

Council

MEETING OF BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

Held in the Council Chamber, City Hall
on Thursday, 8th January, 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, McCoubrey, McCullough and Rodgers; and Councillors Abernethy, Anglin, Beattie, Bell, Black, Bower, Bradley, Brennan, R. Brooks, T. Brooks, Bunting, Canavan, Carson, Cobain, Collins, de Faoite, 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, McCusker, 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

An apology for inability to attend was reported on behalf of Councillor Flynn.

Declarations of Interest

Councillors Groogan, Duffy, P. Donnelly, R.M. Donnelly, McCabe and Verner declared an interest in relation to the item 'Minutes of Shared City Partnership' within the minutes of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, in that their employers were in receipt of PEACEPLUS funding. Councillor Beattie also declared an interest in relation to the same item, in so far as it related to the Community Recovery Fund, as he was associated with a group/organisation which had applied for or received funding.

Councillor de Faoite declared an interest in relation to the items 'Planning Information' and 'Requests for use of the City Hall' within the minutes of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, in that he was on the Board of Governors of Forge Integrated Primary School.

Councillor McKeown declared an interest in relation to the item 'Draft Public Health Agency Partnership and Engagement Strategy 2025-2030' within the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, in that he was employed by the Public Health Agency.

Councillor Murray declared an interest in relation to the items 'Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann' and 'Contracts Update' within the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, in that he was employed by SOS N.I. who were a delivery partner of the Fleadh Cheoil na hÉireann.

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Councillor Maghie declared an interest in relation to the item 'Physical Programme' within the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, in that she was a member of a club which had been referenced within the report in respect of the Sporting Pitches Investment 2025/26.

Councillors Beattie, Black, Bradley, Canavan, Doran, Groogan, M. Donnelly and Verner declared an interest in relation to the item 'Community Support Plan - Large Grant Funding Programme' within the minutes of the People and Communities Committee, in that they were associated with organisations which had applied for or received funding.

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

Councillor Long declared an interest under the item 'Draft Amenity Byelaws' within the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, in that his wife was the Minister for Justice, however, was not required to leave the meeting.

Minutes of the Council

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

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the meetings of the Council of 1st and 22nd December, 2025, be taken as read and signed as correct.

Official Announcements

The Lord Mayor congratulated Mr. Noel Liggett, District Master of Ballynafeigh LOL No 10, who had been awarded as a Member of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) as part of the New Year Honors list for his services to the community in South Belfast.

The Lord Mayor also congratulated Council employee, Ms. Vivienne Fullerton, Lead Registrar, who had been awarded a British Empire Medal (BEM) as part of the New Year Honors list for her services to Local Government.

The Lord Mayor advised the Council that Ms. Eimear Henry, Creative and Strategic Lead for Belfast Stories, would soon be leaving the Council and thanked Ms. Henry for her service and dedication to the role.

The Deputy Lord Mayor thanked the Council team, and its partners, for their efforts and work in helping the city secure the title of a European City of Sport for 2026. The Deputy Lord Mayor highlighted the importance of sport across the city from grassroots participation to elite performance.

Councillors Long and R. Brooks paid tribute to Councillor McAteer for all her work throughout 2025 in her role as High Sheriff, and wished the incoming High Sheriff, Alderman McCoubrey, well in the role for the year ahead. Councillor McAteer thanked the Members for their kind words and wished Alderman McCoubrey well in the role.

Alderman Lawlor acknowledged a recent tribute by the Hanwood Trust to its late former Chair, Mr. Brian Rea CBE JP, who had named a room within the Hanwood Community Resource Centre in his honour.

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Alderman Lawlor extended his congratulations to former Deputy Lord Mayor and High Sheriff, Mr. Tom Haire, who had been awarded a British Empire Medal (BEM) as part of the New Year Honors list for his services to Local Government and to the community in Belfast. At the request of Alderman Lawlor, the Lord Mayor agreed to send a letter of congratulations to Mr. Haire on his award.

Alderman Lawlor acknowledged the 50th anniversary of the Kingsmills massacre on 5th January and commended the courage of survivor Mr. Alan Black and the victims' families in their campaign for justice.

Councillor Smyth extended his condolences to the families and friends of the two people who lost their lives in the city centre before Christmas. He also highlighted the issue of homelessness within the city centre and the need for a collective approach from the voluntary and statutory sectors to help address this issue.

Councillor de Faoite congratulated Lisnasharragh constituent Mr. Sean McFarlane, founder of local biotech company Biomarx, on the news that Biomarx had raised £700,000 in pre-seed funding to progress the development of a diagnostics platform focused on lung cancer. At the request of Councillor de Faoite, the Lord Mayor agreed to write to Mr. McFarlane to congratulate Biomarx on the funding raised.

Councillor de Faoite also extended his condolences to his party colleague, and former Councillor, Ms. Mary Muldoon on the recent passing of her sister. At the request of Councillor de Faoite, the Lord Mayor agreed to send a letter of condolence to Ms. Muldoon on behalf of the Council.

Councillor Collins extended his condolences to the family and friends of local boxer Mr. Paul McCullagh Jr., who had recently passed away. At the request of Councillor Collins, the Lord Mayor agreed to send a letter of condolence to the family of Mr. McCullagh Jr. on behalf of the Council.

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 19th December, 2025, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted."

Hardship Programme 2025/26 –
Response from the Department for Communities Minister

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Collins,
Seconded by Councillor Smyth,

"That the decision under the heading 'Hardship Programme 2025/26 - Response from the Department for Communities Minister' be amended to provide that the Council writes to the Minister for Communities to express its objection to the confirmation that the Department for Communities hardship funding, provided in 2023/24, would not be available in future years, and to encourage the Minister to look at more equitable ways to tax the profits of energy companies to help fund the service going forward."

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At the request of Councillor de Faoite, the proposer and seconder agreed that the motion be amended to provide that the Council writes also to the Minister of Education to express its concern in relation to the Education Authority's decision to increase the price of school meals, and to state its support of the campaign by trade unions for the delivery of free school meals for all children.

Accordingly, the Council agreed that the decision of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 19th December, 2025, under the heading "Hardship Programme 2025/26 - Response from the Department for Communities Minister" be amended to provide that the Council writes to:

- the Minister for Communities to express its objection to the confirmation that the Department for Communities hardship funding, provided in 2023/24, would not be available in future years, and to encourage the Minister to look at more equitable ways to tax the profits of energy companies to help fund the service going forward; and
- the Minister of Education to express its concern in relation to the Education Authority's decision to increase the price of school meals, and to state its support of the campaign by trade unions for the delivery of free school meals for all children.

Draft Amenity Byelaws

Amendment

Moved by Alderman McCullough,
Seconded by Councillor McDowell,

"That the decision under the heading 'Draft Amenity Byelaws' be amended to provide that the Council agrees not to progress with any byelaws that censor imagery or content."

On a recorded vote, seventeen Members voted for the amendment and forty-one against and it was declared lost.

For (17)	Against (41)
The Lord Mayor (Councillor Kelly); Aldermen Copeland, Lawlor, McCoubrey, McCullough and Rodgers; and Councillors R. Brooks, Bunting, Cobain, Doran, D. Douglas, S. Douglas, Ferguson, McCormick, McDowell, I. McLaughlin and Verner.	The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Doherty); and Councillors Abernethy, Anglin, Beattie, Bell, Black, Bower, Bradley, Brennan, Canavan, Carson, Collins, de Faoite, M. Donnelly, P. Donnelly, R. M. Donnelly, Duffy, Garrett, Groogan, Hanvey, Long, Lyons, Magee, Maghie, McAteer, McCabe, McCallin, McCann, McCusker, McDonough-Brown, McKay, McKeown, R. McLaughlin, Meenehan, Murphy, Murray, Nelson, Ó Néill, Smyth, Walsh and Whyte.

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Adoption of Minutes

Subject to the foregoing amendment, the minutes of the proceedings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 19th December, 2025, 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 2nd December, 2025, be approved and adopted.

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

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

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee of 3rd December, 2025, 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 10th December, 2025, 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 Alderman McCullough and

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the Planning Committee of 9th December, 2025, 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 Hanvey,
Seconded by Councillor Duffy and

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. Shareholders' Committee of 15th December, 2025, be approved and adopted.

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Climate and City Resilience Committee

Moved by Councillor M. Donnelly,
Seconded by Councillor Ferguson and

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the Climate and City Resilience Committee of 11th December, 2025, be approved and adopted.

Lord Mayor
Chairperson