



1. As the largest victims' organisation supporting victims and witnesses of crime in Scotland, Victim Support Scotland (VSS) is supportive of the Scottish Government's plan to tackle social isolation and loneliness and build stronger communities.
2. Communities that are inclusive, cohesive and connected have fewer incidents of criminal activity and anti-social behaviour. VSS understands there is a connection between neighbourhood crime/anti-social behaviour and social isolation, so it is crucial that criminal activity is adequately addressed in any strategy to tackle social isolation.
3. The Draft Performance Framework detailed on page 24 of the consultation describes the vision for reducing social isolation in Scotland as: ***A Scotland where individuals and communities are more connected and everyone has the opportunity to develop meaningful relationships regardless of age, status, circumstances or identity.*** VSS is encouraged that one of the identified outcomes of this vision is "*fewer causes of social isolation and loneliness*" and that one of the measures of success for this outcome is "*less neighbourhood crime and antisocial behaviour*". However, we would like to see the indicators for this measure demonstrate a clearer link to crime reduction. Although "[a] *decrease in the number of bullying cases in schools*" is given as an indicator for this measure, it would also be appropriate for "*reduced incidents of anti-social behaviour/neighbourhood crime*" (or something similar) to be included to ensure that the connection between social isolation and crime/anti-social behaviour is appropriately captured and addressed.

4. On another outcome: “**Communities are more empowered to directly respond to social isolation and loneliness**” lists “*reduced anti-social behaviour*” as a measure of success with “*more people feel safe in their communities*” included as an indicator. It is crucial that people feel safe in their communities and do not fear victimisation. The fear of crime (and experiencing crime) can lead people, especially the elderly, to socially isolate themselves. No one in Scotland should live in fear of victimisation and it is evident given the link between fear of crime and social isolation that it is a necessity to address neighbourhood crime/anti-social behaviour in order for a social isolation strategy to be effective and meaningful. We are satisfied that the connection between neighbourhood crime/anti-social behaviour and social isolation has been acknowledged. However, we urge the Scottish Government to ensure the role neighbourhood crime/anti-social behaviour plays in causing and perpetuating social isolation is given due prominence in the strategy and future activities on the issue.
5. We accept that anti-social behaviour and neighbourhood crime can be both a cause of social isolation and a result of social isolation. Reducing social isolation will reduce crime and violence in our society and will also result in people feeling safer and so less likely to shut themselves off from their communities. When people feel safe in their communities, they feel secure walking the streets of their neighbourhood and so they engage with their communities, rather than shutting themselves in the perceived safety of their homes.
6. VSS recognises the critical contribution that volunteering brings to building a cohesive society. We agree that promoting volunteering is helpful as a means to combat social exclusion and that volunteering is an important contributor to the success of any strategy to combat social isolation.
7. The role of volunteering should be a key plank in assisting marginalised social groups, in creating a civic minded society and used as a tool to bring about community interaction and renewal.

8. Volunteers are crucial to the work of VSS and without their valuable contribution, we would be unable to offer support in our local communities and the in-court environment to the many people affected by crime throughout Scotland.
9. The majority of our volunteers directly support people affected by crime in our Victim and Witness Service. However, our volunteering opportunities aim to offer a range of volunteering to fit the skills and experiences of anyone interested in supporting our organisation and in doing so we hope we can give confidence and bring a real sense of achievement to a person's life.
10. We know from speaking to our volunteers that they volunteer for a host of different reasons. The impact for some has been immeasurable, learning new skills, unearthing talents, providing a sense of purpose, meeting people, gaining experiences and certifications, and some have even gone on to take up employment with VSS.
11. We acknowledge the interplay between various sectors and the significance that voluntary power has to affect individuals and society and so we ask that volunteering continues to be given the priority it deserves within the context of the Scottish Government's evolving plan to tackle social isolation.

ENDS