

Council

SPECIAL MEETING OF BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

Held in the City Hall on Friday, 2nd August, 2019
at the hour of 1.30 o'clock p.m., pursuant to Notice.

Members present: The Right Honourable the Lord Mayor (Councillor Finucane) (Chairperson); the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor McReynolds); Aldermen Haire, McCoubrey, Rodgers and Spence; and Councillors D. Baker, Black, Brooks, Bunting, Canavan, Carson, Matt Collins, Michael Collins, de Faoite, Donnelly, Dorrian, Flynn, Garrett, Graham, Hanvey, Hargey, Heading, Hutchinson, M. Kelly, T. Kelly, Kyle, Lyons, McAllister, McAteer, McCusker, McLaughlin, McMullan, Mulholland, Newton, Nicholl, O'Hara, Pankhurst, Smyth, Verner and Walsh.

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 Sandford), Aldermen Copeland and Kingston and Councillors Beattie, Cobain, Ferguson, Groogan, Howard, Hussey, Long and McKeown.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Requests to Film Proceedings

The Chief Executive reported that requests had been received from a number of broadcasting companies to film the proceedings of the meeting.

The Council approved the requests.

Request to Address the Council

The Chief Executive reported that a request had been received to allow a deputation of Trades Union officials to address the Council in advance of the motion on Harland and Wolff Shipyard being proposed by Councillor Heading.

The Council agreed to receive the deputation and, accordingly, Mr. B. Reid and Mr. P. Beattie, representing GMB, and Ms. S. Fitzgerald and Mr. J. Passmore, from Unite the Union, were admitted to the meeting.

Mr. Reid reported that he had worked in the Harland and Wolff Shipyard for the past thirty-three years and was the fourth generation from his family to be employed there. He highlighted the Shipyard's close historical and economic links to the City of

Belfast over the years and stressed that every effort should be made to secure the future of the business.

Mr. Passmore explained that the impact of the closure of the Harland and Wolff Shipyard would be felt well beyond those 123 jobs which would be lost immediately. He pointed out that each new contract generated a significant number of additional direct and indirect jobs and highlighted the fact that £261 million had been paid to sub-contractors, agency staff and employees over the past seven years. That, in turn, had created substantial economic benefits for the City. He added that the closure of the Shipyard would lead to a loss of skilled workers and confirm the demise of the industrial sector in Belfast.

Mr. Beattie, who had worked in the Shipyard since 1981, provided details of potential future contracts, some of which could last for up to fifteen years. Whilst those would generate additional employment and offer apprenticeship opportunities, work could only commence when a suitable owner had been found. He added that there would, post-Brexit, be increased demand for United Kingdom input in terms of the offshore renewable industry and that Harland and Wolff had the facility and expertise to deliver on that. However, he stressed that all of the aforementioned work was dependent upon the Shipyard's immediate difficulties being resolved.

Ms. Fitzgerald confirmed that the Trades Union movement was supportive of the workers' demand for the re-nationalisation of the Harland and Wolff Shipyard. She stressed that the support of the Council had contributed to the success of the campaign to secure jobs in Bombardier Aerospace in Belfast and concluded by urging it to support the current campaign by endorsing Councillor Heading's motion.

The Lord Mayor thanked the deputation for their contribution.

The Council noted the information which had been provided and that Members would, shortly, have an opportunity to discuss the matter.

Notice of Motion

Harland and Wolff Shipyard

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

"This Council notes the economic importance of the Harland and Wolff Shipyard to the workers, sub-contractors and the City of Belfast.

The Council will convene an urgent forum between the relevant Trades Unions, Invest NI, Department for the Economy and the UK Government to identify any measures possible to secure the continued operation of the Harland and Wolff Shipyard."

The motion was seconded by Councillor Flynn.

The proposer agreed to amend his motion to reflect the following requests:

Councillor Hanvey – That the following wording be inserted between the first and second paragraphs: "The Council calls on the UK Government to provide

immediate interim funding to allow Harland and Wolff to explore long-term opportunities for a substantive solution to save the yard.”;

Councillor Hargey – That the forum referred to within the motion be led by the leaders of the Political Parties represented on the Council;

Councillor Matt Collins – That the following wording be added to the end of the final sentence: “,including the possibility that the existing skill set of workers could be used to transform the site into a hub for the creation of green energy, helping to save jobs whilst simultaneously tackling climate change”; and

Alderman Rodgers – That the Council agrees to seek an immediate meeting with the Secretary of State to discuss the matter.”

The motion, standing in the name of Councillor Heading and seconded by Councillor Flynn, as amended and set out hereunder, was thereupon put to the meeting and passed:

“This Council notes the economic importance of the Harland and Wolff Shipyard to the workers, sub-contractors and the City of Belfast.

The Council calls on the UK Government to provide immediate interim funding to allow Harland and Wolff to explore long-term opportunities for a substantive solution to save the yard.

The Council will convene an urgent forum, led by the leaders of the Political Parties represented on the Council, between the relevant Trades Unions, Invest NI, Department for the Economy and the UK Government to identify any measures possible to secure the continued operation of the Harland and Wolff Shipyard, including the possibility that the existing skill set of workers could be used to transform the site into a hub for the creation of green energy, helping to save jobs whilst simultaneously tackling climate change.

In addition, the Council will seek an immediate meeting with the Secretary of State to discuss the matter.”

The Council agreed, in accordance with Standing Order 47 (2) (c), that the decision would not be subject to call-in, on the basis that an unreasonable delay could be prejudicial to the Council’s or the public’s interest.

Lord Mayor
Chairperson