

Working Group on the Climate Crisis

Monday, 18th January, 2021

MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE CLIMATE CRISIS

Members present: Councillor Smyth (Chairperson);
Alderman Copeland;
Councillors Baker, Bunting, de Faoite,
Ferguson and Hutchinson.

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

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 9th November, 2020 were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were reported.

2021 Work Plan

The Commissioner for Resilience submitted the undernoted report in regard to the priorities and objectives contained within the draft work plan for the period 2021/2022 and which had been incorporated within the Council's Corporate Plan.

“1.0 Purpose of Report

This short paper outlines the draft Workplan for this All Party Working Group for this forthcoming financial year 2021/22, for discussion and agreement. Following this meeting, it will go to SP&R Committee for approval.

2.0 Recommendations

That the committee agree the priorities contained within this draft Workplan.

3.0 Main Report

Resilience and Sustainability is a core priority in Belfast City Council's Corporate Plan and therefore the primary focus of this

Working Group's Workplan for 2021/22 is to ensure progress in the achievement of the objectives set out.

In the forthcoming financial year, this Working Group will consider as priorities:

1. Overseeing the development of a draft Climate Adaptation and Mitigation Plan for Belfast City Council, for SP&R approval by end of December
2. Working with the Resilience and Sustainability Board to ensure Belfast City Council Priorities in the Belfast Climate Plan are progressed- this will include taking advice from the Belfast Climate Commission as appropriate
3. Ensuring Belfast City Council contributes to progress on climate adaptation and mitigation at a regional level, e.g. through the DEARA Green Growth Task Force
4. Ensuring Belfast City Council plays its part in contributing to the UN Climate Conference in Glasgow in 2021.

Further detail on each of these is below.

3.1 Belfast City Council Climate Adaptation and Mitigation Plan

This working group previously agreed that the BCC Climate Adaptation and Mitigation Plan would be developed by June 2021 for approval by SP&R. To date, work is mostly on track, and we have tried to ensure that Covid-19 lockdown has not reduced momentum, as much as possible. The plan will be supported by three separate studies:

- A Climate Adaptation Plan, being developed by Climate NI for BCC. Work is ongoing, and on track, and a detailed report will be brought to the All Party Working Group in February to ensure progress continues.
- An Environmental Sustainability Audit, being developed by KPMG for BCC. Work is ongoing and on track, and a detailed report will be brought to All Party Working Group in March, to ensure progress continues.
- An Energy / Climate Mitigation Review. This work is to be commissioned, and may be delayed due to recruitment of new Climate Commissioner. A further update on progress will be made available as soon as possible, and a verbal update at our January meeting.

It is intended that work on delivery of the Climate Adaptation Plan and implementation of the findings of the Environmental Sustainability Review will commence in advance of the summer, to ensure we are ahead of schedule, and therefore any delays to the Energy Review will be mitigated somewhat. That will enable us to meet most of the original timetable of June 2021 for the BCC Plan, and any amendments due to the delayed Energy Review will be brought to this committee in the Autumn, well in advance of the end of year.

- 3.2 Members are aware that the Resilience Assessment and Climate Plan were launched in December 2020, and the city-wide Resilience Board is taking forward delivery of the 30 programmes contained in the document. BCC are responsible for leading several of the programmes (e.g. coordination of One Million Trees), and contributing to delivery of others (e.g. Architects for Change programme). For this reason, this All Party Working Group should receive regular reports from officers, to outline progress (1) with BCC programmes (2) with the wider plan. You may feel it is useful to have a joint meeting with the co-chairs of the board from time to time to discuss progress.**
- 3.3 A number of structures have been set up at Executive level to coordinate action on (1) climate adaptation (2) climate mitigation (3) green growth. The Resilience Team at BCC work closely with colleagues in various departments to ensure we are contributing to policy and strategy at a regional level. This Working Group will receive regular updates – as a Standing Item- on policy and strategy being developed at a regional level to ensure BCC makes a full contribution.**

At present, BCC officers are preparing a response to DEARA's Discussion Document on a Northern Ireland Climate Change Bill. This will be brought to this Working Group in February for consideration and to SP&R Committee for approval.

- 3.4 COP 26 - the UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow is a significant moment for cities who are committed to action to tackle climate change. It represents an opportunity to press for government action in this area, to fund areas of priority and to highlight the work taking place in Belfast, to a global audience. However, it is also an opportunity to offer a platform to young people to set out their aspirations for action. In the coming months, in partnership with the Belfast Climate Commission, we will use our engagement platform 'Your Say Belfast' to provide an opportunity for young people in Belfast to make a strong ask of global decision makers in the run up to COP 26. An update on this work, and other work ongoing as part of our existing networks, to influence and contribute to COP 26 will be brought to each meeting of this Working Group."**

The Commissioner referred to the fact that the Resilience Strategy and Climate Plan had been published recently and had been approved by the Resilience Board. She referred also to the 30 programmes contained within the Resilience Strategy, all of which were city-wide programmes and some of which were being undertaken in collaboration with other external partners.

The Members were informed of the requirement for the Council to sign off the Climate Adaptation Plan which should be available for final consideration and approval by the end of the current calendar year. She highlighted the importance of the Council working in close partnership with the Resilience Board. The Commissioner informed the Members of the important role that the Council had in its contribution to regional policy and also its role in working with central government policy makers to influence change at a regional level.

The Commissioner referred to the COP 26 climate change conference which would be held in Glasgow in 2021 and highlighted the importance attached to engaging with young people to ensure wide ownership of the climate change engagement process. She stated that it was important to incorporate some of the proposals emanating from that engagement process into the Council's business plan.

The Sustainable Development Manager highlighted that a number of important consultation documents had recently been issued by DEARA, which included a Discussion Document on a Climate Change Bill and proposals for a new Environment Bill, and gave a summary of the proposals within both documents. She stated that she would be compiling a response, on behalf of the Council, to the consultation documents, which she would present to a future meeting of the Working Group, prior to its submission.

In response to a question from a Member in regard to engagement with older people, the Commissioner stated that engagement with older people would be part of the engagement process, once it was safe to do so given the current Covid-19 restrictions. A Member requested information in respect of the waste strategy and how that strategy could be developed. In response, the Commissioner stated that a report on waste management was due to be discussed by the Council's Chief Officers Management Team and that a report in the matter, including its impact for the Circular Economy, would be brought back to a future meeting of the Working Group.

A Member raised a further question in regard to governance arrangements in respect of the Council's sustainability objectives with particular reference to the Circular Economy. In response, the Commissioner referred to the work undertaken by K.P.M.G. to ensure that the Council's governance arrangements were fit for purpose and stated that the Member's concerns, in regard to governance arrangements, would be discussed as part of any new council policy on environmental sustainability.

The Commissioner referred to the work which was being undertaken, on behalf of the Council, in regard to its plans for climate adaptation in conjunction with Climate Northern Ireland. She stated that it was anticipated that a report in the matter would be presented to a future meeting of the Working Group. She referred also to the ongoing work undertaken by the Policy and Data Analyst in respect of food sustainability and that it was anticipated that a report in the matter would be brought back to a future meeting of the Working Group.

Noted.

The Chairperson and Members of the Working Group thanked the Commissioner for her valuable contribution, in terms of ensuring that Climate Change was placed firmly on the Council's corporate agenda, and wished her well in her new role as Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive.

Chairperson