

Minutes

All Party Group on Climate Action

26 June 2020 | 10:30am

at Virtual

Members in attendance: Rachel Woods MLA, John Blair MLA, Andrew Muir MLA, Claire Sugden MLA, Pat Catney MLA, John Stewart MLA, Jim Wells MLA, Steve Aiken MLA, Clare Bailey MLA, Caoimhe Archibald MLA, Phillip McGuigan MLA, Cllr Billy Webb (ANBC), Cllr Roisin Lynch (ANBC), Cllr Stephen Dunlop (ANDBC), Cllr Eddie Thompson (ANDBC), Cllr Siobhan Currie (FODC), Cllr Martin Greg (LCCC), Alderman Michael Henderson (LCCC), Cllr Brian Smyth (BCC), Cllr Greg McKeen (MEABC), Cllr Darryn Causby (ABCBC), Cllr Jill MacCauley (ABCBC), Cllr Peter McReynolds (BCC), Cllr Donal McPeake (MUDC), Cllr Mary Durkan (DCSDC), Cllr William Clarke (NMDDC)

In attendance: Denis McMahon (DAERA), Steven Agnew (NIRIG), Lisa O’Kane (NILGA), Nichola Hughes (Sustainable NI), Leo Strawbridge (Sustainable NI), John Barry (QUB), Ricky Bamford (Green Party NI), John Martin (RSPB), Jonathan Bell (RSPB), Paul Stapleton (NIE Networks), Edel Creery (NIE Networks), Shane Finnegan (AIKEN), John McManus (AIKEN), Charlotte Daly (FODC), Gavin Wallace (North Coast World Earth), Geraldine Noe (BITC), Chris Lowans (QUB), Robert Clements (NIHE), Cathy Burns (DCSDC), Joseph Ireland (QUB), Sheena McEldowney (NMDDC), Andrew Cassels (MUDC), Barry Patience (ABCBC), Patrick Keatley (UU), Stephen Jones (Climate NI), Kate Livingstone (Alliance Party)

Apologies: Cllr Robert Irvine (FODC), Cllr Terry Andrews (NMDDC), Cllr Anne Forde (MUDC), Margaret McMahon (FODC)

1.	Welcome	Action
	<p>Rachel Woods, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were noted. Rachel stressed the importance of the meeting in light of the need for a holistic green recovery from Covid 19 and the announcement of the Green Growth Strategy by Minister Poots earlier in the week.</p> <p>Rachel noted a change in representation from ABC Council: Darryn Causby and Jill MacCauley replace Brona Haughey and Brian Pope.</p>	
2.	Governance	Action
	<p>The minutes of the previous meeting with accepted as a true record. This was proposed by Cllr Brian Smith and seconded by Cllr Martin Gregg.</p> <p>The Terms of Reference were circulated prior to the meeting, with one amendment. This added biodiversity as a key issue. They were accepted on the proposal of Roisin Lynch which was seconded by Cllr Martin Gregg.</p>	

3.	Policy Update	
	<p>Minister Poots sent his apologies but Denis McMahon, DAERA Permanent Secretary attended in his place Owen Little, Head of Environmental Policy was also present. It was agreed that all unanswered questions would be submitted in writing to the Minister.</p> <p><u>Presentation</u></p> <p>Minister Poots has shown a real sense of purpose in making climate change his 1st priority. He has already started to put this into action in a number of areas. The thinking around green growth has been a key principle since 2018 and working towards a sustainable, living, working active landscape. Dmcm said that there was recognition that there is a synergy between a low carbon lifestyle, health and better business. There is a need for a co-designed strategy with as broad a base as possible. Expressions of interest from possible contributors has been high, with 2,500 responses. DMcM assured members that the green growth strategy is an Executive wide strategy. This has been given a mandate and must be developed as a coalition. He admitted that the links between cause and effect are weak, thereby making it harder to measure against a single indicator. This then makes it harder to communicate outcomes. There are 9 possible foundation projects which include: forestation, removing plastics, creation of energy for export, sustainable transport, connecting people to the environment and growth, blue carbon habitats and the sequestration of carbon.</p> <p>He said that recovery must be green and that the market must be linked into the conversation e.g. how farmers can account for carbon and to educate them leading to behavioural change. There is a commitment to move to a zero carbon economy in line with the Climate Change Act (CCA). He wishes to reinvent NI to be a place that can produce a lot of food sustainably without impacting negatively on the environment.</p> <p><u>Q&A</u></p> <p>RW asked if the CCA will be coming before the house in this mandate and if there was additional information that could be shared with the assembly.</p> <p>DMcM said that it was planned to be in the current mandate but with delays as a result of Covid 19 he cannot guarantee this. OL said that the Minister doesn't want to be rushed over legislation which sets the agenda up to 2050. He wishes to consider the issues in depth. The circular economy agenda is complex and he wants to understand the implications.</p> <p>IMcC asked if the woodland strategy of 2006 would be refreshed as it is significantly off target. DMcM said that they were going to phase in planting with 500 hectares this year. Moving towards 900 hectares pa is moving quickly and the</p>	

Minister is committed to the next 10 years.

PMcG said that the CCA must set the context for all other strategies and cannot be delayed, everything else ties into this. DAERA are working on the basis of the CCA happening in this mandate at an appropriate level for NI based on the findings of the CCC at Westminster.

CIrBW raised the issue of the financial challenges facing Councils and asked if the Minister could commit to adequate resourcing of any mandate given to them to mitigate against climate change. **DMcM** said that there was a general commitment to work with Councils, as illustrated in the Reuse/Recycle programme for example.

SA said that greenhouse gas emissions had decreased by 45% since the 90s. He asked if an assessment had been carried out on the breakdown of that figure and if the impact of renewable energy had been included? **DMcM** said that official statistics did not cover everything but would look at this if SA wrote to the Department.

The next big step was to link energy to sustainable transport. There was a need to store more energy and investigate the scope for off-shore production. It is important that the energy strategy is linked to the CCA. He said there was great support from the DfE.

CL spoke on transport and energy equity. Research was been carried out at QUB on equity and a just transition which looked at how CC could make inequality worse for those already disadvantaged. There was a need to mitigate for inequality. He was happy to share their findings with the Department.

JB questioned what was 'growth' and that growth is problematic when it is decoupled from welfare. He said that it is biophysically impossible to grow the economy in a static environment. The world cannot get any bigger even if that growth is green. Normal was the problem and we need to build on social justice and inclusivity. He offered to work with the Department on ensuring a socially just transition.

DMcM acknowledged that there were political differences around the economy. Low carbon lives were healthier but the link between poverty and poor health is a challenge. JB asked if Green Growth must mean more consumption and that profitability is not the same as more or bigger.

CIr ET asked about EV infrastructure and the difficulty for Councils in accessing funding for on street residential charging points. He said that central government should play a key role in a regional approach to charging points and funding should be split as it is on street maintenance.

DMcM said he would follow up on this directly with the Minister

	<p>and that the Minister is keen on the principle of electric vehicles. NH clarified that Councils need access to grants and that DfI need to lead on this. It would be more cost effective if organised centrally. DAERA have a role to play in encouraging this.</p> <p>JB talked about the need for nature based solutions e.g. kelp/forests/reed beds and said that the Nature for Climate Fund in England and Scotland had significant investment. He asked if this could be replicated and if funding would come from Westminster or the EU under the Protocol?</p> <p>DMcM said that NI needed to work within the existing budget. That the Department is looking at all options. There is a Peatland Strategy being developed and they will look for funding on the back of this. VfM is a key challenge and proving that investment provides this for the tax payer. It is hard to show how bio-diversity produces gains and to make results meaningful and it needs 'currency' which shows impact including financial impact. This then leads to further investment.</p> <p>OL added that there was work being carried out under Peace Plus to make sure eco-system and low-carbon projects can be funded in priority areas and on a cross border basis.</p>	
<p>4.</p>	<p>Presentation: The Role of Local Government in Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation, Nichola Hughes, Sustainable Northern Ireland</p>	
	<p>NH asked what are the drivers for a Green Recovery? There needs to be a mission statement (the Why) which will be central to assessing What needs to be done and How it will be implemented.</p> <p>Key opportunities for local authorities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change planning has started, councils ahead of central government on climate delivery • Councils well placed to understand opportunities in their local areas • Councils could develop local area energy plans – but energy and spatial planning must become integrated • Councils could set renewable energy targets in their Local Development Plans but national planning policy framework must be reviewed first • Councils have critical role in ensuring buildings are 'fit for the future' - new build and retrofit, including providing cheap finance • Councils can implement clean air zones and incentives for clean transport • Waste infrastructure will need to be 'carbon capture storage' ready • Councils are well placed to develop resilience plans <p>Barriers to local authority action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is insufficient capacity within councils at present • Anything not statutory is at risk post Covid 19 • Climate legislation needed ASAP • Need statutory duty on Councils to act 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Climate change not given sufficient attention in local plans e.g. Community Plans, LDPs • Building regulations and national planning policy currently hinder local climate progress • There is no monitoring of local area GHG emissions currently • There is no enforcement of sustainable development duty at present • Emissions reductions pathways are not being coordinated across the eleven council areas <p>Discussion:</p> <p>JB said he was keen the Green Growth strategy is talked about outside Stormont. Community groups and individuals need involved. The public need educated and inter-departmental working must improve.</p> <p>OL said that inter-departmental working is very complex. While the draft PfG revolves around outcome based accountability, departmental structures don't link this to budgets and shared targets. There are constraints in channelling the money to the right areas. There continues to be competition for resources and political drivers. Addressing CC will become another area of competition. There are still many barriers to joint working. Systems create inertia and the systems have not changed.</p> <p>SA asked how the restructuring of green energy development sits with the climate emergency commitment.</p> <p>JB asked if it would be possible for there to be a public record of what each council is doing in regard to renewable energy. Adjacent councils might be doing very different and contradictory things. Lisa from NILGA agreed to look at this.</p>	
5.	Date of Next Meeting	
	<p>It was agreed that it was important to continue with the APG The next meeting will be held on 25th September at 10.30 am when the guest speaker will be Chris Stark, Committee on Climate Change.</p>	
6.	Close	
	Rachel thanked everyone for attending. Meeting closed at 12:15	