Item 15.9

Notices of Motion

Ending Loneliness in the City Forum

By Councillor Ellsmore

It is resolved that:

(A)   Council note:

   (i)   loneliness is about feelings of isolation or a lack of social connection that effects our mental health, our physical health, our quality of life and our sense of community;

   (ii)   loneliness is an increasingly common experience in Sydney, and around the around the world, particularly since the Covid pandemic. It is estimated one in four people in Sydney experiences loneliness;

   (iii)   the importance of community connection, and addressing social isolation and loneliness, is identified in a number of Council policies and plans. This includes the City of Sydney Council's Community Strategy Plan which has a target that by 2050 community cohesion and social interaction will have increased. This is based on at least 75 per cent of the local resident population feeling part of the community, agreeing most people can be trusted and believing that when needed, they can get help from their neighbours;

   (iv)   other targets and outcomes in the Community Strategy Plan include that everyone has equitable and affordable access to community and cultural facilities and programs, supporting social connection and wellbeing;

   (v)   on 8 June 2023, an 'Ending Loneliness in the City Forum' was held at Sydney Town Hall. The event was attended by sixty people and around twenty organisations including resident action groups, community organisations, health researchers and health services, homelessness services, and architects;

   (vi)   hosted by Deputy Mayor Sylvie Ellsmore, speakers included the CEO of Wayside Chapel Jon Owen, Executive Officer of Inner Sydney Voice and Council for the Ageing Marika Kontellis, research fellow at the University of Sydney's Matilda Centre Dr Marlee Bower, representative of the Coalition of Caring for Community Centres Melanie Tait, and student leader at the Sydney Alliance Eliza Putnis;

   (vii)   the forum aimed to stimulate conversation about loneliness, what is known about loneliness; what works to prevent loneliness; and what opportunities exist to address loneliness in the City of Sydney;

(B)   Council further note:

(i)   a report detailing the outcomes of the forum and key discussion points is being drafted and will be circulated for feedback, before being finalised and circulated to Council;

(ii)   some of the key notes or suggestions from the forum included:

(a)   loneliness effects everyone, but people are particularly impacted at points of transition in their lives. This is one reason why young people, older people and new mothers are groups particularly impacted by loneliness;

(b)   although loneliness does not discriminate, poverty and inequality can exacerbate the risk of feeling lonely. Public housing tenants are another group particularly impacted by loneliness and social isolation;

(c)   people living close together may in fact be more isolated. Apartment buildings can be lonely places to live;

(d)   the interplay between economic inequalities and the built environment can exacerbate loneliness especially for low marginalised and low socioeconomic groups;

(e)   well-maintained natural spaces and well-designed, inclusive, and accessible public spaces allow for both planned and unexpected social interactions;

(f)   community leaders and community-led groups play a key role in supporting community connection;

(g)   Council is supporting a number of programs that increase community connection and address loneliness;

(h)   responses to loneliness that work include those that aim to connect neighbourhoods, and are place-based. Placed-based responses to loneliness should be co-designed with local communities;

(i)   having access to a place or space that the community feels safe and has ownership of is very important. This can include spaces such as churches, community centres, neighbourhood centres, libraries, men's sheds and town halls;

(j)   everyone should have access to a local space like this, which the community feels ownership of, in their neighbourhood;

(k)   local councils have a key role to play in addressing loneliness, being the level of government closest to the community, and the custodian of many of the spaces where communities come together and connect;

(l)   the availability of staffed community centres that are accessible, inclusive and within walking distance of every neighbourhood are critical to building social cohesion and community pride;

(m)   sport is a key way for communities to connect. The costs of sport fees or hiring sport fields facilities can be a barrier;

      (n)   there are lessons that can be learnt from other jurisdictions who have developed strategies to address loneliness, particularly the UK. Other Councils across Australia have developed endling loneliness strategies, including the City of Monash in Melbourne who initiated a five-year Loneliness Framework in 2020; and

      (o)   there was interest in continuing the discussion about solutions to address loneliness in the City; and

(C)   Council thank the panel members for contributing to the discussion about loneliness.

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