

Working Group on the Climate Crisis

Monday, 21st October, 2019

MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Members present: Councillor de Faoite (Chairperson);
The Deputy Lord Mayor, Councillor McReynolds;
Alderman Spence; and
Councillors Baker, Ferguson, Hutchinson and Smyth.

In attendance: Ms. G. Long, Commissioner for Resilience;
Ms. C. McKeown, Sustainable Development Manager;
Ms. C. Shortt, Policy and Data Analyst;
Mr. R. McLernon, Project Co-ordinator; and
Mr. G. Graham, Democratic Services Assistant.

Apology

An apology was reported on behalf of Alderman Copeland.

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 16th September, 2019 were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were declared.

Presentation by Invest NI

Ms. B. Anderson and Mr. S. Knox, Invest Northern Ireland, attended in connection with this item and were welcomed by the Chairperson.

Ms. Anderson provided the Working Group with an outline of the risks to both the local and global economy associated with climate change and how that change would impact on such areas as water security, agricultural production and economic resources. She identified further a number of key drivers to address the issue of climate change, amongst other things, the Paris agreement and the U.K. National Energy and Climate Plan.

The Working Group was provided with a number of targets which required to be met if the worst effects of climate change were to be avoided, and the requirement to reduce carbon emissions by at least 35% of the 1990 levels by 2030. She highlighted the significant challenges ahead to meet those targets listed and referred specifically to the lack of progress in relation to policy and infrastructure in Northern Ireland associated with transport and infrastructure.

Ms. Anderson referred to some of the Northern Ireland characteristics associated with its emissions profile in particular, the fact that 30% of all greenhouse gases emanated from agriculture and that 75% of homes in the province were heated by oil or electric resources. The Working Group was provided with estimated medium emissions in respect of temperature rise, precipitation levels and rises in sea level by 2050 which, amongst other things, predicted a rise in temperature of between 0.8-4c with a corresponding rise

in sea level of between 22.8-37.6 cm. Ms. Anderson highlighted the challenges facing governments to halt the impact of climate change comprising a joined up multi-national approach and of the requirement to develop new products and services including the deployment of new forms of transportation with a less or zero carbon footprint as well as the development of new environmentally friendly transport systems.

The Working Group was provided with information on a number of innovative companies which were leading the way in the development and provision of holistic energy and power solutions such as, leading edge technologies such as wind energy, hydro power and industrial solar energy. The Members were informed that the target to achieve 100% decarbonisation by 2050 and 40% renewable energy by 2020 would present a significant challenge.

Mr. S. Knox provided the Working Group with information on a range of business ventures and business models which could be developed on a commercial basis to transform the circular economy and renewable sectors. He highlighted the need to develop a comprehensive industrial strategy and the potential to integrate the various business models including opportunities to generate energy and the creation of district heating schemes. He referred specifically to a range of funding streams available from Innovate U.K. Clean Growth as part of an industrial strategy which could provide technical support in the area of water, energy, transport the circular economy and intelligent systems. The Working Group was informed of the potential developments as part of the energy transition to 2050 and how such innovations, including for example, the use of fuel cells and hydrogen boilers could be utilised to replace traditional sources of energy.

In response to a question from a Member in respect of potential dangers associated with the use of Hydrogen as a source of energy, Mr. Knox stated that all companies were required to be regulated and adhere to a strict code of practice in that regard. A Member raised a further question in regard to the future development of the North Foreshore and was advised that currently the North Foreshore had attracted small to medium companies in the renewable sector and that it would be beneficial to the economy and environment as a whole, if much larger consortiums could be encouraged to relocate at the North Foreshore.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Working Group, thanked the representatives from Invest Northern Ireland for their detailed and informative presentation and they departed from the meeting.

Presentation by National Energy Action NI

Ms. L. Cochrane and Mr. H. McVeigh, National Energy Action NI (NEA) attended in connection with this item and were welcomed by the Chairperson.

The Working Group was provided with information on the aims and objectives of NEA and was provided with a definition of fuel poverty which had been categorised as, any household which required to spend more than 10% of their income on household fuel. The Members were provided with a range of statistics on the energy costs in Northern Ireland such as the mortality rates during the winter months, many of which related to hypothermia, particularly among the elderly. The Working Group was provided with a range of comparative statistics by Council area which had been compiled by the House Condition Survey outlining the levels of fuel poverty covering the period 2006 compared to 2016. It was reported that the statistics confirmed that Mid-Ulster continued to experience the highest levels of fuel poverty in Northern Ireland, a trend which had continued over the ten year sample period. Mr. McVeigh highlighted the fact that the statistics had understated the extent of fuel poverty in Northern Ireland in that they did not reflect the current high cost of home heating oil which had doubled in price since the data had been collected.

The Members were provided with a range of organisations and schemes dedicated to assisting those groups most at risk from fuel poverty including, The Healthy Ageing Partnership and the Affordable Warmth Team. The N.E.A. team provided the Working Group with a number of new energy and fuel poverty strategies for example amongst other things, the provision of a just transition to decarbonised domestic heating including increased investment in fuel poverty and energy efficiency schemes. The Working Group was reminded of the correlation between fuel poverty and health and of the inequalities in life expectancy between the most affluent and deprived areas in the province.

Several Members raised concerns in regard to the lack of progress made by the Housing Executive in delivering a programme for insulating homes and, as a consequence, households may be required to use excessive amounts of fuel to heat homes that could not retain the warmth generated within their confines. The Members agreed that there was a need for the Housing Executive to retro-fit existing homes before undertaking the installation of replacement boilers. Members expressed concerns also in respect of the Welfare Reform changes due to be introduced in early 2020 and, in particular, the impact that such reforms would have in respect of the most deprived neighbourhoods.

The Chairperson, on behalf of the Working Group, thanked the representatives from NEA for their informative presentation and they departed from the meeting.

Forward Planning: Developing a Climate Adaptation and Mitigation Plan

The Commissioner for Resilience reminded the Working Group that the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee, at a previous meeting, had recommended that the Working Group consider a report and make recommendations in December 2019 which would map out the priorities and work streams which the Council would take forward on Climate adaptation and mitigation. She stated that the report would be modelled on work by a number of cities in the 100 cities network which had developed climate adaptation and mitigation plans. She stated further that the plan would take between eighteen months and two years to complete and would provide detailed costings and timelines associated with the implementation of the climate adaptation and mitigation plan.

The Working Group was advised that (1) BCC's climate adaptation and mitigation plan is within our control and therefore this Working Group and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee will be the key decision making structures as we complete the plan within eighteen months. (2) However, a wider plan for the city would require significant partnership working, which is why the Resilience and Sustainability Board will be established. This has previously been approved by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee and the Community Planning Partnership Board.

Members were provided with some areas which might be considered under targets for decarbonisation, including an agreement on a carbon budget and overall targets and the identification of a target year when Belfast would cease to become a net energy importer and achieve energy self-sufficiency. Other areas of work identified included:

- Energy Transition
- The Low Carbon Economy
- Development of low carbon buildings
- The existing built environment
- The Circular Economy
- Low- Carbon Transport
- Greening the city
- Health

The Commissioner referred to other areas of work, including, enhanced water resilience and the setting up of structures and governance arrangement to manage the process, which would include a process of public engagement and the creation of networks to facilitate climate adaptation.

Several Members raised the issue of securing sufficient resources to deal with the climate crisis given that resources were limited and the fact that there were competing priorities. The Chairperson suggested that it might be appropriate to invite representatives from other Councils to ascertain how they had approached the problem of climate change and their efforts to mitigate the problems associated with its impact. The Commissioner agreed that she would explore the possibility of acceding to the Chairperson's request and agreed further to provide the Working Group with a list of those local authorities which had declared a climate emergency.

Noted.

Visit of U.K. Climate Change Commission – December 2019

The Sustainable Development Manager informed the Working Group that the UK Climate Change Commission was scheduled to be held on 2nd December, 2019. She reported that the visit would be facilitated by the Department for the Environment and Rural Affairs (D.E.A.R.A.). The Sustainable Development Manager agreed further that she would provide a further update on the visit at the November meeting of the Working Group.

Noted.

Update on Climate Ready Clyde

The Sustainable Development Manager submitted the undernoted report, copies of which had been circulated previously, outlining the structure and governance associated with Climate Ready Clyde:

“1.0 Purpose of Report or Summary of main Issues

1.1 To update Members on the Climate Ready Clyde structure in Glasgow.

2.0 Recommendations

The Committee is asked to review the attached information, which relates to the structure and governance of Climate Ready Clyde. This is one city's approach to putting a mechanism in place to address climate adaptation city –wide.

3.0 Main report

3.1 Climate Ready Clyde is a cross-sector initiative funded by the Scottish Government and 12 member organisations to create a shared vision, strategy and action plan for an adapting Glasgow City Region.

3.2 Climate Ready Clyde is governed and steered by a board comprising senior representatives from each of the funding organisations. The board is supported by a small secretariat who lead the implementation on behalf of the board.

3.3 The function of the board is to:

Lead development of a Climate Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan for Glasgow City Region by:

- **Collating and disseminating high-quality information and evidence about expected climate change, its impacts on Glasgow City Region and examples of suitable actions to adapt, including where appropriate commissioning research or coordinating with academic consortia.**
- **Assessing and monitoring how prepared Glasgow City Region is for climate change.**
- **Assisting with development of strategies, policies plans, projects and governance, which affect the City Region, including by responding to key consultations.**
- **Undertaking actions which co-ordinate and support members to champion adaptation in the City region, in particular helping assess their climate risks and opportunities and developing adaptation plans and strategies.**

3.5 Facilitate delivery of adaptation actions where feasible

3.6 Promote the value and benefits of the vision to stakeholders, and help them to take climate change as one of the long-term factors in decision-making and practices.

3.7 Exchange information, experience and good practice with other organisations and cities.

3.8 Engage with the media to help ensure that appropriate messages about the impacts of climate change and ways of adapting to it reach their audiences in Glasgow City Region, and to promote Climate Ready Clyde.

3.9 Influence key government bodies, to accelerate adaptation in the City Region.

3.10 Work in ways which contribute to the wider U.N. sustainable development goals and are complementary to the work of other organisations and partnerships.

3.11 For more information please see:

<http://climatereadyclyde.org.uk/>

The Working Group noted the information provided.

**Update on P-CAN Network and
Low Carbon Climate Commission**

The Sustainable Development Manager advised the Working Group that the application for Place-based Climate Action Network (P-CAN) for £15,000 towards the cost

of communication and engagement on climate resilience had been successful. She stated that Belfast was working closely with London and Leeds to develop an action plan and stated further that the money secured could be used to fund a mini conference, and a range of quarterly lectures and engagement events in Belfast in 2020. She informed the Working Group that she would bring back a report providing further information on the subject matter to the November meeting of the Working Group.

Noted.

Opportunities with E.U. Low Carbon Networks

The Commissioner provided the Working Group with an update on a number of meetings in Brussels, which she had attended in connection with opportunities to develop, in conjunction with Europe, a range of low carbon networks. She referred to a number of those networks, which the Council had an opportunity to engage with such as the Eurocities Environment Forum and the DEEDs project. She stated that Europe was interested particularly in Belfast because of its high dependency on carbon related fuels.

The Chairperson provided the Working Group with a range of European Union City and Regions related events which it might wish to attend. The Working Group was reminded that attendance at the Committee of Regions event which was due to be held on 3rd till 5th December 2019. He informed the Members that access to the event was age limited and that Members would be required to apply to attend on a personal and individual basis.

The Chairperson also noted that he had been approached by two local organisations Belfast Food Network and Belfast Healthy Cities who would be keen to present to the committee.

The Working Group noted the information which had been provided.

Date of Next Meeting

The Working Group agreed that its next meeting would be held on Monday, 18th November at 4.30 p.m.

Chairperson