

Minutes of Meeting through teams of Climate Change and Biodiversity

Strategic Policy Committee held on 26th May 2023

I Láthair:

Baill: Cllr. Alastair Mc Kinstry, Cathaoirleach
Cllr. Martina Kinane
Mr. John Hynes
Mr. Henry Walsh
Mr. Peter Butler
Mr. Liam Scott

Oifigigh:

Ms. Tina Ryan, Climate Change Co-Ordinator
Mr. Dave O'Loughlin, Executive Engineer
Ms. Sabina O Connell, Assistant Staff Officer
Ms. Colette Kennedy, A/Assistant Staff Officer

Apologies for non-attendance received from Cllr Gabriel Cronnolly, Eileen Ruane DOS, Ms. Maria Flynn, Administrative Officer
Cllr Kinnane apologised about having to leave early

Ms Ryan commenced the meeting by giving a presentation on the update of the Climate Action Plan. She apologised that the issues paper was not yet finalised due to staff losses at the CARO office, but as soon as they were updated, she would circulate it to all members. Once the document was reviewed at the SPC it will be made available for pre-draft engagement. Ms Ryan complimented Liam Scott for all of his work in relation to the report and informed the meeting that Rebecca Mooney, Climate Action Officer was taking up her new position on the 29th of May 2023, and Denise Feeney as Community Climate Action Officer on the 19th June 2023.

The first report was a risk assessment conducted by KPMG where changes in Galway's Climate were assessed. A workshop on this has been held. Ms Ryan referenced issues experienced by GCC in the past including river and groundwater flooding, heatwaves and droughts that resulted in an increased demand for services and an increase in the frequency of uncontrolled fires. Actions in our plan will focus on the evidence-based issues contained in the KPMG report.

The report also outlines what the predicted changes will be by 2050. It shows the expected frequency of river flooding, coastal flooding, coastal erosion, heatwaves and droughts and the resulting impact. The major impact would be a risk of severe widespread decline in service provision. River flooding is of particular concern. Increases in extreme

precipitation are predicted to result in an increased risk of surface water and river flooding. Rising sea levels are predicted to increase the risk of coastal erosion and inundation and increases in droughts and heatwaves are also predicted. As a result, current issues such as wildfires, damage to biodiversity, low water levels etc will increase.

Ms Ryan summarised the key findings of the report and stated that Climate Change is going to be a critical challenge for Galway County Council and our communities. It will result in a wide range of major impacts across the county. She explained that we will have to plan for and adapt to the future risks that have been identified.

Ms Ryan moved on to the next report called the Baseline Emissions Inventory Report. Mr Scott was thanked for the work he put into producing this report. The aim of this inventory is firstly to identify where emissions are being generated in the county. It also allows us to decide on what actions we need to put into our Climate Action Plan to reduce these emissions and this will allow us in the future to measure the impact of those actions in terms of emissions reductions.

Ms Ryan explained how the figures were obtained. The main data set used was MapElre which was produced by the EPA in 2019. This is based on a National Mapping Project where emissions were mapped on a Square KM scale. This worked for Industrial Process Sectors, Waste, Agriculture and LULUCF (Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry) as well as Manufacturing Sectors. The MapElre Data does not include electricity consumption at the point of use. It is more valuable for us to understand where electricity is consumed as opposed to where it was generated therefore additional calculations were carried out on this data.

Next, Ms Ryan reported on the Transport Emissions conducted by the National Transport Authority Model. County Galway emissions were compared to the National Baseline. She noted that 45% of our emissions are from the Agricultural Sector, 16% from Transport and 15% from Residential. The Transport and Residential figures are similar to the national figures. Agricultural is slightly higher than National figures but this is to be expected from a rural County. The Manufacturing and Commercial Services are lower than the national averages which again is expected in a rural county. The total emissions are approximately 4.7% of the National Emissions with approximately 3,000 kt carbon dioxide equivalent emissions. Ms Ryan added that the next step is to identify how we can reduce emissions in the above areas. She noted that as a local authority, we will not have a significant role in all the areas, for example in relation to Agriculture, Teagasc and the Department of Agriculture will have much more of a role in influencing the emissions from that area. The emissions by Galway County Council are less than 1% of the overall emissions for the County.

Climate Action Guidelines sets out the different areas where we would have a role. We have full accountability and direct targets set for our own emissions, for example, public lighting, social housing, our fleet, and our buildings. The council can also have a significant influence on the design of our towns and villages, planning, transport infrastructure and active travel. Local authorities also have a significant role in relation to Green Public Procurement, i.e. the materials we purchase can have a role in relation to the reduction of emissions.

Galway County Council will have a particular role in relation to the Aran Islands, which have been chosen as the Decarbonisation Zone for the county of Galway. We will bring

key stakeholders together and help to support and facilitate emissions reductions. The local authority will work with the public, businesses and 3rd level institutes to reduce emissions within the Decarbonisation Zone and then support other communities to carry out similar actions. Support for the development and implementation of Energy Master Plans will be important. Ms Ryan also provided information in relation to Galway County Council's advocacy and raising of awareness role. The Community Climate Action Officer will work with communities in implementing actions in their towns and villages.

The legally binding target is to reduce GHG by 51% nationally by 2030 and a Net Zero by 2050. Local authorities have a significant role in reducing emissions and important areas were highlighted including Public Representatives, Policy Making and Education and Information. We will develop actions to try and reduce emissions across many different areas. The Climate Action Plan will be revised in 2030 to see how the actions work and to develop new actions.

The 3rd document Ms Ryan discussed was the Communications Plan. This plan sets out how the local authority will engage with the stakeholders over the next couple of months as we are developing the Climate Action Plan and the actions needed to reduce the emissions identified in the Baseline Inventory. There are 2 main stages of stakeholder engagement, pre-draft and official consultation on the draft plan. This will enable the public and stakeholders to engage in developing the plan from the bottom up. The plan must be inclusive, co-coordinated and collaborative.

Several areas of interest were identified and are listed below:

- Economic development and Enterprise
- Environment, Climate and Waste
- Cultural, Built and Natural Assets/Heritage
- Emergency Services
- Tourism and Landscape
- Infrastructure and Transport
- Planning, settlement strategy and sustainable development
- Energy efficiency, green energy
- Biodiversity and designated sites
- Flooding and management of risk
- Housing maintenance and provision
- People/communities and quality of life
- Arts/Cultural development and libraries
- Communication and awareness

Next Ms Ryan spoke about the four key Thematic Areas:

- Homes and how citizens can be supported to decarbonise and build resilience.
- Communities and Businesses and how they can be supported to decarbonise and build resilience.
- Transport and how we can support the avoid shift and improve model.
- Agriculture and Land use – support farmers and liaise with farming communities.

Ms Ryan apologised for issues paper not being finalised yet and confirmed that when the issues paper is developed it will provide the framework for the consultations and include questions. Consult.ie will be used and questions can be developed on the portal. Stakeholders will be identified in the key areas. Ms. Ryan added that a lot of work has already been undertaken with local authority staff but that more is required. Workshops are taking place at the national level to engage with Government Departments and State Agencies. The Youth Assembly took place in April and this in turn will feed into plan.

The Communications Plan includes who we plan to engage with and what methods will be used and the timeframe involved. When the communications plan and issues paper is approved by the Management Team and Elected Members, stakeholder mapping will take place and the submissions portal and website will be developed. We are aiming to make the questionnaire available at the end of June.

A Steering Group needs to be set up for the decarbonisation zone with community members on the Aran Islands. A baseline assessment and risk assessment is also required for the decarbonisation zone.

Ms. Ryan confirmed that she will revert in July with timelines. She thanked everyone for listening to her presentation and asked if there were any comments.

Peter Butler commented on the areas where there was full accountability and limited accountability and noted that he was surprised not to see any allowance/reference to the large infrastructure projects that Galway County Council is pushing for, for example, the greenway – Athlone to Galway, Claregalway bye pass, ring road Galway city. He questioned why they were not part of the planning process around what they would contribute in terms of emissions. He appreciates Galway County Council cannot influence people's use of cars.

Mr Butler raised a query in terms of database numbers as to whether it will be accessible to the public. Ms Ryan replied that this information will be available on the EPA website.

Mr Butler further raised the issue of agriculture/forestry and questioned if there were anything that GCC could do to influence agriculture particularly forestry and implications in terms of policy changes that the County Council can make in favour. Ms Ryan replied that the Local Authority would not have a defined role in the agricultural sector, but as we did in the past, we can in some areas use our influence going forward for example, forestry and the Development Plan. Any projects undertaken by GCC will fall under our full accountability. Ms Ryan further added that we will be looking to support farmers to make changes.

Ms Ryan invited Mr Scott to add to any of the above comments. He agreed with Ms Ryan's comments and commented that the details of the categories and subcategory breakdowns by quantities of CO₂. The detail is in the baseline report for Galway County Council and the more technical summaries are also detailed. He concluded by stating that the EPA inventory is a robust inventory and is available to view online.

Mr. Butler asked for clarification on infrastructure, that if it is not included in national guidelines, then where is it included? Ms Ryan replied that our direct emissions are in our returns to SEAI. Mr. Butler again pointed out that The Moycullen Greenway and By-pass for example should help reduce emissions for Galway County and enquired where a person would be able to find the figures on those reduced emissions. Ms Ryan stated that these will be included in the 2030 Plan and may not be seen now.

Mr. Scott added that emissions for transport are captured in baseline (MapElre) transport data. The NTA modelling system is captured in the baseline year of 2018 and in the future changes will be captured again.

The Cathaoirleach thanked Ms. Ryan for her presentation adding that it was a pity that the Issues paper was not available for today. He stated that GCC cannot approve these plans until the Issues Paper has been approved. The legislation is strong in requiring Local Authorities to be consistent with National policy to meet targets. The Cathaoirleach added that, for example, our plans must show how a 20% reduction in km driven by 2030 is going to be achieved.

Changes to the County Development Plan will be required regarding building and design centres. Concrete use will need to be understood and will need to be broken out in the emissions to track that. The Cathaoirleach added that Council will need technical support from the Department as changes in land use plans, local economy plans, and the County Development Plan will likely be needed.

The Cathaoirleach added that he believes that we underestimate the direct & indirect effects that climate change will have in the future— reference was made to the increased population due to migration/refugees and supply chain issues in the provision of goods and services. Ireland had already seen examples of steel shortages and issues with the provision of other building materials. The cost of these materials has also increased dramatically. Local authorities will have to adapt accordingly to understand the wider national issues.

The Cathaoirleach noted that there will need to be more focus on green building and construction of buildings with wood and that the use of wood needs consideration throughout housing: this is an example of the changes in DM standards in the development plan discussed in the previous paragraph. In Scandanavia they have 80% less emissions per house built because of this; we will need the same. Ms Ryan noted that Greenville Procurement, a leading Irish consultancy in this area is providing some advice and support in relation to green procurement.

The Cathaoirleach noted that baselines will prove to be a technical challenge and assistance may need to be sought from 3rd level institutes. Regarding the risk assessments, he felt that they over relied on averages and mean values. Averages rather than extreme values were used which is inappropriate for a risk assessment. Eg. A 7 – 14% drop in rainfall is minor, but when this is the average of an increase in droughts mixed with flash floods, it is a mistake to consider the danger as minor. The Cathaoirleach believes that better statistical data may be available for us to use. Overall, a technical workshop is required to delve into this thoroughly.

Ms Ryan thanked the Cathaoirleach for his comments and pointed out that he gave a very comprehensive assessment and acknowledged that his technical background is a huge advantage to the process. She stated that a technical workshop with KPMG on a regional basis would be beneficial and that she will discuss further with Mr. Scott outside of this meeting. Ms Ryan asked if all members could revert to her if they would be interested in attending.

Ms Ryan agreed that a large amount of technical input is essential before any decisions can be made. Ms. Ryan agreed with the Cathaoirleach that she believes we underestimate the effects that climate change now and into the future. All the concerns around migration / refugees and supply chains should perhaps be brought back to national government as they affect all local authorities. Our County Development Plan, Ms. Ryan concluded, is not based on predicted population increase and technical support is necessary.

Henry Walsh complimented Ms. Ryan for the excellent presentation. He stated that the points raised by the Cathaoirleach were very valid. In relation to livestock, he would like to see balance in relation to agriculture. He also commented on the challenge of constructing timber houses. He stated that there was an insufficient number of trees planted commercially to build these types of houses. He went on to say that education is extremely important at every level. He stated that we are heading for a 10m population in this country and that we will have many challenges ahead with this population explosion. He also noted that we can no longer base future predictions on the past norms. He further added that the document provided is a far-reaching document but believes that it needs to be paused until further information is provided.

Ms. Ryan thanked Mr. Walsh for his input. She stated that the plan will give Galway County Council the opportunity to highlight issues which will be coming down the line. She stated that agricultural emissions are not about apportioning blame solely to farmers. Ms Ryan referenced the upcoming Climate Conference due to take place in September which will be run by the Bia Innovation Centre. The purpose of this conference will be to bring stakeholders together and support all involved. She agreed that there will be a population increase which needs to be planned for. Ms Ryan clarified that the 4.7% emissions listed is based on the MapEire data and should be highlighted as per population emissions.

Mr Walsh stated that he had no trust in the government policy in relation to forestry. It does not recognise the work carried out in bogs and raised peat lands. No credit or recognition has been given in relation to the value of these and farmers have serious concerns regarding this.

Ms Ryan stated that it will be important to feedback the outcomes from the stakeholder engagement to the national level where appropriate. She acknowledged that there are implications for the farming community. She added that we need to work together and understand people's concerns.

The Cathaoirleach advised that the EPA conference on climate change and land took place yesterday and acknowledged that a huge amount of work has already been completed but issues of concern need to be raised at national government level.

Ms Ryan commented that the Climate Action Plan will be open for submissions before the end of June.

Mr Butler reiterated his earlier comments regarding transport emissions adding that infrastructure projects including new bus services in the planning process should be included in the numerical data. He believes that the final plan needs to be more stringent to include plans on transport.

Ms Ryan thanked Mr Butler for his comments and recognised his concerns as valid. Mr Scott stated that we are using the best data available which was averaged over a 3-year period however going forward the EPA will be reviewing on a yearly basis.

The Cathaoirleach added that clarification is needed from National Government about the fraction of the targets that will need to be met by each LA. The Cathaoirleach also asked if the Galway County Council is working towards the 2025 target to which Ms Ryan replied that Galway County Councils plan will be a 5-year plan from 2024 – 2029. Mr Scott added that the plan is to contribute to a 2030 emissions reduction of 51% and a net zero by 2050.

Ms Ryan stated that Galway County Council may look for a further decarbonisation zone. She raised concerns about the manpower / funding required and believed that this could prevent us from meeting our 2030 targets. This will need to be highlighted in the plan. This

The Cathaoirleach pointed out the difficulties with retrofitting and added that we need to track the carbon impact on future plans.

Ms Ryan added that workshops will be organised, and she will e-mail with an update on same on Ms. Ruane's return. The questionnaire will then be open to the public for their comments.

Meeting Concluded 12:21

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CATHAOIRLEACH ALASTAIR MCKINSTRY

