

HEALTH AND SPORT COMMITTEE

SOCIAL PRESCRIBING OF PHYSICAL ACTIVITY AND SPORT

SUBMISSION FROM THE SCOTTISH LIBRARY AND INFORMATION COUNCIL

Public Libraries, Health and Social Prescribing

The Scottish Library and Information Council (SLIC) is keen to respond to the Committee in relation to social prescribing's ability to tackle physical and mental wellbeing issues across Scotland. Scotland's public libraries remain the most popular civic resource with over 43 million visits last year. More than 50% of the population visited their local library at least once in the last year. Public libraries have re-presented their offer over recent years to ensure people can make the most of their library services. One area in which strong focus has been placed has been the support which public libraries play in combatting social isolation, supporting mental health and well-being and supporting individuals with their health literacy needs which supports self management of long term conditions.

To what extent does social prescribing for physical activity and sport increase *sustained* participation in physical activity and sport for health and wellbeing?

Public libraries in Scotland provide communities with a safe, welcoming and friendly space to meet, and host a broad range of health and wellbeing events and activities. These initiatives have been shown to have a positive effect on people's health with libraries receiving referrals from the NHS, HSCP and Community Link Workers. *Ambition and Opportunity: A Strategy for Public Libraries in Scotland 2015-2020* identifies health and wellbeing as a key strategic priority for public libraries. SLIC, NHS Scotland, the Health and Social Care Alliance Scotland have established a strategic partnership to develop the role of public library staff to support health literacy and self-management. The Scottish Government's Public Library Improvement Fund (administered by SLIC) has enabled libraries to develop innovative wellbeing projects.

Key Scottish public library initiatives include:

- OnFife Libraries' *Walk On*, which features a short walk followed by tea, books and conversation
- Midlothian Libraries' *Braw Blether*, a bibliotherapy project supporting individuals with mental health issues
- East Dunbartonshire Culture and Leisure's *Words for Wellness* use words and texts to spark conversation
- North Lanarkshire's *Browse and Blether* sessions illustrates that a combination of reading and socialising has a pivotal role in improving people's mental health. Feedback included: 'Great to have different people to talk to' and 'Brought back happy memories and lots of fun and laughter throughout the event'.

- *Well Connected*, North and South Lanarkshire's social prescribing initiative has seen 29,000 resources borrowed
- North and South Ayrshire libraries ran *Mind an' Read Well* which promoted books on prescription to young people with mental health issues.

Through wellbeing activities, public libraries play an important role in reducing social isolation. Public libraries also play a strong role in the prevention agenda, GPs signpost people to libraries to obtain hearing aid batteries and walking stick ferrules, and access health and wellbeing titles.

Public libraries are central to the delivery of the Bookbug programme which supports children to build the literacy and learning skills that contribute to wellbeing and thriving in adulthood. Bookbug also helps to combat social isolation and mental health needs among parents.

Public libraries have made services accessible for people with autism, additional support needs, and dementia. Midlothian and Inverclyde Libraries have collaborated to ensure public libraries are supportive environments for young people with autism. The Public Library Improvement Fund has supported projects to make libraries dementia friendly, including accredited staff training in North Ayrshire Libraries, delivering a dementia friendly library in Dundee, supporting Playlist for Life activity through Moray Libraries and AngusAlive Libraries' memory box project provides reminiscence services for older people in care homes and homecare settings.

Library services with established relationships with Community Link Workers include Aberdeen and East Renfrewshire Libraries. These library services share information about wellbeing services and the Community Link Workers refer people to the libraries' mindfulness, knitting, art, singing, creative writing and bibliotherapy sessions. East Renfrewshire Libraries received 202 bookings in 2017 through the social prescribing initiative. In 2018, East Renfrewshire Libraries worked with 130 adults and 126 reported that they felt more socially included as a result of library activities.

Aberdeen Libraries distribute falls awareness leaflets and people are referred to the library service by GPs to obtain this information.

A number of public libraries across Scotland share premises with the NHS which strengthens the links between health and libraries.

Through the strategic partnership between the ALLIANCE, NHS and SLIC, libraries will become a national networked knowledge resource for health and wellbeing. Social prescribing and referrals to libraries will have a key role in enabling people in Scotland to take more control over their health and wellbeing and live well on their own terms with any conditions they may have.