

County Wicklow Public Participation Network

Representative Reporting

Name of Committee: Climate & Biodiversity Action SPC

Name of Representatives: Keith Scanlon & Sharon Jackson

Date of Meeting Attended: 31st October, 2019

During the meeting a number of interesting topics and very good Wicklow practice were presented and some Policy Recommendations were agreed.

Policy Recommendations from CABA SPC to Wicklow County Council (For the Nov 4th meeting, 2019)

- That Wicklow County Council (WCC) join the All-Ireland Pollinator Plan
- That WCC prioritises Environmental/Climate & Biodiversity Action in Wicklow at the forthcoming Council budget meetings to reflect the Council's commitment to act on the Climate and Biodiversity Emergency

Other Policy Recommendations and SPC Workplan were referred to the next SPC meeting.

Present: Cllrs: Cllr. Jennifer Whitmore (Chair), Social Democrats from Greystones Municipal District; Cllr. Rory O'Connor, Non-Party from Bray M.D; Cllr. Peir Leonard, Non-Party from Arklow M.D; Cllr. Dermot O'Brien, Sinn Fein from Bray M.D; Cllr. Lourda Scott, The Green Party from Greystones M.D; Stephen Matthews, Cllr. The Green Party from Bray M.D, who will take over the Chair in 2.5 years time (guest).

WCC Officials: Sean Quirke (Director of Services, Planning & Environment); Breege Kilkenny (incoming Dir of Service, Planning & Environment, Dec. 2019); Theresa O'Brien, Senior Exec Officer (CABA SPC co-ordinator), Mary Cahill, Senior Executive Engineer; Deirdre Burns, Biodiversity Officer; Jim Callery, Environmental Officer; Marc Devereux, Senior Engineer, Planning, Development & Environment; Rahim O'Neill, Environment Awareness Officer who presented at the launch of the new Sustainable Energy Communities

Others: Tom Short, IFA; Gary McKenzie, Glen fuels; SEC; Representatives from Business and from Forestry & Fisheries Sectors to join later; Rhona Lennox, Representative of Comhairle na nOg

After the meeting concluded from 12 to 1 pm were present: SEAI Rep, Gary Harte; Sustainable Energy Community Reps from 5 Wicklow SECs: Glenmalure, Glendalough/Laragh, Newtown, Greystones/Delgany & Wicklow Town

Community Reps: Keith Scanlon, (East Wicklow region), Sharon Jackson (West Wicklow region) for the PPN

SUMMARY & OUTCOMES:

This was the first meeting of the new SPC, following the Council elections on May 24th and the Declaration of a Climate and Biodiversity Emergency by unanimous decision of Wicklow County Council on April 29th.

Item 1: Introductions: The Chair welcomed everyone and everyone introduced themselves and the organisation they represent and mentioned what hopes or plans they and/or their organisation had for this SPC to achieve.

Various attendees expressed satisfaction in that an unusually high number of Council officials were present to share in the future work of the SPC. Deirdre Burns and Jim Callery were commended by Sean Quirke and Jennifer Whitmore for their recent years' hard work, transferring their expertise to several new projects, often single-handedly.

A special welcome was extended to the Representative of Comhairle na nOg, Rhona Lennox, who is making history as the youngest Representative ever on a Council Committee.

A Series of Presentations then followed:

- 1. Item 2: On the Role of the SPC as outlined in the WCC Strategic Policy Scheme 2019-2024 and on the Corporate Plan. Presentations made by Theresa O'Brien, CEO**
 - The general role of the SPC's was outlined here, as was the Corporate Plan, 2019-2024.

The text of the WCC Strategic Policy Scheme 2019-2024 was forwarded to the Community Representatives before the meeting.

Some quotes from this document:

From the Section : On the Role of the SPCs:

"The SPC system is intended to give councillors and relevant sectoral interests an opportunity for full involvement in the policy making process from the early stages, when policy options are more fluid.

"Wicklow County Council is committed to mainstreaming climate change, both mitigation and adaptation, in the formation of strategic policy reflected in the high level goals of the Wicklow County Council Climate Change and Adaptation Strategy, 2019 – 2024, adopted by the Council on the 2nd September 2019."

From APPENDIX II SPC meetings and Procedures: "Each SPC should adopt a multi-annual work programme linked to the local authority's Corporate Plan and updated regularly as necessary."

"SPC meetings should be conducted in a much less rigid and formal way than full council meetings in order to create an informal and collaborative atmosphere that would allow honest views and opinions on policy issues. ..."SPC chairs should introduce SPC recommendations for full approval by full council."

"Members of SPCs should be provided with automatic feedback on the outcome of the council's decisions on SPC recommendations."

On the transparency Code: "The SPCs of Wicklow County Council in their operations will comply with the Criteria set out in the Transparency Code."

- **The Draft WCC Corporate Plan:**

Consultations on the Corporate Plan 2019 -2024 have closed to the public but PPN Reps may make suggestions on or before Nov 5th next. Wicklow PPN held a meeting of its representatives to discuss its final submissions on Nov. 5th.

- 2. Item 3: On Biodiversity and the all- Ireland Pollinator Plan:** Deirdre Burns presented the National Biodiversity Action Plan (2017-2022), noting that Biodiversity is in crisis worldwide, with 1 million known species threatened with extinction. The Pollinator Plan has been well received. Her advice to local communities, based on international norms, is to mow community grass just 5 times in the

year starting in April and to spend to remove the grass cuttings. This measure is cost-neutral, it costs no more than current mowing 20 + times.

- **By show of hands, the SPC voted unanimously to recommend that Wicklow County Council become a partner of the all-Ireland Pollinator Plan.** This vote was noted in the minutes.

The Chair, Cllr. Jennifer Whitmore, spoke to remind us that the work of this SPC is Climate and Biodiversity Action, CABA for short. This equal weighting of Climate Adaptation and Biodiversity was deliberately chosen. This SPC intends to give the preservation and sustainability of Wicklow's abundant Biodiversity its full weight in all discussions and Actions taken by this SPC.

3. **Item 4: Jim Callery** gave a presentation on **Wicklow County Council's Climate Change Adaptation Strategy**. Copies of the **Climate Action Charter**, (which has been signed by all 31 Local Authorities and is "For Local Authorities and Minister for Communications, Climate Action and the Environment on behalf of the Government) were distributed to each Representative present.

Some quotes from the Climate Action Charter: "The signatories share a common understanding that: "the evidence of global warming is unequivocal.... that it is important to take action to adapt to the now inevitable consequences of climate change and to work collectively..." "The signatories acknowledge that: Central government has a lead role to play in developing policy and ensuring resources are made available to realise Ireland's commitment to achieving a net zero carbon energy system objective for Irish society..." " Local authorities are ideally placed to provide robust leadership in advancing this objective at local and regional level and will require support and resources, in addition to their own resources, in developing and implementing relevant activities under this charter." .. ".Local authorities will adhere to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, in particular Goal 13 Climate Action.....,deliver a 50% improvement in energy efficiency by 2030(on the 2009 baseline), implement green public procurement strategy, encourage clients/customers/service users to undertake lifestyle changes to reduce their carbon impact, play a key role in helping to build a sustained localised citizen engagement model, work with relevant stakeholders to source funding for implementing climate action projects, develop links with young citizens to give voice to their concerns on climate change and to enhance the actions they can take, report annually on the implementation of activities under this Charter.."

4. **Item 5:** Drawing up the Work Plan for this SPC was carried over to the next meeting. Director of Service, Planning & Environment, Sean Quirke, invited everyone to have inputs on the Work Plan for this SPC ready for the next meeting on January 30th. (The meeting had already run for almost two hours)
5. **Item 7:** There was a presentation on the **new plan for SECS, Sustainable Energy Communities**. The Presentation was **by Rahim O'Neill**, Environmental Awareness Officer with Wicklow County Council.

Some key points about the new WCC SEC Scheme: The SEC network is made up of over 200 communities around Ireland who are interested in community energy. The Climate Action Plan aims to expand the SEC Network to 1500 communities all over Ireland by 2030. WCC can now help new SECs. The SEAI , Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland has a mentorship system to help SEC's with a Learn>Plan>Do cycle, hosts a network of SEC's and has a 100% grant scheme for the carrying out of an Energy Masterplan (EMP) for communities; the SEC claims the grant back from the SEAI. WCC expects that Wicklow will have 4-5 consistent, high quality EMP's produced within 12 months. SEC's will be able to develop projects with grant funding and/or seek finance through CU's, Clan Credo etc.WCC may seek to bundle projects with Better Energy Communities (BEC) grant applications

6. **Reps from 5 of the Sustainable Energy Communities** up and running in Co Wicklow arrived for a working lunch. **An SEAI Rep** was also present.

Other Recommendations made:

- The proposal that WCC join the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy was referred back to this SPC for examination and recommendation at a future meeting (The Council was positive but wishes for more time to study the Covenant).
- A proposal through the Chair that Co. Wicklow seek the appointment of a Climate Change Officer was welcomed and noted as a proposal in the minutes.
- The suggestion that a simpler, more visual version of the Climate Adaptation Plan should be produced for use in schools and community groups was well received and commented on favourably by several speakers in the group.
- Note that the Councillors present signalled their intention to stand with the Chair in seeking a substantial increase to funding for the Environmental sector in Wicklow at the forthcoming Council budget meeting. This to enable 'the timely roll out of new projects and to reflect the Council's commitment to Climate and Biodiversity Action' (CABA) made this year when WCC declared a state of Climate and Biodiversity Emergency in County Wicklow.
- Cllr. Stephen Mathews proposed to invite CABA Experts to brief Council meetings regularly on the environmental challenges being met in the different sectors, (as energy, water, waste, construction, transport, retrofitting, biodiversity, agri-ecology.....) This so everyone on the Council would better understand & own the scale of the Emergency. This was noted in the minutes. This was discussed and generally approved.
- The Chairperson spoke of the need to establish strong and effective two-way communication to keep the public informed and to hear back from them. Given the strong community involvement so far, she anticipates there will be keen community interest in the work of this SPC. She will personally ask the Council's IT Department to help set this up. Other SPCs and other Councils will also be invited to share Actions, experience & expertise through social media.
- As an example of best practice: 97 submissions received from the public (individuals and groups) for the Climate Adaptation Strategy will be followed up. Each will be pointed to the Chief Executive's Report on the Submissions that shows how their submission was listened to and considered. They will be encouraged to continue to engage in CABA issues, e.g. submit inputs to the County Development Plan.
- The quarterly Wicklow County Council newsletter called Countywise was agreed as another vehicle for communicating news about CAB (Climate and Biodiversity Actions)
- As future meetings of this SPC rotate around different venues, the local area may choose to make a presentation about itself and its biodiversity & environmental work to the visiting Reps.
- Each meeting will invite local people to attend afterwards and SPC members are asked to stay on for an hour or so after each meeting to chat with/receive the input of locals.

Other Upcoming Events:

- Youth Summit (Comhairle na nÓg): 15 Nov, Parkview; Brittas Bay Biodiversity Beach Walk, Sat., Nov 9th.

Next Meeting: Thursday, 30th January 2020 in Bray Municipal District Offices

Items carried over to the next meeting, Thursday, January 30th

1. The Workplan for this SPC

The Director of Services, Planning & Environment invited everyone present to have submissions ready for the next meeting as to which Climate and Biodiversity Actions (CABA) they put forward for inclusion on the Work Plan of this Committee.

Keith Scanlon and Tom Short (IFA) called for stronger Wicklow partnership, stronger Wicklow measurements, and stronger Wicklow long- term planning (20 years+).

Cllr. Peir Leonard and others called for stronger protection of our existing local biodiversity sites.

2. The Budget for this SPC is to be considered at the annual WCC Budget meeting scheduled for mid November.

The Chair, Jennifer Whitmore, seconded by Councillors, notably Cllr Dermot O'Brien and various others present assenting by voice, stressed that this SPC needs to push for a strong plan and strong budget funding for CABA

3. The proposal that WCC join the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy was referred back to this SPC for examination and recommendation at a future meeting (The Council was positive but has not yet studied materials relating to the Covenant)
4. The employment of dedicated CABA Staff and the employment of a Climate Change and Biodiversity Officer, being an option named by Cllr Stephen Matthews, were proposals met with favour by the Chair and others present and the proposal was noted.
5. The need to establish a CABA portal was raised and discussed.
 - Various suggestions and recommendations were made here to get two-way communications up and running with the Public. (see Recommendations above) The Chair stated that she anticipated there to be great interest in the work of this SPC; Keith Scanlon spoke of sharing with other Councils the various communications practices they have found effective, of the opportunity to build on the unprecedented public engagement with Climate and Biodiversity Actions and of reviewing which **WCC decisions and best practices can be issued as press releases to sustain the unprecedented public engagement seen to date.**
6. The WCC Corporate Plan consultations with the public have been completed.

Given that the section titled: The Goals, Actions and Strategies for each SPC Sector in the draft Corporate Plan was to be filled in only after Consultations with the public, Keith Scanlon agreed to the request from the Chair, that if anyone on the SPC, or any interested Group, still wished to contribute more in this section for CABA that they could input to him and he would collate a CABA SPC submission.

The County Development Plan will be open for Consultation+ on November 11th 2019. CABA input will be a vital part of this plan. The Chair and others present recommended that everyone look to contribute.

Keith Scanlon

Sharon Jackson

2 Attachments:

Item 6: Proposed schedule of CAB Meetings for 2020: bi-monthly on last Thursday of the month in venues rotating around the districts. Each meeting will run from 10 to 12. The Chair invites SPC members to stay on for an hour afterwards, so as to meet with those of the local community who may be interested to call up to the venue to raise local concerns or interests directly with members and Councillors present.

- Thursday 30th January 2020 – Bray Municipal District offices
- Thursday 26th March 2020 – Arklow MD offices
- Thursday 28th May 2020 – Baltinglass MD office
- Thursday 30th July 2020 – Greystones MD office
- Thursday 24th September 2020 – Wicklow MD office
- Thursday 26th November 2020 – Wicklow County Buildings

The Agenda for this first meeting:

AGENDA

1. Introductions of the members of the SPC
2. To present the Strategic Policy Committee Scheme (copy attached)
3. To receive a presentation on Biodiversity and in particular the All Ireland Pollinator Plan.
4. To receive a presentation on Wicklow County Councils Climate Change Adaptation Strategy (copies will be available for new members on the day)
5. To decide on work programme for the SPC for submission to the Corporate Policy Group
6. To set a schedule of meetings for 2020
7. To receive a presentation on Sustainable Energy Communities which will be launched at the end of the meeting
8. Any Other Business