

Council

SPECIAL MEETING OF BELFAST CITY COUNCIL

Held in the City Hall and also remotely, via Microsoft Teams, on Monday, 14th March, 2022 at 4.00 p.m., pursuant to notice.

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

Summons

The Divisional Solicitor submitted the summons convening the meeting.

Apologies

Apologies for inability to attend were reported for Aldermen Copeland and McCoubrey and Councillors Flynn, Long, McDonough-Brown, McReynolds, Pankhurst and Whyte.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

Motion

Cost of Living

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

“This Council recognises with deep concern the cost-of-living crisis that is impacting hundreds of thousands of families across our society, and the rise in home energy and electricity costs, which has placed a severe burden on already struggling households and businesses across our city.

The collapse of the Executive caused by the resignation of DUP First Minister Paul Givan is preventing a budget, or the allocation of £300m available from Treasury from being agreed and is hampering Ministers from using their full spending power to give people relief who rely and depend upon it.

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This Council calls for the immediate restoration of the Executive in order to allocate and agree spending to support workers and families.

Furthermore, this Council calls upon the Westminster Government to take action, where local Ministers cannot, by scrapping VAT on domestic energy bills and cutting duty on home heating oil, petrol and diesel, for the duration of the energy crisis; introducing a windfall tax on energy generators and redirect money towards supporting families; reverse the planned increase in National Insurance Contributions; and halt the planned change in red diesel entitlement.”

The motion was seconded by Councillor McLaughlin.

The proposer advised the Council that he wished to amend the wording of the proposal to allow for the following two additions. After the word “families” in the third paragraph insert the following sentence:

“(This would include requesting an expansion of the £200 home energy scheme to include others considered particularly vulnerable at this time).”

To include an additional final paragraph, as follows:

“And finally, this Council agrees to present the Members with further proposal including additional resources at the earliest opportunity to create a citywide hardship fund to support those most at need at this time.”

The Council agreed to the updated wording for the proposal and the proposer also acceded to a request from Councillor Heading to add the following additional wording after the word “families” in the third paragraph “or the introduction of emergency legislation to release the £300 million.”

The proposal, as amended, therefore reads:

“This Council recognises with deep concern the cost-of-living crisis that is impacting hundreds of thousands of families across our society, and the rise in home energy and electricity costs, which has placed a severe burden on already struggling households and businesses across our city.

The collapse of the Executive caused by the resignation of DUP First Minister Paul Givan is preventing a budget, or the allocation of £300m available from Treasury from being agreed and is hampering Ministers from using their full spending power to give people relief who rely and depend upon it.

This Council calls for the immediate restoration of the Executive in order to allocate and agree spending to support workers and families or the introduction of emergency legislation to release the £300 million. (This would include requesting an expansion of the £200 home energy scheme to include others considered particularly vulnerable at this time).

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Furthermore, this Council calls upon the Westminster Government to take action, where local Ministers cannot, by scrapping VAT on domestic energy bills and cutting duty on home heating oil, petrol and diesel, for the duration of the energy crisis; introducing a windfall tax on energy generators and redirect money towards supporting families; reverse the planned increase in National Insurance Contributions; and halt the planned change in red diesel entitlement.

And finally, this Council agrees to present the Members with further proposal including additional resources at the earliest opportunity to create a citywide hardship fund to support those most at need at this time.”

Amendment

Moved by Councillor Ferguson,
Seconded by Councillor Collins,

That the motion standing in the name of Councillor Garrett and seconded by Councillor McLaughlin be amended to read as follows:

“This Council recognises with deep concern the cost-of-living crisis that is impacting hundreds of thousands of families across our society, and the rise in home energy and electricity costs, which has placed a severe burden on already struggling households and businesses across our city.

The collapse of the Executive caused by the resignation of DUP First Minister Paul Givan is preventing a budget, or the allocation of £300m available from Treasury from being agreed and is hampering Ministers from using their full spending power to give people relief who rely and depend upon it.

The Council condemns the failure of the Stormont Executive to declare a Hardship Emergency months ago and to put in place financial assistance in line with the scale of the cost-of-living crisis.

Accordingly, the Council demands that any restoration of the Executive to deal with this crisis must be based on agreeing to allocate and agree spending to support workers and families; to implement above inflation pay raises across the public sector; raise the minimum wage to a living wage; expand the benefits system, by scrapping the benefit cap and restoring the Universal Credit £20-a-week uplift; expand the existing Energy Payment Support Scheme; implement a rent freeze and rent reductions in the private sector; and adopt the full recommendations of the Anti-Poverty Strategy Expert Advisory Panel report from December 2020.

Furthermore, this Council calls upon the Westminster Government to take action, where local Ministers cannot, by:

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- scrapping VAT on domestic energy bills, cutting duty on home heating oil, petrol and diesel, and introducing price caps to ensure customers benefit, rather than fuel companies, for the duration of the energy crisis;
- introducing a windfall tax on energy generators and redirect money towards supporting families;
- reversing the planned increase in National Insurance Contributions;
- halting the planned change in red diesel entitlement;
- and implement a permanent increase on corporation tax to ensure those who profited from the pandemic assist with getting those in need through this crisis.”

The Council agreed to vote on the amended motion, on a recorded vote, sixteen Members voted for the amendment, and thirty-two against, and it was declared lost.

| <u>For 16</u> | <u>Against 32</u> |
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| The Lord Mayor, (Councillor Nicholl); and Councillors Matt Collins, Michael Collins, de Faoite, Ferguson, Groogan, Hanvey, Heading, M. Kelly, Lyons, McAllister, McKeown, McMullan, Mulholland, O’Hara and Smyth. | The Deputy Lord Mayor, (Alderman Haire); The High Sheriff (Councillor Hussey); and Aldermen Kingston, Rodgers and Sandford; and Councillors Baker, Beattie, Black, Brooks, Bunting, Canavan, Carson, Cobain, Corr, Donnelly, Garrett, Gormley, Howard, Hutchinson, T. Kelly, Kyle, Maskey, McAteer, McCabe, McCann, McCullough, McLaughlin, Murphy, Newton, Spratt, Verner and Walsh. |

The Motion standing in the name of Councillor Garrett, as altered by the proposer and seconder, was thereupon put to the Council as the substantive motion, on a recorded vote, thirty-three Members voted for the amendment, and seventeen against, and it was declared passed.

| <u>For 33</u> | <u>Against 17</u> |
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| The Lord Mayor, (Councillor Nicholl); and Councillors Baker, Beattie, Black, Canavan, Carson, Matt Collins, Michael Collins, Corr, de Faoite, Donnelly, Ferguson, Garrett, Gormley, Groogan, Hanvey, Heading, M. Kelly, Lyons, Magee, Maskey, McAllister, McAteer, | The Deputy Lord Mayor, (Alderman Haire); The High Sheriff (Councillor Hussey); and Aldermen Dorrian, Kingston, Rodgers and Sandford; and Councillors Brooks, Bunting, Cobain, Howard, Hutchinson, T. |

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| McCabe, McCann, McKeown, McLaughlin, McMullan, Mulholland, Murphy, O'Hara, Smyth and Walsh. | Kelly, Kyle, McCullough, Newton, Spratt and Verner. |
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Lord Mayor
Chairperson