East Renfrewshire has a combination of urban and rural areas and with this in mind we wish to outline the following:

**Prevalence of Social Isolation in Urban and Rural Settings**
There was an acknowledgement that in rural areas there may be issues such as transport links and affordability of transport to reach social opportunities and services. This may also impact on difficulties in identifying those who are affected by social isolation as the problem may be exacerbated by the geography in more remote areas.

There is a perception in urban areas which are well served by amenities in communities and services that social isolation is less of an issue. The opposite may be true as while surrounded by others some children and young people still feel disconnected, marginalised and struggle to ‘fit in’. It is a challenge for services to identify and measure social isolation for children and young people. There are many variables which impact on this for example the child/young people’s perception, stage of development and impact of factors such as the media and the ever growing use of social media in young peoples lives.

Resource implications can also impact on services to address issues of social isolation in both urban and rural areas leading to reduced services. This may affect both community based services which are universal and those formal services aimed at targeting those identified as being socially isolated.

**Impacts of Social Isolation**
There are a number of impacts of social isolation including:

- Loneliness
- Impacts on mortality
- Emotional and cognitive difficulties
- Mental health issues including self harm and suicide
- Bullying
- Behavioural issues
- Poor self esteem and coping skills
- Limited choice
- Increased vulnerability to exploitation
- Lack of opportunities for sport leisure and social connections
- Lack of cohesion within the community
- Lack of connectedness with others

**Best Practice and Ideas of Targeted Support**
Services which target early intervention and sit within universal services including parenting groups should provide the initial response to preventing social isolation in the future and link to the Getting it Right for Every Child approach. This should provide parents with knowledge about the importance
of building nurturing relationships with their children to equip them with resilience and the skills to cope in situations of adversity. Services such as early year's services and health visitors also have an important role to play in supporting parents with these issues. Building assets in the community should help to promote a sense of connection for children and young people, support them to take some responsibility for their local area and improve their skills and knowledge. The value of structured organised groups such as Brownies and Boys Brigade were seen as being of value in the context of prevention.

In terms of more targeted support, Seasons for Growth (a group work intervention) which aims to support children and young people who have experienced significant change or loss and nurture groups are beneficial. Other services which may tackle social isolation include; educating children and young people about relationships, initiatives which inform them about housing options and homelessness, family mediation where there are relationship issues, universal holiday clubs and holiday clubs for children with additional support needs.

The voluntary sector often plays a significant role in reducing social isolation and can bridge gaps in services. Services to young carers who provide both one to one support and group work for children and young people in a caring role can improve peer support. Befriending services are also beneficial.

The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 should also strengthen the corporate parenting duties in local authorities to provide services to more vulnerable groups of children such as looked after children. This also provides accountability across services.

**Potential Ideas for Improvement and Influencing Policy**

- Consulting with young people about what helps
- Additional resources which target early intervention should impact on the long term costs of social isolation.
- Partnerships between local authorities and the 3rd sector which provide opportunities for innovative practice and joint working opportunities should be explored.
- Holistic approaches considering which take into account the whole system around a child are useful.
- Policies and resources are often weighted towards issues of deprivation which is not always the only source of concern in terms of children and young people affected by social isolation.
- Increased awareness for staff to help in identifying social isolation
- Having a key person in services who has knowledge of local services and resources could signpost people into the most appropriate pathway to supports.

- Protocols which are meaningful and make a difference to children’s lives

- Investing in the local Parenting Strategy

- Tackling stigma and discrimination within communities

- Targeted support via the Mental Health Strategy

- Equipping those in the role of the named person with appropriate training and resources in terms of children’s wellbeing

**Effective Awareness Raising Within Communities**

Given the variables which impact on social isolation this raised the question about the purpose of raising awareness and the expectations on services of this exercise. General information regarding wellbeing and educating people to be more aware of the issues may have some benefit however the impact on services would need to be considered. Awareness raising should offer support for those affected and therefore may be more useful if this was a local response. Consideration would need to be given as to how best to engage with children and young people and their carers in our communities.

Kate Rocks (Chief Social Work Officer)
Head of CHCP Children’s Services & Criminal Justice
East Renfrewshire Council
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