Introduction and summary

In "A Route Map to the 2020 Vision for Health and Social Care" the Scottish Government and NHS Scotland set out a shared vision that "by 2020 everyone is able to live longer healthier lives at home, or in a homely setting".

We now understand that social isolation can adversely impact on longevity and health.

This submission offers the Equal Opportunities Committee information on Abbeyfield Scotland's approach as a charity providing services in homely settings to older people. We were founded over 50 years ago, to combat social isolation, and recognise that the problem has increased and requires new solutions in an increasingly fragmented yet nominally more "connected" society. Integral to the Abbeyfield ethos is care for the whole person, i.e. the social, physical, spiritual and creative needs that we share regardless of age and this informs our response.

We have pointed to our own experience below, and to other examples of which we are aware and would be happy to expand further on our own role when it may be convenient to the Committee.

Our perspective

Being independent and alone can have a downside – the potential for loneliness as friends age and health changes. For older people as much as anyone else, enjoying conversations, good company and sharing experiences is as important as feeling safe and physically well. Our own expertise lies in older age and isolation though we are fully aware that loneliness can be as prevalent amongst young people.

Abbeyfield Scotland provides safe, secure, quality accommodation where those in later life can maintain their independence but benefit from a little help and enjoy companionship and company - when they want it.

Our residents and their families place a high value on their Abbeyfield experience – attractive locations, shared spaces for dining and entertaining, good food and an active social life.

Abbeyfield was sparked by one man's determination to put an end to the loneliness and neglect of London's older citizens in the 1950s. Richard Carr-Gomm's vision spread with Abbeyfield Houses set up by volunteers across the UK.
Abbeyfield Scotland was created in 2008 to sustain and develop the Abbeyfield experience in Scotland by bringing together several individual Abbeyfield societies.

We are a unique, not-for-profit housing association, registered with, and regulated by, the Scottish Housing Regulator, the Care Inspectorate and OSCR.

We provide housing and support services to older people in 23 communities from Dumfries to the Black Isle.

People come to Abbeyfield Scotland because:

- they want support to meet their changing support and care needs in later life
- they seek company and freedom in all-inclusive serviced accommodation
- we offer a high standard of independent living in a shared, homely setting
- we have a 50 year reputation for hospitality and companionship
- our staff "go the extra mile"
- we place a high value on the supportive communities within and outwith our Houses
- we are a charity that cares about reinvesting our surpluses, campaigning and lobbying
- we benefit from service development all over the UK and the world

Whilst our services are rooted in our original values, we base our plans on what our residents tell us and we are exploring ways of anticipating the priorities and changing needs of tomorrow’s customers.

One of the ways in which we do this is through research. Work was recently commissioned to examine spirituality in Abbeyfield. The report is called "Spiritual Needs and Care in Abbeyfield: A Qualitative Study" by Jenny Kartupelis, MBE MPhil (The Abbeyfield Society, June 2014). Some key points drawn from her observations and the comments of residents, staff and volunteers:

*Family life* - The community of residents in an Abbeyfield House resembles in many ways "a family" and eating together is vital to ‘family’ life. The service and sharing of food, the routine of mealtimes and the dining area, are at the heart of family life, and play a key role in spiritual wellbeing. Meals, coffee mornings, afternoon teas are all times when conversation leads to understanding and trust, and so are opportunities to share confidences or worries, and also to notice when things are not as they should be with someone. Attractive food and harmonious mealtimes ensure good nutrition, and this alone can transform lives, feeding body and spirit.
Security - Residents fear isolation, and it is a key factor in encouraging the move to Abbeyfield. Safety is associated with long term, settled relationships. Much of what housekeepers and volunteers do, is geared towards preventing loneliness. Residents are valued as individuals who each have different needs for company and privacy, physical and emotional

Peace of mind and spiritual wellbeing - the most important things are:

- being acknowledged as a valuable human being
- keeping in contact with friends and family
- having one’s individuality respected and individual needs met
- opportunities for company, friendship and privacy
- good, nutritious food served attractively at communal meals
- a feeling of safety and security

Prevalence of social isolation in urban and rural settings

We would comment that rural areas are "ageing" at a faster rate than urban areas. The appropriate solutions for older people suffering isolation may well differ between urban and rural settings.

Impacts of social isolation

We know that loneliness and isolation impacts on mortality and morbidity. It means a poorer quality of life for older people, e.g. an increased fear of crime. And it results in increased use of expensive health and social care services.

"The benefits to health and quality of life of addressing loneliness are clear for example, reduced depression and increased physical activity. Both of these have major consequences for the control of some long term conditions. There are also significant potential...savings for example, reduced prescribing costs and emergency admissions." Dr Shikha Pitalia GP, United League Commissioning Localities in St Helens and Wigan, North.

from ("Tackling Loneliness in Older Age - the Role of the Arts" David Cutler (Barings Foundation / The Campaign to End Loneliness), October 2012.

Best practice and ideas that could be shared across Scotland, including examples of targeted support or initiatives (including housing, health, third sector)

Public policy aims to enable older people to remain as independent as they want for as long as possible in their own homes. As needs change connections to the local community can often reduce. And support to address the physical needs of older people – for personal and domestic care and sustenance– must be complemented by an assessment of their emotional, creative, social and spiritual wellbeing.
Everyone now agrees on the need for a person-centred approach rather than a 'one-size-fits-all' solution when assessing and catering for people's changing needs. The Scottish Government-backed Joint Improvement Team's recent "Talking Points" publication with its support for an outcomes-based assessment approach specifically prompts professionals to check that people have "contact with significant other people and that they have opportunities for social participation". This is particularly apt now we understand the direct risks to long-term health from loneliness.

"Tackling Loneliness in Older Age - the Role of the Arts"  David Cutler (Barings Foundation / The Campaign to End Loneliness, October 2012) cites case studies from across the UK including Scotland - "older people need access to a broad range of community activities to help stave off loneliness – from faith groups to leisure, from the arts to fitness and outdoor pursuits, to education and learning, to hobbies and clubs. Older people also need access to reliable transport, safe environments and community spaces".

Examples given include "Read Aloud" and "Plantation Productions".

"Read Aloud" is a volunteer-based project started by Edinburgh City Libraries and the Scottish Poetry Library (www.scottishpoetrylibrary.org.uk). Volunteers visit Edinburgh care homes monthly, reading familiar and new poems and songs as a trigger for reminiscence and conversation

**Plantation Productions** is a community based media company based in Govan, one of Scotland’s most socially and economically deprived cities. They offer community groups of all ages the opportunity to learn about film making, media and the arts.

The Portal Seniors’ Film Club has been running at The Portal in Govan, Glasgow, for the past five years. A mixed group of around 15 pensioners aged 65-94 meet for two hours every Thursday afternoon to explore their creativity, enjoy the company of others and produce some compelling film works after learning the film making process of research, script writing, interview skills, acting, filming and editing. In 2010 the group embarked on art classes, learning to draw and ultimately exhibiting their works in the Glasgow Museum of Modern Art (GOMA). For some group members, this was the first time they had ever tried drawing in their lives. This fascinating project was documented in a film entitled ‘From Govan to GOMA’, and the film was played as part of the exhibition. Many of the group have created friendships and meet out with the film club either on other projects, or at cultural events that they find out about through The Portal (www. plantation.org.uk).

Closer to home, Abbeyfield Scotland has worked with a music company to bring entertainment and stimulation to its residents in Coatbridge and elsewhere.

**Paragon** is an inclusive music company inspiring people to create and perform their own music. They struck up a relationship with the Friends of Abbeyfield House in
Coatbridge which has led to its regular performances of a repertoire for our residents there. Paragon are all about using music and the arts to raise people's aspirations, promote positive self-image, teamwork, communication and learning.

The excellent volunteers at Abbeyfield Scotland are a key link between older people and the communities in which they live.

**Potential ideas for improvement and influencing policy**

Raising awareness of the problem of social isolation is very important. It follows that we must encourage the provision of new solutions and raise the profile of existing services and opportunities. We all have a role in this, as commissioners, service providers and general members of the community. Here are some suggestions:

- Partners engaged in Joint Strategic Commissioning should consider how social isolation figures amongst the identified needs of individuals and communities. In enabling people to decide what will best address those needs and in joint agency working to put the right services and support in place they should be encouraged to think "outside the box". Potential solutions to some issues may come from community arts projects, local faith groups, not-for-profit counselling services amongst others. There is a big job to do in mapping local provision and in making contact with organisations that fall outwith the usual sphere of consideration..

- Similarly many service providers are good at getting to know what their clients and residents care about, but there is always scope to reach further out to others through research, both local and internet-based.

- Professionals, enthusiasts, private businesses and charitable enterprises should be encouraged to think about what they can offer older people and how they can reach them. Indeed there may be a strong role for volunteers and social entrepreneurs, from "retired" people to youngsters as intermediaries to bring older people together with arts clubs, dog-walkers, amateur historians, IT professionals, corporate and social responsibility professionals etc. For some older people, there are real barriers to participation, e.g. of confidence, transport, mobility which have to be bridged.

**Conclusion**

We welcome this Inquiry and would conclude that, in Scotland, we must continue to build the capacity of communities and professionals to make broader connections if we are to help alleviate the loneliness many older people feel, whether they live at home or in a homely setting.

Niall Patterson
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