

Council

MEETING OF BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

Held in the Council Chamber, City Hall,
on Monday, 2nd March, 2026 at 6.00 p.m., pursuant to notice.

Members present: The Lord Mayor, Councillor Kelly (Chairperson);
The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Doherty);
The High Sheriff (Alderman McCoubrey);
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, M. Donnelly,
P. Donnelly, R.M. Donnelly, Doran, D. Douglas,
S. Douglas, Duffy, Ferguson, Flynn, Garrett, Groogan,
Hanvey, Long, Lyons, Magee, Maghie, McAteer,
McCabe, McCallin, McCann, McCormick,
McDonough-Brown, McDowell, McKay, McKeown,
I. McLaughlin, R. McLaughlin, Meenehan, Murphy,
Nelson, 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

Councillor T. Brooks declared an interest in the item “UPSURGE project” within the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee minutes, in that she worked for Queen’s University Belfast. However, she clarified that, as she did not work within that team, she did not feel that she needed to leave the meeting for the item.

Councillors Groogan and McCabe declared an interest in the item “City Imagining Investment Programme – Cultural Multi-Annual Grants (CMAG)” within the City Growth and Regeneration minutes, in that they worked for, or with, organisations which had applied for funding. The item did not arise during discussion.

Councillors Duffy and Groogan declared an interest in the item “Vacant to Vibrant” within the City Growth and Regeneration minutes, in that their employers had applied for funding through the scheme. The item did not arise during discussion.

Councillors P. Donnelly, R-M. Donnelly, Duffy, Groogan, McCabe, McCann and Verner declared interests under the item ‘Minutes of Shared City Partnership’ which related to the

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matters 'PEACEPLUS', in that they, or their relatives, worked for organisations which had applied for, or were in receipt of, funding under the programmes. The item did not arise during discussion.

Councillors Beattie, Bradley, Canavan, M. Donnelly, P. Donnelly, Duffy, Groogan and McCann declared interests under the item 'Social Supermarket Fund' in that they, or their relatives, worked for organisations which had applied for, or were in receipt of, funding under the programmes. The item did not arise during discussion.

Councillors R. McLaughlin and Long declared an interest under the item "Notice of Motion - Call for the NI Executive to Introduce a Basic Income for Artists Scheme", in that their partners were, respectively, a Junior Minister and a Minister within the NI Executive. Councillor Long also declared an interest in the item "Stand alone Hate Crime Bill", in that his wife was the Justice Minister. They left the room during the discussion on the Notice of Motion.

Councillor Bunting declared an interest in the item "Physical Programme and Asset Management – (ii) Botanic Gardens (Lower Section)" within the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee minutes, in that she was a Committee Member of Belvoir Community Allotments and Shed, as it was a potential satellite site for the UPSURGE project, she left the room during discussion and did not participate in any vote on the matter.

Councillor Lyons declared an interest in the item "Physical Programme Update - Belfast Stories" within the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee minutes, in that he was a Member of the National Union of Journalists (NUJ). He left the room during discussion and did not participate in any vote on the matter.

Minutes of the Council

Moved by the Lord Mayor (Councillor Kelly),
Seconded by Councillor R. McLaughlin and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the meetings of the Council of 9th and 13th February, 2026, be taken as read and signed as correct.

Official Announcements

The Lord Mayor paid tribute to Mr. Damien Lavery, who had recently passed away. He had been a Civil Engineer in the Council's Landscape Planning and Development Team for over 18 years and the Lord Mayor, on behalf of the Council, expressed her condolences to his family and friends.

The Lord Mayor referred to the recent retirements of long-standing staff members Vivienne Fullerton, Roberta Wilkinson and Gary Livingstone. A tribute was also paid to Catherine Christy, who would also be retiring shortly. The Council wished them all well in their retirement.

Councillor Long thanked officers in the Civic Services and the Property and Projects teams for the marking of the Electric Vehicle charging points within the City Hall Courtyard.

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Councillor M. Donnelly referred to the recent passing of Bláthnaid Ní Mhaoilmheanna, aged four, who had been diagnosed with an aggressive brain tumour in May 2025. He requested that the Council would illuminate the City Hall as brightly as possible in her memory, and that the Council would consider ways in which to raise awareness of both brain injury and brain cancer.

Councillor Brennan congratulated Emma Kelly and the Community Sports Network (CSN) on recently completing their 15th Winter League. She explained that the winter league was for girls Gaelic Football teams, aged 12-16, with over 1100 girls having registered to take part over 7 weeks. The Lord Mayor agreed to write to Emma and CSN to congratulate them.

Councillor McKeown congratulated the Camogie team of Aquinas Diocesan Grammar School, which had recently won the Rosina McManus Cup for the first time in the school's history.

Councillor Maghie congratulated the Hockey team of Strathearn School on having reached the semi-final of the School's Cup.

Councillor McCabe reminded the Council that International Women's Day would take place on Sunday, 8th March. Councillor Groogan added that the Reclaim the Agenda International Women's Day Rally was entitled "Strength in Solidarity" and would take place on Saturday, 7th March, in Writers Square. She advised that guest speakers included former President of Ireland, Mary Robinson, and encouraged other Members to attend.

Councillor Groogan also congratulated Hannah Spencer MP (The Green Party), on recently winning the by-election in Greater Manchester.

Councillor Walsh advised the Council that Seachtain na Gaeilge, an international Irish language and cultural festival, would take place from 1st to 17th March, 2026, and he encouraged Members to participate.

A number of Members stated that their thoughts were with the people in Iran, who deserved safety, dignity and a future free from oppression and violence.

Several Members condemned the illegal bombing of Iran by the United States and called for an immediate cessation of US bombs against the country.

A further Member stated that thousands of British and Irish citizens lived and worked in Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Doha, as well as Members of the UK Armed Forces, all of whom had loved ones who were concerned for their safety.

Changes of Membership on 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 McKeown to replace Councillor de Faoite on the People and Communities Committee; and

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- that Sinn Fein wished to replace Councillor Walsh with Councillor R. McLaughlin on the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

The Council approved the changes.

Request to Address the Council

The Chief Executive reported that a request to address the Council had been received from Ms. A. Mulholland, Ms. M. Mulholland and Mr. P. McAnespy, representatives from Friends of the Field and the Stranmillis Neighbourhood Association, regarding the future of Lower Botanic Gardens. The Council agreed to receive the deputation.

Ms. A. Mulholland stated that the Friends of the Field was a cross-community community group which had co-designed and co-delivered a thriving community garden at the Lower Botanic site. She outlined a number of their projects and achievements to date.

She stated that, while they appreciated the time some Members had recently spent engaging with them, they were extremely disappointed with the lack of coherent and targeted communication and engagement in respect of the future of the site. She outlined that they had learned about the plans for a GAA pitch being installed on the site through social media and the press, rather than through direct communication. She explained that the messaging had been confusing and, at times, contradictory in nature. She advised that Friends of the Field had been told by Elected representatives that the community garden would not be affected by pitch development. However, subsequently, a Council official had approached them about potentially relocating.

She concluded by stating that Friends of the Field wished to be included in the discussions regarding the future of the site and to be treated as a valuable stakeholder, representing the environmental and wider community's interests.

The Lord Mayor thanked Ms. Mulholland for attending and she retired from the meeting.

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

The Chief Executive advised the Council that the decisions relating to "New Crematorium at Roselawn" and "Draft City Centre Byelaws" had been Called-in and therefore those items were not before the Council for consideration.

Moved by Councillor Brennan,
Seconded by Councillor Beattie,

"That the minutes of the proceedings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 20th February, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted."

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**Physical Programme and Asset Management –
(ii) Botanic Gardens (Lower Section) – Licence Agreement with
Friends of Belfast Botanic Gardens**

Amendment

Moved by Councillor T. Brooks,
Seconded by Councillor McDonough-Brown and

Resolved - "That the decision, under the above-mentioned heading, be amended to also provide that a report be submitted to a future meeting, providing additional information on whether the UPSURGE project and a GAA pitch can co-exist on the site.

**Requests for the Use of City Hall –
Belfast National Graves Association – East Lily Launch**

Amendment

Moved by Councillor McDowell,
Seconded by Alderman McCullough,

"That that the decision to approve the Use of City Hall for the Belfast National Graves Association – East Lily Launch, be rejected."

On a vote, seventeen Members voted in favour of the amendment, with twenty-six voting against and twelve 'no votes' recorded. Accordingly, it was declared lost.

Restricted Items

The information contained in the reports associated with the following item is restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Resolved – That the Council agrees to exclude the members of the press and public from the meeting during discussion of the following item as, due to the nature of the item, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

The Members were advised that content of 'restricted' reports and any discussion which takes place during closed session must be treated as 'confidential information' and no such information should be disclosed to the public as per Paragraph 4.15 of the Code of Conduct.

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**Physical Programme Update-
Belfast Stories**

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Groogan
Seconded by Councillor Flynn and

Resolved – “That the Council agrees to move forward with the enhanced studio space and that a report be brought back with potential operating models, including how it would be financed.”

**Contracts Update – Competitive Tenders:
Supply and Delivery of Uniforms, Footwear and PPE**

Amendment

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

Resolved – That the Council agrees to refer the item back to the Committee for further consideration.

City Centre Gritting Feasibility Study

Amendment

Moved by Councillor R. Brooks,
Seconded by The High Sheriff (Alderman McCoubrey) and

Resolved – “That the Council agrees to write to the Minister for Infrastructure to seek clarification on the Winter Preparedness arrangements for Belfast City Centre, specifically in relation to drainage and gully management, in light of the sustained and prolonged rainfall across Northern Ireland and to request the urgent clearance of all drains in order to ensure that the City Centre has no unnecessary barriers to accessibility.

Adoption of Minutes

Subject to the foregoing amendments, the minutes of the proceedings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 20th February, were approved and adopted.

People and Communities Committee

Moved by Councillor Cobain,
Seconded by Councillor Doran and

That the minutes of the proceedings of the People and Communities Committee of 10th February, be approved and adopted.

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A Member stated that he had been contacted countless times by constituents regarding an ongoing lack of availability of food waste bags. He requested that more be made available, particularly for those at the end of each refuse collection route.

After discussion, the minutes of the proceedings of the People and Communities Committee of 10th February, were approved and adopted.

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

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

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee of 11th and 24th February, be approved and adopted.

Licensing Committee

Moved by Councillor Doran,
Seconded by Councillor Carson and

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the Licensing Committee of 18th February, 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 Carson and

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the Planning Committee of 17th February, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

Climate and City Resilience Committee

Moved by Councillor M. Donnelly,
Seconded by Councillor Walsh,

That the minutes of the proceedings of the Climate and City Resilience Committee of 12th February, be approved and adopted.

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District Heating Network

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Groogan,
Seconded by Councillor McKay and

Resolved - That a report comes before the Committee urgently, with tangible proposals in order to progress the District Heating scheme for Belfast, that it includes looking at a social housing element and to consider the upskilling of local trades people in relation to low carbon energy sources.

Expenditure

Amendment

Moved by Alderman McCullough
Seconded by Councillor Doran and

Resolved - That a report be submitted to a future meeting, detailing the exact expenditure on all Climate functions within the Council.

Adoption of Minutes

Subject to the foregoing amendments, the minutes of the proceedings of the Climate and City Resilience Committee of 12th February, were approved and adopted.

Minutes of the Standards and Business Committee

Moved by Councillor Flynn,
Seconded by Councillor Carson and

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the Standards and Business Committee of 24th February, be approved and adopted.

Notice of Motion

**Call for the NI Executive to Introduce
a Basic Income for Artists Scheme**

In accordance with notice on the agenda, it was

Moved by The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Doherty)
Seconded by Councillor de Faoite,

“This Council notes that:

The arts, culture and creative sectors are central to Belfast’s social fabric, wellbeing, identity, and local economy.

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Many artists, performers and creative workers in Belfast and across the North continue to experience insecure, low and irregular incomes, worsened by the long-term impacts of COVID-19 and the ongoing cost of living crisis.

The Irish Government introduced a Basic Income for Artists pilot in 2022, providing an unconditional weekly payment to artists and creative workers, which has been independently evaluated as improving financial stability, wellbeing, and time spent on creative practice.

The Irish Government has now committed to making this scheme permanent, recognising the structural precarity faced by those working in the creative industries.

This Council believes that:

- Artists and creative workers should not be forced out of their professions due to financial insecurity.
- Belfast's creative sector is a vital public good, contributing to community cohesion, regeneration, tourism, mental health, youth engagement and cultural life.
- A Basic Income for Artists scheme in the north would help protect creative livelihoods, retain local talent, and strengthen the city's cultural ecosystem.

This Council resolves to:

- Call on the Executive to introduce and fund a Basic Income for Artists scheme, modelled on the Irish Government's programme, providing regular, unconditional income support to eligible artists and creative workers.
- Request that the Minister for Communities lead on the development of this scheme, in partnership with the Department for the Economy and the Department of Finance, engaging directly with the arts and creative sectors in its design.
- Write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister urging that this proposal be treated as a priority within the Executive's Programme for Government and budget-setting process."

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Groogan,
Seconded by Councillor Flynn,

That the motion standing in the name of The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Doherty), seconded by Councillor de Faoite be amended as follows:

"This Council notes that:

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The arts, culture and creative sectors are central to Belfast's social fabric, wellbeing, identity, and local economy.

Many artists, performers and creative workers in Belfast and across the North continue to experience insecure, low and irregular incomes, worsened by the long-term impacts of COVID-19 and the ongoing cost of living crisis.

The Irish Government introduced a Basic Income for Artists pilot in 2022, providing an unconditional weekly payment to artists and creative workers, which has been independently evaluated as improving financial stability, wellbeing, and time spent on creative practice.

The Irish Government has now committed to making this scheme permanent, recognising the structural precarity faced by those working in the creative industries.

This Council believes that:

- **The arts and culture are for everyone and government policy should ensure the widest possible participation, inclusion and engagement with the sector;**
- Artists and creative workers should not be forced out of their professions due to financial insecurity **or have to rely on other employment, detracting from their time and ability to create, in order to survive;**
- Belfast's creative sector is a vital public good, contributing to community cohesion, regeneration, tourism, **public health including mental health and wellbeing**, youth engagement and cultural life;
- A Basic Income for Artists scheme in the north would help protect creative livelihoods, retain local talent, and strengthen the city's cultural ecosystem. **Evidence from the Irish scheme has proven that a Basic Income for Artists is an investment that pays back to the economy and society more than it costs, through increased expenditure, increased productivity and less reliance on other welfare payments. This scheme will help to reduce barriers to people who are from working class, global majority and/or those who are working at a disadvantage, ensuring diversity and inclusion within the creative industries.**

This Council resolves to:

- Call on the Executive to **legislate for** and fund a Basic Income for Artists scheme, providing regular, unconditional income support to eligible artists and creative workers. **This scheme should be permanent, include all eligible artists and creative workers and be provided indefinitely while they remain eligible for the scheme.**
- Request that the Minister for Communities lead on the development of this scheme, in partnership with the **Arts Council of Northern Ireland, the Department for the Economy and the Department of Finance. The Minister should work directly with artists, arts organisations and those working in the creative industries to design and set the terms of the scheme and eligibility based on local needs and experience;** and

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- Write to the First Minister and deputy First Minister urging that this proposal be treated as a priority within the Executive's Programme for Government and budget-setting process."

The amendment was put to the Council and, on a vote, thirty-five Members voted for the amendment, with fifteen against and it was declared carried.

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

Lord Mayor
Chairperson