

# Working Group on the Climate Crisis

Monday, 10th February, 2020

## MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Members present: Councillors Ferguson, Hutchinson and Smyth.

In attendance: Ms. C. McKeown, Sustainability Manager;  
Ms. C. Shortt, Policy and Data Analyst; and  
Mr. G. Graham, Democratic Services Assistant.

Also Attended: Ms. G. Long, Commissioner for Resilience.  
(via digital link)

### **Apologies**

Apologies were reported on behalf of the Chairperson, Councillor de Faoite, the Deputy Lord Mayor, Councillor McReynolds, and Aldermen Copeland and Spence.

### **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting of 13th January, 2020 were taken as read and signed as correct.

### **Declarations of Interest**

No declarations of interest were declared.

### **Presentation from Arup on a Climate Change Risk Assessment**

Ms. D. Emerson, Associate Director (ARUP), attended in connection with this item and was welcomed by the Chairperson. She provided the Working Group with an outline of the potential impacts of future climate hazards on the infrastructure systems for Belfast. The Members were given an overview of the potential impacts of a rise in global temperatures of 2.4 c and 4.3 c and how this temperature rise might impact on transport, water systems and agriculture, including food production. She highlighted a number of factors where the city was suffering as a result of climate change and highlighted the opportunities available to the Council as a planning authority to have a positive impact on the city's infrastructure and resilience.

Ms. Emerson outlined the importance of undertaking a climate risk assessment as part of the city's Local Development Plan, including the importance attached to working with key stakeholders in averting a climate emergency. To this end, she identified the need to undertake a comprehensive citywide climate change action plan which had been identified within the Council's draft Resilience Strategy. She referred to the importance of building knowledge and understanding across the city, with particular reference to the interconnectivity of infrastructure systems, including social infrastructure, housing, the natural environment and the economy.

The Working Group thanked Ms. Emerson for her detailed and informative presentation and she departed from the meeting.

### **Electric Vehicle Infrastructure – Existing Pilot Projects**

The Sustainable Development Manager provided the Working Group with an update on the electric vehicle-charging infrastructure in the city and new pilot projects. She reported that the transition to electric vehicles and the environmental impact of such a switch was easier to achieve than, for example, the transition involved with coal or oil fired electric power stations.

She referred to the reduced running costs associated with the switch to electric vehicles, but acknowledged concern raised about the high initial costs associated with the purchase of such vehicles for the majority of households. She referred to the recent government publication entitled 'The Road to Zero' and the development of new concepts in relation to charging and smart electricity.

The Sustainable Development Manager highlighted the proposal to extend the policy of on street charging points for electric vehicles and forging of partnerships with other pioneers including Virgin Media. She referred to the £9.2 million invested in this area by Innovate UK, which involved repurposing Virgin Media on street connections in 7 cities in the UK. She stated that Belfast City Council had observer status in that project. She raised also the issue that the Council had invested in the procurement of a number of electric vehicles to promote its commitment to reducing its carbon footprint.

A Member raised the issue of the need to develop financial incentives to increase the use of electric vehicles and of the need, as part of its green commitment, to address fuel poverty, incorporating a process of retro fitting homes, to reduce heat loss. The Working Group referred to the work undertaken by 'Green New Deal' in the past and requested that the architects of the Green New Deal be invited to attend the next meeting of the Working Group.

### **Car-Free Days**

The Sustainable Development Manager referred to the work which had commenced in regard to the proposal to have a two- day car free period, in the city centre, in September 2020. She informed the group that the Resilience Team was working with the economic development team on proposals to taking the car out of the city for an event in September and a report would be brought back to the APWGCC. In addition to this, a report was due to be presented to the People and Communities Committee in March, 2020 on City Connectivity which would include proposals from several organisations including, DFC and DFI about taking the car out of the city. She stated further that it was proposed to invite Jacobs to a future meeting of the Working Group to provide an outline of the proposals in the Connectivity study.

Noted.

### **Climate Finance – Briefing from the Belfast Climate Commission Roundtable**

The Sustainable Development Manager referred to a Climate Finance workshop which had been hosted recently by Queen's University and the PCAN project attended by Professor Nick Robbins. She reported that the event examined issues such as the role of investment, equity and public and private finance in making the just transition happen. There was a sharp focus on fuel poverty and retrofitting of premises to conserve energy and reduce associated energy costs and create jobs. The Members were advised of a number of proposals associated with the financial benefits accruing from the pursuance of a green agenda and agreed that it wished to receive a briefing, at its next meeting, from representatives of the 'Green New Deal' group.

### **Fracking, Oil and Gas Exploration**

The Working Group considered a proposed Motion, presented by Councillor Smyth, in respect of future fracking, gas and oil exploration, including permitted development rights. The Members, while supportive of the motion, requested that it might be prudent to receive more detailed information on the legal and policy implications associated with adopting the motion. The Member agreed that he would defer consideration of the motion to allow sufficient time for the Commissioner for Resilience to prepare a paper on the policy levers and implications for the Council in support of the motion, which would be presented to a future meeting of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

### **Symposium on Climate Adaptation (Dublin, April 2020)**

The Sustainable Development Manager provided the Working Group with information in regard to the Symposium on Climate Adaptation which was due to be held in Dublin, on 27th April, 2020. The Members were informed that the agenda for the Symposium would be distributed, once available, and were requested to inform the officers if they wished to attend, subject to the approval of the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee.

### **Date of Next Meeting**

The Working Group that its next meeting would be held on Monday, 16th March at 5.15 p.m.

Chairperson