

Minutes

All Party Group on Climate Action

19 August 2020 | 10:00am

at Virtual

Members in attendance: Clare Bailey MLA, John Blair MLA, Justin McNulty MLA, Kellie Armstrong MLA, Rachel Woods MLA, Steve Aiken MLA, Pat Catney MLA, Cllr Anne Forde (MUDC), Cllr Billy Webb (ANBC), Cllr Eddie Thompson (ANDBC), Cllr Kathryn McNickle (ANDBC), Cllr Peter McReynolds (BCC), Cllr Siobhan Currie (FODC), Cllr Terry Andrews (NMDDC)

In attendance: Adam Martin, Alex Tennant, Alexey Jones, Amanda Slevin (QUB), Amy Bell (Climate NI), Andra Vladu, Anna Kernahan, Barry Patience (ABCBC), Catherine Hunter (MEABC), Cathy Burns (DCSDC), Charlotte Daly (FODC), Chris Quinn (NIYF), Conor, Ellie Massey, Emma Adair (ANDBC), George Poots, Georgia Allen, Geraldine Noe (BITC), Jade Berman (Climate NI), Johnny Stewart (Weber Shandwick), Jonathan Bell (RSPB NI), Joseph Ireland (QUB), Karen Smyth (NILGA), Kate Livingstone (Alliance Party), Lynda Sullivan (FoE), Malachy Campbell (NIEL), Margaret McMahon (FODC), Melissa Lyttle, Naoimi Sloan, Nichola Hughes (SNI), Pamela Beatty (Firmus Energy), Pat Austin (NEA), Philip Glenon (NIYF), Rebecca Begly, Ricky Bamford (Green Party), Roisin Lynch (ANBC), Sinead McIvor (Green Party), Sophie Elder, Steven Agnew (NIRIG), Teresa Hill

Apologies: Cllr Robert Irvine (FODC), Cllr Darryn Causby (ABCBC), Andrew Muir MLA, Cllr Brian Smyth (BCC), Cllr Lorna McAlpine (ANDBC), Caoimhe Archibald MLA

1. Welcome	<p>Rachel Woods MLA (RW), Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting in particular the youth representatives and growing list of observers.</p> <p>Apologies were recorded. RW provided a brief overview of the debate on climate emergency terminology that took place recently following comments by the Minister in a radio interview, which had prompted today's meeting. RW added that it was important the youth voice was heard, and that the APG could be a mechanism to support that.</p>
2. Governance	<p>The minutes of the previous meeting with accepted as a true record. This was proposed by Clare Baily MLA and seconded by Steve Aiken MLA.</p> <p>Rachel noted the Minister's response to a letter issued by the APG after the June meeting.</p>
3. Youth Voice on Climate Emergency	<p><u>Presentations by:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rebecca Begley, Naomi Sloan, Adam Martin, Andra Vladu (Northern Ireland Youth Forum)• George Poots, Ellie Massey (Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and

- Young People)
- Anna Kernahan (Fridays for Future)
- Joseph Ireland (QUB)

Presentations can be downloaded at:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/ded0pmjo157sto8/19%20August%20Presentations.pptx?dl=0>

4 Discussion

RW invited members of the APG to ask the youth representatives questions, and comment on the presentations received.

JB thanked the youth representatives for their presentations. He asked the panellists for their opinions on the Minister comments on the climate emergency. He also said as a member of the AERA committee, he would pass the panellists feedback to the Committee. **JB** appealed to the youth representatives at the meeting to consider participating in the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly: <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/visit-and-learning/youth-assembly-2020/> .

SA: Thanked the youth representatives for their presentations. Asked the group, what is the APG going to do in response to the appeal from the youth representatives for greater action on climate change. What is the Group's purpose? He suggested that if the NI Executive continue to do nothing, that climate legislation with ambitious emission targets should be brought forward to the Assembly as a Private Member's Bill as soon as possible and tied in with the Northern Ireland Youth Assembly, adding that Northern Ireland should be as ambitious as possible when it comes to addressing climate change, to address the concerns of our young people.

PC noted that the UN COP26 event on Climate Change will be hosted in Glasgow in November 2021, and the Group could help garner cross-party support for legislation on climate change before that important event.

JMcN agreed with the suggestion from SA confirming that he would support a Private Members Bill on Climate Change.

CB suggested use of the APG to pull all of the bodies and actors mentioned in **Jl's** presentation together, to strengthen the demands of the youth climate movement.

RW invited the youth representatives to respond to the comments.

AK felt Northern Ireland cannot have a Minister for the Environment who does not believe climate change is an emergency. She outlined that agriculture and the environment are intrinsically linked, and didn't agree that they should be in separate policy portfolios. She noted that agriculture represents the largest share of Northern Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions (27%) and a lot of people depend on it for their livelihoods. Although there are opposing views, it can be part of the solution not the problem if more sustainable agriculture methods are adopted.

In response to a query on what councils can do on climate change, she advised decision makers to be more informed, read up on the issues (IPCC 5th Assessment Report) and listen to the science and be more ambitious. She highlighted there is capacity in the NI electricity grid for 60% renewable energy but we are <50% at present. She highlighted that our emissions need to peak by the end of 2020 in order to limit global warming below dangerous levels, but Northern Ireland's emissions are nowhere near that. She

ended by suggesting that the Minister of Finance should be putting forward proposals for a Green New Deal, focussed on social justice principles.

EM agreed that we should not have a Minister that is not fully committed to tackling climate change and who does not believe climate change is an emergency.

AV said it was a shock to hear our Minister who should be championing the climate cause, saying that it is not really a crisis, and not taking it seriously. She added that politicians have a moral duty to protect children, and all citizens, from the consequences of climate change and limit warming to no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius. To do that, she added, the IPCC recommends cutting carbon dioxide emissions in half by 2030. She sees no evidence of Northern Ireland doing that. There are too many meetings, and not enough action. She ended by appealing to the NI Executive to take forward the commitments in New Decade, New Approach deal with a matter of urgency and to treat the climate crisis with the same level of urgency as COVID19.

KS from NILGA said that progress, at council level, is happening but acknowledged that it is slow. Councils are in the process of developing local climate action plans, in the absence of legislation. She acknowledged that the pandemic had delayed progress and that it was important that climate activists, particularly young people, keep pushing.

AM commented on the language of Minister Poots who said 'the terms crisis and emergency are not helpful' calling this extremely concerning. He noted the fact that climate change will lead to a significant rise in climate refugees around the world, people displaced from their home countries due to inhospitable weather conditions. He reminded the Group that we are responsible for this crisis, and we cannot close our doors and abandon these people. We need a war like approach, same level of effort as we have seen deployed against COVID19.

RB noted that NI has made the lowest contribution to climate emission reductions in the UK. We are lagging behind. More can be done.

SC noted that Fermanagh and Omagh District Council had like many other councils across Northern Ireland declared a climate emergency and is consulting on a local sustainable development and climate strategy. She went on to say that there is only so much that councils can do and that it needs greater attention at Assembly level. It is a cross cutting issue, and agreed that there should be a separate Ministry dedicated to co-ordinating action on climate change. She noted that all Ministers will have to adhere to and make changes. She noted rural challenges in relation to sustainable transport, and that there is still not enough focus on wellbeing within Council. It needs to be dealt with at every level of government. She noted that most councils are on an electricity tariff that is from 100% renewable sourced electricity, but wanted clarity from the supplier if this was definitely the case. **ACTION:** SNI to seek clarity from the electricity contract supplier on % renewable sourced electricity.

RW invited MLAs to respond to the comments and advise on next steps.

KA noted that she is deputy chair of the Communities Committee and that not enough is being done by that department on climate change. Buildings going up today are not fit for the future, they are not low or zero-carbon. She suggested further engagement by this APG with the other APGs and to perhaps begin by writing out to all of the Ministers and ask them what proactive measures they are taking in the short term to address the climate emergency. She also suggested engaging with the other APGs, e.g. APG on Construction, to make sure they are aligned.

	<p>JB appealed for cross-country representation when lobbying government and councils to encourage change beyond the greater Belfast boundary, particularly in the context of sustainable transport and pushing for cycle paths that are not just for recreation but for an interconnected cycling network that could be used for commuting purposes.</p> <p>JI agreed that a Private Members' Bill was the way forward, in tandem with work ongoing by DAERA. CB stated that work was ongoing in this area.</p> <p>RB noted that there was a commitment for 1000km of cycling infrastructure in the NI Greenway Strategy, but that there is no evidence of that happening. She added that it is too dangerous to cycle on the roads outside of the city, and that funding is needed to connect up existing cycling routes.</p> <p>JB suggested at the next meeting a slot is dedicated to councils, to highlight their key asks for MLAs / central government.</p> <p>RW summarised actions / next steps:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write to Minister Poots asking for an indicatable timeline for draft climate change legislation and a climate change strategy • Write to Departments asking what they are doing to contribute to the UN Paris Agreement and UK Climate Change Act
5	Date of Next Meeting
	<p>The next meeting will be held on 25 September at 10.00 am. Guest speaker: Chris Stark, Committee on Climate Change.</p>
6	Close
	<p>Rachel thanked everyone for attending. Meeting closed at 11:30</p>