

Council

MEETING OF BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

Held in the Council Chamber, City Hall and remotely, via Microsoft Teams, on Thursday, 1st February, 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);
The High Sheriff (Councillor S. Douglas); and
Aldermen Lawlor, McCoubrey, McCullough and Rodgers; and
Councillors Anglin, Beattie, Bell, Black, Bower, Bradley, R. Brooks, T. Brooks, Bunting, Canavan, Carson, Cobain, Collins, de Faote, Doherty, M. Donnelly, P. Donnelly, R. M. Donnelly, Doran, D. Douglas, Duffy, Ferguson, Flynn, Garrett, Gormley, Hanvey, Kelly, Long, Lyons, Magee, Maghie, Maskey, F. McAteer, G. McAteer, McCabe, McCann, McCormick, McCusker, 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

An apology was reported on behalf of Alderman Copeland.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Groogan declared an interest in relation to the minute of the People and Communities Committee of 9th January, under the heading “Crescent Park Gates”, in that her employer, the Forward South Partnership, had made a submission regarding the matter and she left the meeting whilst the matter was being considered.

Councillor McDowell declared an interest in relation to the minutes of the Planning Committee of 16th January, in that he owned a property in one of the applications. As the item did not become the subject of discussion, the Member was not required to leave the Chamber.

Councillor McKeown declared an interest in relation to the minute of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 19th January, under the heading “Overdose Prevention Facility”, in that his employer, the Public Health Agency, might be involved in discussions around this facility. The Member left the Chamber during discussion on the matter.

Minutes of the Council

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

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the monthly meeting of the Council of 8th January, be taken as read and signed as correct.

Official Announcements

The Lord Mayor informed the Council that Mr. Jackie Casement, Property and Maintenance, had left the Council recently, having completed 50 years' service, and wished him well in his retirement.

The Lord Mayor, along with a number of other Members, welcomed the restoration of devolved government in Northern Ireland and shared their optimism for a constructive functioning assembly at Stormont. At the request of Councillor de Faoite, the Lord Mayor agreed to write to the Departmental Ministers seeking their assistance and engagement work with Belfast City Council to progress key Council projects that had been outstanding for some time, for example, the Glider and Belfast Cycle Network and reversing cuts to Happy Healthy Minds and holiday hunger payments.

Councillor Dornan highlighted that Children's Mental Health Week, a mental health awareness week that 'empowers, equips and gives a voice to all children and young people in the UK', was being held from 5th – 11th February and he encouraged the Members to support the event to help promote a positive impact on young people's wellbeing.

Alderman Lawlor congratulated the organisers, nominees and award recipients on the recent Annual Eastside Awards. He stated that this event was an exciting initiative aimed at highlighting and celebrating all that was good about East Belfast, whilst showcasing the contributions made to the economic, social and community development of the area. Specifically, he recorded congratulations to Men's Minds Matter who were presented with an award in excellence in Health and Well-being and Mr. Aiden Campbell for his Outstanding Contribution Award. Councillor F. McAteer echoed his sentiments and congratulated the Glentoran Social Partnership for its Community Impact Award, Boundary Brewing Running Club for its Sports Initiative of the Year Award and Templemore Baths for the Heritage Experience Award.

Councillor Bunting congratulated Councillor S. Douglas on becoming the new High Sheriff of Belfast and wished him well during his term.

Councillor McCormick welcomed the work of East Belfast Survivors Suicide and commended the excellent work they did with local east Belfast community who had been affected by suicide and wished them well for the forthcoming year following their recent Annual General Meeting.

Request to Address the Council

The Chief Executive reported that a request to address the Council had been received from Mr. B. Mulgrew and Ms. S. Hayles. They wished to address the Council in relation to proposed erection of gates at Crescent Park, as discussed at the meeting of the People and Communities Committee held on 9th January.

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

Together, Mr. Mulgrew and Ms. Hayles provided a detailed explanation of why they opposed the erection of gates at Crescent Park. Mr. Mulgrew highlighted that he was not privy to the discussion that had taken place at the January meeting of the People and Communities Committee as the matter had been considered as a restricted item. He advised that, whilst he appreciated that there were issues with anti-social behaviour (ASB), he did not feel that simply 'locking' the park with the use of gates would resolve all the problems. He also queried if the gating of parks fitted with the Council's strategy and whether Crescent Park had been considered as part of a feasibility study into lighting requirements at parks throughout the city. He queried the status of the Park and whether there was a possible right of way through the public space, making the space an Open Space and also sought clarity as to whether an Equality Impact Assessment had been undertaken into the proposal.

Ms. Hayles advised that the Park was a muster point for the Crescent Arts Centre in the event of an evacuation being necessary. She advised also that evenings were the busiest time for the Centre, the facility was open until 10.00 p.m. Monday – Saturday, with up to 200 people using it daily. She stated that, given that park currently formed a huge part of any evacuation procedures, she asked the Council to ensure that this was factored into any decision taken from a health and safety perspective.

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

Minutes of Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Moved by Councillor Black,
Seconded by Councillor Ferguson,

That the minutes of the proceedings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 19th and 26th January, 2024, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

Statues- City Hall Grounds

At the request of Councillor McLaughlin, the Council agreed to grant delegated authority to the Director of Property and Projects, in consultation with the Party Group Leaders, to agree the final wording for the two new statues in the City Hall Grounds of Mary Ann McCracken and Winifred Carney.

Extended Cultural Support Programme

Amendment

Moved by Councillor de Faoite,
Seconded by Councillor Flynn

That the decision of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 26th January, under the heading "Extended Cultural Support", in relation to the decision to defer consideration of the report be rejected and the Council agree to the allocation of £200,000 to support the proposed programme of activity, with support up to a maximum of £50,000 for individual direct awards in relation to Orangefest, Ulster Scots Week and Pride. The remainder to be used for events which would support Belfast's bid for the Fleadh Cheoil as outlined in the report.

On a vote, twenty-five Members voted for the amendment and thirty-three against and it was declared lost.

Revenue Estimates 2024/25 and Medium-Term Financial Plan

At the request of Councillor Lyons, the Council agreed to write to the incoming Minister of Finance seeking the Department to look at adopting the model used by the Scottish Government of setting its own business rates, to help pay for local services.

At the request of Councillor Beattie, the Council agreed that all Political Parties should submit in writing to the Chief Executive, in advance of the Special meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee to agree the setting of the rate, any proposals to be considered which might help reduce the rates increase.

Council's Powers of Vesting – Tribeca

At the request of Councillor Whyte, the Chief Executive agreed to write to the relevant Permanent Secretaries and incoming Ministers to highlight the Council's concerns regarding the lack of progress in delivering the Tribeca scheme and to advise that the Council will consider all options for acquiring the site, including the possibility of vesting.

At the request of Councillor Nelson, it was agreed that Council officers would liaise with the current owners regarding the safety of some of the buildings, seeking them to address any dangerous structural issues.

Minutes of People and Communities Committee

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

That the minutes of the proceedings of the People and Communities Committee of 9th and 24th January, be approved and adopted.

Crescent Park Gates

Amendment

Moved by Councillor McKeown,
Seconded by Councillor de Faoite,

That the decision of the People and Communities Committee of 9th January, under the heading "Crescent Park Gates", in relation to the erection of gates at Crescent Park, be referred back to the Committee to enable further consideration in open session and for the stakeholders to make deputations to the meeting.

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

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Flynn,
Seconded by Councillor Smyth,

That the Committee agrees to allocate up to £20,000 of the Council element of the funding for a feasibility study and the delivery of a swift tower in Crescent Park as part of animation of the site and the Council's commitment to conservation of a red listed species.

On a vote, two Members voted for the amendment and fifty-three against and it was declared lost.

Resolved – That the minutes of the proceedings of the People and Communities Committee of 9th and 24th January were approved and adopted.

Minutes of City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Moved by Councillor Nic Bhranair,
Seconded by Councillor Walsh,

That the minutes of the proceedings of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee of 10th and 23rd January, be approved and adopted.

Major Events Update

At the request of Councillor Maskey, the Council agreed to ask the Committee to further consider the Council's approach to St Patrick's Day, with consideration to be given to the event review commencing in April and an invitation being extended to participate in the review to those groups who had decided not to participate in this year's event to enable them to discuss their experience in order to ensure more ambitious events in the future.

Adoption of Minutes

Subject to the foregoing addition, the minutes of the proceedings of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee of 10th and 23rd January were thereupon approved and adopted.

Minutes of Licensing Committee

Moved by Councillor McKeown,
Seconded by Councillor Doran and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the Licensing Committee of 17th January, 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 Ferguson and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the Planning Committee of 16th and 23rd January, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

Belfast Waterfront and Ulster Hall Ltd Shareholders Committee

Moved by Councillor Bower,
Seconded by Councillor R. Brooks and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the Planning Committee of 16th and 23rd January, 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 11th January, be approved and adopted, subject to the inclusion of Councillor Long in the attendances.

Minutes of Standards and Business Committee

Moved by Councillor McDonough-Brown,
Seconded by Councillor R. McLaughlin and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the Standards and Business Committee of 4th and 23rd January, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

Lord Mayor
Chairperson