

EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT - RESULTS

<p>Title of Policy</p>	<p>A Connected Scotland: Our strategy for tackling social isolation and loneliness and building stronger social connections.</p>
<p>Summary of aims and desired outcomes of Policy</p>	<p>A Connected Scotland is among the first strategies in the world to tackle loneliness and social isolation. The strategy aims to make our communities more connected and cohesive, bring together a range of policy areas across Government to tackle loneliness in a strategic way, and create the conditions for communities to flourish.</p>
<p>Directorate: Division: team</p>	<p>Directorate for Local Government and Communities: Equality, Human Rights and Third sector: Equality Unit</p>

Executive summary

The main purpose of the equality screening exercise is to identify whether the introduction of A Connected Scotland, a national strategy to tackle loneliness and social isolation and build social connections,

will adversely impact any particular group of individuals and to consider how this work can better promote equality of opportunity and good relations.

The Equality Impact assessment highlighted that there are no specific areas of concern. The strategy is thought to comprehensively address inequalities, including for protected characteristics. As improving equality is one of the core ambitions of the strategy, the strategy's impact is expected to be positive or neutral, instead of negative. The results indicate that the duties for an EQIA have been met and that there is currently no expected impact that requires remedial action. At this stage the Equality Unit is facilitating discussion between policy teams about what needs to be done to effectively tackle social isolation and loneliness. As a cross-government initiative, responsibility for mitigating actions does not lie with a single policy area, or a single organisation. The Equality Unit will act as a catalyst to raise concerns expressed by stakeholders with the relevant policy teams and to consider potential impacts on equality in any subsequent engagement.

Background

A Connected Scotland is the first strategy to tackle loneliness and social isolation in the UK. In the last Parliamentary term, the Equal Opportunities Committee conducted an inquiry into Social Isolation and Age. The committee found that social isolation and loneliness was a significant problem in Scotland, and recommended that the Government developed a national strategy to tackle it.

The strategy aims to make our communities more connected and cohesive, bring together a range of policy areas across Government to tackle loneliness in a strategic way, and creating the conditions for communities to flourish.

It includes a set of priorities and actions across a wide range of policy areas, including community empowerment and public service reform, building cohesive communities, investing resources, reducing stigma, tackling poverty, addressing inequality, promoting health and wellbeing, working with business, promoting the third sector and volunteering, children and young people, creating high-quality places, promoting Scotland's culture and heritage and improving infrastructure.

The Scope of the EQIA

The impact of introducing a national strategy was assessed against each of the protected characteristics: age, disability, sex (including pregnancy and maternity), gender reassignment, sexual orientation, race and religion and belief. The EQIA has been informed by research carried out by relevant stakeholders and by the Scottish Government's evidence finder.

The strategy will have an impact on almost everyone in Scotland, including individuals with protected characteristics. Because the strategy's impact is expected to be positive or neutral, instead of negative, the EQIA was a lighter touch one and no further consultations were carried out.

Separate equality assessments will be done by service providers and other delivery partners upon implementation of any specific action or piece of work, according to relevant legislation and guidelines. The Equality Unit will continue to consider any impacts on equality in any subsequent engagement with stakeholders or other policy teams.

Key Findings

The Scottish Government does not expect that the strategy will have any negative impact on any particular group of individuals. The EQIA found that the strategy will comprehensively address inequalities, including for protected characteristics.

Social isolation and loneliness are issues that can affect anyone at any point in their life. Different factors can place individuals at greater risk, including major life transitions, personal characteristics and health conditions. The broad nature of social isolation and loneliness makes them difficult problems to tackle, especially as the responsibility does not lie with a single policy area within government, or a single organisation. Particular groups of people may be at increased risk of social isolation and loneliness – socio-economically disadvantaged, young mothers, D/deaf and Deafblind BSL users, those with poor physical and mental wellbeing, people with disabilities, children and young people, those living alone, those who have been bereaved, minority ethnic groups, and those from LGBTI communities.

It is expected that the Strategy will mostly have a positive or neutral impact on minority groups. The Strategy will remove obstacles to

community involvement and improve access to adequate services to improve community connection.

Some of the inequalities addressed by the strategy, such as access to infrastructure, or transport, do not fall neatly into the categories of the protected characteristics, and so into the EQIA's remit. However it is expected that actions in those areas will continue to reduce overall inequality.

Recommendations and Conclusion

Commitment to reducing inequalities is strongly built into the strategy to tackle loneliness and social isolation. The EQIA serves as a safeguard to check that the protected groups, as well as any other equalities considerations, have been reviewed in light of the strategy.

As it was not necessary, no adjustments have been made to the strategy as a result of this assessment. Before implementation, delivery partners and service providers will have conducted their own equalities assessments for the aspects they are responsible for, according to relevant equalities legislation and local guidelines.

Equalities monitoring and review will be integrated into the evaluation and monitoring measures for the strategy as a whole. A new question on loneliness has been included in the Scottish Household Survey from 2018 with the first results available in September 2019. This will allow the Scottish Government to review the impact of new policies on different groups through the implementation process.