

Minutes

All Party Group on Climate Action

24 January 2020 | 10:30am

at Room 29, Parliament Buildings, Stormont

Members in attendance: Cllr Martin Greg (LCCC), Andrew Muir (MLA), John Blair (MLA), Justin McNulty (MLA), John Stewart (MLA), Jim Wells (MLA), Rachel Woods (MLA), Cllr Peter McReynolds (BCC), Cllr Mary Durkan (DCSDC), Cllr Brian Pope (ABCDC), Cllr Roisin Lynch (ANBC), Cllr Billy Webb (ANBC), Cllr Terry Andrews (NMDDC), Cllr Brian Smyth (BCC), Cllr Greg McKeen (MEABC)

In attendance: Andrew Cassells (Sustainable NI), Nichola Hughes (Sustainable NI), Leo Strawbridge (Sustainable NI), John Barry (QUB), Ernest Purvis (Green Party)

Apologies: Cllr Catherine Kelly (FODC), Cllr William Clarke (NMDDC), Cllr Bróna Haughy (ABCBC), Alderman Michael Henderson (LCCC), Cllr Eddie Thompson (ANDBC), Cllr Stephen Dunlop (ANDBC), Pat Catney (MLA), Caoimhe Archibald (MLA)

1.	Welcome	Action
	<p>Andrew Cassells, Chair of Sustainable NI, welcomed everyone. Apologies were noted and attendees introduced themselves.</p> <p>Andrew noted that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the formation of an All-Party Group on Climate Change and to elect Officers for the proposed Group.</p> <p>Andrew provided background information on the work of Sustainable NI, and the rationale for establishing the Group. Andrew noted that MLAs and Councillors had been invited given the intergovernmental nature of the climate emergency.</p> <p>Andrew introduced the guest speaker, John Barry, Professor of Green Political Economy at the Centre for Sustainability, Equality and Climate Action, Queens University Belfast.</p>	
2.	Presentation	
	<p>Presentation: John Barry, QUB, Tackling the planetary emergency at local and regional levels</p> <p>Key points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• The scale and urgency of the task requires system and structure redesign and transformation.• Reform and minor adjustments will not suffice• What is required is fundamental transformation of systems such as food, energy, retail, local services, transport, housing and work. This will require novel	

	<p>solutions.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decarbonisation and climate resilience measures have to go hand in hand with delivering a range of co-benefits and a 'just transition', (for consumers – energy prices and fuel poverty and producers, in high GHG emitting sectors, esp. agriculture in NI) • Local actors required to drive to local action e.g. new 'Belfast Climate Commission' launched by QUB and Belfast City Council • Case Study – Economic Case for Climate Action in Belfast. Belfast's energy bill is currently £389m a year, and it is forecast to grow to £467m a year by 2030. With investment of £180m a year through to 2030, Belfast could reduce its energy bill by £264m each year, with investments paid back in 6 years. <p><u>Discussion points:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brian Pope noted the level of social disruption that climate change will create. He also highlighted the interconnected nature of the policy response required, and that policy makers must engage in new ways of thinking, and mechanisms to co-ordinate what must be a cross-departmental and cross-sectoral response. There should be greater levels of citizen engagement in designing and developing solutions. Brian asked John how Government can coordinate its response to climate change. John suggested one options would be to bring climate change and sustainable development back to the NI Executive. • John Blair described Northern Ireland's overreliance on oil and that piped natural gas was generally only available in the east of the province, not in the west. In terms of infrastructure, how can politicians help support rural communities' transition to cleaner sources of energy? John noted that most of the carbon intensity in rural areas was not coming from the power or transport sectors, but from land use. When the UK comes out of the Common Agricultural Policy following Brexit, John suggested that it would be vital that agri-food policy recognises the role that Northern Ireland's farming community can play in meeting regional climate objectives. Farmers should not be framed as carbon criminals but should be provided with a range of options that allow them to make an adequate living whilst helping to sequester carbon and nitrogen, and restore and protect biodiversity. 	
3.	Policy and Practice Update , Nichola Hughes, Sustainable Northern Ireland	
	<p>Key points:</p> <p>At international level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Sustainable Development Goals) is the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. 	

	<p>Climate action and sustainable development are interrelated.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Paris Agreement 2015, signed by UN Member States, aims to limit the increase in global average temperature to well below 2°C and to pursue efforts to limit the rise to 1.5°C. <p>At UK level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Climate Change Act (2008) requires the UK to contribute net-zero greenhouse gases by 2050. The UK Climate Change Act also created a framework to develop the UK’s ability to adapt to climate change. <p>At NI level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable Development and Climate Change policy sits within Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) • Sustainable Development Statutory Duty for councils and government departments, under the NI (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006. However, there is no compliance or reporting mechanism. • Northern Ireland is the only devolved region of the UK without a Climate Change Act. • There are no specific carbon reduction targets for Northern Ireland in the UK Climate Change Act 2008, however it is implicit that Northern Ireland contributes to the UK effort. There was a special report on ‘Reducing Emissions in Northern Ireland’ (February 2019) published by the UK Climate Change Committee prior to the Net Zero Target which said that Northern Ireland’s fair contribution to the UK’s fifth carbon budget (2028-2032) would require emission reductions of at least 35% against 1990 levels by 2030. • The Northern Ireland Climate Change Adaptation Programme (NICCAP2) was published in January 2019 and sets out government’s response to the latest climate change risk assessment, as well as information on what councils, businesses, the third sector and society are doing to become more climate ready. • There is no equivalent Climate Change Mitigation Strategy for Northern Ireland, yet. • Climate action previously came under Outcome 2 of the draft Programme for Government 2016 – 2021. Climate action in the Outcomes Delivery Plan concentrated on reducing emissions influenced or controlled by government, as well as decarbonising the power sector. • Climate NI, the Government’s climate change support programme, promotes and coordinates climate change adaptation awareness and planning in Northern Ireland. There is no equivalent climate change mitigation support programme. • The New Decade, New Approach highlighted the importance of integrating economic and climate policy, and stated that the Executive will ‘tackle climate change head on’ and ‘introduce legislation and targets for 	
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	<p>reducing carbon emissions in line with the Paris Climate Change Accord'.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sinn Fein motion (amended by Green Party) on the Climate Emergency to be debated by the NI Assembly on Monday 3 February 2020. (Motion carried). • A <i>Local Government Climate Action Network</i> has been established to facilitate collaboration, information exchange and learning among officers responsible for climate change planning. Civil servants also participate. • An <i>All Party Group on Climate Action</i> with MLA and Councillor representation has been established (this group) <p>Council level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No statutory responsibilities on local councils in relation to climate change. Councils do however have a statutory duty on sustainable development. • Four councils have declared a climate emergency • Five councils have an officer working full-time on climate / sustainability issues. • All councils have established or are in the process of establishing a cross-party working group on climate change / resilience • All councils have nominated a Councillor to sit on the NI All Party Group on Climate Action • Key responsibilities / policy levers for local councils on climate action include: planning, housing (building control, energy efficiency and fuel poverty), waste, economic development and emergency planning. 	
3.	Discussion	
	<p>Andrew introduced the discussion, reflecting on the fact that Climate Action is one of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and that it is important to link work on climate change with Northern Ireland's wider sustainable development agenda.</p> <p>Andrew also reflected on his experience in the waste sector and the parallels between the climate and waste policy areas. Andrew noted that Northern Ireland had recently achieved its 50% recycling target but that legislation, targets and price incentives were essential in reaching those targets. Also, it had taken a long time to reach those targets. The climate crisis will require much faster progress.</p> <p><u>Comments:</u> Cllr Andrews noted that communications is key, it is important to get the message out to general public what action is being taken to address climate change. Also, that funding needs to be mobilised quickly and that government needs to devise a plan of action as soon as possible.</p> <p>Collaboration within and between tiers of government is a vital component in an effective national response. Consistency is</p>	

	<p>important across the councils, and that this Group could help facilitate this and drive the changes needed.</p> <p>There was a short discussion about the climate emergency motion brought forward by Sinn Fein, to be discussed by the NI Assembly on Monday. Rachel Woods noted that there had been a couple of amendments made by the Green Party and the updated wording was shared with the Group.</p> <p>The Group discussed the importance of targets, agreeing that regional targets were essential and that they should be science based. Suggestion that the Group could help steer this. The Group agreed that local council area targets should be consistent with NI and UK targets and legislation.</p> <p>John Blair noted that climate change will affect everyone, and everything. From physical health and mental health, to water, transport, energy, business etc. The solutions transcend all government departments, policy areas, and tiers of government. It is not just an environment issue.</p> <p>Justin McNulty added that it would be important to build on the momentum garnered to date, reminding Members that the public want immediate and effective action. A collaborative approach would be required and all political parties should be at the table.</p>	
<p>4.</p>	<p>Governance</p>	
	<p>Andrew noted that the Group needed to elect a Chair, Vice Chair and Secretary. The Group agreed a Treasurer would not be required.</p> <p>It was agreed the title should be:- <i>All Party Group on Climate Action</i></p> <p>Rachel noted that originally it was intended to establish the group as a 'Cross Party Working Group' with councillor representation but with the Assembly restored, it would be wise to register is as an All Party Group as it would carry more weight.</p> <p>Nominations for Chair: Mary Durkan nominated Rachel Woods, Seconded by Brian Pope.</p> <p>Nominations for Vice-Chair: Brian Smyth nominated John Blair, Seconded by Brian Pope.</p> <p>Rachel Woods took over as Chair.</p> <p>There was a suggestion to invite NILGA to a future meeting(s).</p> <p>Andrew noted that a Terms of Reference had been drafted, and would be tabled for adoption at the next meeting. A copy of</p>	<p>Action 1: Rachel to submit APG registration form and check if councillors have speaking rights</p> <p>Action 2: Nichola to circulate Terms of Reference</p>

	John's presentation would also be circulated.	
5.	AOB	
	<p>Members discussed dates for future meetings. The Group agreed to meet quarterly, on the last Friday of the month.</p> <p>Dates of future meetings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 27 March 2020, 10:30 – 12:00 • 26 June 2020, 10:30 – 12:00 • 25 September 2020, 10:30 – 12:00 • 11 December 2020, 10:30 – 12:00 	Action 3: Nichola to circulate minutes and presentation
6	Close	
	Meeting closed at 11:55	