

Council

MEETING OF BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

Held Remotely via Microsoft Teams on Tuesday, 1st September, 2020
at 6.00p.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 Copeland, Dorrian, Haire, Kingston,
Rodgers and Sandford;
Councillors Baker, Beattie, Black, Bradley, Brooks,
Bunting, Canavan, Carson, Cobain, Matt Collins,
Michael Collins, Corr, De Faoite, Donnelly, Flynn,
Garrett, Gormley, Groogan, Groves, Hanvey,
Heading, Howard, Hussey, Hutchinson, M. Kelly,
T. Kelly, Kyle, Long, Lyons, Magee, Magennis,
Maskey, McAllister, McAteer, McCullough, McKeown,
McLaughlin, McMullan, McReynolds, Mulholland,
Murphy, Newton, Nicholl, O'Hara, Pankhurst, Smyth,
Spratt and Walsh.

Summons

The Chief Executive submitted the summons convening the meeting.

Apologies

Apologies were reported from Councillors Kyle and Whyte.

Declarations of Interest

The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor McCusker) and Councillors Long and McKeown declared an interest in relation to the motion on Free Car Parking for Health Workers, Patients and Visitors in that they were employed by the Health Service and left the meeting whilst this item was under consideration.

Minutes of the Council

Moved by the Lord Mayor (Alderman McCoubrey),
Seconded by Councillor Maskey and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the special meetings of 10th August (2) be taken as read and signed as correct.

Official Announcements

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

Councillor O'Hara welcomed the fact that today was the first day that same sex couples in Northern Ireland could register their intent to marry in religious venues if those venues choose to allow same sex marriages to take place.

Request to Address the Council

The Chief Executive advised the Council that a request for a deputation had been received in relation to the motion on Alleygating.

The Council agreed to accede to the request and the Lord Mayor welcomed to the meeting Mr. D. Cafolla, Ms. E. Pantridge and Ms. P. O'Hare, on behalf of residents at Knockbreda Road / Rosetta Road, to the meeting.

The members of the deputation proceeded to outline to the Council details of the problems they had experienced in relation to anti-social behaviour, crime, safety issues and drug-taking associated with alleyways in there are. They outlined the work they had undertaken to clean up the alleyways to mitigate against these problems and the need for assistance from the Council to help the residents in their efforts to create a sustainable community space in their alleys.

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

Change of Membership on Committees/Outside Bodies

The Chief Executive advised the Council that notification has been received from the Alliance Party indicating that it wished to replace;

- Councillor Nicholl with Councillor McReynolds on the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

The Council approved the change.

Minutes

Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

Moved by Councillor Black,
Seconded by Councillor Bunting,

That the Minutes of the proceedings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 21st August, 2020, omitting matters in respect

of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

Amendment

Language Street Signs Policy

Moved by Councillor Ferguson,
Seconded Councillor Matt Collins,

That the decision of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 21st August, under the heading “Dual Language Street Signs Policy” be rejected and accordingly the Council agrees that the policy be amended so that only one resident in any given street was required to initiate the process, with 50% plus 1 respondents being required (that is, a simple majority) to be in favour to erect a second street sign.

The Council proceeded to vote on the matter, with twenty-six Members for and thirty against and it was declared lost.

The Council noted that a further report, to include the proposal circulated by Councillor Beattie, together with further legal advice, would be considered in due course by the Party Group Leaders.

The minutes of the meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee were approved and adopted.

Open Ormeau

The Council noted that an update report on the Open Ormeau proposals and consultation would be submitted to the Committee in due course.

People and Communities Committee

Moved by Councillor Baker,
Seconded by Alderman Rodgers,

That the Minutes of the proceedings of the People and Communities Committee of 11th August, 2020 be approved and adopted.

Amendment

At the request of Councillor de Faoite, the Council agreed that the minute under the heading under the heading “Priorities during Covid Recovery – Verbal Update” be amended to provide that a report be submitted to the Committee providing an update on the work which has been undertaken by the Heads of Service Group of Environmental Health on the resumption/reinstatement of services.

Subject to the foregoing amendment, the minutes of the meeting of the People and Communities were approved and adopted.

City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Moved by Councillor Brooks,
Seconded by Councillor T. Kelly,

That the Minutes of the proceedings of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee of 12th August, 2020 be approved and adopted.

Department for Communities Access and Inclusion Programme 2020-2021

At the request of Councillor McMullan, the Council agreed to write to the Department for Communities to ascertain whether this would be an annual programme; and that a report be submitted to the Committee to consider an Access and Inclusion officer role and any financial implications.

Subject to the foregoing addition, the minutes of the meeting of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee were approved and adopted.

Licensing Committee

Moved by Councillor Donnelly,
Seconded by Councillor McAteer and

Resolved - That the Minutes of the proceedings of the Licensing Committee of 19th August, 2020, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

Planning Committee

Moved by Councillor Hussey,
Seconded by Councillor Murphy and

Resolved - That the Minutes of the proceedings of the Planning Committee of 18th August, 2020, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

Brexit Committee

Moved by Councillor Flynn,
Seconded by Councillor Walsh and

Resolved - That the Minutes of the proceedings of the Brexit Committee of 13th August, 2020 be approved and adopted.

Motions

Universal Basic Income for Northern Ireland

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

“In the wake of the economic crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic, this Council recognises the need for a reformed, fairer welfare system that protects everyone in society and acknowledges the need to provide economic security for all to invest in people, protect livelihoods and kick-start the economy.

Additionally, this Council reaffirms our support for the investigation of a Universal Basic Income (UBI) for Northern Ireland, recognising the need for a radical overhaul of the welfare state and the positive impact this would have on poverty alleviation, inequality and mental health.

Accordingly, Belfast City Council calls on the Departments of Communities, Finance and the UK Treasury to design and deliver a recovery UBI for Northern Ireland, and will commit to producing a plan for how such a pilot could be implemented in Belfast.”

The motion was seconded by Councillor Heading.

Amendment (1)

Councillor Garrett requested that the proposer amend his motion with the following:

The replacement of the second and third paragraphs with:

“Additionally, this Council reaffirms our support for the investigation of a Universal Basic Income (UBI).

Accordingly, Belfast City Council calls on the Departments of Communities, Finance and the British Treasury to carry out a feasibility study on a UBI and report back to the Council.”

The proposer declined the request and, accordingly, Councillor Garrett proposed the amendment, which was seconded by Councillor Walsh.

Amendment (2)

Councillor Matt Collins requested that the motion be amended to provide that, after the first two paragraphs, it read as follows:

“Accordingly, Belfast City Council calls on the Departments of Communities, Finance and the UK Treasury to investigate the design and delivery of a recovery UBI for Northern Ireland, and will commit to producing a plan for how such a pilot could be implemented in Belfast

To this end, Council would consider supporting such a move, provided it included that:

- it is funded through progressive taxation, to ensure the wealthiest shoulder the burden of payment
- it is tied to inflation, ensuring the basic income continues to provide enough funding as prices rise
- it is supplementary to an expansion of currently existing social security benefits and welfare payments, rather than representing a replacement of those payments
- it is introduced alongside a mandatory living wage, preventing bosses from sinking wages because their employees are in receipt of a basic income
- and finally, it is supplementary to the delivery of Basic Services for all.”

Councillor Garrett requested the aforementioned amendment be revised with the substitution of the words *“provided it included that”* with *“following a report back to the Council which includes the following issues:”* after the words “such a move”.

Councillor Matt Collins acceded to the request.

The proposer to the original motion, Councillor McReynolds agreed to accept the proposed amendments and Councillor Garrett withdrew his original amendment.

Accordingly, the motion, as amended, was put to the Council and passed in the following form:

“In the wake of the economic crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic, this Council recognises the need for a reformed, fairer welfare system that protects everyone in society and acknowledges the need to provide economic security for all to invest in people, protect livelihoods and kick-start the economy.

Additionally, this Council reaffirms our support for the investigation of a Universal Basic Income (UBI) for Northern Ireland, recognising the need for a radical overhaul of the welfare state and the positive impact this would have on poverty alleviation, inequality and mental health.

“Accordingly, Belfast City Council calls on the Departments of Communities, Finance and the UK Treasury to investigate the design and delivery of a recovery UBI for Northern Ireland, and will commit to producing a plan for how such a pilot could be implemented in Belfast

To this end, Council would consider supporting such a move, following a report back to the Council which includes the following issues:

- it is funded through progressive taxation, to ensure the wealthiest shoulder the burden of payment
- it is tied to inflation, ensuring the basic income continues to provide enough funding as prices rise
- it is supplementary to an expansion of currently existing social security benefits and welfare payments, rather than representing a replacement of those payments
- it is introduced alongside a mandatory living wage, preventing bosses from sinking wages because their employees are in receipt of a basic income
- and finally, it is supplementary to the delivery of Basic Services for all.”

Review of Housing Fitness Standard

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

“This Council welcomes the Communities Minister Carál Ní Chuilín’s ambitious programme aimed at addressing housing stress, providing housing solutions and supporting those in greatest need. This council recognises that housing faces many challenges but agrees that it should be a primary focus of government as it is so vital to building and sustaining communities and improving the health and wellbeing of our citizens.

This council notes that the current housing fitness standard that is applied to private rented housing in the North of Ireland is the statutory minimum physical standard which focuses on the most basic structural standards for human habitation, and applies to all tenures. It was last updated in 1992. This Council calls on the Department for Communities to carry out a review of the fitness standard with a view to introducing legislation which offers greater protection to tenants.”

The motion was seconded by Councillor Magee.

Amendment

Councillor Pankhurst requested that the proposer amend the motion with the following:

Firstly, replace the term “North of Ireland” with “Northern Ireland” given the letter is going a Minister from the Northern Ireland Executive;

Secondly, add the following paragraph to the end of the motion:

“Further to the above, Council calls on the Department of Communities to review and strengthen their own rules and regulations regarding the housing fitness standards of existing properties managed by the Housing Executive and various Housing Associations. This Council notes the poor conditions that some social housing tenants are living in and calls on the Minister to urgently address these conditions as a matter of priority.”

The proposer agreed to the addition of the final paragraph and, following discussion, agreed that the “North of Ireland” be replaced with “this district”.

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

“This Council welcomes the Communities Minister Carál Ní Chuilín’s ambitious programme aimed at addressing housing stress, providing housing solutions and supporting those in greatest need. This council recognises that housing faces many challenges but agrees that it should be a primary focus of government as it is so vital to building and sustaining communities and improving the health and wellbeing of our citizens.

This council notes that the current housing fitness standard that is applied to private rented housing in this district is the statutory minimum physical standard which focuses on the most basic structural standards for human habitation, and applies to all tenures. It was last updated in 1992. This Council calls on the Department for Communities to carry out a review of the fitness standard, to include a review of sanctions on private landlords for failing to maintain properties, with a view to introducing legislation which offers greater protection to tenants.

Further to the above, Council calls on the Department of Communities to review and strengthen their own rules and regulations regarding the housing fitness standards of existing properties managed by the Housing Executive and various Housing Associations. This Council notes the poor conditions that some social housing tenants are living in and calls on the Minister to urgently address these conditions as a matter of priority.”

Free Car Parking for Health Workers, Patients and Visitors

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

"This Council greatly values and appreciates the role of health workers, especially given their efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic; and believes that proper investment in our health service is necessary to facilitate the incredible effort of health workers.

Council views parking charges for healthcare workers at their workplace as wrong, and as an effective wage cut; also views parking charges for patients and their visitors as a callous charge levelled against the sick and the vulnerable; and believes no-one should have to pay to receive healthcare or visit those in ill-health.

To this end, the Council:

- Opposes the recent move to remove free car parking for health workers and calls on the Minister for Health and the wider Executive to immediately reverse this decision.
- Supports calls from the trade union movement for free car parking to be provided for patients and visitors alike, and agrees to organise an all-party delegation with the Minister for Health to discuss the matter."

The motion was seconded by Councillor Matt Collins.

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Groogan
Seconded by Councillor McMullan

That the motion be amended as follows:

"This Council greatly values and appreciates the role of health workers, especially given their efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic; and believes that proper investment in our health service is necessary to facilitate the incredible effort of health workers.

As such, this Council supports all healthcare workers to be paid a fair and living wage that compensates them appropriately for the critical work they do for all of us in society.

This Council also recognises the negative health inequalities created by air pollution across Belfast, primarily caused by transport emissions, and is supportive of initiatives to ensure that all healthcare workers and patients can avail of active and sustainable travel alternatives.

This Council will write to the Minister for Infrastructure and the Minister for Health:

- to support the extension of the provision of free public transport for all healthcare workers beyond this crisis period due to Covid 19;
- To support the extension of free or reduced cost public transport for those in receipt of PIP and/or Universal Credit;
- To support extensions of the rail and bus networks and active travel infrastructure to improve access to hospitals; and

- To ask for a review of the categories of acute conditions that currently can avail of free car parking to ensure access to those patients most in need.

This Council as part of its strategic review of the Belfast Bikes scheme will also explore how it can provide concessionary access for healthcare workers.

The Council proceeded to vote on the amendment, when 28 Members voted for and 13 against and it was declared carried.

The motion, as amended, was put to the Council as the substantive motion and passed.

Climate Change Act

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

“This Council welcomes the environmental commitments in the New Decade New Approach Deal. This council is deeply concerned that the Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs did not support an Assembly Motion to develop a Climate Change Act for Northern Ireland.

This Council notes that Northern Ireland has fallen behind other parts of the UK in progressing reduction of emissions. A Climate Change Act can help us realise the ambition of the Belfast Agenda to create an environmentally sustainable City. This Council calls on the Minister to immediately prioritise the development of a Climate Change Act with legally binding and ambitious sectoral emission-reduction targets and a just transition to protect jobs through upskilling in less carbon intensive sectors.”

The motion was seconded by Councillor Groogan.

The Council agreed to vote on the motion, when 39 Members voted for and 15 Members voted against and it was declared carried.

Residents' Parking Schemes

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

“This council recognises the recent changes in commuter travel patterns, including a greater emphasis on connectivity particularly for cycling and walking.

However, this council is mindful that such changes are a result of decreased traffic volumes due to working from home and are likely to rise again with full re-opening, returns to work and education.

Daily issues facing city centre surrounding communities related to excessive parking levels and dangerous practices remain and are increasing to a pre-lockdown hazardous level.

This issue is prevalent in city centre surrounding communities and causes documented operational problems related to cleansing, access for emergency services, road safety for families, street layout, pedestrian access, connectivity, road and pavement surfacing, air quality and daily life.

Belfast City Council, in line with the Belfast Agenda's commitments related to good health and wellbeing, vibrancy, attractiveness and connectivity, must influence action to find realistic solutions to support densely populated urban residential communities.

Flexibility and dynamism have been illustrated during the pandemic related to connectivity. This same level of expediency must be implemented to target this historical and highly contentious problem.

As such this Council agrees to write to the Department for Infrastructure to invite representatives to attend the People and Communities Committee and to advance residents parking schemes in urban affected communities".

The motion was seconded by Councillor McLaughlin.

In accordance with Standing Order 13(f), the motion was referred, without discussion, to the People and Communities Committee.

National Armed Forces Day 2022

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

"This Council agrees to bid for the National Armed Forces Day to be held in Belfast in June 2022."

The motion was seconded by Councillor Hutchinson.

In accordance with Standing Order 13(f), the motion was referred, without discussion, to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

Procurement Policy - Living Wage

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

"That this council consider promoting a procurement policy that supports the principles of a real living wage and respects the rights of workers including the right to form and participate in trade unions."

The motion was seconded by Councillor Beattie

In accordance with Standing Order 13(f), the motion was referred, without discussion, to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

Summer Youth Employment Programme

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

“This council agrees to work in partnership with other public sector bodies, the Belfast Chamber of Commerce and the private sector to develop a Summer Youth Employment Programme.

This programme should be aimed at 14-21 year olds primarily from areas of multiple deprivation from across the 4 quarters of the city. The programme will last 6 weeks.

This paid internship will aim to give the young kids of this city a decent wage, improve their skills and qualities, develop experience and hopefully lead to employment opportunities for kids from lower socio economic backgrounds in sectors that they know, enjoy and excel in.

In developing this programme, Belfast City Council should look to Boston Mayor Marty Walsh’s programme as a model of good practice in this field, which even during the COVID crisis offered 8,000 posts to young people across the city of Boston.”

The motion was seconded by Councillor Beattie.

In accordance with Standing Order 13(f), the motion was referred, without discussion, to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

Alleygating Programme

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

“Belfast City Council:

Recognises that the COVID-19 crisis has allowed local communities to develop a greater appreciation of open and green spaces throughout the city and commends those residents who have taken an active role in improving those spaces in their local area, providing an opportunity for their community to enjoy fresh air, activity and socially distanced interaction during the difficult months of lockdown;

Resolves that Council should do all that it can to support residents and local communities who are proactive in seeking to improve and regenerate open and green spaces in their area.

Believes that, although a review of phases 1-4 of the alleygating programme was agreed earlier this year, the new context of Coronavirus gives cause to reprioritise both our approach to the allocation of alleygates and how a new alleygating programme should be funded.

Determines that a new funded alleygating programme is included as part of Council's Recovery Plan, recognising the intrinsic benefit and popularity of existing alleygating programmes.

Agrees that this new alleygating programme, when determining eligible streets, should give equal consideration and scoring to the efforts of communities to develop and maintain their alleyways as is currently given to crime-reduction and anti-social behaviour concerns."

The motion was seconded by Councillor de Faoite.

In accordance with Standing Order 13(f), the motion was referred, without discussion, to the People and Communities Committee.

Needle Exchange Facilities

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

"This council notes the closing of the needle exchange facility on Botanic Avenue following on from the closure of the Boots facility in City Centre earlier this year. This council will invite the Public Health Agency to its next meeting of the People and Communities Committee to address these worrying closures of much needed facilities and what longer term strategy it has in place to:

1. address drug use and misuse in the City Centre,
2. drive forward a civic conversation of drug classifications, legislation and decriminalisation,
3. develop harm reduction models that save lives
4. and proactively addresses the concerns of local residents."

The motion was seconded by Councillor McCusker.

In accordance with Standing Order 13(f), the motion was referred, without discussion, to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

Addressing Hate and Intolerance across all our Communities

In accordance with notice on the agenda, Councillor O'Hara proposed:

"The Belfast Agenda has an ambition to be a welcoming, safe, fair and inclusive City for all. While we have made significant progress there are opportunities for enhancing this work. This council recognises the work that has been undertaken particularly by many in the community and voluntary sector to improve relations and realise the Belfast Agenda. However, gaps remain, including through the allocation of funding.

This Council recognises the scourge of Hate Crime and Incidents in the City. In 2019/2020 there were 694 Hate Crimes and 758 Hate Incidents reported to Police in the Belfast District Area on the basis of sexual orientation, race and religion. We appreciate that there is a significant underreporting of hate crimes and incidents. There were 98 hate crimes and incidents on the basis of transgender status and 171 crimes and incidents on the basis of disability status across all of Northern Ireland.

This Council recognises that it has a statutory duty to address Good Relations but also recognises that this is on the limited basis of promoting good relations between persons of different religious belief, political opinion and racial group. This only covers some of the hate crime categories yet we understand that to tackle hate and intolerance we must promote good relations between those groups who experience hate but are not covered by the Good Relations duty.

This Council therefore commits to:

- Supporting the extension of the Good Relations duty to the hate crime categories
- Write to the Executive Office requesting flexibility in its Good Relations funding and request that the Executive Office consider extension of its Good Relations duties to the hate crime categories
- Council officers scope internal mechanisms re good relations and equality and diversity funding to fund more proactive work in addressing hate crime and fulfilling the ambition of the Belfast Agenda.”

The motion was seconded by Councillor Groogan.

In accordance with Standing Order 13(f), the motion was referred, without discussion, to the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

Chairperson