



Connected Communities: Tackling Loneliness and Social Isolation

Consultation response

Closing date: January 15th 2019

January 2019

4th Floor, Trafalgar House | 5 Fitzalan Place | Cardiff | CF24 0ED

Tel: 03000 231 011 | Fax: 03000 231060

www.citizensadvice.org.uk

For more information contact **Liz Williams, Policy Research Assistant,**

liz.williams@citizensadvice.org.uk

About Citizens Advice Cymru

Citizens Advice is a charity founded in 1939. Since then, we've given advice, information and support on a range of everyday issues to anyone who needs it, from debt, money and welfare benefits to housing, employment and relationships.

In Wales we have a network of 19 local Citizens Advice¹ - all individual charities, staffed by nearly 800 dedicated volunteers and paid staff. We remove the barriers to advice by going to places where people need us most, delivering advice from over 375 community locations in Wales, as well as offering services over the phone and online.

Every year across England and Wales millions of people turn to us. This gives us a unique insight into their needs and concerns. We use this knowledge to campaign on big issues, both locally and nationally. So one way or another, we're helping everyone – not just those we support directly.

¹ Citizens Advice is changing. We are modernising our services to respond to changing needs and to reach more people. As part of this process there will be a new name for the service - 'bureau' is now called local Citizens Advice.

We have responded to the questions where we have the most significant and relevant evidence.

Question 1: Do you agree with our definitions of loneliness and social isolation? If not, what would you propose instead and why?

Yes.

Loneliness and social isolation share many factors that are associated with increasing the likelihood of people experiencing each, such as deteriorating health, and sensory and mobility impairments. Last year 48% of our clients were disabled or had a long-term health condition. Of those, 25% had a mental health problem. Likewise, 26% of our clients are too unwell to work and 13% are unemployed and seeking paid employment. It is recognised by many that being out of work can act as a catalyst for feelings of loneliness and social isolation.

Vulnerable clients are already reaching out to us and are seeking our help with their practical issues. Disabled people pay on average £550 per month on extra costs related to their disability.² Therefore, benefit maximisation can ensure that people with disabilities or a life-long condition can afford to leave their home and engage in an activity. The issues we most help our clients with a disability or long-term health condition with are Personal Independence Payment (PIP), Employment Support Allowance (ESA) and Housing Benefit. Our clients have on average 4 issues, while clients with a mental health condition have 6 issues. This demonstrates that their needs are complex and aren't clear cut, and that client's with long term health conditions such as mental health conditions come to us with a number of practical issues. These needs are also more urgent and complex.

Question 2: How can we help people to understand the trigger points for loneliness and social isolation and to build emotional and psychological resilience to equip them to take steps to avoid or reduce these feelings?

Loneliness is not an issue that exists in isolation, it is in effect a symptom of a myriad of issues such as life events which can trigger low confidence, low income/poverty, limited transport options, and individuals having no control or ability to exercise choices in life. It is vital that we look to building resilience in communities - solving money worries through benefits maximisation or debt management is key and tackling practical issues such as problems with housing or employment can also prevent and improve feelings of loneliness and social isolation.

4 in 5 Citizens Advice clients experience a shock or life event before coming to us. This means that many of our clients are vulnerable when they seek our advice. Advice can

² https://socialcare.wales/cms_assets/file-uploads/SCW-NPAR-ENG.PDF, p.38.

reduce debt by keeping people in employment and helping people access their welfare rights. Advice can also reduce demand on statutory and public services.³

A report by WCVA describes a *positive model of a resilient community is one that focuses on how the community can adapt and flourish through change, rather than merely surviving it*. Last year Citizens Advice Cymru delivered a project called Money Talks as part of the What Works Fund with the Money Advice Service. The project explored how life events and transitions impact on people's money guidance needs. Life events can act as trigger points for decreased financial capability and as a result the project looked at whether well-timed interventions would be effective in improving their financial capability and overall wellbeing. The project involved delivering one-to-one money guidance support to individuals experiencing a change in their health circumstance, their employment or a breakdown in relationship. This was delivered at scale across Wales in local communities (outside the workplace), reaching more than 1,800 clients between May-December 2017.

Building resilience in individuals and communities is a key part of our service as Citizens Advice - we help people find a way forward, to feel confident about making good decisions. Low confidence was identified during the Money Advice project as a prominent barrier to people displaying good financial capability. In fact, nearly half of the clients we helped during the project had low confidence to take action on money matters. Likewise, over 3 in 5 clients with mental health problems had low confidence. Improving money skills has an impact on clients' wider circumstances and ability to manage, ultimately making them more resilient in other areas of their lives. 3 in 4 of the clients who received the service said it had a positive change in their financial capability, whilst 55% felt more confident to take action. Citizens Advice also observed statistically significant increases in the self-reported wellbeing of Money Talks participants compared to a comparison group. Using the ONS Life Satisfaction measure, the average wellbeing score of Money Talks participants increased from 4.6 to 5.9 (on a scale of 0-10 where 0 is the lowest and 10 the highest wellbeing score).

The project enabled us to identify how life events can act as triggers, and we are able to share this insight with Welsh Government. We also carried out high level evaluation of the project (NESTA Level 3), which highlighted that although multi-channel communication can be effective, the option of face-to-face advice is also very important, as is the advisers showing empathy and understanding.⁴

Early years

Question 3: How can the Welsh Government foster the right environment and create the right conditions to build resilient communities?

3

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/Public/Impact/Citizens%20Advice%20impact%20report%202017%20final%20web.pdf>, p.8.

⁴ Personal Finance Research Centre, University of Bristol, Ipsos MORI, *What Works Fund Evidence Analysis by Life Stage* (2018), pp.47-48.

Our advice can make people more resilient. 3 in 5 people said they had low confidence about taking action to solve their problems before advice. After advice, 2 in 3 felt more confident to handle a similar problem in future and 3 in 4 felt more knowledgeable regarding their rights. We respond to people's needs and increase their ability to solve their own problems in future.⁵

A family's problems with housing, debt, benefits and employment can lead to low income, insecurity and poor mental and physical health. This in turn can affect the family's overall resilience, and have a knock on effect on the children, by potentially acting as barriers to their learning and social development.

Citizens Advice Rhondda Cynon Taf runs a project called Resilient Families which is funded by the local authority. Families are identified through the MASH service, and are usually referred around issues relating to parenting. When a family is referred to Citizens Advice a caseworker visits the client and their family and carries out a financial appraisal, which can lead to benefit maximisation. The aim of the project is to make families more resilient, and in the long term to stop children from going into the care system. For example, by helping a client into employment, it gives them more money to buy their child a coat, shoes, school uniform and food for breakfast, which in turn will allow the child to go to school. If the child is in school, the parent is able to work and have a more reliable income. Likewise, the local authority project looks at the family as a whole, so although the parent may be offered parenting classes, the child may also have emotional, social or behavioural problems that will be looked at. The local authority brokerage team helps the family with four areas of improvement, and these can include health, debt and education. The project in the local office also builds resilience by helping people to help themselves, by accessing the website and making it clear that if they have another benefit issue, for example, they can come back for help.

Infrastructure (Housing, Transport and Digital Inclusion)

Question 6: What more can the housing sector do to reduce loneliness and social isolation? How can the Welsh Government support this?

A Housing Survey reveals that 12% of social housing residents in England and Wales are affected by mould and damp. The condition of a person's home can have a dramatic impact on their physical health and mental health. If a person's home is in disrepair, they may be far less likely to invite friends and family into their home due to feelings of shame or embarrassment. This could have even more detrimental effects on disabled individuals who may not easily be able to leave their home, in turn causing them to be socially isolated. Likewise, if the area that a person lives in is unsafe, they may be less likely to leave their home.

5

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/Public/Impact/Citizens%20Advice%20impact%20report%202017%20final%20web.pdf>, p.5.

Last year, we helped 8,994 people with 13,807 problems relating to housing. Of these, 903 people had 1,128 issues around local authority housing and there were 969 queries related to housing association property. Problems with Private Rented Sector (PRS) housing dominate in this area with almost a third of all problems relating to privately rented housing (2,833 people, 4,011 issues). The top PRS issues amongst our clients were repairs and maintenance of the property (587 issues).

It is vital that the housing sector improves the condition of both social and privately rented housing by ensuring the fitness for human habitation reflects the housing health and safety rating system (**HHSRS**) and is enforceable by the tenant. The standard of housing could also be improved if the housing sector was to publish guidance to landlords on the maximum acceptable timescales to complete repairs. The Welsh Government should continue to support landlords to deal with disrepair if they say they can't afford it. Where support is available the Welsh Government should push advertisement of the loan system so that landlords are aware that they can access it.

Practical issues such as problems with housing are often the root cause of a person's loneliness and social isolation. Evidence also shows the close link between cold homes and people's physical and mental health. In order for communities to be resilient, people must be able to able to heat their homes.

Cold homes and unaffordable fuel bills lead to cumulative problems for vulnerable people in the UK, and older people, young children and those with an existing respiratory or cardiovascular health condition are more at risk. The World Health Organisation estimates at least 30% of excess winter deaths are due to cold homes- that could be avoided if homes were properly insulated and heated, and people able to afford their fuel bills.⁶

The Welsh Government should continue to fund schemes that help alleviate fuel poverty, such as NEST, whilst also ensuring that they are publicised effectively so that they target the hard to reach households such as the elderly and those living on welfare benefits.

An example of successful intervention was a project running in Merthyr Tydfil, which helped 200 people over a 9 month period. Advisers from Citizens Advice Merthyr Tydfil helped people in their own homes, in turn keeping them warm and well.

6

<https://wearecitizensadvice.org.uk/warm-homes-affordable-fuel-and-healthy-people-cf99e272d3ad>

Bernard's story

Bernard didn't have enough money to meet friends, and as a result was lonely and confined to his home, even relying on food banks to eat. His home was also cold as he couldn't afford the bills and was on a more expensive tariff. The advisers carried out a benefit check on Bernard, they realised he was entitled to more money than he was receiving. This additional money allowed Bernard to socialise and also helped him to heat his home.

There was a 15% increase in the number of issues amongst our clients relating to utilities and communication in 2017/18 compared to 2016/17 in Wales. A new project run by Citizens Advice, *Warmer Wales*, targets fuel poor 'hard-to-reach' households and those people who may be vulnerable to ill-health due to cold homes as a result of unaffordable energy bills. The service offers face-to-face and telephone energy advice through appointments and home visits to help with practical problems such as debt and benefits and refer them for specialist support. The project also helps clients to improve their energy efficiency and reduce their bills by finding clients a more cost effective tariff. The project helps people manage their debts by helping them develop the knowledge, skills and behaviours to reduce consumption. This in turn increases the health and wellbeing of whole families along with developing community resilience. The project highlights the importance of advice around practical issues such as debt management and benefit maximisation, which in turn can improve wellbeing and prevent loneliness, isolation and poor mental health. The Welsh Government should continue to work with the advice sector to promote partnership and referrals between the statutory sector and independent advice providers. Earlier and more frequent referrals will enable preventative advice, will help build resilience and will help prevent problems from escalating.

The Government should work with the housing sector to provide fair and secure housing. No fault evictions should be abolished to give people stability and help build more resilient people and communities. Last year we also helped 1,487 clients with 1,748 problems relating to threatened homelessness and actual homelessness. Homelessness and threatened homelessness have negative effects on a person's physical and mental health and wellbeing, and as a result lead to chronic loneliness and social isolation.

Question 7: What more can Welsh Government do to support the improvement of transport services across Wales?

Affordable, safe and reliable transport is vital in enabling communities to be connected by allowing access to jobs, high streets, wider community services and allowing the

opportunity for people to socialise. During 2017-18 our clients had 2,633 issues with travel and transport, 196 of which were related to public transport.

Unemployment and poverty are factors in causing loneliness and isolation. Affordability and provision of public transport is key to helping people into work and out of poverty. As a third of Wales' population (ONS) lives in a rural area, transport connectivity to employment is key. A lack of access to affordable transport is a major barrier to finding and sustaining employment and in accessing services. Not only is the individual trapped in a cycle of isolation, but they are unable to support local business and communities due to a lack of transport.

Cost is not the only barrier, it's also accessibility and whether the service will take them to where they need to go at the right time. For those with additional needs- especially individuals with sensory loss, mental health, physical disabilities and learning disabilities -travelling from place to place gets even harder. For example, the Papworth Trust published figures on disability which show 29% of working age disabled people say that a lack of transport is a key barrier to employment. Whilst Leonard Cheshire claim that 23% of disabled people have had to turn down a job due to a lack of accessible transport.

The rising cost of transport and availability of our public transport system means people feel excluded and isolated, unable to access opportunities, from jobs to healthcare, that many take for granted.

This can be a particular problem in rural areas, where jobs and services are more widely dispersed, but is also an issue faced in more built up areas too. The post-industrial make up of the economy in parts of Wales has meant many are forced to travel outside of their communities to find work. (Access Denied, 2012 - Sustrans, Citizens Advice, Save the Children, Age Cymru)

The Welsh Government should create a stronger consumer voice in the operation, delivery and policy planning for public transport in Wales.

Question 8: How can we try to ensure that people have access to digital technology and the ability to use it safely?

Almost 1 in 3 of our clients are digitally excluded and need help to use online services, forms and tools. Digital literacy is a cross cutting issue that affects all services that residents come into contact with and there needs to be digital literacy support available through the continuation of projects such as Digital Communities Wales.

It is important that the Welsh Government raises awareness that not only the 65+ are affected by digital exclusion in order to tackle the stigma around it. This in turn might encourage more people to reach out for support.

Digitally excluded groups can be vulnerable to scams and being taken advantage of by essential services. Advisers at a local Citizens Advice told us that one client was paying over £100 a month for 2 phone contracts, after taking out a new one without cancelling his last one. This was all done online, and the provider didn't explain this to him and he didn't have a good understanding of the internet. Their response was that it wasn't their problem to make sure someone understands what they're signing up to.

As a result, as well as boosting digital literacy and ensuring the correct infrastructure is in place, there should be a minimum standard that is available offline. Multi-channel communication is important in ensuring that consumers who can't access the internet don't miss out on good deals and vital information.

Social Care and Health

Question 9: What experience do you have of the impact of social services on addressing loneliness and social isolation?

Alleviating poverty and deprivation must be built into existing pathways such as the care planning process to ensure that material deprivation does not push vulnerable adults into loneliness.

Money issues and the impact of poverty are not routinely taken into consideration when the health sector and local government are trying to understand what the service user needs. Care and support in Wales: national population assessment report identifies the importance of preventative work in playing a role in improving social care and support in Wales. The report stresses the importance of information, advice and assistance, including advice on finance, employment and housing. We have previously made a number of recommendations on accessing and paying for social care in Wales, including access to information and advice.⁷

For people with mental health problems we continue to call for advice to be available in health settings to ensure people get the support they need where they most need it. We know from our own research with clients that providing access to free, impartial and quality-assured advice builds peoples resilience, improves wellbeing - and reduces costs to the public purse. Having mental health problems can make it difficult for people to manage other practical problems in their lives, such as money, debt, housing, immigration and employment. These problems can also exacerbate a mental health condition. As a result, practical issues erode people's sense of wellbeing and put people at risk of loneliness and social isolation.

Mental health practitioners have told us that they are spending increasing amounts of time helping patients with practical problems instead of focusing on their treatment. Having practical advice available in mental health settings is of great benefit. Better Advice Better Lives (BABL) is a Welsh Government funded project which allows some of

⁷ [Accessing and paying for Social Care in Wales](#)

our advisers to be located within mental health settings. This allows our advisers to assist mental health practitioners who are trying to resolve problems that aren't medically related. In fact, last year 8 in 10 people felt less stressed, depressed or anxious after coming to us for advice.

Question 10: What more can the social care sector do to tackle loneliness and social isolation?

See response to Question 9.

Question 11: What more can we do to encourage people who are at risk of becoming lonely and socially isolated to get involved in local groups that promote physical activity?

From our clients' experience it is evident that people are less likely to engage in any activity if they are struggling with immediate problems such as low income, debt or housing problems. Our [impact report](#) demonstrates the importance of support and guidance in improving people's ability to cope with their everyday lives as well as make positive decisions. After coming to us for advice, nearly 3 in 5 felt they had better relationships with others and 2 in 3 found it easier to manage day-to-day.⁸

Resolving the social determinants of health have to be considered a fundamental platform from which people can be encouraged to participate. Mental health, physical health and financial health all impinge on one another, so in order to encourage people to engage in physical activity both mental and financial health need to be taken into consideration too.

Mental Health

Question 12: In what other ways can health services play their part in reducing loneliness and social isolation?

Social Prescribing should help tackle poverty and deprivation. We welcome joined up new ways to tackle loneliness and social isolation which recognise the complexity of these issues.

When it comes to social prescribing, we welcome this person centred approach, but our position is firm that all social prescribing schemes must tackle the social determinants of housing, employment and income before introducing expectations to engage in wider social activities. Ignoring poverty and socio-economic circumstances will not solve the problems. Is it realistic to expect a patient/service user to meaningfully engage/ to visit a day centre for a lunch if they can not afford the bus there or the lunch?

8

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/Public/Impact/Impact%20of%20local%20Citizens%20Advice%20in%20Wales%202017-18.pdf>

The Money Talks project had positive effects on clients' finances, wellbeing and confidence, and the project was successful in reaching a client base that might not have typically sought our money guidance. Health services should routinely ensure that patients and families with a change of circumstance such as a life event or new diagnosis have access to advice so that they are able to stay well and resilient and remain independent. *A key feature of the Money Talks service was the development of partnerships to support effective and timely referral routes. The services were often co-located within partner locations, such as job centres, to allow clients easy access to the support provided by the service. The key benefits partners found in the service were that it offered a specialist independent and impartial service to their clients which enabled them to see a way forward.*⁹ This highlights the importance of the availability of advice in accessible locations, as it allows vulnerable people to be targeted.

Volunteering

Question 13: What more can the Welsh Government do to encourage people to volunteer?

Volunteering is a key contributor to people's ability to embark on lifelong learning and develop skills that will help them gain a step into employment and better paid work. Our research found that volunteering can keep people active and motivated, and counteract some of the negative impacts unemployment can have on mental health.¹⁰

Volunteering can also make individuals more resilient by improving their sense of self and wellbeing. By allowing individuals to have a sense of purpose, it can help give people the confidence by allowing them to play an active role in society.

It is also important that disabled people have enough opportunity to volunteer in order to remove barriers to employment but also to allow them to play an active role in the community to reduce their chances of becoming lonely and socially isolated.¹¹ Volunteering also helps towards community cohesion by bringing individuals closer to their local area and in turn creating stronger and more inclusive communities.¹²

It is important that the Welsh Government ensures that there is investment for volunteers to be trained and supported. It is also vital that minority and vulnerable

9

[https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/Public/Impact/Citizens%20Advice%20\(A248e\)%20What%20Works%20fund%20-%20Money%20Talks%20evaluation%20report%20-%20final%20v2%20\(1\)%20\(2\).pdf](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/Public/Impact/Citizens%20Advice%20(A248e)%20What%20Works%20fund%20-%20Money%20Talks%20evaluation%20report%20-%20final%20v2%20(1)%20(2).pdf), p.49.

10

https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/Migrated_Documents/corporate/value-volunteering-may-14.pdf, p.5.

11

https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/Migrated_Documents/corporate/value-volunteering-may-14.pdf, p.7.

12

https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/Migrated_Documents/corporate/value-volunteering-may-14.pdf, p.8.

groups are targeted (BME, LGBTQ+, individuals with physical, sensory and learning disabilities) in order to ensure all groups are given the same opportunities. Other factors such as available transport can make volunteering more accessible and appealing.

Investing in volunteer development at charities like Citizens Advice has hugely benefited its volunteers as well as its clients. Volunteer support and training has led to volunteers improving skill development and employability, and has improved soft skills and resilience, health and wellbeing, community cohesion and engagement.¹³ Citizens Advice train 2,800 new volunteer advisers each year across England and Wales, plus many hundreds more volunteers to take on a variety of other roles. Every year, 30% of the volunteers that leave us do so for employment, further education or other training opportunities.¹⁴ One volunteer at a local Citizens Advice was trained as a plumber but wanted a career change. He began volunteering in the local office, and after gaining experience became a specialist housing adviser. This shows that volunteers at local Citizens Advice offices gain skills through training which in turn allows them to benefit as well as give back to the community. Through improved local knowledge, Citizens Advice volunteers also have a greater awareness of the issues affecting their community and how to tackle them.¹⁵

Third sector

Question 14: How can the Third sector play a stronger role in helping to tackle loneliness and social isolation? What can the Welsh Government and other public bodies do to support this?

The Third sector can play a stronger role in helping to tackle loneliness and social isolation by sharing good practice with other organisations in Wales. This will help organisations to work towards a person-centred approach and provides them with the opportunity to identify individuals who are lonely and socially isolated or who are at risk of being lonely or isolated, and help them to access the support they need. Information sharing would also help organisations to develop meaningful referral links so that individuals can be identified, but also helped by the most suitable organisation.

The Third sector is also able to engage with harder to reach communities more easily and effectively than public bodies for a variety of reasons, including that a significant amount of Third sector activity takes place at a community level. Many see an important role for the Third sector as 'empowering communities'.¹⁶ WCVA research

¹³

https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/Migrated_Documents/corporate/value-volunteering-may-14.pdf, p.4.

¹⁴

https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/Migrated_Documents/corporate/value-volunteering-may-14.pdf, p.5.

¹⁵

https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/Migrated_Documents/corporate/value-volunteering-may-14.pdf, p.8.

¹⁶ https://www.wcva.org.uk/media/4697244/literature_review_e.pdf, p.6.

emphasises the important role that Third sector organisations play in informing better policy. The report explains that their ability to ‘facilitate citizen and community voice’ and put ‘people at the centre through engagement and co-production....planning, designing and delivering services’ makes their approach unique. As a result, it is important that Welsh Government supports a robust and accessible Third sector through provision of support and resources to enable ongoing engagement with individuals and communities.

Skills and Employability

Question 15: How can employers and businesses play their part in reducing loneliness and social isolation?

During 2017 to 2018 Citizens Advice helped over 9,000 people with over 17,000 employment related issues in Wales. Pay and entitlements were the top employment issues facing clients (3,105 people with 4,156 issues), followed by dismissal (1,769 people with 2,735 problems), dispute resolution (1,521 people with 1,950 problems), and terms and conditions of employment (1,500 people with 1,883 problems).

Women, disabled, Black Asian minority ethnic (BAME) and lesbian, gay, bisexual or trans (LGBT) people face additional barriers to employment.¹⁷ These are some of the groups that are most vulnerable to loneliness and social isolation, and as a result it is important that they are given equal opportunity to engage in the labour market and society more broadly.¹⁸ Work and regular income are vital to our sense of security and wellbeing, as well as given us a sense of purpose and opportunity for regular interaction.

Businesses and employers working with the Third sector could help those who are furthest away from the labour market into work and provide them with opportunities to progress. This can be done by offering personalised support based on individual needs. For example, in order to support employees with disabilities or long-term health conditions in the workplace businesses and employers can think about innovative ways they can redesign jobs, design their sickness policies, redeploy employees and deal with different types of health conditions, particularly mental health and fluctuating or hidden conditions.

Employers and businesses should also ensure good practice for their employees, by acting more ethically and socially responsible. For example, it is important that workers are aware of their rights and are given secure employment with consistent hours and income.

¹⁷

[https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/Equalities/CAB339_Sol_Rec_Report_v7.1%20\(1\).pdf](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/Equalities/CAB339_Sol_Rec_Report_v7.1%20(1).pdf), p.2.

¹⁸

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/wellbeing/articles/lonelinesswhatcharacteristicsandcircumstancesareassociatedwithfeelinglonely/2018-04-10>

Business and employers should also ensure good referral links to advice services, so that employees can get help with practical problems such as benefits, housing, employment issues and debt, which could in turn ensure that they are able to remain in their current employment and maintain their mental and physical health.

Businesses could also:

- Sign up to the Code of Practice for Ethical Employment in Supply Chains in the Welsh public sector
- Allow employees paid volunteering days; employers and businesses can encourage people to volunteer and in turn reduce loneliness and social isolation
- Ensure that employers are better informed and trained on their duties under law and support employees appropriately and empathetically
- Ensure child care policy serves those on non-standard employment contracts

Tackling Poverty

Question 16: What more can the Welsh Government do to support those who experience poverty alongside loneliness and social isolation?

We have addressed this question through our answers to previous questions.

Question 17: What more can we do to build community resilience and support communities to combat loneliness and social isolation?

We have addressed this question through answers to previous questions.

Question 18: Do you agree with our proposed approach? If not, what would you otherwise suggest?

We agree that tackling loneliness and social isolation is a long-term challenge and that Welsh Government's strategy will help support the first steps needed in tackling the issues which are complex and affect many different groups of people.

Ensuring a holistic approach is essential in tackling some of the causes of loneliness and isolation, this should include access to community services, including advice services as an important element of the overall strategy.

Question 19: Are you aware of examples of successful interventions within Wales, or beyond, that you think we should be looking at?

Case study 1

Citizens Advice Rhondda Cynon Taf uses a social prescribing model to support individuals with substance misuse and mental health problems. The PAT project has two tiers; tier one is primary care mental health which is funded by the health board and tier two is acute mental health which is local authority funded. The projects are referral led (referred by CPNs, support workers, social workers and doctors) and mirror each other. Tier one appointments take place in health centres while tier 2 appointments can take place anywhere, such as in the client's home or in the hospital, wherever is convenient and where the client wants to be seen. Clients are seen by one of two case workers in Citizens Advice RCT, which means that clients are not passed around and are able to build rapport with the case workers. This, as well as the fact that the caseworkers will go to the client wherever they choose, makes the project so successful. The project aims to empower clients whilst also dealing with their practical problems through benefit maximisation etc.

Case study 2

One local Citizens Advice office currently run a Third Sector Broker project. The Third Sector Broker is integrated in social services 'hubs', and receives referrals from the Common Access Point (CAP); social work and hospital teams; and individuals and families who require support in the local area. At present the Third Sector Broker supports people Over 50 who may not currently reach the criteria for social services support, by brokering the best opportunities that are available to them within the Third Sector.

Individuals may require support to relieve social isolation; help with maintaining their independence, e.g. shopping services; respite services etc. The Third Sector Broker will signpost or refer the individual to the most appropriate support that is available to them in their local area.

The Broker also identifies gaps in services and links new groups with funding advisers to aid in their facilitation.