1) Prevalence of social isolation in urban and rural settings

In Edinburgh we are currently using GIS software to map population and service data to inform the development and planning of services for local older people. Identifying measures of loneliness at a city-wide level is a challenge, and we have been considering different proxies to illustrate this data. Our evidence of the prevalence of social isolation is largely anecdotal as reported through various channels such as the Edinburgh Older People’s Service Providers Forum (which brings together Third Sector organisations across Edinburgh), alongside information from practitioners across health and social care. We would welcome any relevant learning and guidance on how to measure loneliness and isolation across communities.

The local evidence we have about the prevalence of social isolation is in line with the wide range of published evidence (see appendix 1).

However, a particular challenge for Edinburgh is its nearly unique private housing stock in the city centre, in the form of tenements. Edinburgh has the second highest proportion of flats in Scotland at 65%. Flatted homes can be difficult for people with mobility problems to access, especially flats above the ground floor. Nearly half (48%) of all homes in Edinburgh were built before 1945 compared to the Scottish average of 36%, indicating that access above the ground floor is likely to be an issue and can lead to isolation.

Edinburgh has other particular characteristics. It has internationally renowned universities, is the seat of national Government, is the second biggest financial centre in the UK and has a very strong cultural and hospitality sector, which means that people are attracted to the city from across the world. This diversity of a dynamic, but at times transient, population brings with it much strength, but also significant challenges in supporting a growing older population and building strong communities.

Other highlighted thoughts in relation to Edinburgh and isolation:
- Edinburgh is perceived out-with the city as prosperous, but we know that prosperity doesn’t eliminate isolation and that health inequalities are exacerbated by the polarity of wealth and deprivation
- Another factor associated with wealth and education is the number of older people whose families are dispersed and whilst relatives are concerned and supportive, they are not close at hand to provide direct contact.
2) Impacts of social isolation, for instance loneliness, ill-health

Our experience is in line with the well reported evidence on the impact that isolation and loneliness can have on health and wellbeing (Appendix 1).

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

Edinburgh has a wealth of services and activities for all age ranges that prevent isolation and loneliness. Edinburgh TSI has recently mapped over 2,100 activities per week for people aged 65+ - see http://www.evocredbook.org.uk. The challenge we acknowledge is raising awareness and also increasing the confidence and motivation of people from all backgrounds to participate. We know there are particular challenges for some people to engage in activities. It is maybe ironic that in such a rich diverse city such as Edinburgh many residents do not feel that the activities are “for the likes of them”. Other groups that can feel excluded are LGBT and BME communities and other equality groups.

To address this challenge we have undertaken and supported a range of measures. We have benefitted from the Scottish Government Change Fund to trial innovation. Third sector organisations bring resources to the city to tackle social isolation and loneliness. Prevention and maximising people’s independence are key priorities throughout statutory, third and independent sector services. We have outlined some specific examples of work in Edinburgh below:

‘Local Opportunities for Older People’ [LOOPs] networks aim to bring together a range of statutory, independent and Third Sector services to improve signposting and support for older people. In addition these networks have acted as an investment conduit for a funding stream provided by City of Edinburgh Council. This funding has been specifically invested to improve local infrastructures to ensure that older people are better informed about existing local Third Sector organisations. This has included a dedicated ‘preventative activities’ phone line, a ‘community navigator’ project and ‘in-reach’ to the most isolated older people with access difficulties – all of these services are delivered by trained volunteers as well as paid staff.

The LOOPs networks themselves provide the opportunity for providers from all sectors to come together to discuss the challenges they experience in delivering their services to the most isolated older people in the community:

- How to find people – when they are effectively ‘off the grid’ in terms of health and social care provision
- How to build support with older people to attend activities when, for example, confidence has been lost
- How to take the time to find the right activities when they are most needed and in a context of extremely stretched capacity within organisations.

In addition to these developments, the LOOPs work closely with organisations across the city to ensure that appropriate and timely support can be provided. Much of this work relies upon a strong knowledge of existing service provision, the current
regulatory and strategic frameworks and/or relevant gaps within or challenges to current service delivery models across the city.

**Community Connecting**
Community Connecting is a support service for older people, helping people join in local opportunities and activities. Volunteers help to identify things the individual would like to do and support them to start doing them.

The activities that people choose are wide ranging such as

- going to a local coffee shop
- playing pool
- visiting art galleries
- help to start using public transport or a person’s own transport again

Often people use this service because they have become isolated or not been able to do things they used to enjoy. People might have lost confidence after a fall, illness or bereavement. The service supports people for around 4 months by which time it is hoped that they will feel less isolated and more active.

The service provides opportunities for volunteers from a range of ages and backgrounds, to give something back or broaden their experience. Volunteering can also have a positive impact on the volunteer’s own health, wellbeing and employability.

**Making it CLEAR** (Community living, enablement and resilience) was a three year partnership project involving City of Edinburgh Council, NHS Lothian, Third Sector and Queen Margaret University (QMU). The aim was to enable older people to live well within their communities by better understanding what supports them to remain resilient. The project has produced a review of the literature on resilience which revealed there were no appropriate assessment tools to determine older people’s resilience; using the evidence from the literature a tool has been developed alongside a practical manual for staff and volunteers to help identify ways to improve a person’s resilience.

Through the research social connectedness was identified as an important factor in an individual’s resilience (i.e. their ability to ‘bounce back’ from adverse events in their lives).

Through ongoing partnerships with QMU we are benefitting from robust academic research and analysis into a number of themes, many of which are related to social isolation e.g. Current Occupational Therapy PhD at QMU is exploring the impact of volunteering on Lothian’s ‘Sense of Belonging’ mental health strategy.

**Timebanking**
Edinburgh currently has five locally-based Timebanks that bring communities together to help support each other. Members can deposit time credits in their Timebank by providing help or services to others, and can withdraw these time credits when they need something done by a fellow Timebank member.
Timebanking is based on the simple principle that for every hour of time a person contributes to help someone else; they receive one time credit. A time credit is stored and then exchanged for services when needed from others. For example - if you help someone for an hour decorating their home, you can ‘buy’ an hour of someone helping you - let’s say - cutting your grass. It's fun, easy to start and no money changes hand.

Everyone is invited to give something back to their local community regardless of their background, skills or finances. This could help someone collect their shopping, paint a fence, wash a car or walk a dog. Time Bank members give and receive all sorts of help, such as listening and visiting, gardening and form filling, or sharing skills in music, knitting and using computers, to simple repairs, ironing and running errands. The more people share their time and skills, the healthier and happier your neighbourhood will become. With Timebanking, everyday acts of kindness are recognised as the important contribution they are to everyone’s wellbeing.

Timebanks also deliver collective activities as a means of developing trust amongst new members and within the wider community. Much evidence has been generated by Edinburgh’s Timebanks about their effectiveness amongst local communities. As with many services, the challenge of sustainability in a context of financial austerity must be acknowledged.

Volunteering
Both within the Third Sector and statutory service provision, volunteers play an important complimentary role in delivering services and activities that address a range of issues. Individuals themselves that choose to volunteer report the positive impact that their volunteering has on their lives;

- meeting people
- raising self-esteem by doing an activity of worth for others
- giving something back
- developing new skills and confidence.

From organisations’ perspective, services in Edinburgh would fall apart without the vital contribution made by citizens who choose to volunteer their time. At any one time, over 500 opportunities are advertised on the city’s volunteering database – [http://www.volunteeredinburgh.org.uk](http://www.volunteeredinburgh.org.uk). The majority of these are supporting services and activities that promote positive health and wellbeing. 2,760 organisations each benefit from an average 98 volunteering hours per week – that is 270,480 volunteer hours donated by citizens to citizens. The secondary benefit to the volunteers themselves cannot be underestimated, including evidence that suggest active volunteers are much less likely to require access to services.

Transport
Transport is consistently noted as key to supporting people to remain independent and reducing loneliness and isolation. Public transport may be enough for many people, but the importance of accessible Community Transport for those that need specialist provision must be acknowledged. Edinburgh has a strong Community Transport network and good relational links across sectors. However, ongoing sustainable investment to continue to provide existing levels of service against growing demand is a continuing challenge. We would recommend this inquiry
makes reference to the previous Scottish Parliament inquiry into Community Transport by the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee.

**Befriending**
In recent discussions it has been identified that there is a clear lack of mainstream befriending services in Edinburgh. Existing befriending services are frequently focussed on individuals with a specific need e.g. people with learning difficulties or specific health conditions or on individuals from Equality seeking groups e.g. lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. While these activities are extremely beneficial to these groups, it has become clear that there is a crucial need for generic befriending activity, tackling social isolation and loneliness, available across the city. Indeed, it has recently been identified that Edinburgh is the city with the lowest levels of mainstream befriending in Scotland.

Befriending and support that is able to facilitate new community connections or supports for older people is regularly identified as a cost effective intervention to tackle negative outcomes, preventing or delaying people’s need to receive statutory health and/or social care services (including preventing hospital admissions).

**URBACT Healthy Ageing project**
Edinburgh has recently participated in the URBACT II Healthy Ageing project. The project aims to transfer learning between partner cities about their approaches to tackling issues arising from a growing older population and meeting the needs of older people through effective prevention and health policies.

Since joining the project, Edinburgh has benefited from the transfer of learning from the lead city of Udine in Italy, and through exchange with the other partners: Grand Poitiers, in France, Klaipeda in Lithuania and Brighton and Hove, UK. All partners have the same aspirations – to make the changes needed to keep older people involved in their communities and remaining active, healthy, and as independent for as long as possible.

The exchange has focused on 3 main areas:

a) Methods of data and analysis – Udine has undertaken work to inform the future planning of services and support for older people, the tools and methods are transferable to other cities, for example:

   • GIS mapping to produce city health maps – mapping the spread of older people and their profiles across the city has informed the location of public services and facilities such as pharmacies

b) Preventative approaches – all of the partner cities recognise the importance of investing in preventative/ early intervention activities to support healthy ageing. The project provided an opportunity to share learning about such approaches, including what works well, what doesn’t work and evaluation methods.

c) Engagement of older people – all of the partner cities want to ensure that the voices of older people are at the centre of the planning and delivery of services. Partners have exchanged experiences and have learned from different methods of engaging older people.

*We would be delighted to provide further information, quotes and case studies on any of the work described in this submission.*
4) Potential ideas for improvement and influencing policy

Building on Christie and the importance of prevention, the RCOP Change Fund offered a fantastic opportunity for the development of new and innovative services. What is now required is a longer-term sustainable approach to resourcing preventative services, so that they are embedded within health and social care systems.

It is probably fair to say that the public and media continue to hold an overarching view that the medical model provides the answer to meet the nation’s health and social care needs. Locally, there is frustration and disappointment that innovative, proven initiatives that reduce social isolation, have to fight for recognition within a system often focused on hospital based services. We all need to work harder to raise awareness of the impact of social isolation and ensure that through integration we have a joined-up strategy across preventative, community and acute services.

5) Effective awareness-raising within communities

Many of the initiatives described above include awareness-raising in terms of both the importance of being connected, and awareness of the wealth of local activities that exist. A wider national campaign about social isolation could enhance the work being delivered locally and help shift cultural attitudes by emphasising the important health benefits that being socially connected can bring.

Caroline Clark, Planning and Commissioning Manager – Older People’s Services, Health and Social Care, City of Edinburgh Council

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13 March 2015
Appendix – Key references to evidence

The campaign to end loneliness has a wealth of material:
www.campaigntoendloneliness.org.uk

Combating loneliness: A guide for local authorities:
http://www.local.gov.uk/c/document_library/get_file?uuid=4e104158-77a2-4eb1-87a7-53154b2d5105&groupId=10171

www.local.gov.uk/web/guest/ageing-well/what-makes/- /journal_content/56/10171/3489675/ARTICLE-TEMPLATE#Loneliness written guides

IRISS Insights No 25:
IRISS Preventing loneliness and social isolation in older people

Age UK Loneliness evidence review:

Evaluation Support Scotland Stitch in Time - A model to explain the third sector contribution to Reshaping Care for Older People:
http://www.evaluationsupportscotland.org.uk/resources/261/

Community Transport background information:
http://www.ctauk.org/in-your-area/scotland.aspx