

Council

Monday, 3rd March, 2025

Meeting of Council

Members present: Councillor ; and
Councillors McCormick, McAteer, Copeland, Lawlor,
McCoubrey, McCullough, Rodgers, Abernethy, Anglin,
Beattie, Bell, Black, Bower, Bradley, Natasha, Brooks,
Brooks, Bunting, Canavan, Carson, Cobain,
CollinsMichael, Faoite, Doherty, Donnelly, Donnelly,
Donnelly, Doran, Douglas, Douglas, Duffy, Ferguson,
Flynn, Garrett, Groogan, Hanvey, Kelly, Long, Lyons,
Magee, Maghie, Maskey, McCabe, McCallin, McCann,
McCusker, McDonough-Brown, McDowell, McKay,
McKeown, McLaughlin, McLaughlin, Murphy, Nelson,
Ó Néill, Smyth, Verner, Walsh and Whyte

Summons

The Chief Executive submitted the summons convening the meeting.

Apologies

An apology for inability to attend was reported on behalf of The Lord Mayor, Councillor Murray.

Minutes of the Council

Moved by the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor McCormick),
Seconded by Councillor Ferguson and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the monthly meeting of the Council of 3rd February, 2025, be taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

Councillors McCabe, Groogan, R-M Donnelly, Duffy and Verner declared an interest in the item 'Minutes of the Shared City Partnership' within the minutes of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 21st February, in that they worked for organisations which had applied for PEACEPLUS funding. Councillor McKeown declared an interest in 'Draft Response to Department for Communities Fuel Poverty Strategy' in that his employer was referenced within the report. Councillor Long declared an interest within the minutes of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee in items 2 (d) Wider University and Lower Ormeau Intervention; and 2 (e) Support for businesses affected by the August riots, in that his wife was Justice Minister.

Councillor Black declared an interest in the item 'Independently Managed Community Centres' within the People and Communities Committee minutes of 4th February' in that she worked for an organisation in receipt of Council support under the terms of the fund. Councillor I. McLaughlin declared an interest in the same item in that he was a member of the committee of an organisation in receipt of Council support under the terms of the fund.

Councillor R. McLaughlin declared an interest in the item 'Request to Present – Belfast Harbour Commissioners – Corporate Strategy 2025-2029' within the City Growth and Regeneration Committee, in that he was a member of the Board of the Belfast Harbour Commissioners.

As the above-mentioned matters did not become the subject of discussion or debate during proceedings, the Members were not required to leave the meeting.

Official Announcements

The Deputy Lord Mayor referred to the recent passing of Mr. Cyril Thompson, a former Health Safety and Fire Advisor with the Council, and of Mr. Andrew Ross, a Parks Warden based in the East Belfast area. It was agreed that letters of condolence would be forwarded on behalf of the Council to the families of Mr. Thompson and Mr. Ross.

Alderman McCullough referred to the deaths of Shiri Bibas and her children Kfir and Ariel, all of whom had been taken hostage by Palestinian militants on 7th October, 2023, and expressed his condolences and support for the Bibas family.

Councillor D. Douglas extended congratulations to Council employee Mr. Kyle Smith who had recently won the Ulster senior middleweight boxing title representing his club Holy Trinity.

Councillor R. Brooks reminded the Council that it was World Hearing Day and welcomed the recent second reading of the Sign Language Bill, which had been introduced to the Assembly in February. She outlined the benefits which Bill would bring across the community and how the Council would be able to provide additional accessibility to the deaf community through the outworkings of the legislation.

Councillor Walsh reminded the Council that the date of the Council meeting coincided with *Seachtain na Gaeilge*, the annual festival to celebrate Irish language and culture and he encouraged people to use their Irish words, or *cúpla focal*, in the promotion of the Irish language.

Councillor Groogan pointed out that International Women's Day would be marked on Saturday, 8th March, and that the theme for the celebration in 2025 would be 'Solidarity Beyond Borders – Women for World Peace'. She encouraged as many people as possible to attend the march and rally to mark the day which would commence in Writers' Square on the aforementioned date.

Councillor Nelson conveyed his congratulations to all of the nominees and winners at the recent Northern Ireland Care Awards, which had taken place in the City Hall. He paid tribute to the vital work undertaken locally by the fostering community across Belfast and Northern Ireland.

Councillor Canavan extended congratulations to St. Dominic's Grammar School's under-16 camogie side on winning the Corn Úna thus becoming the first side from Belfast and Ulster to win an all-Ireland camogie title at any grade. At Councillor Canavan's request, the Deputy Lord Mayor indicated that a letter of congratulations would be forwarded to the school.

Councillor McKay expressed his thanks to the volunteers of the Ulster Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals who had assisted recently in the rescue of a distressed swan in the vicinity of the Albert Bridge.

Requests to Address the Council

Action to Address Empty Homes

The Chief Executive reported that a request to address the Council had been received from the Community Action Tenants Union, who wished to speak on a notice of motion 'Action to Address Empty Homes' which had been proposed by Councillor Collins and seconded by Councillor Groogan. That motion, which had been considered by the Standards and Business Committee, at its meeting on 20th February, was referred to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee for consideration. The Council acceded to the request and the Deputy Lord Mayor welcomed Ms. H. Gibson and Mr. S. Doherty to the meeting.

The Council was informed that, despite the huge demand for public housing across Belfast, there remained a substantial number of unoccupied homes throughout the city. It was reported that Land and Property Services had determined that the figure sat at 3,694 for the Belfast area. In the last decade, it was pointed out, the number of people deemed officially as homeless across Northern Ireland had risen by 136 per cent, whilst there existed an estimated 22,500 vacant domestic properties. In addition, it was added, rents were rising at a significant rate, with a 10 per cent increase recorded over the past year alone. Ms. Gibson pointed out that the lack of adequate social housing meant that significant resources were being spent on temporary accommodation and hostels and that the housing issue needed to be addressed urgently by all statutory bodies and agencies.

The Deputy Lord Mayor thanks the representatives of the deputation for attending the meeting. The Council noted that the motion would be discussed at the meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, scheduled for Friday 21st March.

Dogs in Kennels - Transfer of Ownership

The Chief Executive reported that a request to address the Council had been received from Ms. Z. Duncan, Mr. D. Barclay and Ms. S. Wood, regarding the notice of motion 'Dogs in Kennels - Transfer of Ownership'. That motion, which had been proposed by Councillor Flynn and seconded by Councillor Verner, was referred to the Council by the Standards and Business Committee at its meeting on 20th February. The Council acceded to the request.

The Council was advised that the current breed specific legislation, which was applied to determining a 'dangerous' dog breed, was over thirty years' old. It was stated that a review should be undertaken since the legislation was based on a dog's appearance and not its temperament, which led to the unnecessary destruction of healthy dogs. It was suggested that an updated training criteria was required to ensure that the welfare of dogs was maintained throughout the assessment and outcome process. It was suggested that criteria based on a dog's appearance and attributes was subjective and negated the role of dog owners in the management of their animals. The deputation concluded their address by requesting that the Members would support the motion as set out on the agenda.

The Deputy Lord Mayor thanks the representatives of the deputation for attending the meeting.

Adjournment

At this point of the meeting, the attention of the Deputy Lord Mayor was drawn to the fact that there had been a connectivity issue affecting those Members who had joined the meeting remotely. In accordance with section 2.1.0. of the Council's Remote Meetings' Protocol and Procedure Rules, the Deputy Lord Mayor adjourned the meeting for a period of fifteen minutes to allow for the connection to be re-established.

After the period specified, it was determined that the remote connection to the remote Members could not be re-established. In accordance with section 2.1.1. of the aforementioned protocol, the Deputy Lord Mayor determined that those Members who had joined the meeting remotely were deemed to have left the meeting and that proceedings would continue to consider the remaining items on the agenda.

Minutes of Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Moved by Councillor Murphy,
Seconded by Councillor Duffy,

That the minutes of the proceedings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 21st February, 2025, be approved and adopted.

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Doran,
Seconded by Councillor Ferguson,

That the decision be deferred to enable the Council to receive a definitive answer from Urban Villages as to whether it was it was permissible to 'flip' an event space and for Council officers to bring back a report on all available options for Newington F.C. in North Belfast.

On a vote by show of hands, fifteen Members voted for the amendment and thirty-seven Members against and it was declared lost.

2024/25 Quarter 3 Financial Report

At the request of a Member, the Council agreed that the decision under the heading '2024/25 Quarter 3 Financial Report' be amended to provide that a report be submitted to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee regarding the Council's banking arrangements and its ethical procurement framework.

Finance, Procurement and Performance

At the request of a Member, the Council agreed that the decision of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 21st February, under the heading 'Finance, Procurement and Performance', be amended to provide that all of the tenders considered, including that for the appointment of a public analyst, be approved for public advertisement.

Adoption of Minutes

Subject to the above-mentioned amendments, the minutes of the proceedings of the People and Communities Committee of 21st February, 2025, be approved and adopted.

Minutes of People and Communities Committee

Moved by Councillor R. Brooks,
Seconded by Councillor Bunting,

That the minutes of the proceedings of the People and Communities Committee of 4th February, 2025, be approved and adopted.

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Brennan,
Seconded by Councillor Murphy,

That the minute of the meeting of the People and Communities Committee of 4th February under the heading 'Applications for Dual Language Street Signs' be amended to provide that Malone Valley Park be included within the list of streets in which a second street nameplate in Irish would be erected.

On a vote by show of hands, twenty-nine Members voted for the amendment and twenty-three against and it was declared carried.

Adoption of Minutes

Subject to the above-mentioned amendment, the minutes of the proceedings of the People and Communities Committee of 4th February, 2025, be approved and adopted.

Minutes of City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Moved by Councillor Nelson,
Seconded by Alderman Lawlor and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee of 5th February, 2025, be approved and adopted.

Minutes of Planning Committee

Moved by Councillor Carson,
Seconded by Councillor Ferguson and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the Planning Committee of 11th February, 2025, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

Minutes of Standards and Business Committee

Moved by Alderman Lawlor,
Seconded by Councillor R. McLaughlin and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the Standards and Business Committee of 20th February, 2025, be approved and adopted.

Motions

Dogs in Kennels Transfer of Ownership

In accordance with Notice on the agenda, it was

Moved by Councillor Flynn,
Seconded by Councillor Verner that

"This Council recognises that the safety of people and communities is paramount, and that any dog irrespective of breed or type may display aggression. However, this Council also recognises that the provisions, as set out within the Statutory Rule The Dangerous Dogs (Designated Types) Order (Northern Ireland) 2024, under powers conferred by Article 25(1)(c) and (8) of The Dogs (Northern Ireland) Order 1983 (the 1983 Order), as relates to XL Bully dogs that make it an offence to rehome is unnecessary cruel.

Restriction of rehoming, even by establishments such as rescue centres and animal shelters has led, as is leading to, the unnecessary destruction and euthanasia of healthy animals, which have no history of violence or aggression, and goes against the 'unnecessary suffering' clause in the Welfare of Animals Act NI 2011. Therefore this Council will write to the DAERA minister outlining our opposition to the continuation of the legislation as currently set out and asks that the Minister allow for managed rehoming by shelters and other specific animal rescue establishments, of dogs including those considered to be XL Bullies with no history of aggression or violence, to suitable owners, to prevent further animal suffering."

Amendment

Moved by Councillor R. McLaughlin,
Seconded by Councillor Maskey,

"This Council recognises that public safety is of utmost importance and that any dog, regardless of breed or type, may display aggressive behaviour. It is also essential to ensure that animal welfare is not compromised. The restrictions on rehoming outlined in The Dangerous Dogs (Designated Types) Order 2024 is now in place, and its implementation should be assessed particularly regarding outcomes for public safety and animal welfare.

A balanced and evidence-based approach is necessary to ensure that both public safety and animal welfare concerns are addressed effectively. Like any new legislation there is an imperative to consider its outcomes. Therefore, this Council will write to the DAERA Minister requesting an assessment of the impact of these restrictions to date."

The amendment was put to the Council and on a vote by show of hands forty-six Members voted for the amendment and four Members voted against.

The amendment was put to the Council as the substantive motion and passed.

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Council
Monday, 3rd March, 2025

Chairman