

Council

MEETING OF BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

Held in the Council Chamber, City Hall and remotely, via Microsoft Teams, on Monday, 9th January, 2023 at 6.00 p.m., pursuant to notice.

Members present: The Right Honourable the Lord Mayor; (Councillor Black) (Chairperson);
The Deputy Lord Mayor, (Councillor M. Kelly);
Aldermen Copeland, Dorrian, Haire, Rodgers and Sandford; and
Councillors Beattie, Bradley, Bower, Bunting, Canavan, Carson, Cobain, Matt Collins, Michael Collins, de Faoite, M. Donnelly, R.M. Donnelly, Doran, Duffy, Ferguson, Flynn, Garrett, Gormley, Groogan, Hanvey, Howard, Hussey, Hutchinson, T. Kelly, Kyle, Long, Lyons, Magee, Maghie, Maskey, McAteer, McCabe, McCann, McCullough, McDonough-Brown, McKeown, McLaughlin, McMullan, Murphy, Murray, Nelson, Newton, O'Hara, Pankhurst, Smyth, Spratt, Thompson, Verner, Walsh and Whyte.

Summons

The Chief Executive submitted the summons convening the meeting.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported on behalf of Alderman McCoubrey and Councillor McCusker.

Declarations of Interest

Alderman Copeland declared an interest in relation to the item "Fuel Poverty Hardship Fund" within the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee minutes, in that her daughter worked for an organisation that was a potential delivery partner.

Councillor Beattie declared an interest in relation to the item "Social Supermarket Funding – Update" within the People and Communities Committee minutes, in that he was employed by an organisation which was a potential recipient of the funding.

Councillor Bradley declared an interest in relation to the item "Fuel Poverty Hardship Fund" within the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee minutes, in that she was an employee of the Healthy Living Centre.

Councillor Canavan declared an interest in relation to the item "Social Supermarket Funding – Update" within the People and Communities Committee minutes, in that she was a Committee Member of one of the potential delivery partners.

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Councillor Gormley declared an interest in relation to the item “Fuel Poverty Hardship Fund” within the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee minutes, in that he was a board member of LORAG which was one of the strategic partners for delivery of the scheme.

Councillor Groogan declared an interest in relation to the items “Fuel Poverty Hardship Fund” within the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee minutes and “Social Supermarket Funding – Update” within the People and Communities Committee minutes, in that she was employed by one of the strategic partners for delivery of the scheme, Forward South Partnership and that she would therefore leave and not take part in the discussion on the item.

Councillor Hutchinson declared an interest in relation to the items “Fuel Poverty Hardship Fund” within the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee minutes and “Social Supermarket Funding – Update” within the People and Communities Committee minutes, in that he worked for an organisation that line managed one of the strategic partners.

Councillor McKeown declared an interest in relation to the item “Physical Programme and Asset Management” within the People and Communities Committee minutes, in that his son played for a mini soccer team.

Councillor McLoughlin declared an interest in relation to the item “Fuel Poverty Hardship Fund” within the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee minutes, in that his cousin was employed by a strategic partner and that he would therefore leave and not take part in the discussion on the item.

Councillor Thompson declared an interest in relation to the items “Fuel Poverty Hardship Fund” and “Update on Area Working Groups” within the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee minutes, in that she was a Board Member of the Greater Shankill Community Council.

Councillor Verner declared an interest in relation to the item “Social Supermarket Funding – Update” within the People and Communities Committee minutes, in that she was employed the Greater Shankill Partnership who was a Strategic Partner, and that she would therefore leave and not take part in the discussion on the item.

Councillor Whyte declared an interest in relation to the item “Ulster University and Queen’s University” within the City Growth and Regeneration Committee minutes, in that he was a teaching assistant at Queen’s University School of Economics.

Minutes of the Council

Amendments

Councillor M. Kelly pointed out that, at the meeting of the Council of 1st December, she had declared an interest, which had not been recorded, in the Motion – Translink – Night-time Provision of Services, in that she worked for an organisation that Translink regularly consulted with.

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Councillor Gormley requested a correction under the official announcements of the minute of the meeting of the Council of 1st December, whereby he had offered congratulations to Mr. Mark Sykes, whose name had been misspelled.

Councillor Maghie pointed out that her attendance at the meeting of the Council of 1st December had not been recorded, and that she had belatedly joined the meeting remotely.

The Council agreed that the minutes be varied accordingly; and

Moved by the Lord Mayor (Councillor Black),
Seconded by Councillor McLaughlin and

That the minutes of the proceedings of the monthly meeting of the Council of 1st and 7th December, be taken as read and signed as correct.

Adoption of Minutes

The minutes of the proceedings of the Council of 1st and 7th December were thereupon approved and adopted, subject to the foregoing amendments.

Official Announcements

Welcome

The Lord Mayor welcomed Councillor Doran to his first meeting of the Council.

The Lord Mayor also agreed to Councillor de Faoite's request that she write to Mr. Joe Kennedy III to welcome his appointment as the US Economic Envoy to Northern Ireland.

Best Wishes

Alderman Rodgers and Councillor McCullough paid tribute to former Councillor Dale Pankhurst who had recently stepped down and wished him well in his future endeavours.

Alderman Rodgers brought to the Council's attention that former Lord Mayor, Eric Smith, had been in hospital and the Lord Mayor acceded to his request to write to Mr. Smith to extend the Council's best wishes.

Alderman Rodgers also thanked Councillor Hussey for his term as High Sheriff.

Condolences

The Lord Mayor and Cllr Magee paid tribute to former Councillor Mr. Bobby Lavery and offered condolences to his family upon his recent death.

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She also stated that she had been saddened to hear of the sudden passing of former Council employee, Alan Stewart, and passed on her sympathy and condolences to Alan's family.

The Lord Mayor, in response to a request from Councillor Walsh, agreed to write to the family of Irish language activist, Mr. Diarmuid Ó Tuama, to offer condolences on behalf of the Council upon his recent death.

Congratulations

The Lord Mayor offered congratulations to Deputy Registrar, Winnie McConnell, who had been awarded a British Empire Medal (BEM) for services to local government.

Alderman Copeland and Councillor Lyons offered congratulations to Councillor Kyle as the incoming High Sheriff. Councillor Kyle stated that it was a great honour to be nominated as High Sherriff.

Councillor T. Kelly congratulated Mr. Brian Armstrong, who had become a Guinness World Record holder after completing fifty half triathlons and the Lord Mayor agreed to write to Mr. Armstrong, on behalf of the Council, to offer congratulations.

Councillor Verner congratulated Ms. Mary Montgomery, Principal of Boys Model Secondary School, and Ms. Debbie Watters, Co-Director of Greater Shankill Alternatives, on receiving Orders of the British Empire (OBEs) in the new year honours list.

Councillor Maghie congratulated the Northern Ireland Women's Wheelchair Basketball Team on their recent establishment and the Lord Mayor agreed to write to the team to convey the Council's best wishes for the future.

The Lord Mayor agreed to Alderman Rodgers' request that a letter would be sent to congratulate former professional football, Mr. Pat Jennings, who had been awarded a Commander of the Order of the British Empire (CBE) in the new year's honours list.

Gender Based Violence

The Lord Mayor condemned the recent murders of Natalie McNally and Bruna Fonseca and offered condolences to their families, friends and local communities.

Several Members concurred with the Lord Mayor's sentiments and she stated, in response to Alderman Copeland's comments, that she would write to the Northern Ireland Executive for an update on the proposed strategy to end violence against women and girls, and that a meeting would be convened by the Lord Mayor to discuss the issue.

Request to address the Council

The Chief Executive reported that two requests to address the Council had been received, the first from Ms. Clare Mullaly from End Deportations Belfast and Ms. Kellie Turtle from Faith Voices for Reproductive Justice to address the Council meeting in relation to their ongoing campaign regarding the living conditions of

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pregnant asylum seekers and refugees. The second was from Mr. Chris Eisenstadt from BookTrust – in relation to a motion on an Imagination Library

The Council acceded to the requests and, accordingly, Ms. Clare Mullaly from End Deportations Belfast, together with Ms. Kellie Turtle from Faith Voices for Reproductive Justice, were welcomed by the Lord Mayor.

Ms. Turtle explained that Faith Voices for Reproductive Justice was one of three organisations that were campaigning on the issue of the detention of pregnant women at Larne House, a short-term holding facility.

She said that it had come to light through freedom of information requests that, between June 2016 and June 2022, eight pregnant women had been held at Larne House, and that the issue was of great concern. She stated that reproductive justice meant creating a society where the reproductive rights and health of women and pregnant people were fully available to all without discrimination and included the right to have safe and dignified pregnancy and birth and have babies born into safe environments.

She stated that it was unacceptable to have pregnant people in detention in Larne House on the basis of their immigration status, which would mean that they are cut off from all statutory health services and would only receive care from a private healthcare provider, Mighty, who operate the facility on behalf of the Home Office.

She explained that most individuals who passed through the UK immigration detention system were subsequently released back into the community, with their detention having served no purpose and to subject pregnant people and their babies to risk for no clear purpose, was not acceptable.

She concluded by stating that there had been clear consensus that the dehumanising treatment of marginalised people was not acceptable and that there was a need for alternatives to detention. She said that Belfast City Council had a part to play and asked for commitment to being part of the process in developing community based alternatives to prevent pregnant people being detained in Larne House.

Ms. Mullaly stated that Larne House, as a short-term holding facility and according to the UK Home Office, immigration detention should only be used to detain an individual immediately prior to their scheduled deportation, however, she explained, that the reality was different and, in 2022, only fourteen percent of individuals detained were eventually deported.

She informed the Council that alternatives to detention existed and that Action Foundations' alternative to detention pilot, run in conjunction with the UK Home Office, identified an humane alternative to detention with no decrease in compliance to immigration rules.

She pointed out that the geography of Northern Ireland provided an ideal region for alternatives to detention and that she was calling on the Council to work with other bodies to explore ways to ensure everyone in the city was treated with dignity and respect and that Larne House would cease to operate.

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The Lord Mayor thanked Ms. Mullaly and Ms. Turtle for their deputation and they retired from the meeting. She welcomed Mr. Eisenstadt from BookTrust to the meeting.

Mr. Eisenstadt explained that he was pleased that the Council had been taking action to support children's reading and that he felt the Council had a capacity to do a lot of work to encourage and support children's reading.

He outlined the work of the BookTrust and how they deliver through the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust and the Education Authority, and how the BookTrust carefully selected partners who were working towards the same goal, to get children to enjoy reading. He stated that all projects were designed to fit in with the work that partners were undertaking and not to add to their busy schedules.

He provided an overview of a pilot project which had been in progress, BookTrust Early Years, which was a targeted project aimed at children who had been, statistically, most likely to miss out on forming a reading habit. He informed the Council that the pilot project did not have a funding source as it was still in the pilot stage and that the BookTrust was keen to find resources to expand the project.

He explained that the BookTrust Time to Read project, which was being delivered by teachers and the Letterbox Club project, whereby children, signed up to the project, between the ages of three to thirteen were sent an age-appropriate book between the months of May to October to encourage reading over the summer months.

He concluded by stating that the BookTrust had a range of partnerships, pilots and projects and had successfully worked with children and families across age ranges and communities and had strong local knowledge and that he was delighted that the Council recognised the vitality of the issue and had seen a role for itself in supporting giving children the joys of reading.

The Lord Mayor thanked Mr Eisenstadt for his attendance and he retired from the meeting.

The Council noted the information.

Change of Membership on Committees/Outside Bodies

The Chief Executive reported that notification had been received from the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) of the following changes in membership:

- Councillor Thompson to replace former Councillor Pankhurst on the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee;
- Councillor Verner to replace Councillor Bunting as Deputy Chairperson on the People and Communities Committee;
- Alderman Haire to replace former Councillor Pankhurst on the Standards and Business Committee;

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- Councillor Cobain to replace former Councillor Pankhurst on the Cathedral Quarter Trust; and
- Councillor McCullough to replace former Councillor Pankhurst on the North Belfast District Policing and Community Safety Partnership.

The Council noted the changes.

Minutes of Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Moved by Councillor McDonough-Brown,
Seconded by Councillor Beattie,

That the minutes of the proceedings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 16th December, 2022, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

Amendment

Fuel Poverty Hardship Fund

Moved by Councillor Flynn
Seconded by Councillor Kyle and

Resolved – “That the Council agrees that the All-Party Cost-of-Living Task Group be re-established, to discuss the challenges and learnings of the scheme, that would be considered should a similar scheme be required in winter 2023.”

Adoption of Minutes

Subject to the foregoing amendment, the minutes of the proceedings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 16th December were thereupon approved and adopted.

Minutes of People and Communities Committee

Moved by Councillor Murray,
Seconded by Councillor Donnelly,

That the minutes of the proceedings of the People and Communities Committee of 6th December be approved and adopted.

Pitch Partner Agreement – Alderman Tommy Patton Memorial Park

At the request of Councillor de Faoite, the City Solicitor agreed to provide a report to the People and Communities Committee with regards to any previous partnership agreements which may have been withdrawn and to consider a review of the provisions of partnership agreements.

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Notice of Motion - Imagination Library

At the request of a Councillor Murray, the Council agreed that the BookTrust be included as one of the interested partners the Council would work with to secure the success and sustainable funding of the scheme.

Financial Reporting - Quarter 2 2022/23

At the request of Councillor Whyte, the Council agreed to the holding of special meetings of the People and Communities Committee specifically to discuss issues around waste collection. In addition, the Chief Executive undertook to re-establish the Cleansing Taskforce.

Adoption of Minutes

Subject to the foregoing additions, the minutes of the proceedings of the Strategic People and Communities Committee of 6th December were thereupon approved and adopted.

Minutes of City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Moved by Councillor Murphy,
Seconded by Councillor Duffy and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee of 7th December be approved and adopted.

Minutes of Licensing Committee

Moved by Councillor Matt Collins,
Seconded by Councillor McLaughlin and

Resolve - That the minutes of the proceedings of the Licensing Committee of 14th December, 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 Whyte,
Seconded by Councillor Maskey and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the Planning Committee of 19th December, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

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Minutes of the Climate and City Resilience Committee

Moved by Councillor Walsh,
Seconded by Councillor McCabe and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the Climate and City Resilience Committee of 8th December, 2022 be approved and adopted.

Minutes of Standards and Business Committee

Moved by Councillor Harvey,
Seconded by Councillor Duffy and

Resolved - That the Minutes of the proceedings of the Standards and Business Committee of 5th January, 2023, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

Lord Mayor
Chairperson