

# Working Group on the Climate Crisis

Monday, 13th January, 2020

## MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE CLIMATE CRISIS

- Members present: Councillor de Faoite (Chairperson);  
The Lord Mayor, Councillor Baker;  
The Deputy Lord Mayor, Councillor McReynolds;  
Aldermen Copeland and Spence; and  
Councillors Ferguson, Hutchinson and Smyth.
- Also attended: Councillor O'Hara.
- In attendance: Ms. G. Long, Commissioner for Resilience;  
Ms. C. McKeown, Sustainable Development Manager; and  
Mr. G. Graham, Democratic Services Assistant.

### Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 18th November, 2019 were taken as read and signed as correct.

A Member sought clarification on the role of the Resilience and Sustainability Board and its links with the Council's Resilience Strategy. The Commissioner explained that the Board provided a coordinating role at a Community Planning level (that is, across the city) for developing a city-wide climate plan, and that the Council was responsible for the development and implementation of its own resilience strategy and climate plan-through that All Party Group and the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

### Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were declared.

### Belfast Emergency Planning Team

Ms. Claire Carleton, Project Manager for Belfast Emergency Prepared Group attended in connection with this item and was welcomed by the Chairperson. She provided the Working Group with an outline of the work of the Emergency Preparedness Group and the actions taken by that group when an emergency was called. The Members were provided with an overview of the integration and coordination of the various groups involved in response to an emergency situation, including the actions required to restore the infrastructure after the emergency had concluded. The Working Group was provided with information in respect of a risk register which highlighted the risk factors to the city associated with a major incident and or hazard and the likelihood of their occurrence.

Ms Carleton outlined a range of emergencies which the Emergency Planning Team had prepared for including, amongst other things, severe weather, major transport accidents and malicious attacks. She provided an outline of the Civil Contingencies Structures in Northern Ireland incorporating a list of the range of partner organisations within the Emergency Preparedness Group. The Members were informed of the key role performed by local authorities in managing emergencies such as the structure and key personnel of the Belfast City Council Emergency Planning Team and the resources available to the Council to mitigate against the impact of potential emergencies.

The Working Group was provided with a range of resources available to it to mitigate against the impact of potential emergencies. This included the communication network to inform political representatives, and the public at large, in the provision of guidance and advice to ensure that risk to life and property was minimised. The Emergency Preparedness Manager outlined a number of major emergencies which had impacted on the city in recent years, for example, the Bank Buildings fire in August, 2018 and ex-hurricane Ophelia which had occurred in October, 2017. She provided information also on the actions taken by the Council to provide a coordinated response and assistance to residents and the community, in general affected by the impact of those occurrences. The Chairperson requested that members of the Working Group be invited to attend one of the emergency management training sessions and the Resilience Manager agreed that this request could be accommodated.

The Members thanked the Resilience Manager for her informative presentation and she retired from the meeting.

### **Motion from Strategic People and Communities Committee On Car- Free Days in the City**

The Working Group referred to a previous motion referred to the People and Communities Committee in respect of undertaking a number of proposed car-free days to highlight the issue of congestion and air pollution in the city. The Members highlighted the importance of ensuring that the Department for Infrastructure were supportive of the proposed initiative and had suggested that the 20th till 22nd September would be preferable dates coinciding with the Culture weekend and other social events within the city. A Member raised the point that Translink might have concerns about the city centre being closed to transport. In response, it was explained that car-free only referred to vehicular traffic and not buses. Other Members raised the issue that provision would need to be made for essential services, including disabled access, emergency services and access to church services

The Working Group was keen to reinforce the benefits of clean air over the proposed period under which the car-free initiative would be held such as the promotion of the park and ride scheme and the possibility of subsidised public transport fare arrangements over the same period. The Members stressed the importance of communication with the public, outlining the benefits to the environment and the climate associated with undertaking the initiative.

The Commissioner for Resilience agreed that she would work with other relevant teams within Council and revert to the Working Group with some options as to how the proposed car-free days initiative could be developed. This would include a proposed timeframe for implementation, and agreed also that the Department for Infrastructure (DfI) would be invited to a future meeting of the Working Group to take a collaborative approach and coordinated effort, thereby ensuring the success of the initiative. She made reference also to the ongoing City Connectivity Study which would emerge in the coming weeks.

Noted.

### **Consultations to note - Environment Strategy and Maximum Resale Price of Electricity**

The Sustainable Development Manager referred to the consultation document on the MRP (maximum resale price of electricity) which the Utility Regulator had issued, and explained the impact of the two options in the paper, that is, removal of the MRP or proposal that the Utility Regulator retain the regulation role on the price of resale of

electricity. The Working Group was provided with an explanation of government policy and practice in Great Britain and how the removal of the MRP enabled the commercialisation of the charging infrastructure, as providers could supply electricity at a profit, thus enabling electric vehicle charging operators to make further investment. The Members considered the point that if the maximum resale price for electricity were to be removed, competition within the industry could potentially set the price.

The Working Group expressed its concern in regard to the high purchase price of electric vehicles which acted as a barrier to individuals purchasing such vehicles, and the importance of affordability more generally. The Commissioner for Resilience advised that the Council required the development of greater policy/strategy in respect of the issues pertaining to the matter and that the Working Group agreed that it would defer consideration of the issue until its next scheduled meeting to be held in February, 2020 and to permit further information in the matter to be provided.

Noted.

### **Belfast Climate Action Plan – Process for Moving Forward**

The Commissioner for Resilience informed the Working Group that the methodology for developing a Climate Action Plan had been signed off and that work had commenced in regard to the implementation of the recommendations contained therein. She referred to three pieces of work which required to be undertaken as part of the implementation of the plan including:

1. A climate risk assessment of Council assets;
2. A wider sustainability review; and
3. Data capture on existing and potential scenarios for energy use

The Chairperson referred to the launch of the Place Based Climate Action Network (PCAN) event which had been very successful and of the requirement to secure funding from central government in respect of future events. The Working Group agreed also that consideration be given to writing to the newly appointed Ministers for Environment, Economy and Infrastructure, requesting that additional funds be made available for that purpose. The Working Group agreed also that both the Belfast Youth Forum and the Northern Ireland Youth Forum be invited to attend its March meeting, subject to the approval of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

### **Appointment to Sustainable Northern Ireland**

The Commissioner for Resilience requested that nomination be sought from the Sinn Fein Party Group to replace the Lord Mayor who, given his civic duties, was unable to continue as that party's political representative on Sustainable Northern Ireland.

### **Date of Next Meeting**

The Working Group agreed that its next meeting be held on Monday, 10th February at 5.15 p.m.

Chairperson