

Report on	Update on Age Friendly and Mid Ulster Loneliness Network
Date of Meeting	14 th September 2021
Reporting Officer	Fiona McClements

Is this report restricted for confidential business?	Yes	
If 'Yes', confirm below the exempt information category relied upon	No	X

1.0	Purpose of Report
1.1	To update Members of the ongoing work around Age Friendly Communities and associated Networks across the Mid Ulster District Council Area and advise on a request for funding towards community projects.
2.0	Background
2.1	The MUDC Age Friendly Coordinator is involved with a number of partners and networks that helps MUDC drive the Age Friendly agenda and progress towards a society for ageing well. There are close linkages with the Loneliness Network helping to deliver on Community Planning targets under the Health and Wellbeing Community Planning thematic group to develop and implement an integrated response to mental health and wellbeing.
2.2	Loneliness and Isolation have been major issues in society and can lead to poor mental health. Traditional perceptions view Loneliness and Isolation affecting those in later life, however loneliness can also affect anyone from teenagers, new parents, carers, recently bereaved, to students and those with disabilities. During the Covid 19 pandemic, the restrictions have exacerbated this issue for many.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	As Members would be aware from previous reports, a Mid Ulster Loneliness Network has been formed through collaboration between Northern and Southern Trusts, MUDC, and the Agewell Partnership. The Network works with Statutory, Voluntary, and Community sectors to raise awareness of loneliness, share best practice and learning on ways to address and prevent loneliness and so promote positive mental wellbeing throughout the MUDC area. By working in partnership with local communities, the aim is to reach into communities to identify, support, and help those who may be suffering from isolation and loneliness. As part of this work there has been an activity programme to which MUDC match funded the Trusts' contribution of £1,500 in the last financial year. Programme money has been spent on the following to date:
3.2	Activities Programme Each organisation listed below received up to £300 for their projects:

- **Praxis** - Application was for a therapeutic garden enlisting volunteers from the befriending scheme to help.
- **Mid Ulster Volunteer Centre** - Key aim is to reduce loneliness and isolation through offering a range of socially distanced activities.
- **Mid Ulster Victims Empowerment** - The project they have chosen is to provide large piece jigsaws, puzzle books, word search books and art and crafts activity packs to members. They will be able to extend this through other funding that they have received.
- **Agewell** - The project involves giving each client a calendar with a pocket in front of it where they could insert their appointment letters and write reminder dates on the calendar. These calendars were sourced locally. They are hoping to print approximately seven hundred which will be distributed to all their members.
- **Cookstown and Western Shores Area Network** - Weekly click and connect. People are connected via phone call, WhatsApp group or zoom call. They then find out if people need signposted to any other services.

Slow cookers update

A slow cooker programme was put in place with the support of the “Make a Change” officers from MUDC facilitating the applications. This initiative provides participants with a slow cooker starter kit which includes the basic items to enable the use of a slow cooker to be experienced and embedded within the home. Support and encouragement was provided through regular and timely phone calls / contact which also allowed further guidance and reassurance to be offered. The primary benefit of the initiative is improved knowledge and skills to create nutritious and healthy meals on a low budget resulting in a sustained lifestyle change.

Activity packs update

Items for activity packs were purchased for older and young people. The older people’s packs consist of:

- A puzzle
- A wordsearch book
- Greeting cards of beauty spots in the MUDC area
- 6 stamps

The younger people’s packs consist of

- A £5 coffee voucher
- Notebook
- Pen
- Water bottle
- Small hand sanitiser

Care homes

Links have been made with care homes in order to help residents keep active during the Covid 19 pandemic. One of the resources is a “Move with Mary” DVD. The exercise sessions cater for every level of capability, ranging from simple seated stretches, to balance, strength and gentle aerobic exercises suited to older people. The resources have been developed in partnership to support the work of the Northern Ireland Frailty Network, Age Friendly Network NI, care homes and Age Sector Networks delivering locally for the benefit of older people. There is also a booklet, ‘Keeping Well at Home’ which compliments this resource. Care homes

	<p>have been making links with the Age Friendly Co-ordinator to receive the resources.</p>
3.3	<p>Chatty Benches</p> <p>Mid Ulster Loneliness Network has placed its first 'Chatty Bench' in the Mid Ulster district, with the support of Mid Ulster District Council, marking this year's Loneliness Awareness Week (14 – 18 June). Situated in the popular and picturesque surrounds of Dungannon Park, the special bench has been introduced to provide a place for people to come together to have a chat.</p>
3.4	<p>Positive Ageing Month</p> <p>October is Positive Ageing Month which is a month-long festival of events and activities for older people. It celebrates the contribution that older people make to their communities. This year there is a regional approach organised through the Age Friendly Northern Ireland Network. Unfortunately, due to Covid-19 and the current restrictions in place to keep people safe, we are unable to bring everyone together this year. Instead, the Age Friendly Co-ordinators have worked in partnership with organisations to bring an online calendar of events that older people can participate in free of charge. As well as a regional approach, the Age Friendly Co-ordinator has planned to run some local sessions for residents of Mid Ulster District Council. The calendar of events is currently being populated and it is anticipated that it will be shared throughout the month of September for people to register and take part.</p>
3.5	<p>WHO & UK network application</p> <p>As members are aware one of the funded targets set for MUDC is to join the WHO Global Network for Age-Friendly Cities and Communities. As part of the application criteria to join the WHO there is a requirement for commitment towards becoming an age-friendly city/community. This would include a Letter from the Chair of the Council or subnational public authority leadership. The Age Friendly Co-ordinator has recently made an application to join the UK Network of Age Friendly. As an affiliate of the WHO's Global Network of Age-friendly Cities and Communities (GNAFCC) the UK Network of Age-friendly Communities (UK Network) supports the GNAFCC's mission and aims to stimulate and enable UK cities and communities to become increasingly age-friendly. The fundamental purpose of the UK Network is to support members in their own efforts to develop more age-friendly places and communities and to work towards becoming full members of the GNAFCC, having taken credible steps and being well positioned to do more (e.g. the authority and capacity to convene inter-sectoral collaborations, conduct baseline assessments and to develop, implement and monitor action plans).</p>
3.6	<p>Pensioners Parliament 2021</p> <p>The Age Friendly Co-ordinator is involved with Age NI and the NI Pensioners Parliament 2021. Age NI remained committed to ensuring the voices of older people would be heard through a Pensioners' Parliament. Age NI's Policy and Engagement Team is leading the planning for Pensioners' Parliament and working with partners and stakeholders. In October 2020, as part of an organisational recovery plan, the team began taking forward plans and elements for the Pensioners' Parliament. A key feature of this is working with stakeholders including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Age NI's Consultative Forum

- Local sector networks across Northern Ireland
- Former members of Age Sector Platform
- Age Friendly staff in local Councils
- Northern Ireland Assembly Engagement Team

The aim of this engagement was to explore:

- Engagement with and participation of older people safely and effectively
- Involvement of local age sector networks and Age Friendly staff in Councils
- Ideas and opportunities

As well as hearing views on how to plan and manage local and regional events, these meetings generated suggestions on programme content, resources, communications, promotion and participants exchanged innovative ideas for engaging with older people both for on and offline activities.

The Age NI's Pensioners' Parliament 2021 is scheduled to take place 17th September 2021. In line with current restrictions, 22 people are permitted in the Chamber at Parliament Buildings, Belfast. Age NI have allocated one representative for each of the Age Sector Networks to ask Minister questions. Arrangements are being made to host a socially distanced session in Mid Ulster, the venue is to be confirmed. A limited number of people can register to go along and watch the event live on a screen.

There is also an opportunity to join online Via Zoom Wednesday 8 September from 2.30-4pm, where the results of the Lived Experience 2021 survey will be launched. These results were collected earlier in the year when older people in Northern Ireland were asked what mattered most to them. To register to take part the link is [Lived Experience 2021 Forum Registration | Age NI](#)

3.7 **Within Mid Ulster District Council**

Cross departmental meetings have been scheduled to ensure that all departments are actively considering the Age Friendly agenda in the provision of their services. Additionally multi agency meetings are being arranged under the community planning Health and wellbeing thematic group.

Financial support

3.8 The Mid Ulster Loneliness Network is aiming to secure funding to develop further community projects including further roll out of the chatty bench initiative. The Northern Health and Social care Trust and the Southern Health and Social care Trust each have advised of a funding contribution in the region of £3,000 towards activity programmes and the Northern trust will be contributing a further £1,500 for Children & young people.

Mid Ulster Council have been asked if they wish to contribute in the region of £3,000 for the extension of the chatty bench initiative. It has been proposed that the chatty benches are placed in parks, local villages and towns to serve as a place where people can go and sit and don't mind others sitting for a chat as well. The benches would hopefully in turn help to tackle loneliness and support positive mental health within the community.

	<p>It is anticipated that the funding would be used to fund local men sheds to build the benches and have children and young people paint and decorate the benches to stand out. This would encourage intergenerational work amongst the community and help to tackle social isolation and loneliness. The funding would also be used to purchase chatty bench signs and the development of a QR Code which would provide additional features, most crucially statistics to help measure the success of the campaign and direct users to the location of the benches and further information on Mid Ulster Loneliness Network.</p>
3.9	<p>Members may wish to consider in principle the potential for recurring funding towards the loneliness Network to allow for future planning and preparations. Detailed information would be brought to Council for consideration at the appropriate planning stage each year for discussion and final decision making.</p>
4.0	<i>Other Considerations</i>
4.1	<i>Financial, Human Resources & Risk Implications</i>
	Financial: A request has been made for a contribution to the extension of the chatty bench initiative at a cost to MUDC of £3,000
	Human: Staff time
	Risk Management: Current covid restrictions to be adhered to
4.2	Screening & Impact Assessments
	Equality & Good Relations Implications: N/a
	Rural Needs Implications: N/a
5.0	Recommendation(s)
5.1	To note the content of the report outlining the recent activities of the Age Friendly work and associated Loneliness Network.
5.2	Consider the request for a contribution towards programme costs for the loneliness Network in order to deliver on the chatty bench initiative as supported by the other key partners of the Mid Ulster Loneliness Network including NHSCT and SHSCT.
6.0	Documents Attached & References
6.1	Appendix 1-Press release of the launch of the 1 st chatty bench in Mid Ulster
6.2	Appendix 2-Chatty Bench OBA- MS PowerPoint