

Against Zero Hour Contracts

Following a motion she brought on the issue to October's meeting of Belfast City Council, Claire Hanna is working proposals through council to try to ensure that no council staff have 'zero hour contracts (ZHCs)' imposed on them. While acknowledging that ZHCs can suit a minority of employees and provide flexibility for employers, Cllr Hanna highlighted the potential for discrimination, inability of workers to plan for family or financial commitments, and cited an authoritative Chartered Institute of Personnel Development report that found a majority of ZHC staff needed more hours to make ends meet. It is estimated that some 30,000 workers in Northern Ireland are employed on these terms.

"Life on a ZHC means a life permanently on-call, uncertain as to whether a sufficient number of working hours can be secured each week to pay the bills and often fearful that any sign of inflexibility or unwillingness to work will lead to future hours being withdrawn as a penalty – what is commonly known as being "zeroed-down". As councillors we have a huge duty to our ratepayers but also to our staff and it is appropriate for Belfast City Council to lead by example as a responsible employer"

Hanna welcomes withdrawal of 'toxic' Planning Bill

Cllr Claire Hanna, Chair of Belfast City Council's Town Planning committee, has commended Environment Minister Mark H Durkan for withdrawing the flawed Planning Bill at Stormont.

While the changes initially proposed to Planning by former minister Alex Attwood were welcome and aimed to make decisions more accountable locally, last minute changes by DUP and SF would have hugely restricted the right of residents to object to applications in their area and transferred more decisions to perpetually deadlocked OFMDFM.

"My colleague Mark H Durkan received legal advice suggesting that the restrictions in the bill could run counter to the European Convention on Human Rights, and would certainly take power from local residents to appeal unfair planning decisions. He is right to stand up against bad law and power grabbing and his decision to scrap the legislation was welcomed by Alliance, the UUP, the Green Party and a range of civil society groups"

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Balmoral; clean, green, shared & safe.



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Social Democratic and Labour Party
SDLP Representatives in this area:
Cllr Claire Hanna

Cllr Bernie Kelly

Alasdair McDonnell MP MLA

Fearghal McKinney MLA

"Councillors are here to help ensure you get the best out of public services. If I can help you with a council service or to liaise with external agencies (like NI Water, Roads Service, PSNI etc), please contact me at any time by telephone, email, Twitter or by post. I'm happy to take on a wide range of cases and while I don't work out of a constituency office, I can meet with you at a time that suits if you'd like to discuss an issue in person."

Cllr Claire Hanna



Balmoral Report

Winter 2013



An update from Councillor Claire Hanna

Education funding proposals bad news for local schools

If Education Minister John O'Dowd's Common Funding proposals are implemented, primary schools in Balmoral will be among the biggest losers. Ironically framed as a social justice initiative, this is a raid on 81% of schools based solely on the crude measurement of Free School Meal (FSM) entitlement, with no performance indicators built in to establish whether or not the money diverted is being used effectively. Claire Hanna made a personal submission to the consultation, reflecting concerns raised by local parents.

Over this funding cycle, St Anne's Dunmurry, St Bride's Derryvolgie and Finaghy Primary would collectively lose £237,879, despite having an average of 17% of children on FSM and a combined total of 282 children with Special Educational Needs (SEN).

The Minister has said that these cuts should not affect children with SEN. However, the bulk of a school's budget is already committed to teachers' salaries with little discretionary spending available for SEN, so it will directly affect these 282 children. In South Belfast in particular there has been significant immigration with many pupils enrolling whose first language is not English. These children may need additional support and these proposals would deprive them of it.

John O'Dowd is right when he says that educational underachievement is one of the main obstacles to obtaining employment and leading a fulfilling life. However, taking resources from blameless children is not the way to address the issue. If these proposals go through, there will be little to stop the Minister squeezing the budgets of these schools year-on-year and going on to do the same to second-level schools in the area.

Security alert disruption

At least five security alerts have caused significant disruption in Balmoral since September. Homes have been evacuated and roads closed following suspect devices in Finaghy, Malone and Stockman's Lane, causing major upset for nearby residents as well as disruption for commuters, school children and local traders.

Commenting on the alerts Claire Hanna said *"These bombscares are as pointless and disruptive as those that Belfast residents endured for the last few decades, and this latest spate won't achieve anything either, except to polarise and annoy people"*.

As house evacuations have become more frequent and lengthy, Claire has been liaising with PSNI and Council to discuss how we can better communicate with those most affected by the alerts and provide support where necessary.

If you find yourself affected, Claire may have access to regular updates so do get in touch or follow [Twitter.com/ClaireHanna](https://twitter.com/ClaireHanna).



Upgrade work at Drumglass Park

Claire Hanna has welcomed confirmation from Belfast City Council of a series of works at Drumglass (Cranmore) Park that will allow the site to be used for occasional events, while preserving it primarily an open, green space for everyday use.

Further to improvements to the fence around the park, Council has agreed to a refresh of the flower beds at the main entrance, an adjustment to the wall bordering the Lisburn Road (to allow more light, while maintaining security and protection from traffic noise) and LED lighting beneath trees to create subtle, seasonal displays. In consultation with the Lisburn Road Traders Association and Paperclip Architects, the Council will also be installing service and electricity points to allow occasional events like the recent Jazz Festival, and potentially a farmers market, to take place. Claire (pictured, right, in the park) had previously also pushed for a replacement bandstand roof and additional bins.

Flooding Updates

Though we have avoided a major flooding incident in Balmoral so far this year, residents endured 'near misses' in late May and October and local drainage infrastructure clearly still needs major investment. Claire Hanna has been working hard with local residents, other elected representatives and the relevant agencies to ensure these issues are not overlooked, with some of the outcomes below achieved.

- Rivers Agency have agreed to take on responsibility for and maintain the watercourse that runs from Woodlands Grange and previously contributed to flooding on **Finaghy Road North** and in **Orchardville**. This is now inspected when heavy rain is forecast, and there are new signs asking people not to dump material in them and to phone Rivers Agency if the watercourse becomes blocked. In recent heavy rain, this watercourse has not overflowed.
- Formal upgrade works to the main Lisburn Road pipe have already begun, benefitting **Sicily Park, Marguerite Park** and **Greystown** residents with an estimated 20% additional capacity in the pipes around these streets, though the flood risk remains until work is completed.
- Clearance work in pipes under roads and houses has reduced risk to homes in **Ashton**, though Claire is still pushing for development of a 'sink' area on waste ground to collect rain run-off from the M1.
- In **Orchardville**, Claire is supporting residents in their campaign to persuade NI Water of the need to upgrade the inadequate pumping station that doesn't clear water quickly enough in heavy rain.
- In **Erinvale**, Claire worked with Council to have new drainage installed along the bank of trees on Rathmore Gardens. Combined with clearance work last year of the nearby culverts and recent dredging of pipes under houses in September, this will hopefully reduce flooding in this area.
- In **Malone**, Claire has arranged for special attention to be paid to ensuring gullies remain clear of leaves, and has requested council to investigate saturated back gardens backing on to Strangford playing fields.
- Crucially, many residents are now without flood insurance or have the burden of excess fees of up to £10,000. Claire has lobbied the Association of British Insurers and Consumer Council to ensure a new arrangement is in place to guarantee comprehensive and affordable flood coverage to all those in flood affected areas. She has also been working with the council's Emergency Planning department to ensure that resources are targeted properly when flood warnings are issued and that residents have access to sandbags, 'road closed' signs and disinfection facilities if sewage does overflow. If you are interested in working up a Community Resilience Plan with your neighbours, please get in touch.



Post Office News

After she first highlighted the issue in early September, Claire Hanna has been in contact with the Post Office centrally to secure commitment that a Post Office will remain on the Lisburn Road if the proposed sale of the Co-operative supermarket to Marks and Spencer goes through. Although her preference is keeping it at the current site, with good access and adequate parking, Claire has welcomed reassurance that the local service definitely will not be lost.

The Post Office has also confirmed that the Upper Lisburn Road branch, based in Creighton's Garage, will be upgraded with extended opening hours to 7pm Monday to Friday.

Greenway bridge named for Sam Thompson

Claire Hanna was delighted at the overwhelming endorsement of the name Sam Thompson Bridge in a public vote to name the new bridge at Victoria Park installed over the community greenway, a multimillion pound investment in the city's green infrastructure. Inspired by the values in his plays and politics, Claire proposed the name which went on to win a public poll with 44% of the vote.

Claire said: "I nominated Sam Thompson because he came from Ballymacarrett, minutes away from the bridge, and worked locally in the shipyard where he was a trade union activist. He was a committed democratic socialist and a prophetic voice. His plays dealt with then-taboo subjects including sectarianism, fundamentalist intolerance, inequality and political corruption – many of which still dog our society today".

Staged amid great controversy, his best-known work 'Over the Bridge' (1960) was seen by over 40,000 people in Belfast. On both the stage and through his political activism Sam Thompson showed an overriding sense of humanity, decency and fair play.



Tackling predatory 'pay day' lenders

At September's Belfast City Council meeting Claire Hanna proposed and secured all party support for a comprehensive motion that gives council the mandate and tools to help combat the rise of 'pay day' lenders who prey on vulnerable borrowers, leading to spiralling debt.

Claire's motion committed council to work with advice agencies and credit unions to support those in debt, to promote financial education and awareness of the risks of this type of borrowing, and to improve access to affordable credit. Her speech highlighted the steep rise in troublesome loans, numerous breaches of regulations and failure to conduct credit checks, and interest rates of up to 4,000%.

Are you registered to vote?

With four elections due in 24 months from next May, this is an important time to make sure you're registered to vote and have a say on local issues. The Electoral Office has just done a full door to door canvass, but if you missed them or have just moved house there is still time to get on the register by visiting EONI.org.uk or calling 0800 4320 712 to get the right forms.

The European Election will take place on Thursday 22 May 2014 and it is expected that elections to new 'Super Councils' will be on the same day. NI is moving from 26 councils to 11, with Belfast bringing in new wards from Dunmurry and Castlereagh. Balmoral District Electoral Area is likely to change too, losing the wards of Windsor and Blackstaff (Lower Lisburn Road and the Village), to be replaced by Belvoir ward, and going down from 6 councillors to 5.

Across South Belfast only 45.7% of the estimated eligible electorate returned their forms by mid-October, almost 10% lower than the total across NI as a whole. Residents from other EU states are entitled to register and to vote in European and Local Elections. Local politics can be really frustrating at times, but participation is important - bad politicians are often elected by good people not voting!

Autumn Leaves & Winter watch

Although beautiful and mature trees are one of the things that make Malone such an attractive a place to live and visit, the leaves can be a problem at this time of the year. Council and Roads Service have no statutory duty to clear leaves from footpaths as they aren't classed as litter and it wouldn't be possible to keep on top of their removal throughout Autumn. However, as they often become slippery in the rain and can clog up gullies, Claire Hanna has requested additional resources to supplement the weekly street clean in Malone during autumn.

Claire has also been working with the Council Emergency Planning team to help mitigate negative impacts of winter. A seasonal safety event will take place in City Hall on 4 December, from 10am – 2pm, with info and free equipment from various agencies working to improve household security and reduce fall out from cold weather snaps.