

Council

MEETING OF BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

Held in the Council Chamber, City Hall and remotely, via Microsoft Teams, on Monday, 8th January, 2024 at 6.00 p.m., pursuant to notice.

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

Summons

The Chief Executive submitted the summons convening the meeting.

Apologies

No apologies were reported.

Declarations of Interest

Councillors Ferguson and McDowell declared an interest in respect of the item entitled “Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund” in that they were Members of a Belfast Orange Lodge.

Alderman Copeland declared an interest in the item “Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund”, in that her daughter was employed by the Greater Village Regeneration Trust, an applicant to the Fund.

Councillor Nic Bhranair declared an interest in the item “Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund”, in that she was an employee of Fáilte Feirste Thiar.

Councillor Gormley declared an interest in the item “Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund”, in that he was a Member of the Lower Ormeau Residents Action Group (LORAG) and it was an applicant to the Fund.

Alderman McCullough declared an interest in the Motion regarding the Ulster Bank Closures, in that he had a relative who was an employee of the bank.

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Councillor McKeown declared an interest in relation to the item entitled “Public Health Agency Consultation on the Substance Use Strategic Commissioning and Implementation Plan – Council Response” and also in relation to the Motion regarding Fast-Track Cities, in that his employer was involved with both.

Alderman McCoubrey declared an interest in relation to the item entitled “Update on Physical Programme” in that he was a Board Member of the Black Mountain Shared Space.

The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Groogan) declared an interest in the item “Request to Present - Forward South Partnership” in that she was an employee of that organisation.

Minutes of the Council

Moved by the Lord Mayor (Councillor Murphy),
Seconded by Councillor Nic Bhranair and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the monthly meeting of the Council of 4th December, 2023, be taken as read and signed as correct.

Request to Film Proceedings

The Chief Executive reported that a request had been received from the BBC to film the proceedings of the meeting.

The Council acceded to the request.

Requests to Address the Council

Sólás Special Needs

The Chief Executive reported that a request to address the Council had been received from Dr. J. Henderson, Managing Director of Sólás Special Needs, and Ms. E. Gallagher and Ms. J. McGann, two Members of the Sólás Parent User Group. They wished to address the Council in relation to disability community services and inclusion in South Belfast.

The Council acceded to the request and, accordingly, they were welcomed to the meeting by the Lord Mayor.

Together, Ms. Gallagher and Ms. McGann outlined the fantastic services, support and advice that Sólás provided to children with autism and additional needs, as well as to the parents. They explained that the service was for people living throughout the City and that it had been an invaluable resource for them.

The Lord Mayor thanked them for their presentation and they left the meeting.

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Financial Services Union

The Chief Executive advised that a further request to address the Council had been received from Mr. B. McDowell, Head of Communications and Public Affairs (Financial Services Union), Mr. J. O'Connell, FSU General Secretary, and Mr. J. Allsopp, FSU Sector officer for Ulster Bank. They wished to speak in relation to the Closure of Ulster Bank Branches, whereby a motion on the topic was being proposed later in the meeting.

The Council acceded to the request and, accordingly, they were welcomed to the meeting.

Mr. O'Connell explained that the Financial Services Union was extremely disappointed that the Ulster Bank had announced that ten of its branches in Northern Ireland would close in 2024. He called on the Ulster Bank to reverse its decision to close the branches and highlighted that it would result in a loss of jobs, reduced in-person banking services for communities, particularly for the most vulnerable in society. He called upon the Members to support the Motion that would come before it later in the meeting.

The Lord Mayor thanked the deputation and they left the meeting.

Minutes of Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Moved by Councillor Black,
Seconded by Councillor R. M. Donnelly,

That the minutes of the proceedings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 12th and 15th December, 2023, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

Exclusion of the Press and Public

Resolved – That, in accordance with Section 42(4) of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014, the Council agrees to exclude the press and public from the meeting to allow consideration of confidential information in relation to the minute of the meeting of 12th December, 2023, under the heading “Belfast 2024”, and in relation to the minutes of the meeting of 15th December, 2023, under the headings “Neighbourhood Renewal Fund - South Belfast Area Working Group and East Area Working Group”, in so far as the discussion would relate to the financial or business affairs of any particular person.

Belfast 2024

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Carson,
Seconded by Councillor R. McLaughlin and

Resolved - That the reports associated with Belfast 2024 be referred back to both the City Growth and Regeneration Committee and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, for consideration to be given to reprofiling the

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funding for the Power Plants project towards the Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund.

Neighbourhood Regeneration Fund

South Belfast Area Working Group

A Member requested clarification on how officers determined whether items were to be restricted when the issue related to the allocation of public money, particularly within the context of the public perception test.

A further Member requested clarity from the Chief Executive and the City Solicitor as to whether it was possible for the Council to reprofile money from the Belfast 2024 project to the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF), when the process had already begun. The Chief Executive advised that advice would be provided to the relevant Committees in respect of that.

Amendment

Moved by the Deputy Lord Mayor, Councillor Groogan,
Seconded by Councillor de Faoite,

That the Council agrees that the following projects be progressed to Stage 3 – Delivery in South Belfast, with the allocations as stated below:

- Sólás, Special Needs Charity – Sólás New Build Project, £800,000;
- Greater Village Regeneration Trust - Branching Out project, £224,949;
- Lower Ormeau Residents' Action Group (LORAG) – Lagan Water Access Activity Hub, £224,949;
- Hearth Historic Buildings Trust – Redevelopment of Riddell's Warehouse, £224,949;
- Fitzroy Presbyterian Church - Redevelopment of Former School of Music, £224,949; and
- Market Development Association – Market Heritage Hub, £224,949.

On a vote, nineteen voted for the amendment, thirty-six against and with one no vote, it was accordingly declared lost.

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For 19	Against 36	No Vote 1
The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Groogan); Councillors Bell, Bower, Collins, de Faoite, Doherty, Flynn, Hanvey, Long, Lyons, Maghie, F. McAteer, McDonough-Brown, McKeown, McMullan, Murray, Nelson, Smyth and Whyte.	The Right Honourable the Lord Mayor (Councillor Murphy); Aldermen Lawlor, McCoubrey, McCullough and Rodgers; Councillors Anglin, Beattie, Black, Bradley, R. Brooks, Bunting, Canavan, Carson, Cobain, M. Donnelly, P. Donnelly, R-M Donnelly, Doran, D. Douglas, S. Douglas, Duffy, Ferguson, Garrett, Kelly, Magee, Maskey, G. McAteer, McCabe, McCann, McCormick, I. McLaughlin, R. McLaughlin, Nic Bhranair, Ó Néill, Verner and Walsh.	Councillor McDowell

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Bunting
Seconded by Alderman Lawlor,

That the Council agrees that the following projects be progressed to Stage 3 – Delivery in South Belfast, with the allocations as stated below:

- Greater Village Regeneration Trust - Branching Out project, £500,000;
- Market Development Association – Market Heritage Hub, £500,000;
- Sólás, Special Needs Charity – Sólás New Build Project, £308, 248;
- Lower Ormeau Residents’ Action Group (LORAG) – Lagan Water Access Activity Hub, £308, 248; and
- Fitzroy Presbyterian Church - Redevelopment of Former School of Music, £308, 248.

On a vote, forty-six voted for the amendment and eleven against and it was accordingly declared carried.

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For 46	Against 11
The Right Honourable the Lord Mayor (Councillor Murphy); The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Groogan); Aldermen Lawlor, McCoubrey, McCullough and Rodgers; Councillors Anglin, Beattie, Black, Bradley, R. Brooks, Bunting, Canavan, Carson, Cobain, Collins, de Faoite, Doherty, M. Donnell, P. Donnelly, R-M. Donnelly, Doran, D. Douglas, S. Douglas, Duffy, Ferguson, Flynn, Garrett, Kelly, Lyons, Magee, Maskey, G. McAteer, McCabe, McCann, McCormick, McDowell, McKeown, I. McLaughlin, R. McLaughlin, Nic Bhranair, Ó Néill, Smyth, Verner, Walsh and Whyte.	Councillors Bell, Bower, T. Brooks, Hanvey, Long, Maghie, F. McAteer, McDonough-Brown, McMullan, Murray and Nelson.

East Area Working Group

At the request of Councillor Ferguson, the Council agreed that the Special Meeting of the East Area Working Group, scheduled to take place on Monday, 15th January, be postponed until the Stage 2 process for the projects had been completed.

(The Council resumed in public session at this point in proceedings)

Confirmation of Decisions

The Lord Mayor announced the decisions which had been taken during the restricted session of the Council and reminded the Members that those decisions would be subject to Call-in.

Adoption of Minutes

Subject to the foregoing additions, the minutes of the proceedings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 12th and 15th December, 2023, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, were approved and adopted.

Minutes of People and Communities Committee

Moved by Councillor Murray,
Seconded by Councillor Róis-Máire Donnelly,

That the minutes of the proceedings of the People and Communities Committee of 5th December, 2023, be approved and adopted.

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Proposal for Dual Language Street Signs

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Ó Néill,
Seconded by Councillor de Faoite,

That the Council agrees that a Dual Language Street sign also be erected at Knock Eden Park and that a resurveying of the street not be carried out.

On a recorded vote, forty Members voted for the proposal and seventeen against and it was declared carried.

For 40	Against 17
The Right Honourable the Lord Mayor (Councillor Murphy); Councillors Anglin, Beattie, Bell, Black, Bower, Bradley, Canavan, Carson, Collins, de Faoite, Doherty, M. Donnelly, P. Donnelly, R-M Donnelly, Duffy, Flynn, Garrett, Gormley, Harvey, Long, Lyons, Magee, Maghie, Maskey, F. McAteer, G. McAteer, McCabe, McCann, McDonough-Brown, McKeown, R. McLaughlin, McMullan, Murray, Nelson, Nic Bhranair, Ó Néill, Smyth, Walsh and Whyte.	Aldermen Copeland, Lawlor, McCoubrey, McCullough and Rodgers; Councillors R. Brooks, Bunting, Cobain, Doran, D. Douglas, S. Douglas, Ferguson, Kelly, McCormick, McDowell, I. McLaughlin and Verner.

A Member requested that the officers would consider the removal of the statistics on “those who did not respond” to a proposed Dual Language Street Sign survey within future reports.

**Applications for Dual Language Street Signs for
Ballysillan Road, Ebor Street and Sunningdale Park North**

Moved by Councillor Doran,
Seconded by Councillor Ferguson,

That the Council agrees that no surveys should be carried out on the grounds of the potential adverse impacts identified in relation to both Ballysillan Road and Ebor Street, and that those two applications are closed.

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

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

Adoption of Minutes

Subject to the foregoing amendment, the minutes of the proceedings of the People and Communities Committee of 5th December, 2023, were approved and adopted.

Minutes of City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Moved by Councillor Nic Bhranair,
Seconded by Councillor Duffy,

That the minutes of the proceedings of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee of 6th December, 2023, be approved and adopted.

Update on the Fleadh Cheoil

Moved by Councillor Nic Bhranair,
Seconded by Councillor Duffy and

Resolved - that the Council agrees to expand the officer and Elected Member representation at the 2024 events.

Adoption of Minutes

Subject to the foregoing amendment, the minutes of the proceedings of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee of 6th December, 2023, were approved and adopted.

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Minutes of Licensing Committee

Moved by Councillor McKeown,
Seconded by Councillor McCabe and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the Licensing Committee of 13th December, 2023, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

Minutes of Planning Committee

Moved by Councillor Garrett,
Seconded by Councillor Carson and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the Planning Committee of 12th December, 2023, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

Minutes of Climate and City Resilience Committee

Moved by Councillor Róis-Máire Donnelly,
Seconded by Councillor Walsh and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the Climate and City Resilience Committee of 7th December, 2023, be approved and adopted.

Minutes of Standards and Business Committee

Moved by Councillor McDonough-Brown,
Seconded by Alderman Rodgers and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the Standards and Business Committee of 4th January, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

Motions

Fast-Track Cities

In accordance with notice on the agenda, Councillor P. Donnelly proposed:

“This Council recognises that ending the HIV epidemic requires a comprehensive approach that allows all those in need, to access quality lifesaving treatment, enhances prevention, care, and support services for HIV, tuberculosis (TB), and viral hepatitis. Council further recognises that integrating these services into sexual, reproductive, and mental health services is critical to achieving universal access to health care. This Council seeks to eliminate stigma and discrimination by building on scientific evidence. Understanding that

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successful HIV treatment and viral suppression prevents HIV transmission which can help reduce stigma and encourage people living with HIV to initiate and adhere to HIV treatment. Therefore, this Council will sign up to the Paris Declaration supporting the FastTrack Cities aim of eliminating the stigma associated with HIV and AIDS as well as aiming for no new HIV diagnosis by 2030.”

The motion was seconded by Councillor R-M. Donnelly.

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

Ulster Bank Closures

In accordance with notice on the agenda, Councillor G. McAteer proposed:

“This Council notes its concern with Ulster Banks decision to close another ten of its branches resulting in the loss of 21 jobs and removal of access to cash and face to face services; acknowledges that the move towards increased digitalisation will make it harder for small businesses to access finance and for people to access cash, advice and ATM services; recognises the worrying trend that 52 branches across various banks have closed in the last three years; and

Calls on this Council to support the Financial Services Unions (FSU) and to write to Ulster Bank calling on them to reverse these closures, protect jobs and maintain its branch network; and supports efforts that would protect our local communities and prevent further branch closures in the next few years.”

The motion was seconded by Councillor Gormley.

At the request of the proposer, the Council agreed that a letter would also be sent to the Commissioner for Older People.

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

Lord Mayor
Chairperson