning and support is needed. This needs to be nationally led – similar to the "meet the mouse" programme that worked well but funding was not continued. We want to see an end to discrimination through digital exclusion by default – by statutory organisations (including Welsh Government) as well as businesses, ensuring ready access to consultations, application processes and complaint procedures that are not just on-line.

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

Comments:

The duties placed on Councils under the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 to provide early intervention and prevention responses should go some way to providing the framework to tackle isolation and loneliness. Experience suggest that these service responses are not yet sufficiently well developed or available in the required numbers to provide the solution. Introduction of a Prevention Grant under the recently announced funding for Social Care would provide a way forward to address the gap**.**

Specifically, austerity has seen many Councils re-evaluate their Day Services with closure of day centres frequent. As modernized approaches to day services are implemented, it is important that people who are assessed with non-critical/substantial care needs are catered for including those who are isolated and lonely. Preventive approaches are being developed to replace out dated services but thresholds must not be set too high so as to exclude those who are isolated and lonely. The "what matters" approach must be made a reality.

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

Comments:

Social Care Institute of Excellence Research (2018) suggests the key messages are:

To move away from commissioning block contracts for a 'whole service' towards a willingness to 'micro-commission' to support existing groups and enable the establishment of new ones.

To identify and map existing assets in the local area, which will help to sustain knowledge and build on expertise.

To make it clearer and easier for smaller organisations to respond to commissioning tenders. Response times and tender requirements should be proportionate to the organisation's size and capacity.

To promote services which are willing to work closely to produce a seamless offer. This will help avoid duplication, ensure cost effectiveness, and potentially provide routes into areas of poverty and deprivation that will help local authorities tackle other priorities at the same time.

To invest 'upstream' in the community to reduce the likelihood of people becoming isolated, for example following bereavement.

To devolve budgets to local area coordinators to free up new approaches within an asset-based framework

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?

Comments:

Early intervention and prevention services – see above

The "Chatty Café" Initiative being developed in Caerphilly provides one way forward that could be replicated

https://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/News/News-Bulletin/November-2018/Caerphilly's-quest-to-get-people-chatting

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

Comments:

Tackling isolation and loneliness must be through GPs and community health services with regard to the NHS. Resources must be released from the acute sector to enable preventative approaches that are sustainable. Integration with Social Services would prevent people who are isolated and lonely falling through the gaps. Poor health is a major

contributory factor in loneliness and isolation and reducing waiting times for operations is key.

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

Comments:

Older People provide by far the largest amount of volunteering in Wales. With changing approaches to retirement there is an untapped potential to increase the numbers involved. However a national awareness/recruitment programme is needed that also matches people, their skills and volunteering opportunities that are practical – not everyone want to join a committee or forum!

Neighbors often help their elderly neighbors and this could be encouraged and extended by the promotion of a national " Look out for your Neighbor" scheme.

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:

The Third Sector has a huge potential to help tackle isolation and loneliness if that can be facilitated by straightforward and uncomplicated programmes. Funding on a collaborative and non-competitive basis over 3 years rather than annually is required. The organisations supporting the age sector provide excellent support to older people but they are extremely stretched and capacity building programmes are needed to maximise their role in implementing this Strategy

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

Comments:

Development of day services in Care Homes has occurred over many years but is being impacted by austerity. Support and encouragement to develop links between communities and care homes can help those living in the community who are lonely as well as residents. Some businesses already release employees for a few days a year to volunteer in the community and there could be an extension of this scheme, with appropriate training in age-awareness. Council pre-retirement programmes could also be utilised including for post retirement volunteering opportunities.

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

Comments:

The draft Strategy does not recognise that poverty amongst older people in Wales is now increasing – after years of decline. Only a minority of older people have a good occupational pension and many exist on the basic state pension. Uptake of Pensions Credit in Wales is not good - £100m is not being claimed. Income maximization programmes that were operated with great success by Council Strategy for Older People coordinators in the past should be revitalized. These programmes identified people who were isolated and lonely and made referrals.

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

Comments:

We want to see the creation of Age Friendly Communities across Wales which recognise and celebrate diversity, brings people together to challenge ageism and ensure that all ages can fully participate in community life. This should take account of the need to develop Dementia Friendly Communities and meet the World Health Organisation 8 Domains for age-friendly communities. This concept should be developed and supported by Councils and Health Boards in Wales. The Ageing Well in Wales programme should be given full support to further develop and reach its potential to ensure an active old age for all older people in Wales and to create the age friendly communities we need.

There is a wide range and diversity of small local groups that are run by and for older people in Wales. These groups mainly support older people within a few miles of where they live e.g. church groups, community centres, retirement, hobby and activity related, walking groups, choirs etc, who tend not to be well linked with the Council. They play a vital role in their communities and have been impacted by austerity. The Community Connectors are beginning to map these groups and the potential they have for supporting prevention and tackling isolation and loneliness should be further developed with additional funding. Age Connects, Age Cymru and Ageing Well all have good networks of small local groups. The question for Welsh Government is how they can fund and facilitate these arrangements to grow and develop not diminish as is happening now. It would be an "invest to save" policy to be supporting these smaller groups and promoting what they do for older people particularly on prevention and tackling isolation and loneliness.

The process for applying for grants by community groups needs to be made as simple and transparent as possible. The concept of time-banking has been introduced in Wales but needs further support and funding to develop and become more widely available. At the same time older people should be given help in developing individual resilience and

confidence so that they can take advantage of the various opportunities available. One of the best ways of combatting loneliness and isolation is being involved in helping others

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

Comments:

The Strategy provides a good starting point and has real potential. However further time and development is needed if for example it is to match what is happening in Scotland. The approach needs to recognise more substantially the significant numbers of older people who are isolated and lonely. Comparisons between young and older people who are suffering isolation and loneliness are disingenuous and do nothing to tackle the route issues. Use of only 75+ population figures is flawed. Welsh Government use 50+ for its Strategy for Older People and 60+ for the Commissioner for Older People legislation. In deprived communities there are many older people who will not reach 75 because of their life course disadvantage.

Other circumstances such as 'forgotten groups' e.g veterans, travellers and retiring couples who move into holiday resorts and are then left bereft when one of the partners die also need to be considered

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

Comments:

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/nov/23/care-package-french-postal-workers-helping-lonely-older-people

This article describes how the French postal service provides a support programme for lonely and isolated older people. It is chargeable at £18 a month but "Watch Over My Parents" provides an innovative approach that could be adapted for Wales.

Other examples include:

No one should have no one initiative https://www.ageuk.org.uk/get-involved/no-one/

Age Cymru prevention programmes https://www.ageuk.org.uk/cymru/

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

Comments:

This needs to be taken forward on a robust and grounded basis – so everyone can understand how the measurement works. Swansea University (Dr Deborah Morgan) have experience and expertise in this area which should be utilised.

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?

Comments:

Along with young people, older people as a group have greater than average numbers of Welsh Speakers, a number of for whom Welsh is their language of choice. This must be recognised in developing the Strategy.

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:

People with dementia are known to revert to their "mother tongue". The "More than Just Words" initiative provides a good way forward but there is an inevitable under supply of Welsh speakers in Social Care in the areas where Welsh is not used on a day to day basis. Further support and funding to help provide short and long term solutions should be provided.

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:

The Age Sector – the national organisations, local older people's forums and groups – should be engaged meaningfully in the further development and implementation of the Strategy

A robust funding framework to support implementation of this Strategy is essential. There needs to be multi-level and cross cutting grant programme so that Councils, Health Boards, the Voluntary Sector can all "invest to save" on a consistent basis but also innovate so that excellent ideas at the "ground level" are not lost because of the lack of funding