

Council

MEETING OF BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

Held in the Council Chamber, City Hall and remotely, via Microsoft Teams, on Wednesday, 1st March, 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);
The High Sheriff (Councillor Kyle);
Aldermen Copeland, Dorrian, Haire, McCoubrey and Rodgers; and Councillors Beattie, Bower; Bradley, Bunting, Canavan, Carson, Cobain, Matt Collins, Michael Collins, de Faoite, M. Donnelly, R. M. Donnelly, Doran, Douglas, Duffy, Ferguson, Flynn, Garrett, Groogan, Hanvey, Heading, Howard, Hutchinson, T. Kelly, Long, Lyons, Magee, Maghie, Maskey, McAteer, McCabe, McCann, McCullough, McDonough-Brown, McKeown, McLaughlin, McMullan, Murphy, Murray, Nelson, Newton, O'Hara, Smyth, Spratt, Verner, Walsh and Whyte.

Summons

The Chief Executive submitted the summons convening the meeting.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of Alderman Sandford and Councillors Gormley, Hussey and Thompson.

Declarations of Interest

Councillor Groogan declared an interest in relation to the following minutes as she was employed by the Forward South Partnership, which was involved with all four items. As none of the items became the subject of discussion, the Member was not required to leave the Chamber.

- minute of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 17th February, under the heading, "Fuel Poverty Fund" and under the heading "Minutes of the Meeting of the Shared City Partnership";
- minute of the People and Community Committee of 7th February, under the heading, "Capacity Building and Revenue Grants"; and
- minute of City Growth and Regeneration Committee, under the heading "Business Cluster and Community Grant Programme".

Councillor McKeown declared an interest in Agenda Item 13 "Motion – Overdose Prevention Facility", in that he was an employee of the National Health Service and he left the meeting whilst the matter was being considered.

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Councillor McCabe declared an interest in relation to the minute of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 17th February, under the heading “Summer Community Diversionary Festival Programme” as she was employed by Feile an Phobail. As the item did not become the subject of discussion, the Member was not required to leave the Chamber.

Councillors Beatie, Canavan and Verner declared an interest in relation to the minute of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 17th February, under the heading “Fuel Poverty Hardship Funding”, in that they were either employed or associated with organisations that operated a social supermarket. As the item did not become the subject of discussion, the Members were not required to leave the Chamber.

Councillors Duffy and Murphy declared an interest in relation to the minute of the City Growth Committee of 8th February, under the heading “Business Cluster and Community Grant Programme” in that they had both assisted organisations that had submitted an application for funding. Councillor Bradley also declared an interest in the same agenda item in that she worked for an organisation associated with the grant programme. As the item did not become the subject of discussion, the Members were not required to leave the Chamber

The following Councillors declared an interest in relation to the minute of the Special City Growth and Regeneration Committee of 22nd February, under the heading “Rent Controls”, all the Members left the meeting whilst the item was being discussed:

- Alderman Dorrian, Councillors Kyle, Magee, McCabe, McDonough-Brown and McKeown, either as a landlord or a close family member was a landlord;
- Councillors Bunting, R. M. Donnelly and Murphy as private tenants; and
- Councillors Canavan and Hanvey who either owned or were associated with an Airbnb property.

Minutes of the Council

Moved by the Lord Mayor (Councillor Black),
Seconded by the Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor M. Kelly) and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the monthly meeting of the Council of 1st February be taken as read and signed as correct.

Official Announcements

The Lord Mayor thanked and congratulated the Mac Gabhann family for their tireless efforts in ensuring that Dáithí’s Law had been implemented.

The Lord Mayor welcomed the fact that Belfast City Council had become the first Council in Northern Ireland to become an accredited Living Wage Employer and both she and Councillor O’Hara acknowledged the commitment and work of the Council in achieving this status.

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The Lord Mayor also congratulated Holy Family Primary School on its achievement of being awarded a 'Green Flag Award' for its environmental efforts.

Alderman Copeland and representatives from Political Parties across the Chamber referred to the attempted murder of DCI John Caldwell in Omagh with all standing united in condemnation of the attack. The Chief Executive agreed to write to the Chief Constable and also the family of John Caldwell to condemn the attack and express its best wishes to the officer for a speedy recovery.

Councillor Flynn referred to the recent murder of Brianna Ghey, a young transgender girl, and expressed sympathy and solidarity to her family, friends and to the transgender community.

Councillor Bunting congratulated Mrs Jones, Principal of Belvoir Park Primary School, on her recent success on being awarded Principal of the Year in the recent Blackboard Awards and commended her work since taking up the role of Principal. The Lord Mayor agreed to send a letter of congratulations to mark the achievement.

Councillor Heading referred with sadness to the recent passing of Mr. Henry McDonald following a battle with cancer and paid tribute to his excellent work as a journalist and author, most recently, as political editor of the News Letter. The Lord Mayor, on behalf of the Council, agreed to send a letter of sympathy.

Request to Address the Council

The Council approved a request for Mr. Ian Cameron and Ms. Sharon Hearty (Extern) to address the Council in relation to the Motion later in the meeting – “Overdose Prevention facility in Belfast” and they were welcomed by the Lord Mayor.

Ms. Hearty commenced by thanking the Council for the opportunity address the meeting. She advised that an Overdose Prevention Facility (OPF) would offer a change in how street homeless people with problematic drug use were treated. She referred to the number of valuable services that already existed in Belfast but added that these services were stretched due to the complex needs of those needing help. She went on to state that the missing service was that of an OPF, stating that she felt that such a facility would help to reduce the amount of drug related deaths amongst the street homeless in Belfast.

Mr. Cameron then addressed the Members and detailed the bleak statistics which clearly demonstrated why an OPF in Belfast was necessary. Deaths due to drugs registered in Northern Ireland (NI) in 2021 were 212, over double that of 2011, NI had the second highest drug rate in the United Kingdom (UK), 9.4 deaths per 100,000 population (Scotland had 25.0), those dying from drug related deaths were highest amongst the 25-34 age group and HIV figures in Belfast were starting to increase.

He advised that a trial OPF would be a sanctioned hygienic place which offered:

- A controlled, monitored, and hygienic environment operated by an approved provider to ensure safe injecting to prevent drugs overdose

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of individuals who are homeless and highly dependent on intravenous drugs;

- An earlier intervention for life threatening health issues for those most at risk of early death;
- Regular contact with the most at risk of overdose death;
- Support with treatments to begin to step down from injecting and begin the journey of harm reduction; and
- Monitoring to reduce the risk of blood-borne virus transmission.

Ms. Hearty concluded by advising that an OPF was one of the ways of helping the most extremely vulnerable street drug users caught in the life-threatening trap of intravenous drug use which would support them to the point of reducing harm by drugs and she, once again, thanked the Council for the opportunity to present.

The Lord Mayor thanked the representatives for their presentation and for the work that Extern did on the streets of Belfast and they left the meeting.

Minutes of Strategic Policy and Resources Committee

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

That the minutes of the proceedings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 17th February, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted.

Amendment

Update on Dual-Language Street Signs

Moved by Councillor Beattie,
Seconded by Councillor Walsh,

That the decision of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 17th February, under the heading “update on Dual-Language Street Signs”, be amended to provide that the Council agrees, in principle, to progress with dual language signage in the Gaeltacht Quarter on block as a cost saving measure, subject to equality screening and when finance becomes available, with a report to be submitted to Committee in due course.

On a recorded vote, twenty-nine Members voted for the amendment and twenty-six against and it was declared carried.

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For 29	Against 26
The Lord Mayor (Councillor Black); Councillors Beattie, Bradley, Canavan, Carson, Matt Collins, Michael Collins, de Faoite, M. Donnelly, R.M. Donnelly, Duffy, Ferguson, Flynn, Garrett, Groogan, Heading, Lyons, Magee, Maskey, McAteer, McCabe, McCann, McKeown, McLaughlin, Murphy, O'Hara, Smyth Walsh and Whyte.	The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor M. Kelly); The High Sheriff (Councillor Kyle); Aldermen Copeland, Dorrian, Haire, McCoubrey and Rodgers; and Councillors Bower, Bunting, Cobain, Doran, Douglas, Hanvey, Howard, Hutchinson, T. Kelly, Long, Maghie, McCullough, McDonough-Brown, McMullan, Murray, Nelson, Newton, Spratt and Verner.

Following a proposal by Councillor Long, seconded by Councillor Murray, the Council further agreed to approve the erection for up to 100 Irish Street signs through the existing process by December 2023.

Adoption of Minutes

Subject to the foregoing amendments, the minutes of the proceedings of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee of 17th February, were approved and adopted.

Minutes of People and Communities Committee

Moved by Councillor Murray,
Seconded by Councillor O'Hara,

That the minutes of the proceedings of the People and Communities Committee of 7th and 13th February be approved and adopted.

Amendment

"InTheLoop recycling on the go campaign to improve the city's on street recycling provision"

Moved by Councillor Flynn,
Seconded by Councillor Groogan,

That the decision of the People and Communities Committee of 7th February, under the heading ""#InTheLoop recycling on the go campaign to improve the city's on street recycling provision", be rejected and, accordingly, the Council agrees to place a trial recycling bin in a

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park/open space in North, South, East and West Belfast, with the rest in the city centre.

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

For 13	Against 42
The Deputy Lord Mayor (Councillor M. Kelly); Councillors Bower, Flynn, Groogan, Harvey, Long, Maghie, McDonough-Brown, McMullan, Murray, Nelson, O'Hara and Smyth.	The Lord Mayor (Councillor Black); The High Sheriff (Councillor Kyle); Aldermen Copeland, Dorrian, Haire, McCoubrey and Rodgers; and Councillors Beattie, Bradley, Bunting, Canavan, Carson, Cobain, Matt Collins, Michael Collins, de Faoite, M. Donnelly, R. M. Donnelly, Doran, Douglas, Duffy, Ferguson, Garrett, Heading, Howard, Hutchinson, T. Kelly, Lyons, Magee, Maskey, McAteer, McCabe, McCann, McCullough, McKeown, McLaughlin, Murphy, Newton, Spratt, Verner, Walsh and Whyte.

Adoption of Minutes

The minutes of the proceedings of the People and Communities Committee of 7th and 13th February were approved and adopted.

Minutes of City Growth and Regeneration Committee

Moved by Councillor Murphy,
Seconded by Councillor Maskey,

That the minutes of the proceedings of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee of 8th and 22nd February be approved and adopted.

Amendment

Rent Controls

Moved by Councillor Ferguson,
Seconded by Councillor O'Hara,

That the decision of the Special City Growth and Regeneration Committee of 22nd February, under the heading "Rent Controls", be amended to provide that the Council agrees to add the following additional request to the letters to the Department for Communities Permanent

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Secretary and the Head of the Civil Service, requesting that control rents locally be vested to the Council. Furthermore, the Council agrees to write to Bristol City Council to express interest in their Living Rent Commission, requesting access to its findings and seeking to develop a working relationship, where possible, relating to the issue.

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

**Strategic Planning and Performance
Group – GP Services**

At the request of Councillor Heading it was agreed that the following questions be added to the letter the Permanent Secretary to request an update on the work being undertaken to resolve GP indemnity in Northern Ireland:

- what mitigation measures were being taken to try and address the number of GPs leaving the Health Services; and
- what measures were being taken to try and increase the number of medical students year on year.

Amendment

**York Street Interchange (YSI) Placemaking
and Active Travel Review (PATR)**

Moved by Councillor Maskey,
Seconded by Councillor Murphy

That the decision of the Special City Growth and Regeneration Committee of 22nd February, under the heading “York Street Interchange (YSI) Placemaking and Active Travel Review (PATR)”, be amended to provide that the Council will only reconsider corporately supporting the York Street Interchange project when confirmation is given by the Department for Infrastructure that they will proceed with the option that ensures safety of current residents, delivers the best place making and regeneration outcomes including plans for the bridges across the Lagan and a commitment from the Department that they will co-ordinate efforts to work collaboratively with all relevant stake holders including Belfast City Council, Department for Communities, Housing Executive, Belfast Harbour, The Ashton Centre and Sailortown Regeneration as part of the overall scheme.

At the request of several of the Members, the proposer agreed that the amendment should also include Community Stakeholders, the Stella Maris Hostel and Ulster University as relevant stakeholders and state that the project needed to address both the air quality needs and housing objectives in the city.

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Subject to the aforementioned additions, the Council unanimously adopted the amendment.

Adoption of Minutes

Subject to the foregoing addition and amendment, the minutes of the proceedings of the City Growth and Regeneration Committee of 8th and 22nd February, were approved and adopted.

Licensing Committee

Moved by Councillor Matt Collins,
Seconded by Councillor McLaughlin and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the Licensing Committee of 15th February, 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 Carson and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the Pre - Determination Hearing and Planning Committee of 14th February, 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 Walsh,
Seconded by Alderman Copeland and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the minutes of Climate and City Resilience Committee of 9th February, be approved and adopted, subject to Councillor Copeland being added to the list of attendees.

Minutes of Standards and Business Committee

Moved by Councillor Hanvey,
Seconded by Councillor Kyle and

Resolved - That the minutes of the proceedings of the Standards and Business Committee of 21st February, 2023, omitting matters in respect of which the Council has delegated its powers to the Committee, be approved and adopted, subject to Councillor Kyle being added to the list of attendees.

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Motions

Overdose Prevention Facility in Belfast

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

“This Council supports the establishment of an Overdose Prevention Facility in Belfast. This Council will work with key partners in the community, voluntary and statutory sector to bring together a partnership to advocate for the establishment of an Overdose Prevention Facility (OPC) for the city. With almost 350 drug related deaths in the city from 2017-2021 and over 1,000 needles recovered each month, a facility like this will save lives and reduce the amount of discarded drug debris. There are over 200 Overdose Prevention Facilities in 14 countries across the world.

While we are conscious that the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 is an inhibitor to the establishment of this service and that it would require some form of special legal dispensation from the Act for the facility to be lawful, it is clear that current policy is not saving lives. In the absence of a local Assembly to deliver reform and innovation that can save vulnerable lives, this Council will act as a civic leader by requesting our City Solicitor and Chief Executive to engage with partners and to lobby Belfast Trust, PSNI, the Departments of Health and Justice and the Attorney General to make the case for special dispensation.”

The motion was seconded by Councillor Smyth.

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Murray,
Seconded by Councillor Bower,

That the motion standing in the name of Councillor O'Hara and seconded by Councillor Smyth be amended to also include:

“That this Council facilitates an open call to organisations who wish to be involved in the setting up of such a facility to work together to draft a proposal on what this service would include, centred on providing overdose prevention facilities and wrap around support services for those in need, and to write to the relevant agencies to urge them to provide multi-year funding for the Complex Lives strategy.”

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The proposer agreed to accept the amendment.

The motion was put to the meeting and passed.

Lord Mayor
Chairperson