

Minutes

All Party Group on Climate Action

25 June 2021 | 10:00 am – 12:00 pm
at Virtual

Members in attendance: Rachel Woods MLA (Chair), John Blair MLA, Minister Edwin Poots MLA, Kellie Armstrong MLA, Andrew Muir MLA, Cllr Roisin Lynch, Cllr Terry Andrews, Cllr Donal McPeake, Cllr Maeve O'Neill, Cllr Simon Lee, Cllr Michael Henderson, Cllr Katheryn McNicholl, Cllr Brian Smyth, Cllr Billy Webb

In attendance: Alan McVicker, Ani Kanakaki, Eimear Montague, Liam McNally, Anthea Owens, Caroline Magill, Catherine Blease, Catherine Cunningham, Catherine Hunter, Charlotte Daly, Charmaine Beer, Christine Watts, Ciara Burch, Ciaran Fox, Claire Downey, Colin Breen, Darren McKinstry, David Morrow, Declan Allison, Dolores Blazhevskia, Elaine Smith, Fiona McKilligan, Heidi Clarke, Ian Montgomery, Janice Harris, Jennifer Stephens, Jennifer Cunningham, Joe McKearney, Joseph Doherty, Karen Smyth, Karen Phillips, Karen Arbuckle, Kate Livingstone, Kathy Dunphy, Leo Strawbridge, Lesley Roberts, Lisa Cartmill, Louise McCardle, Margaret McMahon, Martin Hearty, Mary Brady, Clare McKeown, Neale Blair, Neil McCauley, Nigel Dowrey, Nuala Griffiths, Oonagh McGillion, Philip Thompson, Rachel Hook, Richard Hauxwell-Baldwin, Robert McLaughlin, Sheena McEldowney, Andrew Cassells, Sophie Elder, Tim Gilpin, Jim Mairs, Scott Howes

Attendees: 72

Apologies: Steve Aiken MLA, Cllr Eddie Thompson, Cllr Siobhan Currie, Cllr Robert Irvine

1	Opening Remarks
	Rachel Woods MLA (RW), Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting and extended her thanks to the speakers. RW noted the meeting had been arranged to look at and discuss the issue of waste and the transition to a circular economy. She advised the group that she would have to leave at 11:45 and that John Blair, Vice-Chair, would Chair the remainder of the meeting.
1.1	Apologies
	Apologies were recorded.
1.2	Chair's Business
	RW noted consultations live right now.
2	Meeting Admin
2.1	Minutes of meeting on 28 May 2021
	Minutes of the meeting on 28 May were approved: proposed by Cllr Terry Andrews, seconded by Cllr Michael Henderson. RW noted the next meeting on 24 September will focus on divestment. David Murphy (NILGOSC) and Adam McGibbon (Market Forces) are confirmed as speakers.

3	Presentation: Climate Change and the Circular Economy
	<p>RW welcomed the first speaker Eimear Montague (EM), Project Manager of the Northern Ireland Resources Network (NIRN).</p> <p>EM delivered a presentation on NIRN members' activities to promote reuse and repair in the community, citing a variety of material streams and good practice including paint, bikes, digital equipment, tools, water bottles etc.</p> <p>Key asks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Separate targets for reuse and preparation for reuse • More the funding for reuse and repair sector • Promotion of NIRN and its members (www.ni.rn.com) <p>Contact: eimear@ni-rn.com</p> <p>Slides available here. Position paper available here.</p> <p>Q&A followed.</p> <p>RW asked what it means to be an affiliate member of NIRN, noting that not all councils are listed as such.</p> <p>EM explained that affiliate membership recognises that they cannot contribute to and shape policy positions in the way that full members can.</p> <p>RW asked if there are currently any targets for reuse or repair in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>EM confirmed there are not. She noted that the Irish parliament has drafted a Circular Economy Bill, which includes separate targets for reuse and preparation for reuse, which NIRN would welcome in NI.</p> <p>Kellie Armstrong (KA) asked if NIRN has had any discussions with DoF around government contracts and opportunities for reuse and waste reduction (e.g., reuse of digital equipment). She noted large volumes of waste equipment from schools and local health trusts, and described government efforts to tackle this kind of waste as piecemeal.</p> <p>EM noted that £3bn is spent annually in public procurement in NI and NIRN recognises this as a key opportunity for change. The Network has developed a position paper on green public procurement. EM said she was aware that government has looked at the option of reserve contracts and introduced good practice criteria on social value, but she believes more can be done.</p> <p>EM described a digital equipment reuse scheme operated by Belfast City Council. She also noted NIRN is working closely with DAERA on a blueprint to tackle digital household waste. There haven't yet been any conversations with the Department of Health or Department of Education but acknowledged the opportunities there.</p> <p>Maeve O'Neill (MO'N) asked what the big opportunities and challenges are for reuse?</p> <p>EM said last year, Circle Economy's Circularity Gap Report revealed that our world is only 8.6% circular, leaving a massive Circularity Gap. It highlighted the key opportunities for reducing emissions through circularity, with the largest gains to be made in housing, nutrition and mobility. The NI Executive is working on a new Circular Economy Strategic Framework which identifies four key sectors (Construction,</p>

	<p>Tourism, Bio-economy, Advanced Manufacturing) and four material flows (Food, Textiles, Electricals, Packaging) that the Strategy will focus on, modelled around the EU Circular Economy Action Plan.</p> <p>Ani Kanakaki asked (AK) if DAERA is planning to provide more funding for behaviour and lifestyle changes to encourage consumers to reuse materials and resources more.</p> <p>EM noted the strapline of NIRN is Rethink, Reuse, Repair. The network is funded by DAERA, and the Department supports programmes and activities around rethinking our use of resources in line with the waste hierarchy.</p> <p>Alan McVicker (AMcV) provided an overview of the Strategic Investment Board's work for the Department for Economy to benchmark circular economy performance and activities in Northern Ireland, noting the current Call for Evidence to inform the development of the Circular Economy Strategic Framework.</p> <p>RW expressed an interest in finding out more about this and will follow up on this separately.</p>
4	<p>Insights from Industry</p> <p><u>Presentation</u></p> <p>RW welcomed Liam McNally (LMcN) from International Synergies, who delivered a presentation on its resource matching service, delivered on behalf of Invest NI.</p> <p>Contact: Liam.McNally@international-synergies.com</p> <p>Slides available here.</p> <p><u>Presentation</u></p> <p>RW welcomed Joseph Doherty (JD) from Recycle NI, who provided an overview of progress in the recycling sector in Northern Ireland including practical examples of local circularity of materials from the recycling waste stream. He also outlined key challenges and opportunities for the sector.</p> <p>Contact: JosephDoherty@regenwaste.com</p> <p>Slides available here.</p> <p>Q&A followed.</p> <p>RW enquired if a lack of re-processing infrastructure or demand for certain materials in NI means that materials are exported to external markets?</p> <p>LMcN said there is an emphasis on prioritising re-purposing of materials for internal markets, but in some cases when a resource can't be matched within NI it is matched on the database with client in UK or EU.</p> <p>JD noted in some waste streams, where there isn't enough demand to match supply (e.g., over 30,000 tonnes of paper is produced by Huhtamaki but most of the paper must be exported as there isn't enough demand in NI).</p> <p>JD said the industry requires more support and investment to extend the quantity and quality of recyclable materials that can be recovered, which can be facilitated through</p>

	<p>public sector investment and planning support. To make recycling economical, 'niche' products must be exported where the capabilities do not yet exist in NI.</p> <p>MO'N noted that the quality of the recycling is paramount to material recovery, and that there should be a focus in waste policy on source separation and educating citizens to do their bit.</p> <p>JD acknowledged that kerbside sorting does tend to produce a higher quality product for the industry. Paper from co-mingled recycling is currently going to Huhtamaki for reprocessing. JD also noted that whilst DRS may do harm to the industry by reducing material flow for reprocessing, EPR will bring some benefits as packaging and other materials will be better designed to support separation and recycling.</p> <p>JB asked is DAERA and other government departments are currently supporting and promoting the resource matching service provided by International Synergies?</p> <p>LMcN noted that the programme's outcomes are set by the Department for Economy, the sponsor Department, but that they have engaged with DAERA and local authorities occasionally when specific issues arise.</p>
5	<p>Policies and programmes to reduce waste</p> <p>RW welcomed Edwin Poots (Minister for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs) to the meeting.</p> <p>The Minister provided an overview of measures underway or planned by his department to accelerate the transition to a zero waste, circular economy. EP noted the Department's primary strategy on climate change would be the Green Growth Strategy. His department is focussed on the biggest contributors to GHG emissions which are the agriculture, transport, and residential sectors. He listed examples of low hanging fruit but said that some changes are more challenging and will need government support. He said that his department would be investing £100m to support delivery of the Green Growth Strategy and Action Plan.</p> <p>RW enquired if the Department is planning to address the recycling infrastructure gap in Northern Ireland which results in recyclable material being sent to other countries for re-processing?</p> <p>EP noted that there is lots of research and innovation happening in this area, supported by his department, to boost domestic recycling capabilities. For example, work by Loughry College on sustainable food packaging. The recycling target is 65% but he believes NI should be aiming for a 70% recycling rate.</p> <p>EP noted that there is an infrastructure gap for dealing with residual waste. He noted gasification as being more efficient and environmentally friendly than traditional energy from waste technology, but that the government's emphasis going forward will be on driving up recycling rates to minimise residual waste. The Extended Producer Responsibility and Deposit Return Scheme represent significant steps forward in terms of government policy on waste reduction.</p> <p>JB noted that there isn't a joint up approach between local authorities and DAERA to incentivise recycling on the ground, for example in the hot food takeaway market. He asked if there could be a scheme whereby environmental inspectors check and enforce environmental standards in takeaway packaging and incentivise reusable and sustainable packaging through local grants or rates incentives?</p> <p>EP noted that DRS will help in this regard but also the takeaway packing represented a small fraction of the waste stream, there may only be marginal gains. He is keen to</p>

go beyond reverse venting DRS options, to make it even easier for citizens to return packaging and items at a household level. His department is working to eliminate single use plastic from the government estate. He said he would ask his department to explore if anything is planned in relation JB's line of enquiry.

Cllr Brian Smyth (**BS**) asked if the Minister can do anything to increase the fines for environmental crimes?

EP noted that whilst government can influence the maximum penalties available to the Courts, and NIEA can take an individual or an organisation to court over an environmental crime, ultimately the fine amount is at the discretion of the Judge.

Cllr Simon Lee (**SL**) asked for the Minister's thoughts on the proposed residual waste treatment facility at Hightown.

EP noted that in principle he was not against the use of incinerators but would prefer to use more advanced and efficient technologies. However, because of the time scales, these technologies may not be available and a solution would have to be found for NI's residual waste problem. He noted that energy from waste is routinely used in northern European countries considered to be environmentally advanced nations. He said he would be making his views clear on the matter, but that ultimately it was a decision for the Minister for Infrastructure.

Karen Smyth (**KS**) asked if DAERA would be providing adequate resourcing for local authorities to help government deliver the green growth agenda?

EP said there is a £25m fund for councils on waste but recognised this isn't the only element. Carbon reduction will require significant investment, and local councils and businesses will need to be supported appropriately. The challenge is technically possible but is a huge challenge and requires significant levels of funding from government. He listed a variety of projects his department is leading on to analyse and tackle waste and CO2 emissions from key emission sectors, particularly in the agri-food sector.

Cllr Maeve O'Neill (**MO'N**) respectfully disagreed on the need to build a new incinerator, preferring instead that NI works towards a zero waste, circular economy and prioritises investment in reuse and recycling and behaviour change over residual waste treatment facilities, noting the air and water pollution risks they pose and the need to secure a minimum amount of waste to 'feed' these facilities. She enquired if DAERA is developing a strategy to deal with animal waste from large-scale industrial farms, such as the planned 80,000 pig farm in the Antrim and Newtownabbey area?

EP outlined various solutions being developed to process and extract nutrients from animal waste, including energy through anaerobic digestion. He said large farms would be better equipped to invest in green growth measures than small farms. He said management of farm waste is a key priority for DAERA. There is likely going to be a £5.6m animal waste treatment plant needed in Northern Ireland in future, which will not be commercially viable and public investment will be necessary.

RW asked if the Minister is looking at introducing separate targets for reuse and preparation for reuse, as proposed by the NIRN earlier in the meeting?

EP said he wasn't sure but would check with his officials.

RW thanked the Minister for his time today.

6

AOB

John Blair (**JB**) took over as Chair.

	<p>He asked if there are any further items of business.</p> <p>Cllr Terry Andrews asked if consideration could be given to hosting a future meeting in person, with video-conferencing facilities to allow people to join remotely.</p>
7	Summary and close
	<p>JB summarised the main action points from the meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask the Minister / DAERA for a progress update on the department’s waste management strategy • Ask the Minister / DAERA if there are plans to introduce separate reuse targets within government policy and reporting frameworks • Ask if the Minister is working across government to prioritise rebuild over retrofit to reduce carbon and resource consumption in the construction sector <p>The next APG meeting will take place on Friday 24 September at 10:00am and will focus on Divestment.</p> <p>JB thanked members for attending. Meeting closed at 11:55.</p>