Introduction

Glasgow is Scotland’s largest city. Outside London, Glasgow is one of the largest concentrations of economic activity in the UK and Scotland’s only conurbation - the city and its surrounding area, the Clyde Valley, make a significant contribution to Scotland’s economy. Glasgow as an urban environment has a high level of citizens living in single occupant households in Glasgow - appreciate that not every one of these people will feel or consider themselves socially isolated but living alone is considered a large factor in isolation and loneliness:

- 30.4% of households (86,728) in Glasgow have one single occupant under the age of 64
- 12.8% of households (36,508) have one single occupant aged 65+
- 14.5% of households (41,315) have an occupant who is a lone parent

Looking after the City’s vulnerable people is noted as one of the Council’s Priorities and there have been several campaigns under this umbrella which have an effect on social isolation. Examples of this would be Glasgow’s acceptance onto the World Health Organisations “Age Friendly City” network and the Carer’s Strategy.

Prevalence of social isolation in urban and rural settings

Groups which are particularly at risk of social isolation are the elderly, disabled people, carers, bereaved and lone parents. Social isolation is prevalent in all age groups and different strategies may be needed to tackle each demographic. Two-in-five adults surveyed in deprived areas in Glasgow experienced loneliness. This included 17% of men and 15% of women who reported frequent feelings of loneliness (“all of the time” or “often”). There is a broad consensus across the literature that aspects of urban living including changing neighbourhood demographics and dynamics related to “in and out” migration, ageing populations, job insecurity, family and relationship breakdown, increasing single person households, and spatial concentrations of deprivation and inequality are all factors in the increasing numbers of socially isolated individuals. There is renewed interest and drive from policy makers to better understand and address the negative effects of isolation. Groups identified as experiencing social isolation and its negative effects include older people, men, care leavers, unemployed people, LGBT people and people with disabilities.

Impacts of social isolation, for instance loneliness, ill-health

Impacts include detrimental effect on mental health, such as causing depression and anxiety. An individual who feels socially isolated may question their own value to
society. Isolation can also lead to addiction issues if people turn to alcohol or other substances, this in turn can lead to further health issues.

Through our consultation event for Age Friendly Cities we found anecdotal evidence suggesting that isolation of older people often links with poor physical and mental health, being part of programmes which prevent loneliness considerably improve quality of life. Moreover having access to good transport links and local amenities make it easier for lonely people to participate socially.

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

Within Glasgow we operate a website http://www.yoursupportglasgow.org which provides a directory of day opportunities, care providers and much more, for example lunch clubs and other groups which exist to help people, families and carers to find appropriate social opportunities within the city.

We support a number of lunch clubs etc. throughout the city which allow older people to socialise on a regular basis. The council also funds a large number of community projects for both adults and children through our Integrated Grant Fund, many of which are specifically focussed on tackling social inclusion.

We recognise that carers can also feel isolated and have a carer’s strategy and associated suite of information for carers to support them in their role. We set up the Carers Reference Group to ensure that carers are involved directly in the development of policy, service planning and delivery. Over this time it has contributed to informing learning disability services, welfare reform, transitions from child to adult services and the Carers Privilege Card. The Carers Privilege Card gives carers access to discounts from the council and other organisations, for example Cineworld. Since the card’s launch in September 2013, 7,000 unpaid carers have received the card. A further 500 have been delivered as part of the package of support when accessing carer services.

**Potential ideas for improvement and influencing policy**

Glasgow Life if an arm’s length organisation who delivers the sport and leisure services on behalf of Glasgow City Council. They have anecdotal evidence that many of the programmes improve the self-reported sense of connectedness that users feel towards each other and their local neighbourhoods particularly via attending regular programmed activities, volunteering and festivals.

Culture, sport and learning opportunities help promote trust, understanding and empathy among people with different identities, values and experience. Learning and knowledge are well documented as amongst the most powerful ways to enable individuals to improve themselves, understand and achieve their potential. Heritage helps create a sense of identity, roots and place. Art challenges perspectives and articulates the human experience. Sport creates discipline, fitness and skill and the thrill of competition. Culture, sport and learning offer fun, meeting others and can create a sense of meaning. They can enhance a feeling of belonging to something
bigger. We believe that each of these qualities has the potential to be harnessed to challenge social isolation.

However there is a need for robust evaluation to better understand how culture, sport and learning can be used to address isolation and to identify and upscale effective projects.

During 2015/16 Glasgow Life is carrying out a mapping exercise of the services we deliver which may have a role in addressing social isolation in the city. This is the first stage in a process of trying to develop a better understanding of how culture, sport and learning can be used to mitigate the effects of social isolation. To this end we are interested in sharing learning from this process. We would also welcome partnership opportunities and learning exchange from other areas.

The vision and policy direction for health and social care services in Scotland is that more people live longer in their own homes and within their own communities. This does in some sense increase the risk of social isolation for individuals and carers, so this must be considered in the development of policy in this area.

The Age Friendly Cities programme will consult with older people and through the baseline research Glasgow City Council will have a better view of the effects of social isolation and ways in which it can be tackled.

Glasgow City Council has received an “engaged” Carer Positive Scotland Kite mark. As an employer we are working towards the goal of achieving the “Exemplary” stage. Carers are particularly susceptible to social isolation and around 1 in 7 people in the workforce will be carers, with this number forecast to increase significantly as the population gets older and we continue to work longer. Being a Carer friendly employer, implementing the Carers Strategy and instating the Carer Card are all ways which Glasgow City Council makes sure that carers have a strong support network.

**Effective awareness-raising within communities**

The best places to attempt to raise awareness of opportunities and support available to people experiencing social isolation is in those places where people tend to go most often, for example GPs surgeries, supermarkets etc. If a comprehensive information repository were to be created, then a national awareness raising campaign backed up by local information provision through for example GPs and community nursing, health visitors etc. could also support this.

Lisa Liddle
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Bibliography

Age UK. (2014) Loneliness - Evidence Review

Other useful sites:
http://www.yoursupportglasgow.org Reshaping Care for Older People