

Loneliness is a key problem affecting Scots

Health Secretary highlights issue in launch of report

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LONELINESS is one of the key problems affecting people in Scotland, Health Secretary Shona Robison said as she launched a major report.

Ms Robison insisted “we need to sit up and take notice” of the number of people who feel isolated on the back of a national consultation about creating a healthier nation.

She highlighted the growing elderly population and the changing shape of family life as reasons feeling alone was raised by so many in response to the Scottish Government’s “National Conversation” about health and wellbeing.

The report says: “The impact of social isolation and loneliness were raised by people of all ages, in all kinds of communities across Scotland. Causes include a lack of close friends or family, transport or access issues, difficulty finding out what’s available and communication problems.”

More than 9,000 people took part in the National Conversation, which was launched last summer, by attending organised events. Thousands more participated through social media.

Ms Robison said the problem of loneliness had also been raised with the Health and Sport Committee in the Scottish Parliament.

She said: “It should not be a surprise given we have a different demographic, an ageing population, we have families living in



LONELY: A growing number of elderly people are affected.

different ways. But it is something I think we need to sit up and take notice of because it is not something a medication can help or even something a care service can help, albeit that may be part of human contact.”

She spoke of the need to link people, particularly the elderly, with others in the community and said the plan for new community hubs that bring together GPs and social care services could help build such bridges.

She said: “It would be such a simple thing to do, but we have never really managed to do it in a systematic way and I think the bolstering of community services gives us an opportunity to do that.”

Community groups who participated in the consultation highlighted inconsistencies in social care services, saying the quality varied from area to area.

Glenda Watt, from the Scottish Older People’s Assembly, said some people had described care homes

and care at home services with very good standards, while others had had less good experiences. She said: “Older people are looking for much more of a consistency.”

Cutbacks and staff shortages in social care services are also highlighted by the report on the National Conversation.

Inclusion Scotland, which represents people with disabilities, is quoted saying: “... of great concern to disabled people is the extent to which access to social care services are becoming ever more limited to those with the most desperate needs.”

The report says: “We heard a number of comments about the pressures on the social care workforce due to distance between clients, travel arrangements and staff shortages. This can affect the quality of care provided.”

Recruitment and retention of social care staff is described as “difficult” by one contributor. They note high levels of staff turnover are making it hard to give people consistent care.

Ms Robison said one reason £250 million is being spent on community health and social care over the next financial year is because of the need to “enhance and strengthen our social care services.”

She also spoke of the need to allow people to continue to influence the way health and social care services are run. A scheme called Our Voice is among the next steps for taking this forward.

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