

Council

SPECIAL MEETING OF BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

Held Remotely via Microsoft Teams on Thursday, 19th November, 2020
at 4.00 p.m., pursuant to notice.

Members present: The Right Honourable the Lord Mayor
(Alderman McCoubrey) (Chairperson);
The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor McCusker);
The High Sheriff (Councillor Verner);
Aldermen Dorrian, Haire, Kingston, Rodgers and
Sandford; and
Councillors Baker, Beattie, Black, Bradley, Brooks,
Bunting, Canavan, Carson, Cobain, Matt Collins,
Michael Collins, Corr, De Faoite, Donnelly, Ferguson,
Flynn, Garrett, Gormley, Groogan, Hanvey, Heading,
Howard, Hussey, M. Kelly, T. Kelly, Kyle, Long,
Lyons, Magee, Magennis, Maskey, McCabe,
McAllister, McAteer, McCullough, McDonough-
Brown, McKeown, McLaughlin, McReynolds,
Mulholland, Murphy, Newton, Nicholl, O'Hara,
Pankhurst, Smyth, Spratt, Walsh and Whyte.

Summons

The Chief Executive submitted the summons convening the meeting.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of Alderman Copeland and Councillors Hutchinson and McMullan.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Official Announcements

The Lord Mayor, on behalf of the Council, welcomed Councillor McCabe to her first meeting.

He also congratulated Councillor Beattie on the birth of his sixth child and Councillor Verner on the birth of her grandchild.

Suspension of Standing Orders

The Chief Executive advised the Council that six requests for representation had been received in relation to the motion. She pointed out that Standing Order 8 states:

“Deputations shall not comprise of more than 3 persons and shall be restricted to making not more than two short speeches of not more than 10 minutes total duration.” Accordingly, if the Council was minded to accede to the additional requests, it would be required to suspend Standing Orders.

The Council agreed to suspend Standing Order 8 to allow the additional speakers to be heard but agreed that each speaker be restricted to not more than 5 minutes in duration.

Request to Address the Council

The Chief Executive informed the Council that requests for representation had been received from Mr. J. Girvan (Upper Andersonstown Community Forum), Mr. P. Armstrong (Trussell Trust), Dr. C. Fitzpatrick (Ulster University), Mr. D. Power (Greater Falls Neighbourhood Partnership), Mr. M. Maguire (Crumlin Ardoyne Neighbourhood Partnership) and Ms. N. Brennan (Lower Ormeau Residents Action Group).

The Council approved the requests and the representations were welcomed to the meeting.

Each speaker then presented to the Council their respective views in respect of the Motion.

Mr. J. Girvan commenced by referring to the successful coordinated approach that the Upper Andersonstown Community Forum had adopted with the support of the Council during the first phase of the pandemic. He advised that during this phase food parcels had been distributed to over 1400 houses in need in West Belfast over a 12 week period and he welcomed the motion which would hopefully enable this work to continue over the Christmas period.

Mr. P. Armstrong advised that the Trussell Trust was concerned about the motion. He explained that setting up publicly funded food aid programmes of this scale represented a failure of government to provide direct support to families. The Trust felt that, instead of providing in-kind support in the form of food aid, financial support should be directed to organisations across the city that could ensure that those in need were given targeted support. It felt that this would provide more flexibility and dignity to people experiencing financial hardship rather than the proposed delivery of thousands of food packages which had the potential to see a duplication in services that already existed.

Dr. C. Fitzpatrick concurred with Mr. Armstrong. She outlined that the problem was not just food poverty but overall poverty and general financial hardship and the answer to financial hardship would not be found through food aid alone. She stated that it was essential to reduce the flow of people who needed to use food banks and she implored the Council to instead provide financial support to community partners who could direct financial support to those in need.

The remaining speakers all spoke in support of the motion and outlined the valuable work that their respective organisations had undertaken in providing direct support to people in need throughout the city. Whilst they noted that levels of deprivation and poverty existed before the pandemic, they stated that it was important to provide support and to ensure it was rolled out quickly to those in need during the second phase of the pandemic so families were not left in a crisis situation over Christmas.

The Lord Mayor, on behalf of the Council, thanked the deputations for attending and they left the meeting.

Motion

Food Poverty

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

“This Council takes note and commends the recent campaign of Marcus Rashford to eradicate child hunger over holiday periods and also the recent statement from Doctor Julie-Ann Maney, a paediatrician from the Royal Hospital for Sick Children who is urging government to tackle child poverty.

Food poverty is a massive issue in normal times and during this pandemic we have seen a huge increase in the demand for food from vulnerable people.

Our children, our vulnerable and our elderly should not be going hungry this Christmas.

We as elected members of this City will do all we can to help those in need.

Therefore this Council will create a fund of 300k and immediately distribute those funds to Neighbourhood Renewal areas across all 4 quarters of this city to provide food parcels for our citizens and communities who are in most need this Christmas.

The amount of funding per area will be scaled based on the population size of the particular Neighbourhood Renewal area.

Furthermore this council will work proactively with the Department of Communities to come up with additional funding beyond our council commitment to try and address food poverty across our city.

Additionally in order to get this money out in time this council agrees to give council officers delegated authority to engage and fund organisations who have previous experience in the distribution of food parcels.”

The motion was seconded by Alderman Dorrian.

The proposer acceded to a request from Councillor Nicholl to amend the motion, agreeing to leave the first three paragraphs (ending at Christmas) and to replace the remainder of the motion with the following wording:

“Furthermore, this council recognises that there is a need to tackle poverty in its entirety, including access to cash payments for goods, utilities, foods and other basic necessities in order to maintain an acceptable standard of living.

This Council recognises the contributions played by key organisations throughout the city who work tirelessly towards addressing poverty and those organisations that have a vast amount of experience and established campaigns, hardship schemes and access to wider advice provision.

Therefore this Council agrees to create a fund of £300,000 to provide additional and holistic support to those who are in need this Christmas. The fund would be distributed on the following basis:

- £150,000 to the Salvation Army and St Vincent de Paul Christmas Family Appeal; and
- £150,000 to be shared across BCC third sector partners for bespoke and targeted support programmes, with any un-utilised funding from this provision reverting to the Salvation Army and St Vincent de Paul Christmas Family Appeal.

Furthermore this council calls upon the Department of Communities to release further funding to alleviate hardship in all parts of the city and commits to work with the department and community sector partners to alleviate imminent hardship while adopting a strategic approach and clear outcomes towards the elimination of poverty through the co-design and co-production of a comprehensive and resourced Anti-Poverty Strategy as a matter of urgency.”

At the request of Councillor Groogan, Councillor Nicholl agreed to add the following paragraph to the amendment:

“This Council also recognises the additional pressure that gift-giving at Christmas presents to some families and commits to bringing forward a pre-loved toys scheme as soon as practicable.”

The proposer, Councillor Beattie, acceded to the request from Councillor Nicholl to accept the aforementioned amendments to the motion.

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Matt Collins,
Seconded by Councillor Ferguson,

That the motion, as amended, standing in the name of Councillor Beattie and Alderman Dorrian be amended further so that paragraphs six, seven and eight be replaced to read as follows:

“That this Council agrees to create a fund of £600,000 to provide additional and holistic support to those who are in need this Christmas. The fund would be distributed on the following basis:

- £300,000 to the Salvation Army and St Vincent de Paul Christmas Family Appeal
- £300,000 to be shared across BCC third sector partners for bespoke and targeted support programmes, with any un-utilised funding from this provision reverting to the Salvation Army and St Vincent de Paul Christmas Family Appeal.”

The Council agreed to vote on the amendment, when seven Members voted for, thirty-two Members against and 18 no votes, and it was declared lost.

Accordingly, the motion, as amended, was put to the Council and passed as follows:

“This Council takes note and commends the recent campaign of Marcus Rashford to eradicate child hunger over holiday periods and also the recent statement from Doctor Julie-Ann Maney, a paediatrician from the Royal Hospital for Sick Children who is urging government to tackle child poverty.

Food poverty is a massive issue in normal times and during this pandemic we have seen a huge increase in the demand for food from vulnerable people.

Our children, our vulnerable and our elderly should not be going hungry this Christmas.

Furthermore, this council recognises that there is a need to tackle poverty in its entirety, including access to cash payments for goods, utilities, foods and other basic necessities in order to maintain an acceptable standard of living.

This Council recognises the contributions played by key organisations throughout the city who work tirelessly towards addressing poverty and those organisations that have a vast amount of experience and established campaigns, hardship schemes and access to wider advice provision.

Therefore this Council agrees to create a fund of £300,000 to provide additional and holistic support to those who are in need this Christmas. The fund would be distributed on the following basis:

- £150,000 to the Salvation Army and St Vincent de Paul Christmas Family Appeal; and
- £150,000 to be shared across BCC third sector partners for bespoke and targeted support programmes, with any un-utilised funding from this provision reverting to the Salvation Army and St Vincent de Paul Christmas Family Appeal.

This Council also recognises the additional pressure that gift-giving at Christmas presents to some families and commits to bringing forward a pre-loved toys scheme as soon as practicable.

Furthermore this council calls upon the Department of Communities to release further funding to alleviate hardship in all parts of the city and commits to work with the department and community sector partners to alleviate imminent hardship while adopting a strategic approach and clear outcomes towards the elimination of poverty through the co-design and co-production of a comprehensive and resourced Anti-Poverty Strategy as a matter of urgency.”

In order to progress the matter, it was agreed that the allocation of the £150,000 community fund be considered, in the first instance, by the Party Group Leaders with authority delegated to the Council’s Strategic Policy and Resources Committee to take the decision in respect of the final allocation. It was noted that a special meeting would be convened for this purpose.

Call-in

The Committee agreed, in accordance with Standing Order 47 (a) (2) (c), that the aforementioned decisions 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.

Chairperson