

Council

MEETING OF BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

Held in the Council Chamber, City Hall,
on Monday, 9th February, 2026 at 6.00 p.m., pursuant to notice.

Members present: The Lord Mayor, Councillor Kelly (Chairperson);
The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Doherty);
Aldermen Copeland, Lawlor, McCullough and
Rodgers; and Councillors Abernethy, Anglin,
Beattie, Bell, Black, Bower, Bradley, Brennan,
R. Brooks, T. Brooks, Bunting, Canavan, Carson,
Cobain, Collins, de Faoite, Flynn, M. Donnelly,
P. Donnelly, R.M. Donnelly, Doran, D. Douglas,
S. Douglas, Duffy, Ferguson, Garrett, Groogan,
Hanvey, Long, Lyons, Magee, Maghie, McAteer,
McCabe, McCallin, McCann, McCormick,
McDonough-Brown, McDowell, McKay, McKeown,
I. McLaughlin, R. McLaughlin, Meenehan, Murphy,
Murray, Nelson, Ó Néill, Smyth, Verner, Walsh and
Whyte.

Summons

The Chief Executive submitted the summons convening the meeting.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported on behalf of The High Sheriff (Alderman McCoubrey) and Councillor McCusker.

Declarations of Interest

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Alderman McCullough and Councillors Beattie, Black, Bradley, Carson, P. Donnelly, R.M. Donnelly, Doran, Duffy, Groogan, McCabe, McCullough, I. McLaughlin and Verner all declared interests under the item 'Community Support Plan - Large Grant Funding Programme', in that they were associated with a group which had applied for, or had received, funding under the terms of the programme. Councillor R-M. Donnelly advised also that she was the chairperson of 'New Start Education' and Councillor McCann declared an interest in that he was related to an individual who worked for the charity which employed Councillor P. Donnelly.

Councillor Murray declared an interest under the item 'Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann' in that he was employed for the SOS Bus NI, who were a delivery partner for the event.

Councillors Carson, M. Donnelly, P. Donnelly, R-M. Donnelly, Duffy, Groogan, Murray, McCabe and Verner declared interests under the item 'Minutes of Shared City Partnership' which related to the matters 'PEACEPLUS' and 'Ending Violence Against Women and Girls' in that they worked for organisations which had applied for, or were in receipt of, funding under the programmes.

Councillor R. McLaughlin declared an interest under the item 'Ending Violence Against Women and Girls' in that his partner was a Junior Minister within the Executive Office and had worked in developing that project.

Councillor de Faoite declared an interest under the item 'Planning Information' in that he was on the Board of Governors of Forge Integrated Primary School.

Councillor Whyte declared an interest under the item 'Request for Use of the City Hall Grounds for Various Events in 2026', in that his employer was associated with one of the applicants.

Councillor D. Douglas declared an interest under the item 'Pitches Programme – Proposed Phasing and Implementation Plan' in that a member of his family played for Bloomfield Football Club.

Climate and City Resilience Committee

Councillor T. Brooks declared an interest within the Climate and City Resilience Committee minutes under the item 'UPSURGE EU Horizon Project' in that her employer, The Queen's University of Belfast, was linked to the funding of research for the project.

With the exception of the item 'Pitches Programme – Proposed Phasing and Implementation Plan,' none of the matters above became the subject of discussion or debate and the Members were not required to leave the meeting. However, Councillor D. Douglas did not vote or partake in any discussion or debate relating to the item 'Pitches Programme – Proposed Phasing and Implementation Plan.'

Minutes of the Council

Moved by the Lord Mayor (Councillor Kelly),
Seconded by Councillor Beattie, and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the meetings of the Council of 8th January, 2026, be taken as read and signed as correct.

Official Announcements

The Lord Mayor referred to an unprovoked attack on three members of Council staff which had occurred in central Belfast on 31st January. She condemned the incident and added that her thoughts and prayers were with the members of staff. A number of Members concurred with the Lord Mayor's comments and extended their best wishes to the staff members.

The Lord Mayor referred also to the recent retirements of long-standing staff members Mr. Cormac McCann and Ms. Mary McKenna. She thanked them both for their dedication to service and, on behalf of the Council, wished them well in retirement.

Councillor R. Brooks paid tribute to Mr. Jonathan McAlpin on the successful hosting of the Eastside Awards and congratulated those groups and individuals who had been nominated. In particular, she referred Mr. Gregor Galway of Templemore Baths, Ms. Dot Blackburn from the Cregagh Estate and the Titanic Gentlemen's Club, all of whom had received awards. At Councillor R. Brooks' request, the Lord Mayor agreed to write to congratulate the individuals and the club mentioned.

Councillor Dornan referred to the recent passing of Ms. Violet Larmour, who was a past member of Council staff. Councillor Larmour paid tribute to Ms. Larmour's loyalty and community activism and added that she would be dearly missed within the wider Shankill area. At Councillor Dornan's request, the Lord Mayor agreed to write to Ms. Larmour's family to express condolences on behalf of the Council.

Councillor Groogan referred to recent revelations which had linked the former Senator George Mitchell, who had been made a Freeman of the City in 2018, to the convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein. She added that she had requested that the Chief Executive put in place a review of the former Senator's status as a Freeman of the City and to make appropriate changes to demonstrate the Council's commitment to upholding the highest standards of integrity. In response, the Chief Executive indicated that legal advice had been sought in the matter.

Councillor McKeown congratulated Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School on their winning of the MacLarnon Cup when they had defeated St Eunan's of Letterkenny in the final on 5th February. In addition, Councillor McKeown expressed his gratitude to those staff members who had overseen the work associated with the opening of the dedicated dog park within Ormeau Park.

Councillor Long thanked all those staff members who had been involved in the delivery of the Council's first-ever epilepsy awareness session, which had taken place to coincide with International Epilepsy Day earlier that morning. Councillor S. Douglas concurred with the comments of Councillor Long.

Councillor Meenahan referred to the recent passing of Mr. Danny Hale, who had been a prolific goal scorer for, amongst other clubs, Cliftonville, Crusaders and Derry City throughout the 1960s. At Councillor Meenahan's request, the Lord Mayor agreed to write to Mr. Hale's family to express condolences on behalf of the Council.

Alderman Copeland congratulated Mr. A. J. Carlisle and Ms. Emma Kincaid of the St John's Ambulance - Grove Cadets Division, who had both received the Knight Commander's Certificate of Commendation for the "professionalism and selflessness" they had displayed during a medical emergency which had occurred at the Asda store on the Shore Road in November, 2025. The Lord Mayor agreed to write to congratulate both cadets and to consider hosting an event to recognise the wider achievements of young people across Belfast.

In response to a request from Councillor Lyons, the Lord Mayor undertook to write a letter of condolence to the family of Mr. Petesy Burns on his recent passing. Mr. Burns had been a stalwart of the Belfast music scene for more than forty years, and as a community activist who had helped found the Belfast Music Collective in the 1980s.

Councillor S. Douglas referred to the recent reopening of the Better Gym at Connswater, which represented one of the largest investments ever made by Greenwich Leisure Limited. The Lord Mayor agreed to write to the Chief Executive of Greenwich Leisure Limited to express the Council's gratitude for the investment in a centre which would, he added, prove to be of great benefit, particularly to the people of east Belfast.

Changes to Committees

The Chief Executive reported that notifications had been received of the following changes to Committees:

- that the Social Democratic and Labour Party wished Councillor de Faoite to replace Councillor McKeown on the People and Communities Committee; and the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Doherty) to replace Councillor Whyte on the Licensing Committee.
- that Sinn Fein wished to replace Councillor Ronan McLaughlin with Councillor Seanna Walsh on the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee; and
- that the Democratic Unionist Party wished Councillor Doran to replace Alderman McCoubrey on the Strategic Policy and Resources; and Councillor R. Brooks to replace Councillor Bunting on the Licensing Committee.

The Council approved the changes.

Requests to Film Proceedings

The Chief Executive reported that requests had been received from the BBC and UTV to film the proceedings of the meeting.

The Council acceded to the requests and the representatives of the broadcasting organisations were admitted to the meeting.

Deputation

The Chief Executive reported that a request to address the Council had been received from Ms. C. McStravick (Northern Ireland Council on Voluntary Action) and Ms. J. Kinnear (Ashton Community Trust) in relation to the motion under the heading 'UK Shared Prosperity Fund', which had been adopted by the Standards and Business Committee at its meeting on 27th January. The Council acceded to the request and the deputation was admitted to the Chamber.

The Council was informed that the Westminster Government's decision to phase out the U.K. Shared Prosperity Fund and to replace it with the Local Growth Fund in Northern Ireland would reduce significantly the annual revenue funding received to address economic inactivity. It was stated that the change would impact significantly on those with complex health, wellbeing, and employability needs and on those local organisations which supported people to return to employment each year. It was pointed out that Northern Ireland already lagged behind the rest of the U.K. in accessing key programmes and investment to provide support through the community and voluntary sectors. Ms. Kinnear concluded by adding that there was a need locally to provide enhanced resources to fund the vital service, which was an integral part of the local economy and community.

The Lord Mayor thanked the deputation for attending and for the information which had been provided.

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Moved by Councillor Brennan,
Seconded by Councillor Black,

“That the minutes of the proceedings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 23rd and 30th January and 6th and 9th February 2026, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.”

**Pitches Programme – Proposed
Phasing and Implementation Plan**

Amendment

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

“That the decision of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 6th February, under the above-mentioned heading, be amended to provide that the second football pitch provision be changed from the current recommendation to prioritise the Blanchflower Park Playing Fields and Aircraft Park in the first phase.”

On a vote, fifteen Members voted in favour of the amendment, with twenty-three voting against and nineteen ‘no votes’ recorded. Accordingly, it was declared lost.

**Pitches Strategy and Strategic Use
of Boucher Road Playing Fields**

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Bunting,
Seconded by Councillor Murray,

“That the above-mentioned decision of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 30th January, insofar as it related to the future Strategic Use of Boucher Road Playing Fields, be referred back to the Committee and that any final decisions regarding the future of the site would be reconsidered after the submission of detailed reports which would address the following:

1. an assessment of how the Boucher Road site could be reconfigured to support enhanced sports provision alongside a major events venue with a capacity of up to 40,000;
2. an evaluation of potential alternative sites across the city suitable for development as a major events space;
3. a comprehensive analysis of the economic impact of Boucher Road operating as an events venue, including benefits to local businesses, tourism, and employment; and
4. the Council works with promoters and partners such as Eventsec, MCD, and Shine, to look at options of creating a hybrid site which provides sporting facilities and large scale events with a capacity of 40k.

In addition, this Council reaffirmed its commitment to music, arts, and culture as central to Belfast’s future. The Council requested that also that an in-depth report outlining current support for the music industry, from grassroots and community-based venues such as the ‘Oh Yeah Music Centre’, through to initiatives that promote Belfast as a leading international city of music and culture.”

On a vote, thirty Members voted in favour of the amendment, with twenty-eight voting against, and it was declared carried.

Pitches Strategy and Strategic Use of Boucher Road Playing Fields and Pitches Programme – Proposed Phasing and Implementation Plan

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Groogan,
Seconded by Councillor Smyth,

“In addition to the inclusion of the previous decision, that the decision of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 30th January, under the heading ‘Pitches Strategy and Strategic Use of Boucher Road Playing Fields’, and the decision of the Committee of 6th February, under the heading ‘Pitches Programme – Proposed Phasing and Implementation Plan’ be referred back to the Committee for further consideration.”

On a vote, thirty-six Members voted in favour of the amendment, with twenty-one voting against, and it was declared carried.

Pitches Programme – Proposed Phasing and Implementation Plan

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Whyte,
Seconded by Councillor O’ Neill,

“That the decision of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 6th February, under the heading ‘Pitches Programme – Proposed Phasing and Implementation Plan’, specifically in relation to the Grove Playing Fields, be amended to provide future phases involving the site, as outlined, be amended to provide that any approach adopted relating to the ‘Grove Playing Fields – Masterplan’ would explore various options including GAA and association football facilities.”

On a vote, thirty-one Members voted in favour of the amendment, with fifteen voting against and eleven ‘no votes’ recorded. Accordingly, it was declared carried.

Revenue Estimates 2026/27

Amendment

Moved by Councillor de Faoite,
Seconded by Councillor Whyte,

“That the decision of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 6th February, under the above-mentioned heading, be amended to provide there be a three per cent increase in the Revenue Estimates 2026/27 to include the removal of the previously agreed increase of £100,000 for the Summer Community Diversionary Programme as agreed at the meeting on 23rd January.”

On a vote, five Members voted in favour of the amendment, with fifty voting against and three 'no votes' recorded. Accordingly, it was declared lost.

Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann

Amendment

At the request of Councillor M. Donnelly, the Council agreed that the decision of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 23rd January, under the heading 'Fleadh Cheoil na Éireann', be amended to provide that the Falls Park be included also within the sites earmarked for camp site provision during the Fleadh Cheoil.

Revenue Estimates 2026/27

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Murphy,
Seconded by Councillor Walsh,

“That the decision of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 9th February, under the above-mentioned heading, be referred back to the Committee to enable clarification to be obtained in respect of the 'growth proposals' which had been removed from within the estimates.”

On a vote, forty-six Members voted in favour of the amendment, with eleven voting against and it was declared carried.

Adoption of Minutes

Subject to the foregoing amendments, the minutes of the proceedings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 23rd and 30th January; and 6th and 9th February, 2026, were thereupon approved and adopted.

People and Communities Committee

Moved by Councillor Cobain,
Seconded by Councillor Doran and

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the People and Communities Committee of 13th January and 9th February, 2026, be approved and adopted.

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Moved by Councillor I. McLaughlin,
Seconded by Councillor Bunting and

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee of 14th January and 9th February, 2026, be approved and adopted.

Licensing Committee

Moved by Councillor Doran,
Seconded by Councillor Long and

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the Licensing Committee of 21st January, 2026, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

Planning Committee

Moved by Councillor Murphy,
Seconded by Councillor R. Brooks and

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the Planning Committee of 20th January and 9th February, 2026, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. Shareholders' Committee

Moved by Councillor Harvey,
Seconded by Councillor Long and

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. Shareholders' Committee of 19th January, 2026, be approved and adopted.

Climate and City Resilience Committee

Moved by Councillor M. Donnelly,
Seconded by Councillor R-M Donnelly and

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the Climate and City Resilience Committee of 15th January, 2026, be approved and adopted.

Standards and Business Committee

Moved by Councillor Flynn,
Seconded by Councillor Smyth and

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the Standards and Business Committee of 27th January, 2026, be approved and adopted.

Lord Mayor
Chairperson