

Minutes

All Party Group on Climate Action

26 March 2021 | 10:00 am – 12:00 pm
at Virtual

Members in attendance: Rachel Woods MLA (Chair), John Blair MLA, Pat Catney MLA, Philip McGuigan MLA, Andrew Muir MLA, Steve Aiken MLA, Dolores Kelly MLA, Cllr Brian Smyth, Cllr Billy Webb, Cllr Terry Andrews, Cllr Donal McPeake, Cllr Eddie Thompson, Cllr Kathryn McNickle, Cllr Michael Henderson, Cllr Mary Durkan, Cllr Roisin Lynch, Cllr Siobhan Currie, Cllr Jill Macauley

In attendance: Karen Arbuckle, Anne Ford, Tiziana O'Hara, John McMullan, Jim Mairs, Andrew Frew, Annika Clements, Catherine Hunter, Charlotte Daly, Ciara Burch, Ciaran Fox, David Cowdrey, Cathy Burns, Ian Montgomery, Ian Gordon, Jane Clarke, John Barry, John Stewart, John McConnell, Johnny Bell, Joseph Carter, Anne-Marie McCann, Una Mailey, Joseph Ireland, Joseph Kilroy, Karen Smyth, Kate Livingston, Kerry Watton, Leo Strawbridge, Leona Maginn, Margaret McMahon, Maria Steele, Martin Hearty, Clare McKeown, Pat Austin, Paul Armstrong, Richard McLernon, Ricky Bamford, Robert McIntosh, Robert Clements, Sheena McEldowney, Sophie Elder, Stephen Dunlop, Steven Agnew, Terry Waugh, Tom Woolley, E Hunter, Barry Rooney

Apologies: Claire Sugden MLA, Cllr Robert Irvine, Cllr Martin Gregg

1	Opening Remarks
	Rachel Woods MLA (RW), Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting and extended her thanks to the speakers - Dolores Kelly MLA and representatives from the Joint Committee on Community Energy for joining the meeting.
1.1	Apologies
	Apologies were recorded.
1.2	Chair's Business
	<p>RW provided an update on activities since the previous meeting, noting the launch of the Economic Recovery Action Plan and the introduction of the Climate Change Bill (Private Member's Bill) to the Assembly at the beginning of the week.</p> <p>RW noted the findings of the recent KNIB litter survey which highlighted a rise in littering (especially PPE) and dog fouling since the pandemic. She also noted the launch of Defra consultations on the introduction of a Deposit Return Scheme and Extended Producer Responsibility.</p> <p>RW also welcomed the news that Wrightbus in Ballymena were one of three UK firms to be awarded a share of £11.2m from the UK government to develop hydrogen-fuel technology, safeguarding 1,000 jobs and creating an additional 3,000 more over the next 10 years.</p>

2	Meeting Admin
2.1	Minutes of meeting on 29 January 2021
	Minutes of the meeting on 29 January were approved: proposed by Cllr Terry Andrews, seconded by Cllr Siobhan Currie.
2.2	Actions arising
	<p>RW noted the following actions had been executed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • APG invited Dolores Kelly MLA to the meeting today to present on her Nature Restoration and Environment Bill • APG invited the Minister of Finance and Minister for Communities to the next meeting of the APG on 30 April to follow up on issues raised at the December meetings about sustainable buildings. • APG will schedule a further meeting on Fri 28 May to focus on sustainable land use, planning policy, and the role of Government and local councils in delivering transformative change in this area.
3	Presentation 1: Community Energy
	<p>RW welcomed Tiziana O'Hara, Anne Ford, John McMullan and Karen Arbuckle who delivered a joint presentation: 'A Case for NI Community Energy Policy'.</p> <p>Slides available to download here. Position paper here.</p> <p>Contact details: E: tiziana@coopalternatives.coop T: 07858 317 634</p> <p><u>Q&A</u></p> <p>RW asked what the average investment has been in projects to date? Anne Ford (AF) said it varies but usually averages at around £1000.</p> <p>RW asked what the main barriers have been so far? AF cited a lack of capacity in NI to organise community share offers, and that they had to use the services of Energy for All in Cumbria. This stems from a lack of 'development investment' in this area in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>John Blair (JB) enquired if the group had received any government assistance to help get schemes off the ground? Karen Arbuckle (KA) said no, they hadn't. The group had approached Belfast City Council some time ago with a strong business proposition for community funded solar panels on council buildings, but due to a lack of support within the Council at the time it didn't move forward. Clare McKeown (CMcK) asked NICE to revisit this with the council, indicating there may be more support for these schemes now.</p> <p>Nichola Hughes (NH) asked if community energy policy is to be included in the policy options as part of the new Energy Strategy for Northern Ireland? John McMullan (JMcM) said that a case has been made to the Department on community energy, and will continue to be made, but that it lacks senior backing and urged Elected Members to advocate for community energy policy and support at government level.</p> <p>Kerry Watton (KW) asked if public awareness / acceptance has been an issue so far? AF stated that it hasn't been an issue for Drumlin Wind as developments are generally sympathetic to local community needs and profits are reinvested back into the community.</p>
4	Presentation 2: Environment and Nature Restoration Bill
	RW welcomed Dolores Kelly MLA (DK) who delivered a presentation on her proposed

	<p>Primate Members' Bill and shared results of the SDLP's recent online consultation exercise. DK extended her thanks to staff in RSPB NI who had assisted her with this work. Slides available to download here.</p> <p>Contact details: E: dolores.kelly@mli.niassembly.gov.uk T: 02838 322140</p> <p><u>Q&A</u></p> <p>Justin McNulty (JMcN) acknowledged the sheer scale of biodiversity loss in Northern Ireland. He asked if there is the potential with this Bill to restore the loss in nature to date?</p> <p>DK said she was confident this could be achieved but that the oversight and scrutiny body proposed in the Bill would be critical to its success.</p> <p>Ciaran Fox (CF) asked if cross-party support has been secured yet? DK noted that there had been no opposition so far, and she hoped she would be able to secure cross-party support.</p> <p>Tom Woolley (TW) noted that a PMB on One Planet Living is being taken forward by Mark H Durkan MLA, and that it would be complementary to the proposed Environment and Nature Restoration Bill.</p>
5	Matters for discussion
5.1	Climate & Energy Governance
	<p>RW highlighted an independent report on climate and energy governance in Northern Ireland (https://ore.exeter.ac.uk/repository/handle/10871/125035) circulated recently, containing four key recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Merge energy and climate mitigation issues into one department 'The Department for Climate and Energy Transition' • Develop a new independent energy body to scrutinise the energy transition; advise the Assembly and the Executive, provide a centre of expertise, and potentially work with other organisations as a delivery body • Statutory NI specific carbon budgets • A duty on NI Government departments to consider climate and energy transition as part of policy development <p>RW asked Members for their reaction to the recommendations, and whether they would like the All Party Group to endorse the recommendations.</p> <p>Steve Aiken (SA) stated that a proper Energy Strategy is required to drive the sustainability / climate / circular economy agendas and that the Department for Economy is not fit for purpose in its current state.</p> <p>RW resolved to draft a letter on behalf of the APG to TEO, DfE and DAERA requesting comments from all three departments on the recommendations. All members were content with the proposal.</p>
5.2	Climate proofing plans, policies and decisions
	<p>RW noted that at the very first meeting of the APG in 2020, Members were advised that public bodies should be screening their policies, plans and decisions for climate change implications and indeed more broadly for sustainability impact.</p> <p>Councils and Sustainable NI have flagged this issue with Members, highlighting a</p>

	<p>willingness for screening at local government level but that there should be a common approach to screening that is mandated and supported by government, similar to the Equality Duty and Rural Proofing Duty.</p> <p>RW added that legislative provision for sustainability screening already exists under Section 25 of the NI (Misc. Provisions) Act 2006, more commonly known as the Sustainable Development Statutory Duty, which applies to all public bodies in Northern Ireland, however the Duty was never enforced by DAERA, the lead department.</p> <p>NH noted reporting guidance had been issued but without an enforcement mechanism, reporting and screening has never taken place.</p> <p>RW asked Members if they were aware of the Duty, however no members said they were aware of its existence.</p> <p>Karen Smyth (KS) noted an absence of direction from government and agreed it would be helpful to have some further guidance and enforcement.</p> <p>Cllr Eddie Thompson (ET) added that the issue should be raised with DAERA and councils. Cllr Roisin Lynch (RL) resolved to raise this with Antrim & Newtownabbey Borough Council's cross-party working group.</p> <p>RW requested that Members individually follow this up at Assembly level and at Council level, to scrutinise the lack of enforcement.</p>
6	AOB
	<p>JB noted receipt of a position paper from the newly established NI Resources Network (NIRN) on 'Climate Change and the Circular Economy'. JB recommended that the APG invite NIRN to present to the APG in June, to which Members agreed.</p> <p>JB highlighted that at a recent AERA Committee meeting, government officials indicated that the establishment of an independent EPA was to be deferred to a future Programme for Government.</p> <p>RW moved to write to Minister Poots on the issue, as it was a commitment in NDNA. All members supported this proposal.</p> <p>Ciaran Fox (CF) noted that the Department of Finance is still not yet in a position to provide a date on when changes to buildings regulations will be brought in. He noted the changes are long overdue. Steve Aiken (SA) raised this at Finance Committee, asking which department was best placed to look after Building regulations to which he hasn't got an answer. RW added that she would have the opportunity to raise this with the Finance Minister on the floor of the Assembly soon.</p> <p>Tom Woolley (TW) raised the issue of indoor air quality, and that it had not been sufficiently addressed in the recent Consultation on a Clean Air Strategy for Northern Ireland. RW noted this and recommended the issue of clean air is addressed in a future meeting.</p>
7	Summary and close
	<p>RW summarised the action points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Write to Minister Poots (DAERA) on the commitment in NDNA to establish an independent EPA and the associated timeframe • Write to Minister Dodds, Minister Poots and The Executive Office for comment on the University of Exeter report recommendations • Write to Minister Mallon (Dfl) to attend the meeting of the APG scheduled for

Friday 28th May which will focus on planning and sustainable land use

- Invite NIRN to present at June meeting of APG on Climate Action
- Councillors to discuss the Sustainable Development Duty within Council, and engage with DAERA on enforcement

RW noted the date of the next meeting is Friday 30 April 2021 at 10.00 am. The theme is sustainable buildings (design and construction focus), with a follow-up meeting scheduled for 28 May 2021 at 10:00am on sustainable land use (planning focus).

RW thanked members for attending. Meeting closed at 11.58.