

Working Group on the Climate Crisis

Monday, 14th September, 2020

MEETING OF THE WORKING GROUP ON THE CLIMATE CRISIS

- Members present: Alderman Copeland;
Councillors Baker, Bunting, de Faoite,
Ferguson, Hutchinson, McReynolds 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, Resilience Co-ordinator; and
Mr. G. Graham, Democratic Services Assistant.
- Also attended: Ms. L. Leonard, European Manager.

Election of Chairperson

Nominations were sought to fill the vacant position of Chairperson and it was:

Moved by Councillor Ferguson,
Seconded by Councillor de Faoite, and

Resolved - That Councillor Smyth be appointed to the position of Chairperson for the period ending June, 2021.

(Councillor Smyth in the Chair)

Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of 10th February, 2020 were taken as read and signed as correct.

Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were declared.

Update on Final Resilience Strategy

The Commissioner for Resilience provided the Working Group with an update on the Final Resilience Strategy which was an important component within the Belfast Agenda. She provided the Members with an overview in regard to the structure and decision making process in relation to the development of an adaptation and mitigation plan by 2021, at both a local and City Wide level, including the development of a local plan for the Council itself.

It was reported that the development of the City Wide Climate Adaptation and Mitigation Plan was owned by the Resilience and Sustainability Board and that it had met throughout the Covid-19 crisis. The Members were made aware of the Resilience goal contained within the strategy to deliver a low-carbon, climate resilient economy within a generation. The Commissioner provided the Working Group with an overview in regard

to the work and role of the Climate Commission and stated that, it was anticipated that the Resilience Strategy would be published by the end of 2020. She referred to the three core element of the Resilience Strategy vis a vis:

- Resilience Assessment
- Ambitions Document and
- Delivery Plan

The Commissioner stated that it was anticipated that the final version of the Resilience Strategy would be presented to Council in November 2020.

The Members were provided with a number of core elements contained within the strategy including, amongst other things, the setting of a carbon budget for Belfast, proposals to enhance air quality for the city and the planting of one million trees by 2035. She highlighted also the importance of integrating both the economic and climate strategy elements, as part of the overall Resilience Strategy. She referred to the work in relation to waste water drainage infrastructure and of the need to integrate services.

The Resilience Co-ordinator and Policy Data Analyst provided the Working Group with an update on the process undertaken, and results attained, following the public consultation exercise and online survey, on the recommendations contained with the draft Resilience Strategy. It was reported that the public consultation exercise had operated from January 2020 till June 2020 and that 13,000 inputs had been received from Urban Scale interventions, an organisation used to assist with the consultation exercise.

The Resilience Co-ordinator referred to a number of workshops which had been held throughout the city which had proved successful in securing public engagement and that, as part of this process, the public had been asked to provide a list of risks and stresses, as result of climate change, which they felt would have an adverse impact on their lives. He stated further that the results of the consultation had been beneficial in assisting with the development of the Resilience Strategy.

The Policy Data Analyst referred to the positive feedback which had been received, in response to the consultation exercise, and the collective agreement which had been received in relation to the fourteen stresses and shocks identified resulting from climate change. It was reported that issues such as mental health, food insecurity, poor education, segregation and division appeared prominently within the survey responses. The Policy Data Analyst stated further that, it was rewarding to find that many issues such as sustainable transport and clean air had been incorporated within the Resilience Strategy.

In response to the presentation, a number of issues were raised by the Working Group including, the need to secure quick wins to operationalise the strategy and the need to engage with the Housing Executive to undertake an extensive retro-fit programme in regard to its older housing stock. The Working Group referred also to the need for substantial investment in waste water solutions and the investment required in terms of infrastructure to minimise waste.

In response, the Commissioner agreed that the Council could take a lead in many of the areas suggested. She stated however that some of the positive suggestions required the cooperation of other external organisations including central government departments and that funding would be required to give effect to the realisation of those proposals. She agreed also that many of the suggestions could be incorporated as recommendations within the Resilience Strategy.

The Working Group thanked the Officers for their informed and detailed presentation and requested that a copy of the slide presentation be circulated to the Members of the Working Group.

Noted.

Presentation of Mini Stern findings and Next Steps

The Commissioner for Resilience provided the Working Group with information in relation to the need for climate action as identified within the Mini Stern findings and the potential implications globally, should temperatures rise on a progressive scale of between 1c -5c, relative to pre-industrial levels. She highlighted the need to develop a carbon roadmap and to secure a target on carbon emissions. The Working Group was informed of the revised target of restricting global temperature increases to not more than 1.5c by 2050. The Commissioner referred to the need to grow the renewable energy sector and to tackle the problems associated with heat loss and pollution from buildings including, securing a reduction in transport emissions. She referred to the success of the electricity sector in reducing emissions and highlighted the need to undertake a mini-stern, specifically in relation to consumption.

The Commissioner stated that Belfast had a carbon budget projected to 2050 but highlighted the fact that, given the current annual carbon emissions, the projected carbon budget would be consumed within the next ten years. She referred to the urgent need to radically reduce carbon emissions if a target of net zero emissions was to be achieved by 2050. She stated that progressing under a business as usual model would not achieve the desired reductions necessary. The Commissioner stated that Belfast would need to reduce its emissions by a factor of 8.4% annually, if the required target was to be achieved.

The Working Group was informed of the potential economic benefits associated with investing in renewable energy and the employment and wealth creating benefits associated with producing a home-grown renewable energy source. The Commissioner referred to the work undertaken by the Council, in conjunction with both the Housing Executive and Translink, to reduce carbon emissions and of the support afforded by Queen's University and the Resilience Board in providing research and guidance to help the city achieve its ambitions in its carbon reduction programme.

In response to a question from a Member in relation to the delivery and roll out of the affordable warmth scheme, for which the Council was a delivery partner, the Commissioner suggested that it might be prudent to invite a representative from DfE to address the Working Group in the matter, given that DfE was working currently on an energy strategy for the province and had requested a response from local government in that regard.

The Working Group noted the information which had been provided and thanked the Commissioner for Resilience for her detailed and informative presentation.

Update on Belfast City Council Climate Plan

The Commissioner for Resilience reminded the Working Group that the Council had signed off previously, the methodology associated with undertaking its Climate Plan. She referred specifically to a key element of that plan involving an environmental sustainability audit which would involve examining all aspects of the Council's functions, including its assets, policies and their impact on climate change. She referred to the need to undertake a financial exercise to evaluate the costs associated with making the necessary adjustments to these areas. She stated that the environmental sustainability audit would be mapped against both the sustainable development framework and relevant legislation, in order to identify the Council's strengths and weaknesses

associated with its policies and process. She stated further that, the mapping exercise would help identify the costs associated with making the necessary adjustments to meet the targets identified within its climate plan.

The Working Group was informed that under the Council's climate adaptation and risk assessment, it would be necessary to undertake a comprehensive risk assessment in relation to the Council's assets and specifically, identify the impact climate change might have on its asset portfolio. The Commissioner informed the Members that the climate adaptation plan on was being undertaken currently, in partnership with Climate Northern Ireland, who would be invited to address the Working Group with an update on the progress of its work, in October 2020.

The Commissioner referred to a third strand of work commissioned by the Council in respect of an energy review which would examine how the organisation procures its energy and what opportunities might be utilised to improve energy efficiency, generate its own supply of energy including the potential to form energy partnerships with other suppliers.

Noted.

DfE Energy Strategy for Northern Ireland and BCC involvement in subsequent expert Working Groups

The Sustainable Development Manager informed the Members that DfE had appointed a number of Working Groups to assist in the development of the new Energy Strategy. She stated that there were seven groups in all, focussing on transport, energy efficiency, heat etc. and that representatives from the Council were sitting on two of those group vis a vis, Transport and Energy Consumers. She highlighted the importance of this work in bringing new and innovative solutions to the table. She noted that the close partnership arrangements between the Council and DfE on this project was mutually beneficially, as each was learning form the other. She noted that within the energy consumers group there was a sharp focus on the need to protect consumers from the impact of both energy price hikes and scarcity of supply.

Noted.

Update on Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure

The Working Group was informed that the Sustainable Development Manager was leading the Innovate UK VPACH 2 project which focussed on repurposing Virgin Media's internet and communications services for the purpose of electric vehicle charging. She reported that the project had a focus of providing infrastructure in 'hard to reach' areas where terraced housing effectively meant residents had no access to off – street charging. She reported that by repurposing Virgin Media's infrastructure this would negate the need to carry out unnecessary excavation work. She stated that there were seven work packages which included the development of a geo-spatial planning tool, and a web form for the requisition of charge points, the promotion of electric vehicle use and the trailing of electric bikes.

It was reported that when the project started it was anticipated that there would be no physical build out of charging infrastructure in the city during the project, however, a policy change in Northern Ireland in March, now provided an opportunity for commercial charge point operators to enter the market. She stated that there were still hurdles to overcome before the private sector investment was realised. She reported that the Council was working closely with DfI to explore the possibility of building targeted charging infrastructure to test the market and encourage new business models to develop.

The Working Group noted the information which had been provided and requested that a briefing paper on the details of the project be made available to the Members, in order to provide more detailed information on the issues to be resolved around the project.

PCAN Belfast Climate Commission - future programme of work

The Commissioner for Resilience highlighted the work and roles of the Climate Commission and Resilience Board, the former which focused on the provision of advice, research and data analysis and the latter dealing primarily with, the delivery of projects. She highlighted the need to forward the mini-stern to central government officials to secure cooperation on this important issue.

The Working Group was informed that the Climate Commission incorporated a number of sub-groups relevant to each of the cities involved in climate mitigation measures and that, the sub-groups relevant to Belfast were:

- Community Climate Action
- Just Transition and
- Green Finance

The Commissioner referred to work which had been undertaken with other cities in order to ascertain how they had structured some of their projects, with particular reference to climate resilient infrastructure and how such projects could be funded in the future. She emphasised the important relationship between the Council and the Climate Commission and stated that, should the Members wish to be provided with further information on the work of the Climate Commission, she would be happy to make that information available.

The Working Group noted the information which had been provided.

Update on Assembly All-Party Group on Climate Action (facilitated through Sustainable NI)

The Commissioner for Resilience agreed to bring an update to the Working Group, as a standing item, on the work of the All-Party Group on Climate Action.

Illumination of City Hall

The Working Group considered a proposal by the chairperson, Councillor Smyth, to illuminate the City Hall on 8th October, 2020 to celebrate Clean Air Day, subject to authority being granted by the Strategic Policy and Resources Committee. The proposal was seconded by Councillor de Faoite and the Commissioner agreed to forward a report in the matter, to that Committee, on behalf of the Working Group.

Date of Next Meeting

The Working Group noted that its next meeting would be held on Monday, 19th October at 5.15 p.m.

Chairperson