

Chat Bench and Tackling Loneliness

“This Council notes that the challenges of loneliness and how this has been compounded during the pandemic. Loneliness is now endemic across Northern Ireland. 88% of people in N.I. say loneliness has become a bigger problem since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. 1 in 3 people in N.I. are ‘more often lonely’ and chronic loneliness affects 1 in 20 people.

This Council further notes the recent British Red Cross N.I report – The longest Year: Life under local restrictions, has called on the Executive to take urgent action to tackle loneliness and states that N.I remains the only part of the UK without a governmental loneliness strategy. 70 organisations including NICVA have also called for an urgent strategy to be brought forward.

This Council can do something tangible to tackle isolation and loneliness by agreeing to consider the repurposing of 2 council owned benches as ‘Happy to Chat Benches’. One of these is situated in the grounds of City Hall and the other in the Titanic quarter. Many Councils across the UK including some in N.I. have introduced chat benches to help break down the barriers of social isolation and to get people talking.

This Council also calls on the Minister for Health to initiate the development of a Northern Ireland Loneliness Strategy in partnership with other relevant Executive colleagues.”

Proposer: Councillor Howard

Seconder: Councillor de Faoite

To be referred, without debate, to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee