



Subject:	Notice of Motion – Transparency by Default – Belfast City Council
Date:	23rd January, 2024
Reporting Officer:	Nora Largey, Interim City Solicitor/Director of Legal and Civic Services
Contact Officer:	Jim Hanna, Senior Democratic Services Officer

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<p>Please indicate the description, as listed in Schedule 6, of the exempt information by virtue of which the council has deemed this report restricted.</p> <p>Insert number <input type="checkbox"/></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Information relating to any individual 2. Information likely to reveal the identity of an individual 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the council holding that information) 4. Information in connection with any labour relations matter 5. Information in relation to which a claim to legal professional privilege could be maintained 6. Information showing that the council proposes to (a) to give a notice imposing restrictions on a person; or (b) to make an order or direction 7. Information on any action in relation to the prevention, investigation or prosecution of crime 	
<p>If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?</p> <p> After Committee Decision <input type="checkbox"/> After Council Decision <input type="checkbox"/> Sometime in the future <input type="checkbox"/> Never <input type="checkbox"/> </p>	

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To consider the Notice of Motion received for the meeting of the Council on 1st February in relation to the Policy on Transparency.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The Committee is asked to note that this motion will be referred on the first instance to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<p><u>Key Issues</u></p> <p>The Committee will be aware that Standing Orders 13 (m) to (r), as agreed by the Council at its meeting on 4th October, are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> (m) <i>The Standards and Business Committee will have delegated authority to adopt or reject Notices of Motion. The Lord Mayor will indicate at the Council meeting those Notices of Motion that have been considered by the Standards and Business Committee and whether such Notices of Motion were rejected or adopted. In either case, the proposer only may speak on the issue at Council.</i> (n) <i>The Standards and Business Committee will refer all Notices of Motion directly to a standing committee when the matter to which the Notice of Motion refers falls within the remit of that committee. At Council, the Lord Mayor will indicate that the Notice of Motion was received and referred. There will be no speakers on such Notices of Motion at Council.</i> (o) <i>The Standards and Business Committee will refer Notices of Motion for consideration by full Council when the Notice of Motion relates to a strategic or constitutional matter.</i> (p) <i>The Standards and Business Committee will not have the power to amend the wording of any Notice of Motion that is being referred to the full Council for debate.</i> (q) <i>Any amendments to Notice of Motions to be proposed at the Council are to be furnished at least one day in advance of going to the full Council and will be circulated to Party Group Leaders in advance of the Council meeting.</i> (r) <i>In referring any matter to the full Council, the Standards and Business Committee may determine to restrict contributions to the debate in relation to any Notice of Motion to one per political party. At the Council meeting, the Lord Mayor will clearly indicate if the restriction applies.</i> <p>3.2 The following motion has been received:</p> <p><u>'Transparency by default' at Belfast City Council</u></p> <p>This council believes that maintaining public trust in the democratic process is essential. A key part of this is ensuring that decisions are made openly and can subject to public scrutiny. Council recognises the concern that there is about the degree to which council, committee and working group discussions and decisions are being conducted in restricted session, and the wholesale redaction of documentation that accompanies these matters.</p>

3.3	<p>To help maintain public trust and ensure that the people of this city can be fully informed about how decisions that affect them have been reached, this council is committed to a policy of 'transparency by default' by which all meetings and documentation will be placed in the public domain as standard, with information or discussions only being redacted or restricted very specifically in relation to those issues which fall within the exemptions in the Local Government Act (NI) 2014. To that end, committee reports will, in addition to identifying the relevant exemption in the 2014 Act, also set out a rationale as to why information or discussions are to be restricted, when this is the case.</p> <p>Officers will also bring forward guidelines in relation to all council, committee and working group discussions and decisions which will enable this approach, to ensure maximum transparency while adhering to legislative requirements, ultimately making this organisation an exemplar public body in terms of transparency and openness.</p> <p><u>Proposer: Councillor Gary McKeown</u></p> <p><u>Seconder: Councillor Donal Lyons</u></p> <p>The motion calls upon the Council to undertake transparency by default by bringing forward guidelines in relation to all council, committee and working group discussions and decisions which will enable this approach, to ensure maximum transparency while adhering to legislative requirements – the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee is responsible for governance issues and the motion will be referred to that Committee.</p> <p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p>
3.4	None associated with this report.
	<u>Equality or Good Relations Implications</u>
3.5	None.
4.0	Documents Attached
	None.