

## Speaker Biographies

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### **Cllr Alison Bennington, Vice-President, NILGA**

Cllr Alison Bennington has worked in Local Government for 38 years. Cllr Bennington has a long-standing record of delivery in Leisure Arts and Parks. She has been appointed as Vice President of NILGA and will take up the role of President in May 2024. Within Council Alison sits on various committees, is Veterans Champion and is Chair on several school Governors Boards. Alison has a keen interest on waste management, strategy development, and investing in infrastructure to deliver services of value to the ratepayers.

### **Rachael Hook, Head of Resources and Waste Strategy, DAERA**

Rachael Hook is the Head of Resources and Waste Strategy for the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs. Her remit includes developing policy and legislation for the Waste Management Strategy, recycling, landfill, implementing the circular economy and waste sector climate action. Rachael is also the honorary secretary for the Chartered Institute of Waste Management NI Centre Council and on the Board of Governors of Mill Strand Integrated Primary in Portrush.

### **Francesca Di Palo, Head of Public Sector Services, Sustainable NI**

Dr Francesca Di Palo is an environmental scientist and ecologist with over a decade of experience spanning academia and the third sector. Her expertise lies in natural carbon sinks, conservation, and education for sustainable development on an international scale. Driven by a commitment to integrate academic insights with practical applications, Francesca has dedicated her career to fostering environmental awareness and promoting sustainable behaviours.

Throughout her career, Francesca has collaborated extensively with the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Network and the Foundation for Environmental Education, enriching her understanding and approach to sustainability education and advocacy.

In 2021, Francesca brought her extensive knowledge and experience to Sustainable NI. There, she leads public sector services and coordinates the NI Sustainable Development Forum, working closely with public bodies and local authorities to advance sustainable development initiatives across Northern Ireland.

### **Debbie Caldwell, Climate Commissioner, Belfast City Council**

An experienced and focused climate professional who has managed and led diverse teams in Europe, Asia and Africa, Debbie is Climate Commissioner for Belfast City Council.

With a background in international development and climate change, Debbie has an outstanding track record in developing and delivering practical solutions to complex climate and environmental problems in a wide range of different contexts.

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A strategic thinker, Debbie is passionate about harnessing innovation and mobilising resources to support climate action and making a genuine difference on the ground. Debbie is at ease with matrix structures and has a leadership style that empowers, encourages, coaches and gets the best out of people.

As Climate Commissioner, Debbie manages the delivery of the City's Resilience Strategy and is committed to developing and maintaining strong relationships with internal and external stakeholders and partners to support the delivery of high quality climate investments that deliver against the City's climate ambitions.

Debbie co-chairs the Resilience and Sustainability Board and the Belfast Climate Commission helping to shape the City's response to climate change and accelerate the transition to an inclusive, resilient, low carbon economy.

With an ability to develop and deliver change within the context of a challenging financial outlook, Debbie is overseeing the delivery of the City's Local Area Energy Plan alongside the development and delivery of a growing pipeline of projects to address the key climate challenges facing Belfast.

Debbie is committed to seizing the opportunities associated with transition to a low carbon economy including developing and delivering low carbon innovation programmes, as well as accessing and making the best use of new lines of finance from the UK Infrastructure Bank, the UK Municipal Bonds Agency and other funds.

With responsibility for overseeing the development of the Council's Climate Action Plan and investment framework, Debbie is driving strategic change from concept stage through to successful delivery, putting in pace the processes and resources to deliver the Council's climate targets. This includes efforts to support collective working and break down silos between functions to increase the mainstreaming of climate and environmental considerations.

Debbie has excellent analytical and problem solving skills with a solid track record in the successful delivery of climate strategies, plans and projects.

### **Jeff Shaw AMSOE AMIRTE, Transport Manager, Ards and North Down Borough Council**

I have worked in a local authority for almost 20 years. I have been a refuse collection and sweeper driver, cleansing supervisor and for 18 years Transport Manager. I am currently chairman of the Institute of Road Transport Engineers (IRTE) Ireland North region. I also sit on the NI regional selection panel for the IRTEC accreditation scheme. I have sat on the FTA (Logistics UK) regional freight council for 18 years and served three as chairman. I sit on discussion panels involved in climate change and de-carbonising transport in Northern Ireland.

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### **Charlotte Banks, APSE Energy Principal Advisor**

Charlotte Banks is the Principal Advisor for APSE Energy. Charlotte is part of the APSE Energy team, which is the Association's local authority energy collaboration that promotes the vision of the municipalisation of energy. A major part of her role is to keep APSE Energy members up to date with new developments across the wide range of topics in the energy agenda. She joined APSE in September 2018 after working at the University of Manchester and before that studying a master's degree in Environmental Governance there.

### **James Rodgers, Parks Manager, Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council**

James Rodgers and am currently Parks Manager for Lisburn & Castlereagh City Council (LCCC).

I have been in the Horticultural industry for 18 years and have studied at Greenmount through level 2, level 3 and level 4 horticultural courses.

In 2022 I started as the Tree & Woodland Officer for LCCC where I was part of the team who started the Big Tree Project and influential in starting and running the Tree Nursery as well as leading many of the other projects relating to this.

I am currently the manager of the project and overseeing the direction of the project and its journey to sustainability.

### **Andrew Mowat- Energy Policy Officer at Fermanagh Omagh District Council.**

Employed by Fermanagh Omagh District Council in 2021 following completion of Postgraduate Diploma in Renewable Energy and Energy Management at Ulster University. Remit involves the delivery of the key Energy Management objectives outlined in the Councils Energy Management Policy and Action Plan.

### **Paddy McCaffrey - Data and Intelligence Officer at Fermanagh and Omagh District Council**

Responsible for implementing business intelligence solutions to support decision making and the promotion of the use of data analytics within the Council.