

Council

SPECIAL MEETING OF BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

Held in the Council Chamber, City Hall,
on Wednesday, 23rd April, 2026 at 6.00 p.m., pursuant to notice.

Members present: The Lord Mayor, Councillor Kelly (Chairperson);
The High Sheriff (Alderman McCoubrey);
Aldermen 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, McKay, McKeown,
I. McLaughlin, R. McLaughlin, Meenehan, Murphy,
Nelson, Ó Néill, Smyth and Verner.

Summons

The Chief Executive submitted the summons convening the meeting.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported for the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor Doherty) and Councillors Whyte and Walsh.

Declarations of Interest

Councillors Long and R. McLaughlin declared an interest, in that their partners were, respectively, a Junior Minister and a Minister within the NI Executive and left the meeting whilst amendment 1 was under consideration.

Motion - Planning Enforcement (Bobby Sands Statue)

Moved by Alderman McCullough,
Seconded by Councillor Bunting

“This Council:

1. Condemns the unauthorised erection of a statue of Bobby Sands on public land in west Belfast, expresses serious concern at the decision not to pursue enforcement action, and calls for that decision to be reconsidered in line with the Council’s planning

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responsibilities and duty to apply the law consistently and fairly across all communities; and

2. Requests full transparency in respect of this decision, including disclosure to Members of all relevant documentation, correspondence, internal communications, and the legal basis and rationale upon which the decision was made, subject to legal and data protection requirements.”

Amendment 1

Moved by Councillor de Faoite,
Seconded by Councillor McKeown,

“This Council:

- believes all planning matters should be dealt with in a fair, equitable and lawful way;
- Regrets that the NI Executive has failed to advance the recommendations of the Flags, Identity, Culture and Tradition Commission, and calls on all Executive Ministers to recommit to those proposals;
- Further calls upon the NI Executive to address major challenges facing the planning process in Belfast, including the underinvestment in waste water infrastructure, and prolonged delays in responses by statutory consultees in DAERA, DfI and DfC.”

On a vote, six Members voted for the amendment and forty-eight against and it was declared lost.

Amendment 2

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

“This Council affirms that planning law must be applied consistently, transparently, and without exception across the city.

Accordingly, this Council further agrees that any review of planning enforcement relating to monuments, statues, murals, memorial gardens, or similar structures must apply to all such installations in Belfast, regardless of political, cultural, or community background.

This includes, but is not limited to, memorials, murals, monuments, and gardens of remembrance located in areas associated with nationalist, republican, unionist, or loyalist communities.

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The Council therefore requests that officers bring forward a report outlining:

1. The current enforcement status of all such structures across the city;
2. Any instances where planning permission has not been sought or granted;
3. Options for ensuring consistent enforcement of planning regulations for all communities;
4. Recommendations for improving clarity, communication, and compliance going forward; and
5. This Council recognises that memorials, monuments, murals, and gardens of remembrance across Belfast—regardless of the community in which they are located—hold deep emotional and historical significance for many people. In acknowledging this, the Council agrees that any approach to planning enforcement must be proportionate, sensitive, and respectful of the role these sites play in remembering the dead.

The Council therefore further agrees that, where such structures exist without formal planning permission, priority should be given to engagement, dialogue, and community led solutions rather than immediate enforcement action. This includes considering whether enforcement is necessary or appropriate in cases where a structure’s primary purpose is remembrance and where it poses no safety risk or obstruction.

This approach ensures that planning law is upheld while also recognising the importance of compassion, dignity, and respect for all communities in how Belfast remembers its past.”

On a vote, twenty-three Members voted for the amendment, twenty-seven against and three no votes and it was declared lost.

Accordingly, the substantive Motion standing in the name of Alderman McCullough was put to the Council and, on a vote, twenty-seven Members voted for the Motion, twenty-two against and three no votes and it was declared carried.

Lord Mayor
Chairperson