

Briefing: The Scottish Government's Draft Loneliness and Isolation Strategy – Summary of Consultation Responses.

In January 2018, the Scottish Government opened a public consultation on its draft strategy for tackling social isolation and loneliness, and building stronger social connections for Scotland. Through this, the Scottish Government aimed to better understand how to enact positive change in communities, and how local and government leaders and other key stakeholders could contribute to creating the conditions that allow social connections to flourish. [You can read CTA's response to the consultation here.](#) At the end of October, the Scottish Government published their summary of responses, 'Analysing responses to 'A Connected Scotland' – the Scottish Government's draft strategy to tackle social isolation and loneliness.'

As we know, community transport is vital in enabling countless journeys for lonely and isolated people who would otherwise be unable to leave their homes, helping them to lead healthy, independent lives. In our response to the Scottish Government's consultation, we highlighted the contribution of community transport to tackling loneliness and isolation, providing examples of the way in which our members go above and beyond to care for their passengers and to create safe, sociable environments on the vehicle, especially for those with disabilities and mobility impairments. We also spoke about how community transport can tie into routes on commercial services by providing the first and last legs of journeys which make the overall journey possible. Pointing to the absence of data on loneliness and isolation, we further encouraged the Scottish Government to adopt a single loneliness and isolation measure across government and the public sector, and asked that the government include the transport sector in this process, so that data garnered could be used to better predict and respond to transport demand.

We welcome the Scottish Government's summary and analysis of responses. Transport, or the lack of it, is consistently mentioned throughout the report and considered one of the key contributing factors

to social isolation and loneliness. There was also a recognition of the impact that cuts to funding for transport was having on Scotland's social connectedness, and the concurrent acknowledgement that the Scottish Government had a responsibility to provide stable funding for third sector organisations to enable them to expand their reach. The CTA agree with the view that there is a need for loneliness and social isolation to be considered and embedded into developing policy, as well as the conclusion that the way forward requires community development and investment by maintaining and funding public and social services.

In particular, it was positive to see that community transport was specifically mentioned within the report, with its effectiveness described as being limited by local authority boundaries. However, the responses summarised seem to overlook the contribution that community transport makes towards improving accessibility for socially isolated individuals and for those with mobility impairments unable to access conventional transport. There is mention of the way in which older or disabled people require transport to be truly door-to-door, and for vehicles to be mobility adapted. Of course, community transport exists to provide this support and it was disappointing that it was not better acknowledged. Moreover, by enabling passengers to reach 'everyday' local amenities, such as GPs, hairdressers, local supermarkets and shops, community transport enables vital custom to local businesses and prevents these services from being centralised into larger towns and cities. The relationship that often forms between passengers and drivers and volunteers also mean that CT providers are vital in signposting their passengers to relevant social and medical services that improve passengers' health and wellbeing. The summary of responses mentions declining public spaces and the importance of social prescribing, but omits the contribution that community transport provides in both these aspects.

The CTA has often observed the way in which projects fail to give sufficient attention to planning how people will access services, and transport planning is considered as an afterthought once budgets and resources have already been allocated. Too often, community transport is also considered as a last resort option, once commercial and subsidised services have failed. We hope that the Scottish Government's future loneliness and isolation strategy will recognise this and embed community transport into policy, service design and planning. CTA will continue to make this case and promote the vital work of our members across Scotland.

More information:

If you want to talk more about this topic with CTA you can contact CTA's Policy Executive Suzanne Lau on suzanne@ctauk.org or 0161 351 1475