

Council

MEETING OF BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

Held Remotely via Microsoft Teams on Monday, 1st February, 2021
at 6.00 p.m., pursuant to notice.

Members present: The Right Honourable the Lord Mayor
(Alderman McCoubrey) (Chairperson);
The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor McCusker);
The High Sheriff (Councillor Long);
Aldermen Copeland, Haire, Kingston,
Rodgers and Sandford; and
Councillors Baker, Beattie, Black, Bradley, Brooks,
Bunting, Canavan, Matt Collins, Michael Collins, Corr,
De Faoite, Donnelly, Ferguson, Flynn, Garrett,
Gormley, Groogan, Heading, Howard, Hussey,
M. Kelly, T. Kelly, Kyle, Lyons, Magee, Magennis,
Maskey, McAllister, McAteer, McCabe, McCullough,
McDonough-Brown, McKeown, McLaughlin,
McReynolds, Mulholland, Murphy, Newton, Nicholl,
O'Hara, Pankhurst, Smyth, Spratt, Verner, Walsh and
Whyte.

Summons

The Chief Executive submitted the summons convening the meeting.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend was reported on behalf of Alderman Dorrian, Councillors Carson, Cobain, Harvey, Hutchinson and McMullan.

Declarations of Interest

The following Members declared an interest in item "Update on Covid -19 Community Response", under the Strategic Policy and Resource minutes of 22nd January, for the reasons outlined below, and did not take part in any discussion on the item:

- Alderman Kingston, in that he was an employee of Forward South Partnership;
- Councillor Verner, in that she was an employee of the Greater Shankill Partnership;
- Councillor McCabe, in that her husband worked for the Upper Andersonstown Community Forum;
- Councillor Gormley, in that he was a Board member of Lower Ormeau Resident's Action Group;
- Councillor Canavan, in that she was a Board member of the Greater Shankill Partnership; and
- Councillor Maskey, in that he was employed by Intercomm.

The Deputy Lord Mayor, Councillor McCusker and Councillors M. Kelly, Long and McKeown declared an interest in Item 7d, the Motion “Takeover of private healthcare” in that they were an employee of a health trust and they left the meeting for the duration of the discussion.

Alderman Copeland and Councillors Flynn, Garrett, Heading and Pankhurst declared an interest in Item 7d, the Motion “Takeover of private healthcare” in that they had a family member who was an employee of the Trust, and they left the meeting for the duration of the discussion.

Councillor Howard declared an interest in Item 7c, the Motion on “Student Support” in that she was an employee of a Further Education College. Councillor Pankhurst also declared an interest in the Motion, in that he was a student.

Councillor McDonough-Brown declared an interest in respect of item 6.a Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, Asset Management, on the basis that his mother was on the Board of the Local Government Staff Commission.

Councillors Matt Collins, Brooks, Garrett, Hussey, Maskey, McCullough, Murphy, Nicholl and O’Hara declared an interest in relation to Item 7a, the Motion “Proposed Future Development - Writer’s Square” in that they were Members of the Planning Committee, and they left the meeting for the duration of the discussion.

Councillor Black declared an interest in respect of item 6.a Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, in relation to the Update on Physical Programme, on the basis that she managed the Grosvenor Community Centre.

In respect of item “Update on City Events Programme and Cultural Funding” under the Strategic Policy and Resource minutes of 22nd January, Councillor McCabe declared an interest in that she was an employee of Féile an Phobail and Councillor Maskey declared an interest in that a family member was an employee of Féile an Phobail.

Councillor McAteer declared an interest in item “Partnerships in Parks and Open Spaces. – Belfast MELA 2021”, under the People and Communities minutes of 12th January, in that a family member was an employee of ArtsEkta which organised the Belfast Mela.

Minutes of the Council

Moved by the Lord Mayor (Alderman McCoubrey),
Seconded by Councillor Pankhurst and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the monthly meetings of the Council of 7th January be taken as read and signed as correct.

Official Announcements

Congratulations

The Lord Mayor extended, on behalf of the Council, congratulations to Councillor McMullan and his family on the recent birth of their daughter Heidi, and to Alderman Dorrian and his family on the birth of their daughter Edie.

The Lord Mayor congratulated Alderman Sandford and his wife on their recent 60th Wedding Anniversary.

The Lord Mayor also congratulated Councillor Long on becoming the new High Sheriff of Belfast and wished him well during his term.

Condemnation of Hate Crimes

Councillor Ferguson expressed her disgust and solidarity with the Belfast Multi-Cultural Association in regarding the fire attack at their property on Donegall Pass. The Lord Mayor agreed to send a letter of support to the Association and offer to meet with the representatives.

Councillor Nicholl condemned the threatening graffiti targeting Leo Varadkar in the Belvoir Area of the City.

Expressions of Sympathy

Councillor Brooks expressed condolences to the family of Norman Houston, Northern Ireland's former representative in Washington DC, following his recent death and paid tribute to his work as Head of the Northern Ireland Bureau and contribution to promoting Northern Ireland in the United States. The Lord Mayor advised that a letter of condolences had been sent on behalf of the Council.

Alderman Kingston expressed condolences to the family of Colm Davis OBE, former principal of Tor Bank, School, following his recent death, and paid tribute to his contribution to education and his charity work with the Motor Neurone Disease Association NI to help raise awareness of the condition. The Lord Mayor agreed to write a letter of condolence to the family.

Request to Address the Council

Motion - Proposed Future Development - Writer's Square

The Chief Executive advised that a late request had been received from Mark Hackett, a Cathedral Quarter Trust Board Member, to address the Council in advance of the motion on the "Proposed Future Development - Writer's Square" being proposed by Councillor Groogan.

The Council acceded to the request and Mr. Hackett was welcomed to the meeting.

Mr. Hackett advised that the Cathedral Quarter Trust Board would like to support the aforementioned motion being brought for consideration by Councillor Groogan. He advised that the space in front of the cathedral was important for a number of events and the setting of the Cathedral.

He suggested that the Department for Communities, when disposing of land, should have a process which includes conditions and a development brief for the area.

He pointed out that the Cathedral Quarter Trust would like to work in partnership with all stakeholders to evolve a detailed design for the space which would meet everyone's requirements without compromising the commercial viability of the scheme.

The Lord Mayor thanked Mr. Hackett for the presentation.

The Council noted the information which had been provided and that it would have an opportunity to discuss the issue later in the meeting.

Minutes

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Moved by Councillor Black,
Seconded by Councillor Walsh

That the Minutes of the proceedings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 22nd January, 2021, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

Request for Matter to be Taken Back for Further Consideration

Medium Term Financial Plan and Efficiency Programme

Moved by Councillor Ferguson,
Seconded by Councillor Matt Collins,

That the Council agrees that the minute of the meeting of 22nd January, under the heading "Medium Term Financial Plan and Efficiency Programme", be taken back to the Committee for further consideration.

The Council agreed to vote on the proposal, when three Members voted for and fifty-one Members against and it was declared lost.

Adoption of Minutes

The minutes of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 22nd January, 2021, were subsequently approved and adopted.

People and Communities Committee

Moved by Councillor Baker,
Seconded by Alderman Rodgers and

That the Minutes of the proceedings of the People and Communities Committee of 12th and 26th January, 2021 and be approved and adopted.

Amendment

Motion – Creating Better Access into the Hills

At the request of Councillor Brooks, the Council agreed to write to the Department for Infrastructure to highlight the necessity to improve the facilities and access to the Cregagh Glen, Castlereagh Hills, and suggest that it works with its key stakeholders towards this objective.

Adoption of Minutes

Subject to the foregoing amendment, the minutes of the proceedings of the People and Communities Committee of 12th and 26th January, 2021, were approved and adopted.

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Moved by Councillor Brooks,
Seconded by Councillor Murphy and

Resolved - That the Minutes of the proceedings of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee of 13th January, 2021, be approved and adopted.

Licensing Committee

Moved by Councillor Donnelly,
Seconded by Councillor McAteer and

Resolved - That the Minutes of the proceedings of the Licensing Committee of 20th January, 2021, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

Planning Committee

Moved by Councillor Hussey,
Seconded by Councillor McKeown and

Resolved - That the Minutes of the proceedings of the Planning Committee of 19th January, 2021, 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 Alderman Haire,
Seconded by Councillor Mullholland and

Resolved - That the Minutes of the proceedings of the Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd. Shareholders' Committee of 18th January, 2021, be approved and adopted.

Brexit Committee

Moved by Councillor Flynn,
Seconded by Councillor Kyle

Resolved -That the Minutes of the proceedings of the Brexit Committee of 14th January, 2021 be approved and adopted.

Motions

Proposed Future Development - Writer's Square

(On advice from the City Solicitor, Councillors Matt Collins, Brooks, Garrett, Hussey, Maskey, McCullough, Murphy, Nicholl and O'Hara declared an interest in relation to the motion in that they were Members of the Planning Committee, and they left the meeting for the duration of the discussion. Councillors Groogan and McKeown, who were also Members of the Planning Committee were advised that their following representations would prohibit their participation in considering the application at a future planning Committee.)

In accordance with notice on the agenda, Councillor Groogan proposed:

"This Council recognises the significance of Writer's Square to the city of Belfast as a public and civic space and its historical significance. This Council calls upon the Department for Communities to ensure that any development brief relating to Writers' Square respects the civic use of the Square as a place facilitating lawful protest and celebration. Further, the Council calls upon the Department to ensure that the setting of St Anne's Cathedral is protected.

The Council will write to the Minister for Communities to that effect.”

The motion was seconded by Councillor McKeown.

After discussion, the motion was put to the Council and passed.

Child Poverty Task Force

In accordance with notice on the agenda, Councillor McCusker proposed:

“This council notes with alarm the Department of Communities Family Resources Survey 2018/2019 which show that 122,000 children in Northern Ireland live in relative poverty (24% of children) with 109,000 of those living in absolute poverty and expresses deep concern that these figures have increased significantly since the previous year and have not improved at all in the last five years. The rise of the Universal Credit claimant count and expected end of the furlough scheme could see a further increase in these numbers, with the two-child tax credit rule and benefit cap only adding to the pressure on families with children.

This Council calls on the Minister for Communities to immediately convene a child poverty task force, to set out how her department will reduce child poverty by next year and over the next decade.”

The motion was seconded by Councillor Whyte.

The proposer agreed, at the request of Councillor Nicholl, to amend his proposal to provide for the following change of wording to the final paragraph:

“This Council calls on the Minister for Communities to immediately convene a child poverty task force, **and to identify regional policy with local outcomes with a clear target: to eradicate child poverty.**”

After discussion, the following motion, as amended, was put to the meeting and passed:

“This council notes with alarm the Department of Communities Family Resources Survey 2018/2019 which show that 122,000 children in Northern Ireland live in relative poverty (24% of children) with 109,000 of those living in absolute poverty and expresses deep concern that these figures have increased significantly since the previous year and have not improved at all in the last five years. The rise of the Universal Credit claimant count and expected end of the furlough scheme could see a further increase in these numbers, with the two-child tax credit rule and benefit cap only adding to the pressure on families with children.

This Council calls on the Minister for Communities to immediately convene a child poverty task force, and to identify regional policy with local outcomes with a clear target: to eradicate child poverty.”

Student Support

In accordance with notice on the agenda, Councillor de Faoite proposed:

“Belfast City Council recognises the COVID-19 pandemic has affected all citizens including having a profound impact on our young people;

Acknowledges the difficulties faced by those young people in full-time third level education, both at universities and further education colleges, who, because of restrictions, are unable to attend classes in person or live in student accommodation which they have paid for;

Believes that many university students have found themselves suffering financial hardship which has caused significant distress and led to poor mental health;

Calls on university accommodation providers and private landlords who have not provided rent waivers to do so immediately;

Further calls on the Department for the Economy and Department of Finance to address these new burdens of generational injustice by developing and funding a Student Support Grant for all full time third level students, many of whom cannot gain any employment at this time and are unable to claim benefits.“

The motion was seconded by Councillor Whyte.

The proposer agreed, at the request of Councillor Spratt, to amend his proposal to provide for the following change of wording to the fourth paragraph:

“Calls on university accommodation providers and private landlords who have not provided rent waivers to do so immediately, ***and release affected students from private rental contracts without penalty.***”

After discussion, the following motion, as amended, was put to the meeting and passed:

“Belfast City Council recognises the COVID-19 pandemic has affected all citizens including having a profound impact on our young people;

Acknowledges the difficulties faced by those young people in full-time third level education, both at universities and further education colleges, who, because of restrictions, are unable to attend classes in person or live in student accommodation which they have paid for;

Believes that many university students have found themselves suffering financial hardship which has caused significant distress and led to poor mental health;

Calls on university accommodation providers and private landlords who have not provided rent waivers to do so immediately, and release affected students from private rental contracts without penalty.

Further calls on the Department for the Economy and Department of Finance to address these new burdens of generational injustice by developing and funding a Student Support Grant for all full time third level students, many of whom cannot gain any employment at this time and are unable to claim benefits."

Takeover of private healthcare

(The Deputy Lord Mayor, Councillor McCusker and Councillors M. Kelly, Long and McKeown declared an interest, in that they were an employee of the Healthcare Trust, and Alderman Copeland and Councillors Flynn, Garrett, Heading and Pankhurst declared an interest in that they had a family member who was an employee of the Healthcare Trust, and they left the meeting for the duration of the discussion.)

In accordance with notice on the agenda, Councillor Ferguson proposed:

"The Council calls on the Stormont Executive to immediately bring the personnel and resources of private health care facilities into public control and under the direction of the health service as an emergency response to ease the burden on our overwhelmed health service and health workers; to ensure the health service has the available beds, capacity and staff to care for all those sick with covid; and in order to carry out all Red Flag cancer surgeries, and all other vital operations and life-saving procedures."

The motion was seconded by Councillor Matt Collins.

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Spratt,
Seconded by Councillor Brooks,

That the motion standing in the name of Councillor Ferguson and seconded by Councillor Matt Collins be amended as follows:

To delete the wording from: "immediately bring the personnel and resources of private health care facilities into public control and under the direction of the health service as an emergency response" and replace it with the following: "***continue to work with all available health care resources, including all publicly funded health professionals and the private health sector***"

The motion, as amended, therefore read:

“The Council calls on the Stormont Executive to continue to work with all available health care resources, including all publicly funded health professionals and the private health sector, to ease the burden on our overwhelmed health service and health workers; to ensure the health service has the available beds, capacity and staff to care for all those sick with covid; and in order to carry out all Red Flag cancer surgeries, and all other vital operations and life-saving procedures.”

The Council agreed to vote on the amended motion, when twenty three Members voted for the motion and twenty one against and it was declared carried.

Accordingly, the motion as amended was put to the Council as the substantive motion and passed.

Urgent action to address invasive odour in Collin

In accordance with notice on the agenda, Councillor Michael Collins proposed:

“Council notes with alarm the invasive odour which has pervaded in the Collin area of West Belfast for several years.

This has caused extreme concern amongst residents, who have been expected to simply put up with this odour, with little or no action from the DAERA minister to address the issue.

The odour has been traced to the Mullaghglass landfill site in Collin. Immediate action must be taken to ensure this odour does not persist, and a comprehensive study should be carried out by DAERA to ensure the air quality in Collin is of a safe standard.

Council resolves to write to DAERA minister Edwin Poots to this end, urging him to assess and allay any concerns about air quality residents have because of this odour, and to take immediate action to eradicate this invasive smell coming from the Mullaghglass site.”

The motion was seconded by Councillor Matt Collins.

In accordance with Standing Order 13(f), the motion was referred, without discussion, to the People and Communities Committee.

Lord Mayor
Chairperson