

Citizens' Assembly meeting on

“How the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change”

5 November 2017

Draft Ballot Paper Explanation by the Chairperson

Introduction

Over the course of the last two weekends, the Members of the Assembly have considered a range of issues in relation to our third topic; *how the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change*. Specifically, the sessions have focused on climate change in the context of energy, transport and agriculture and it will be predominantly in these areas that the Assembly's recommendations will be based.

Earlier this week, the Members were provided with a draft ballot paper. Both that draft and the revised draft, which I will now present, incorporate extensive feedback from the Members already. I think it is important that I describe the genesis of the document- the original draft ballot paper and how that was formulated and the revised draft that I will present today.

The views of the Members have played a significant role in its formation.

At the conclusion of the first weekend on Climate Change, the Members were asked; what would you like to see included on the ballot paper and what would you like to be able to vote on? This feedback was incorporated into a very early version of the ballot paper, which was prepared by the Secretariat with the assistance of the Expert Advisory Group. This was presented to the Steering Group, which is made up of 12 Members of the Assembly, on 19th October. The Steering Group provided further feedback at that session and further extensive work was

undertaken by the Secretariat with the assistance of the Expert Advisory Group to incorporate that feedback.

The Steering group met again on 26th October to consider the ballot paper further and additional comments were received. Once again, these were considered by the Expert Advisory Group. A draft ballot paper was then circulated to all members on 31st October and comments were invited by all means, by which I mean in writing or verbally, in advance of this weekend. The Secretariat has been engaging with Members on an ongoing basis in advance of today.

This revised draft Ballot Paper which I am now going to present attempts also to capture some of the key issues which have emerged during discussions this weekend- this is particularly relevant in the case of the questions on transport and agriculture.

For the benefit of the members, the changes which have been made to that initial draft ballot paper are marked in red text, to make it easier for them to see how their suggestions have been incorporated. All versions of this document will be made available on the website later today to allow the public to view the development of the ballot paper.

In addition to these voted recommendations, later today the Members of the Assembly will be invited to write down any other issues which they feel should be included as Ancillary Recommendations of the Assembly. Any emerging consensus on themes or issues will be included as recommendations in the final report.

This will be done by the Members as a written reflective exercise once voting has concluded.

Before the Members go into Private Session to discuss the draft Ballot Paper, I want to provide a brief explanation of each of the questions; to explain what the question is trying to get at, what each of the options presented to the Members mean, and in some cases why certain terminology has been used. A copy of each question will go up on the screen as I am explaining it for the benefit of those watching online.

Following the Roundtable discussions, the relevant members of the Expert Advisory Group; Margaret Desmond, Áine Ryall, Peter Thorne

and Diarmuid Torney, together with the Chair and Secretariat will then be available to answer any questions. Time has been included on the agenda to allow any amendment agreed by the members to be included on the Ballot Paper.

The results of the final Ballot will form the basis of the recommendations to be made to the Houses of the Oireachtas.

Draft Ballot Paper Structure

The draft Ballot paper is broken down into four sections as follows:

Section A: Putting climate change considerations at the centre of policymaking;

Section B: Energy Policy;

Section C: Transport Policy; and

Section D: Agriculture and Land Use Policy.

Under each section one or more draft questions are provided. I will now explain each of these questions in turn.

The questions have all been framed in the context of our terms of reference, which are: to make recommendations on ‘how the State can make Ireland a Leader in tackling Climate Change’.

As such, unlike some of the ballot papers at previous weekends, these questions are very much framed as statements on what the State should do to achieve a leadership role for Ireland, based on the deliberations of the Members over the course of the two weekends.

Question 1

Question 1 is the first question in Section A that looks at putting climate change considerations at the centre of policy-making. It asks –

“To ensure climate change is at the centre of policy-making in Ireland, a new or existing independent body should be resourced appropriately, operate in an open and transparent manner, and be given a broad range of new functions and powers in legislation to urgently address climate change. Such functions and powers should include, but not be limited to those outlined below.

1. To examine any legislative proposals it considers relevant to its functions and to report publicly its views on any implications in relation to climate change; the relevant Minister must respond publicly to the views expressed in a report prior to the progress of the particular legislative proposal;
2. To propose ambitious 5 year national and sectoral targets for emissions reductions, to be implemented by the State, with regular review and reporting cycles;
3. To pursue the State in legal proceedings to ensure that the State lives up to its legal obligations relating to climate change.”

This question looks at the establishment of a new body or the augmentation of the functions and powers of an existing body to hold the State to account in tackling climate change.

It is not a choice between either establishing a new body or expanding the role of an existing body– the essence of the question is whether an independent body should statutorily have the power to ensure climate change is at the centre of government policy-making.

The three functions we have proposed broadly encompass advisory, ambition setting and compliance and enforcement roles. In the feedback at the end of the first weekend and in the engagement with the members since then, it has been clear that the members want to be able to provide a mechanism for achieving leadership on the issue of climate change. This question seeks to articulate in broad terms the specific gaps which have been identified by the Members of the Assembly in current leadership and proposes potential solutions to remedy these gaps.

In preparing this draft question, I was keen to avoid getting too bogged down on the specifics of the functions and powers the independent body could possess. We were instead aiming to provide a clear direction on what such a body could authoritatively do.

This question was informed by the material presented to the Assembly from a number of the speakers we have heard from over the course of the weekend.

In terms of reporting for this question, you are asked to mark X in one box – either Yes or No. A majority, and therefore the recommendation of the Assembly, will be determined by reference to the total votes cast in favour of ‘Yes’ and ‘No’, with the answer with the highest number of votes deemed to be the majority.

Question 2

In the spirit of the terminology of this topic as outlined in the resolution – *how the State can make Ireland a leader in tackling climate change* - Question 2 looks to confer a leadership role on the State in terms of addressing climate change through both mitigation and adaptation measures.

The wording of the question is –

“The State should take a leadership role in addressing climate change through mitigation options, including, for example, retrofitting public buildings, electrification of public vehicles, renewable generation on public buildings and through adaptation measures including, for example, increasing the resilience of public land and infrastructure.”

It urges the State to both guard against and actively take measures to prevent the impacts of climate change.

This question has been very much informed by the strong feedback from the Members at the last weekend, particularly in the final feedback session when the Members discussed the National Dialogue on Climate Change.

It is a referendum style question, looking for a Yes or No response. The majority and recommendation of the Assembly will be the option that receives the highest number of votes.

Question 3

Question 3 looks to establish a willingness, or not, on behalf of the Members for greater financial contributions from the public to fund the transition to a low carbon future by penalising carbon intensive activities.

The question asks the members to choose between two options as follows:

I would be willing to pay higher taxes on carbon intensive activities

I would not be willing to pay higher taxes on carbon intensive activities

The proposition in either case- for or against- is framed with reference to three qualifications. These qualifications are included as they emerged from the discussions and the feedback from the members as particular issues they wished to see included on a question on taxation.

The first qualification is that: any increase in revenue would be only spent on measures that directly aid the transition to a low carbon and climate resilient Ireland: including for example making solar panels more cheaply and easily available, retrofitting homes and businesses, flood defenses, developing infrastructure for electric vehicles.

In other words, the money raised through these taxes would be separated from other sources of income for the exchequer and directly invested in the transition to a low carbon and climate resilient Ireland.

The second qualification is that: an increase in the taxation does not have to be paid by the poorest households (the 400,000 households currently in receipt of fuel allowance).

In including this qualification, the Assembly would be recommending that the Government should take account of distributional impacts when imposing the tax. In other words it should seek to ensure that those

already in poverty or at risk of poverty are not disproportionately burdened.

The third qualification is that: It is envisaged that these taxes would build year-on-year. In other words the taxes would incrementally increase, in much the same way the cost of cigarettes does annually in the budget.

This aims to provide a signal to dis-incentivise carbon intensive activities.

Again, the Members are asked to indicate their preference by answering Yes or No. The majority and recommendation of the Assembly will be the answer that receives the highest number of votes.

Question 4

Question 4 looks to put an onus on the State to undertake an assessment of the vulnerability of critical infrastructure with a view to building resilience to climate change and extreme weather events, like the damage we witnessed with Storm Ophelia last month.

The exact wording of the question is -

“The State should undertake a comprehensive assessment of the vulnerability of all critical infrastructure (including energy, transport, built environment, water and communications) with a view to building resilience to ongoing climate change and extreme weather events and their consequences. The outcome of this assessment should be implemented. Recognising the significant costs that the State would bear in the event of failure of critical infrastructure, spending on infrastructure should be prioritised to take account of this.”

Question 4 is another referendum style question, with the option of a Yes or No response. The majority and recommendation of the Assembly will be the option that receives the highest number of votes.

Question 5

Question 5 is the first question relating to energy policy, which we covered at the last weekend meeting.

The question is currently worded as follows -

“The State should enable, through legislation, the selling back into the grid of electricity from micro-generation by private citizens (for example energy from solar panels or wind turbines on people’s homes or land) at a price which is at least equivalent to the wholesale price.”

In considering this question, members will recall the presentations received at the last weekend, and in particular the information provided by Marie Donnelly and Brian Motherway.

With respect to the reference to the resale price being “at least equivalent to the wholesale price”, this is designed to reflect the intention that, at a minimum the private citizen should get the price that energy is being sold to the suppliers.

Voting on this question again consists of a simple Yes or No response. The majority and recommendation of the Assembly will be the option that receives the highest number of votes.

Question 6

Question 6 has been included on the draft ballot paper in direct response to Member’s input.

It currently reads –

“The State should act to ensure the greatest possible levels of community ownership in all future renewable energy projects by encouraging communities to develop their own projects and by requiring that developer-led projects make share offers to communities to encourage greater local involvement and ownership.”

In considering this question, members will recall the presentations received at the last weekend, and in particular the information provided by Marie Donnelly, Brian Motherway and Paul Kenny. This issue is also one which featured prominently in the feedback from members.

Members are asked to answer either Yes or No. The recommendation of the Assembly will be the answer that receives the highest number of votes.

[Before I move off this question, I want to mention one further point. We have received some suggestions from Members that the draft ballot paper should seek to express a recommendation that all future renewable energy projects should be publicly/State owned. We understand that this point is being raised in light of concerns about Ireland's energy security into the future and a desire to retain ownership of our renewable energy assets. This suggestion may bring us into very complex areas of EU law, including issues such as state aid rules. I do however want to mention this at this stage so as not to lose sight of it in our discussions, but I also want to make clear that I do not consider it appropriate that the Assembly should vote on matters where it has not received factual expert briefing and advice on the legal implications of such a proposal.]

Question 7

Question 7 concerns peat extraction and bogs. This issue featured prominently in the feedback from Members in the reflective exercise completed at the end of the last weekend. It was also covered in the briefing from Laura Burke from the EPA and to a lesser extent some of the speakers yesterday.

The question is -

“The State should immediately end all subsidies for peat extraction and instead spend that money on peat bog restoration and retraining those workers impacted and providing new employment opportunities for them.”

Again, the Members must answer either Yes or No to the question with the option receiving the highest number of votes constituting the recommendation of the Assembly.

Question 8

Question 8 is the first question in Section C: Transport Policy.

This question relates to sustainable travel

The question is -

“The number of bus lanes, cycling lanes and park and ride facilities should be greatly increased in the next five years, and much greater priority should be given to these modes over private car use.”

This question is, to a certain extent, focussed on solutions in an urban context. This is in recognition of the fact that a significant proportion of our transport emissions come from urban areas, and therefore some solutions must focus on these population centres. The remaining questions in this section make specific suggestions in respect of rural transport needs.

Whichever option, either Yes or No, that receives the highest number of votes will be the Assembly’s recommendation in respect of this question.

Question 9

Question 9 concerns the transition to electric vehicles. We heard from both Anne Graham and Brian Caulfield yesterday morning about the perceived pitfalls of electric car ownership, including range anxiety. This question outlines a number of actions the State could take to encourage greater numbers to purchase electric vehicles and instilling the confidence in members of the public to do so. It also explicitly responds to the feedback from the floor about the special role the car plays in transport in rural Ireland.

The question suggests -

“The State should immediately take the following steps to support the transition to electric vehicles:

- Develop an expanded national network of charging points;
- Introduce a range of additional incentives, particularly aimed at rural communities, to encourage motorists towards electric vehicle

ownership in the short term. Such measures should include, but not be limited to targeted help-to-buy schemes, reductions in motor tax for electric vehicles and lower or free motorway tolls.

- Measures should then be introduced to progressively disincentivise the purchase of new carbon intensive vehicles such as year-on-year increases in taxes on petrol and diesel, motor tax and purchase taxes for petrol and diesel vehicles.”

Whichever option, either Yes or No, that receives the highest number of votes will be the Assembly’s recommendation in respect of this question.

Question 10

Question 10 focuses on the public transport network. It suggests the State should prioritise the expansion of public transport, particularly in rural areas, over the further development of road infrastructure which continues to contribute to our car-based transport system.

The question is currently framed as follows -

“The State should prioritise the expansion of public transport options over new road infrastructure spending at a ratio of no less than 2-to-1 to facilitate the broader availability and uptake of public transport options with particular attention to rural areas.”

In considering this question, Members will recall the presentations received yesterday in relation to transport, and in particular the material presented by Anne Graham about the levels of investment in public/private transport currently.

Members are asked to answer a simple Yes or No to this question.

Question 11

Question 11 is the first question in Section D: Agriculture and Land Use Policy.

The question is currently framed as follows -

“There should be a tax on green house gas (GHG) emissions from agriculture. There should be rewards for the farmer for land

management that sequesters carbon. Any resulting revenue should be reinvested to support climate friendly agricultural practices.”

This question has been included following on from the presentation which the Assembly received from Alan Matthews yesterday, where he advocated putting incentives in place so that the agriculture sector makes its appropriate contribution, and that the agriculture sector would not be exempted from the disciplines that apply to all other sectors.

Members are asked to answer a simple Yes or No to this question.

Question 12

This question focuses on food waste and is included on the draft ballot paper in relation to the presentation we received yesterday from Iseult Ward from FoodCloud.

The question currently reads -

“With the objective of introducing appropriate measures to reduce food waste in the future, the State should introduce a standard form of mandatory measurement and reporting of food waste at every level of the food distribution and supply chain.”

Yesterday we heard from Iseult about how such a measure would place Ireland in a leadership position in relation to tackling food waste.

The Members are asked to vote Yes or No and the option that receives the highest number of votes will be a recommendation of the Assembly.

Question 13

This question relates to land diversifications, a point on which we received a number of presentations yesterday.

The question currently reads -

“The State should review and revise supports for land use diversification with particular attention to supports for planting forests and encouraging organic farming.”

Conclusion

That completes the explanation of the draft ballot paper. Members will now move into roundtable discussions and we will resume in public session at 11.45am for feedback and questions and answers before we finalise the ballot paper.