

**LISBURN & CASTLEREAGH CITY COUNCIL****Minutes of the Environment and Sustainability Committee held in the Council Chamber, Island Civic Centre, and remotely, on Wednesday 1 November 2023 at 6.00 pm****PRESENT IN CHAMBER:**

Councillor C McCready (Chairperson)

Aldermen J Baird, M Gregg, S Skillen and J Tinsley

Councillors R Carlin, P Catney, G Hynds, P Kennedy, A McIntyre, M McKeever and N Parker

**PRESENT IN REMOTE LOCATION:**

Councillor R Carlin (Vice-Chairperson)

Councillors J Lavery BEM, M McKeever and N Parker

**OTHER MEMBERS:**

Alderman A Grehan (Remote)

Councillors N Eaton and S Lowry (Chamber)

**IN ATTENDANCE:****In Chamber:**

Acting Director of Environmental Services (RH)

Acting Head of Service (Waste Management and Operational Services) (JK)

Acting Head of Service (Environmental Health, Risk and Emergency Planning) (SC)

Business Improvement Manager, Building Control (PMcA)

Member Services Officers (BS, BF)

**Commencement of the Meeting**

At the commencement of the meeting, the Chairperson, Councillor C McCready, welcomed those present to the meeting of the Environment and Sustainability Committee. The Chairperson advised that the meeting would be audio recorded unless the item on the agenda was to be considered under confidential business.

Councillor G Hynds entered the meeting at 6.02 pm.

At this point, the Member Services Officer read out the names of the Elected Members and Officers in attendance at the meeting. The Chairperson, Councillor C McCready, stated that, whilst the meeting was being recorded, unauthorised recording was not permitted, as per the Council's Standing Orders. He asked that mobile phones be put on silent or switched off for the duration of the meeting.

In accordance with the Protocol for Remote Meetings, the Chairperson asked that those attending via zoom to ensure that the meeting could not be seen or heard by any other person at their remote location when confidential business was being considered.

Commencement of the Meeting (Cont'd)

Councillor M McKeever joined the meeting remotely at 6.03 pm.

The Acting Director of Environmental Services proceeded to outline the evacuation procedures in the case of an emergency.

1. Apologies (00:02:50)

It was agreed to accept apologies for non-attendance at the meeting on behalf of The Right Worshipful the Mayor, Councillor A Gowan, the Deputy Mayor, Councillor G McCleave, Councillors S Burns and R McLernon, and the Head of Service (Building Control & Sustainability).

2. Declarations of Interest (00:03:15)

There were no Declarations of Interest.

3. Report by the Head of Service (Building Control and Sustainability) (00:03:22)

3.1 Department of Finance Consultation on a Range of Technical Issues Relating to the Building Regulations NI (00:03:36)

The Business Improvement Manager, Building Control, presented this item of business in the absence of the Head of Service (Building Control & Sustainability).

The report circulated outlined the background and key issues in connection with the above consultation and a weblink to the Department of Finance's consultation was also provided.

Further to the report on the above consultation at the October meeting of the Committee and to the subsequent granting of delegated authority by the Council at its meeting on 24 October 2023, a draft response to the above consultation for approval which focused on the Council's direct Building Regulation enforcement function had been appended to the Officer's report.

The Business Improvement Manager, Building Control, and the Acting Director of Environmental Services noted comments and questions from a Member in connection with a number of the responses to questions in the draft response. The Member also sought clarification on other comments contained in the draft response.

It was noted that the Officers would follow up with the Member concerned to provide the necessary clarification and to consider any necessary amendments to the draft response. It was agreed that an amended draft response highlighting any changes would be re-circulated to the Committee prior to the response being submitted to the Department of Finance.

3.1 Department of Finance Consultation on a Range of Technical Issues Relating to the Building Regulations NI (Cont'd)

A number of Members expressed thanks to the Officers for their efforts in preparing this response to the consultation.

It was proposed by Alderman M Gregg, seconded by Councillor G Hynds, and in line with delegated authority granted to the Committee, a final response be submitted to the Department of Finance by the stipulated closing date subject to any amendments being made in relation to the issues raised.

4. Report by the Acting Head of Service (Environmental Health, Risk and Emergency Planning)

4.1 Notice of Motion in the name of Councillor N Eaton on the Subject of the Impact of Animal Welfare Budget Cuts by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) (00:15:44)

The Committee had been provided with a copy of the following Notice of Motion in the name of Councillor N Eaton, which had been referred to the Committee by Council at its meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2023 for consideration:

“This Council considers the impact of cuts from DAERA to Animal Welfare in Northern Ireland from £1.25m to zero with great concern. These cuts have a high risk of negatively impacting the work done by local government in the protection of non-farmed animals in Lisburn and Castlereagh area and consequently could lead to more suffering and maltreatment of animals. The Council will urgently write to DAERA Permanent Secretary to express opposition to this decision and to urge an alternative solution to be found.

Furthermore, given the significant pressure on Animal Welfare in Northern Ireland, we ask that through the Environmental Services Committee that Officers attending the Animal Welfare Strategic Board and those from the Multi Agency Animal Welfare Forum keep both members informed of the work of these groups and provides an opportunity to contribute to this work.”

The Notice of Motion was proposed by Alderman M Gregg and seconded by Alderman S Skillen.

With the permission of the Chairperson, Councillor N Eaton elaborated on her Notice of Motion during which she highlighted a number of issues in relation to the current state of animal welfare in Northern Ireland, including:

- Animal welfare is in crisis in Northern Ireland and animal welfare officers and charities are under incredible pressure
- the Council should do what it can to support the vital services that uphold animal welfare
- there have been additional pressures caused by the Covid pandemic when the number of dog owners increased dramatically, and unethical breeders exploited this for profit and subjecting animals to poor living conditions

4.1 Notice of Motion in the name of Councillor N Eaton on the Subject of the Impact of Animal Welfare Budget Cuts by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) (Cont'd)

- many pet owners having to give their pets away due to the impact of the current cost of living crisis causing additional pressures on animal shelters
- the increase in the number of dog attacks on people and pets which is attributable to unethical breeders and irresponsible dog ownership
- the absence of a functioning NI Assembly

In seconding the Notice of Motion, Alderman S Skillen, made a number of comments in support of the motion during which she emphasised that two Animal Welfare Officers for the entire Lisburn & Castlereagh Council area was not adequate. Councillor Skillen also welcomed the fact that Gavin Robinson MP had sent a letter to the Home Affairs Select Committee at Westminster requesting an investigation into the Barnett formula.

A number of Members spoke in support of the Notice of Motion and the Acting Director of Environmental Services responded to a number of questions and comments thereon. A Member put on record the good work by Council Officers in regard to animal welfare.

Councillor Eaton, in summing up on her Motion, expressed thanks to the Committee for their support and advised that verbal updates from Officers attending the Animal Welfare Strategic Board and those from the Multi Agency Animal Welfare Forum would be acceptable.

At this point Councillor Eaton commended the efforts of the Council's Animal Welfare Officers during the past few days in relation to the severe flooding in a field in which horses were kept, these efforts demonstrating the dedication of the Council Officers.

The Chairperson, Councillor C McCready, put the Notice of Motion to the meeting and it was agreed unanimously that the Notice of Motion on the subject of Animal Welfare be approved as proposed by Alderman M Gregg and seconded by Alderman S Skillen.

4.2 Notice of Motion in the name of Councillor S Lowry on the Subject of Clean Air (00:37:40)

The Committee had been provided with a copy of the following Notice of Motion in the name of Councillor S Lowry, which had been referred to the Committee by Council at its meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2023 for consideration:

“Having learned lessons of the importance of ventilation and clean indoor air for health and productivity during the Covid pandemic; and seeking to take all reasonable steps to enable use of all Council facilities by all citizens, including the vulnerable and so further inclusion; and seeking to care for the health and wellbeing of Council employees, this Council will explore the necessary requirements to signing and implementing the COVID safety pledge; to report on steps already taken to prioritise clean indoor air in Lagan Valley Island and other Council owned and occupied premises, and on what further or additional steps could be taken to improve indoor air quality for

4.2 Notice of Motion in the name of Councillor S Lowry on the Subject of Clean Air (Cont'd)

employees and service users; and to develop and promote advice that can be followed to provide clean indoor air at events supported by Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council.”

With the permission of the Chairperson, Councillor S Lowry elaborated on her Notice of Motion.

At the outset Councillor Lowry thanked Rebecca Davies who had assisted and provided guidance on her Notice of Motion, and also her party colleague, Councillor Jenna Maghie, who had successfully brought this Notice of Motion before Belfast City Council.

Councillor Lowry proceeded to highlight a number of issues in support of her Notice of Motion, including:

- the difficulties experienced by a local family whose daughter suffered from long Covid
- this Notice of Motion was much wider than the Covid Pandemic – it was about clean indoor air and inclusion
- many people suffer from conditions such as allergies, respiratory infections, asthma and other immunosuppressing diseases and it was important that residents and visitors know that they can come to the Council’s premises to attend conferences and other events safely.
- people spend 90% of our time indoors
- the Covid Safety pledge has been signed up to by a number of authorities in England and also by Belfast City Council
- research has shown that the Covid Safety pledge had lowered absences in schools and workplaces, and by signing up to the Covid Safety pledge would benefit Council staff and ultimately continuity in services to our ratepayers
- by reporting on what we have done in our Council properties gives the Council the opportunity to highlight what steps have been taken in relation to indoor clean air and also the opportunity to lead the way on this important matter.

The Notice of Motion was proposed by Alderman M Gregg and seconded by Councillor P Kennedy.

Alderman M Gregg, as the proposer of the Motion, made a number of points in support of the Notice of Motion. He discussed the Motion as having the health of the most vulnerable people at its core, and the fact that many of the Council’s residents were suffering from long Covid and other respiratory diseases, many of whom were children. Many of the residents were still fearful of using Council facilities and that this Motion was seeking to change that. He stated that the Motion was also about protecting the health of our staff and that he looked forward to reports on the feasibility of this Motion being presented to Committee.

The Acting Director responded to questions from the Committee in connection with a number of practicalities that required to be considered, for example in relation to the monitoring air quality levels, advised that Officers would be required to investigate a number of issues relating to the Motion, including cost issues.

4.2 Notice of Motion in the name of Councillor S Lowry on the Subject of Clean Air (Cont'd)

The Business Improvement Manager, Building Control, also made a number of comments in relation to building regulations.

The Chairperson invited Councillor Lowry to sum up on her motion. Councillor Lowry expressed thanks to the Committee for their support and reiterated that this was an opportunity for the Council to lead the way and to improve the health of staff and the community.

The Chairperson, Councillor C McCready, put the Notice of Motion to the meeting and it was agreed unanimously that the Notice of Motion on the subject of clean air be approved, as proposed by Alderman M Gregg and seconded by Councillor P Kennedy.

At this point the Chairperson welcomed Councillor N Eaton and Councillor S Lowry to the Environment & Sustainability Committee meeting and thanked them for their attendance.

4.3 Christmas Eve Trading Hours for Large Retailers (00:56:57)

The Committee considered a report setting out the background and key issues in connection with Christmas Eve Trading Hours for Large Retailers.

It was proposed by Councillor G Hynds, seconded by Alderman M Gregg, and agreed to recommend that in order to support local businesses the relaxation of Sunday Trading hours be relaxed for large retailers from 12.00 noon on Sunday, 24<sup>th</sup> December 2023.

Councillor Hynds paid tribute to the efforts of retail staff on the run up to Christmas.

4.4 Update on Dog Fouling Initiatives including DNA Testing to Support the Prevention of Dog Fouling (00:59:14)

Further to the decision of the Committee in September 2023 that a report be tabled at a future meeting to revisit the feasibility of DNA testing to support the prevention of dog fouling and to update Members on current dog fouling initiatives, the Committee had been furnished with:

- a) a detailed report on DNA testing and
- b) a report outlining a range of innovative and engaging initiatives to effectively reduce dog fouling across the Council area.

The Acting Head of Service (Environmental Health, Risk and Emergency Planning) outlined the key issues therein and responded to a number of comments and questions from the Committee in regard to issues arising from the appended reports.

4.4 Update on Dog Fouling Initiatives including DNA Testing to Support the Prevention of Dog Fouling (Cont'd)

The issue of bag dispensers not being replenished in certain areas was raised by a Member and the Head of Service undertook to issue a reminder to those responsible across the Council area to endeavour to refill their dispensers. She also asked Members to inform her of any areas that were particularly prone to having empty bag dispensers.

Also, in response to other concerns raised the Head of Service agreed to lobby the relevant Government Department on the issue of dog licence fees and Dog Control fixed penalties being set by councils directly.

In regard to the text messaging initiative which sent messages to registered dog owners to remind them that their dog licence was due for renewal shortly, the Head of Service undertook to look into the possibility of an email address being used for anyone who didn't have a mobile phone.

Councillor P Catney left the meeting at 7.12 pm.

It was proposed by Alderman M Gregg, seconded by Alderman S Skillen, and agreed to recommend that:

- a) the Committee note the recent initiatives being undertaken by the Dog Control Service in order to reduce dog fouling throughout the City;
- b) the DNA testing of dogs for the purposes of preventing dog fouling be not progressed, and
- c) Officers lobby the relevant Government Department on the issue of dog licence fees and Dog Control fixed penalties being set by councils directly.

5. Any Other Business

5.1 December Meeting of the Environment & Sustainability Committee - Earlier Start Time (01:15:00)  
The Chairperson, Councillor C McCready

Chairperson advised that in order to facilitate a community Christmas Tree Switch-On event, the meeting of the Environment and Sustainability Committee scheduled to take place on Wednesday, 6th December would commence at the earlier time of 5.30 pm.

5.2 HRC Reports (01:15:44)  
Alderman S Skillen

Alderman S Skillen having proposed at the Environment & Sustainability Committee in June 2023 that a report be brought to the Committee in the Autumn time in connection with the Dundonald HRC, advised that in the absence of such a report she had spoken with the Head of Service on this matter. Alderman Skillen requested that this report be brought to the Committee in the Springtime.

5.2 HRC Reports (Cont'd)  
Alderman S Skillen

It was noted that the Deputy Mayor, Councillor G McCleave, had made a similar proposal at that time in regard to The Cutts HRC and in this regard requested that two separate reports be prepared as they were on individual issues.

5.3 Community Resilience Groups (01:16:27)  
Alderman S Skillen

Alderman S Skillen having referred to the recent severe flooding in her DEA (Dundonald) requested that consideration be given to the establishment of community resilience groups in each of the DEAs effected to include statutory agencies such as Department for Infrastructure, Rivers Agency and community representatives.

The Acting Head of Service (Environmental Health, Risk and Emergency Planning) referred to the establishment of a Community Resilience Group in Dromara following a flooding incident a number of months ago which was being developed as a pilot project and advised that there were plans to establish community resilience groups in other areas. The Acting Head of Service undertook to update the Committee on the development of these groups in due course.

Comments were noted from the Acting Director of Environmental Services in regard to the importance of the community having an important role to play in as it was the community representatives who were often the first responders in such incidents.

Alderman S Skillen referred to difficulties that had been experienced with the various agencies during the recent flooding incidents and emphasised the importance of the statutory agencies working together and providing appropriate advice and support when necessary.

5.4 Free Off-Street Car Parking on Saturdays in December and January  
Alderman J Tinsley (01:19:33)

As part of the Council's support to local retailers it was proposed by Alderman J Tinsley that the Council offers free off-street car parking in Lisburn on each Saturday in December 2023 and January 2024.

The Acting Head of Service (Environmental Health, Risk and Emergency Planning) reminded the Committee that in November 2022 the Council had agreed (as recommended by the then Environmental Services Committee) that free off-street car parking on Saturdays in December be approved as an annual concession.

In view of the above Alderman Tinsley amended his proposal that the Council offers free off-street car parking on each Saturday in January in 2024. Alderman Skillen seconded this proposal.



5.4 Free Off-Street Car Parking on Saturdays in December and January  
(Cont'd)  
Alderman J Tinsley

A discussion ensued during which the Acting Director of Environmental Services responded to a number of comments and questions from the Committee in connection with Alderman Tinsley's proposal which had budgetary implications that would require review prior to any decision being taken. He undertook to discuss the matter further with the relevant Director the following morning in order to ascertain the appropriate course of action.

Alderman Tinsley having taken account of the Acting Director's comments withdrew his proposal and the Acting Director agreed to bring a report on this matter to the Committee, if required.

5.5 Tour of HRC Sites (01:43:58)  
Councillor G Hynds

Councillor G Hynds expressed thanks to the Acting Director of Environmental Services and the Acting Head of Service (Waste Management and Operational Services) for the successful tour of the HRC sites which he stated was very beneficial for those Members who had attended.

5.6 Graffiti Incident – Seymour Street Methodist Church (01:44:25)  
Councillor G Hynds

Councillor G Hynds expressed thanks and appreciation to the Acting Heads of Service for having assisted with the incident of graffiti at Seymour Street Methodist Church which he stated had been disappointing especially as there had been an event taking place at the church for young people at that time.

5.7 Emergency Financial Assistance Scheme in the event of Flooding (01:45:08)  
Councillor A McIntyre

Councillor A McIntyre enquired if Officers could bring a report to the Committee identifying the locations and addresses that had received payment more than once from the Emergency Financial Assistance Scheme in order to have that important evidence to lobby relevant agencies in relation to flood mitigation going forward.

5.8 Litter Bins 'Bagged' pending Replacement/Repair (01:46::19)  
Alderman M Gregg

The Head of Service (Waste Management and Operational Services) responded to questions from Alderman M Gregg in connection with the processes in place to replace or repair damaged litter bins across the Council area. Alderman Gregg requested assurances that the processes and records would be improved.

Alderman J Tinsley left the meeting at 7.51 pm.

Alderman S Skillen indicated that she would email the Head of Service about one particular litter bin in her DEA.

5.9 Free Off-Street Car Parking on Saturdays in December and January  
(Cont'd from item 5.4 above) (01:50:32)  
Councillor J Laverty

Councillor J Laverty having spoken with the Director of Regeneration & Growth advised that the matter of free off-street car parking in Lisburn on Saturdays in January would be discussed the following evening at the Regeneration & Growth Committee meeting.

There being no further business, the Chairperson thanked everyone for their attendance and the meeting concluded at 7.53 pm.

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Chairperson