EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES COMMITTEE

AGE AND SOCIAL ISOLATION

SUBMISSION FROM NHS ARGYLL AND BUTE

BACKGROUND
Social isolation and loneliness is a significant risk factor for health outcomes in older people, it also increases the risk of premature mortality to the same degree as physical inactivity and obesity.

Work has been underway to address loneliness and isolation in Argyll and Bute via Reshaping Care for Older People (RCOP). This is under the banner of a workstream entitled community resilience. A range of stakeholders are involved in this work including NHS, council, third sector, independent sector and community representatives.

Key elements of activity include:

- Workers employed via the third sector in local communities to provide social support and activities for older people living at home.
- Awareness raising for workers and the general population about the risks associated with loneliness and isolation.
- Asset mapping of what resources and services are available in our local communities to ensure front line staff can appropriately refer older people to a range of services that can ward off loneliness; and older people themselves can get accurate information about what services are available.
- Investigation of what older people in one area of Argyll and Bute think about the links between social relationships and their health.

**Prevalence of social isolation in urban and rural settings**

Within Argyll and Bute there are additional factors which are considered to increase these risks, for example, a higher proportion of older people and the remote and rural geography. A research study was conducted in Cowal as part of a masters dissertation in public health. This was a qualitative study and showed that older people are aware of the links between social relationships and their health. A summary of this work is provided below:

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

In December 2014 52 people came together in Inveraray to consider the risks of loneliness and isolation in Argyll and Bute. A report of this event is provided...
below. See also the weblink: http://livingwellinargyllandbute.co.uk/social-isolation-and-loneliness/

Report Social Isolation Conference

The aim of this event was to raise awareness of the risks of loneliness and isolation amongst staff, carers and community representatives.

The agreed next steps from this event are:

- Circulate this report widely, for example, RCOP local implementation groups, Health and Wellbeing Networks etc.
- Make connections between this agenda and the ongoing asset mapping activity that is underway.
- One of the objectives was to consider how to raise this issue in assessments and this was not considered on the 2nd. This will be progressed by members of the working group and key partners who raised this.
- RCOP performance group have identified the need to improve consistency with services such as befriending. The working group will take forward an evaluation of the various methods around Argyll and Bute.
- Better engagement of community representatives to raise awareness of this agenda.

As a result of this event a review into befriending services and hospital to home services is ongoing. This is due to report by end March 2015 and findings can be shared with the parliamentary enquiry if required.

- **Potential ideas for improvement and influencing policy**
  - Provide support and guidance to enable loneliness and isolation to be a criterion in person centred assessments.
  - Recognise that barriers to social integration and connectedness are diverse so policy needs to reflect this, particularly in a rural setting issues like community transport and broadband connectivity are frequently cited as problems.
  - The national direction of travel appears to be about building capacity in the third sector to address social issues such as loneliness. There is a considerable amount of success in this in Argyll and Bute; however it must be recognised that funding arrangements for the third sector are often uncertain and this leads to fragile services that may not know from year to year if they will be sustained.

- **Effective awareness-raising within communities**
  During 2014 partners in Argyll and Bute developed 2 resources on social isolation and loneliness, 1) credit card leaflets for the general public to be displayed in receptions, libraries etc. 2) leaflets for front line workers and carers.
These resources were developed in consultation with older people and are being distributed during spring 2015 along with press and marketing activity to raise awareness with the general population.

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