



<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Motion – Chat Bench and Tackling Loneliness</b>
<b>Date:</b>	20th August, 2021
<b>Reporting Officer:</b>	John Walsh, City Solicitor
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	Jim Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer

### Restricted Reports

Is this report restricted?

Yes

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No

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If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?

After Committee Decision

After Council Decision

Sometime in the future

Never

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### Call-in

Is the decision eligible for Call-in?

Yes

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No

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<b>1.0</b>	<b>Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues</b>
1.1	To bring to the Committee's attention the Motion in respect of a Chat Bench and Tackling Loneliness which was referred to the Committee by the Council at its meeting on 1st July.
<b>2.0</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>
2.1	The Members of the Committee are asked to consider the motion and, should it be agreed, to recommend that, in accordance with the Council decision of 4th May, the Chief Executive exercise her delegated authority to submit to a future meeting a report on how this would be facilitated, resourced and managed.

<b>3.0</b>	<b>Main Report</b>
	<b><u>Key Issues</u></b>
3.1	The Council, at its meeting on 1st July, considered the following motion which had been proposed by Councillor Howard and seconded by Councillor de Faoite.
3.2	<p><i>“This Council notes 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 that 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.</i></p> <p><i>This Council further notes that 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.</i></p> <p><i>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 the 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.</i></p> <p><i>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.”</i></p>
3.3	In accordance with Standing Order 13(f), the Motion was referred without discussion to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.
3.4	<b><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></b>  None.
3.5	<b><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u></b>  This Notice of Motion, if agreed, may have potential equality, good relations and rural needs implications and should be subject to our normal screening process as appropriate.
<b>4.0</b>	<b>Documents Attached</b>
	None.