

Climate and City Resilience Committee

Thursday, 14th March, 2024

MEETING OF THE CLIMATE AND CITY RESILIENCE COMMITTEE

HELD IN THE LAVERY ROOM AND
REMOVED VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS

Members present: Councillor R-M Donnelly (Chairperson);
Alderman Copeland; and
Councillors Anglin, Bell, Bower, R. Brooks,
T. Brooks, Carson, Collins, M. Donnelly,
D. Douglas, McAteer, McCabe, McKeown,
Smyth and Walsh.

In attendance: Mr. J. Tully, Director of City and Organisational Strategy;
Ms. D. Caldwell, Climate Commissioner; and
Mr. G. Graham, Democratic Services Assistant.

Apologies

Apologies were reported on behalf of the High Sheriff, Councillor S. Douglas and Councillors Doherty, Kelly and Long.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 8th February were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were reported.

Restricted Item

The information contained in the reports associated with the following item is restricted in accordance with Part 1 of Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

Resolved – That the Committee agrees to exclude the members of the press and public from the meeting during discussion of the following item as, due to the nature of the items, there would be a disclosure of exempt information as described in Section 42(4) and Schedule 6 of the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014.

The Members were also reminded that the content of ‘restricted’ reports and any discussion which took place during closed session must be treated as ‘confidential information’ and that no such information should be disclosed to the public as per Paragraph 4.15 of the Code of Conduct.

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Presentation by Living with Water Team

The Committee considered a report and associated presentation from the Living with Water Team in relation to a review process which was currently underway on the Strategic Drainage Infrastructure for Belfast and which was being undertaken due to affordability issues.

After discussion, the Committee noted the presentation regarding the review of the LWW programme which was currently underway.

Update on Heat Network

The Climate Commissioner provided the Members with an update on the market engagement to date on a potential heat network in Belfast. She referred to work undertaken with institutional investors, heat developers and other councils as part of that process.

The Members were informed that Belfast, with its density of buildings, was ideally suited to the introduction of a heat network which formed a key part of the local energy plan, alongside the retri-fit of buildings, as part of the Council's net-zero carbon ambitions.

The Climate Commissioner reported that a Heat Network Working Group had been established to inform the development of the Council's approach to incentivising the development of a heat network in Belfast, and that the Group would be encouraging public sector bodies, which owned buildings in the city with a high heat demand, to engage in discussions and market engagement as potential heat off-takers.

The Committee was informed that it was proposed to appoint a commercial and legal advisor to support the market engagement process, including the appointment of a technical advisor to support the market engagement and the provision of advice on technical requirements, subject to the approval of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

The Climate Commissioner provided the Members with an overview of the key elements associated with a heat network. She outlined measures to increase the viability of heat networks, including the introduction of waste heat into the heat production process, and the installation of a direct wire to alternative off-grid sources of energy.

The Committee was informed of the importance attached to securing off-taker heat agreements to encourage investment in heat network schemes and provided the Members with a range of delivery models for heat networks, which could be incorporated as part of any future delivery scheme. It was reported that early market engagement with heat developers had suggested that there was strong private sector interest to invest in heat networks with the provision of lands for the development of an energy centre, provision of grant finance and an available source of waste heat energy, as being strong support structures as part of the heat network development process. The Climate Commissioner reported on some of the barriers in place currently to the creation of viable heat networks in Northern Ireland, namely, the fact that there was currently no financial support available for heat-network schemes and no regulatory system in place.

The Climate Commissioner reported that the £150,000 secured from the Innovate UK Project – Belfast Net-Zero Pathfinder project, was instrumental in securing business funding

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analysis, including commercial and legal assistance to develop and secure commercial contractual arrangements in the absence of statutory regulation.

The Committee was informed that it was important to establish the heat demand requirements prior to the establishment of a series of round table discussions, with relevant parties invited to attend, including off-takers, investors and industry representatives.

In response to a request from a Member, the Climate Commissioner agreed to invite representatives from other authorities who had developed successful heat-network schemes, including off-takers, to present to a future meeting of the Committee. The Committee agreed also that representatives from Bradford City Council be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee in order to provide information on the development of their heat-network scheme.

A Member raised concerns in regard to the development of 15 year heat-network contracts and the viability of such contracts should changes occur in terms of occupancy levels and associated heat demand for those public sector buildings. The Member referred also to the problems associated with previous district network schemes which had been developed in certain parts of the city.

In response, the Climate Commissioner reported that contracts were required to be agreed which protected the consumer in terms of price, and that greater priced leverage could be achieved by collaboration with other stakeholders to ensure that customers got the best value on the unit costs of heat and energy.

The Committee noted the information which had been provided and agreed also to receive a presentation from representatives from neighbourhood district heating schemes which had been developed successfully, and which could provide a valuable insight into both, the technical and contractual frameworks to secure the best value for money in terms of the operation of long-term district heating energy contracts.

Innovate UK Project - Belfast Net Zero Pathfinder

The Climate Commissioner welcomed the securing of £150,000 from the Innovate UK Net-Zero Living Pathfinder competition which would help the delivery of two key priority projects, namely, the city's Local Area Energy Plan (LAEP) and the decarbonisation plan for Queens Island (QIDP).

The Committee was informed that the strategic energy masterplans provided a whole energy system approach, including recommendations for decarbonisation pathway planning. The Climate Commissioner explained that the projects built on the outcomes of the Belfast phase 1 pathfinder feasibility study, and would support a whole systems approach to the transition of the city to net-zero.

The Members were informed that the project would focus on overcoming the non-technical barriers in regard to the delivery of the two decarbonisation projects identified in the LAEP and QIDP, and focussed specifically on the heat network and solar pv projects. The Climate Commissioner reported that by accelerating and de-risking the delivery of two decarbonisation projects identified in the LAEP and QIDP, the projects would assist the

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Council and its partners to reduce emissions from the City's built environment, which was the largest source of emissions within the city .

The Climate Commissioner agreed to bring an update to a future meeting of the Committee on the progress made on delivery of the projects, which was being undertaken in partnership with Energy Systems Catapult, with a scheduled project commencement date of 1st June 2024.

Noted.

Issue Raised In Advance

**Presentation on a vision for the
Connswater Community Greenway**

At the request from Councillor R. Brooks, the Committee agreed to receive at a future meeting a presentation from Eastside Greenways entitled Climate and Nature Action - A Vision for the Connswater Community Greenway.

Chairperson