

NFLA Policy Briefing No.189



Date: 5th August 2019

Subject: Ireland and Climate Change – isn't it time for a local response?

1. Explanation of report

This report has been developed by the NFLA for Irish Councils, environmental NGOs and the Irish Government to provide an analysis of the state of the climate change on the island of Ireland and the scale of the challenge. It also advocates that local government is given a far greater role in delivering policies, strategies and projects that can help the island mitigate the worst effects of climate change by reaching 'zero carbon' emissions over the next couple of decades.

There has been a surge of public interest in this issue, and the recent local and European elections suggest a growing support for more radical action on climate change across the island of Ireland. However, whilst in England, Scotland and Wales local government is playing a valuable role in delivering on a low carbon future, the picture is not as rosy in Ireland, mainly due to the more limited powers Irish Councils have to implement such projects. With new Councils being elected across the island of Ireland from May, this report also helps in launching the **All Ireland Sustainable Energy Forum** – which is a constituent part of the UK and Ireland NFLA. Its new name reflects the 'nuclear free' status of the island, and the need to deliver on fossil-free, nuclear free energy alternatives. NFLA commends this report to all councillors, relevant council officers, Government officials and Ministers to read of a new type of low carbon energy vision for Ireland.

2. Introduction

Ireland's new Climate Change Plan supports the ambition emerging within the European Union to achieve a net zero greenhouse gas emissions target by 2050, and commits to evaluate in detail the changes required to adopt such a goal in Ireland. The plan admits that the Republic is "*way off course*" in its attempts to achieve its emissions targets. The Republic is "*currently 85% dependent on fossil fuels*". When the state's carbon footprint should be reducing greenhouse gas emissions they "*have been rising rapidly*" and that trend has to be reversed. (1)

Ireland is set to miss both its domestic and EU targets. Failure to decarbonise difficult sectors, such as dairy farming and road transport, have left it with the third highest per-capita emissions of any member state. In its most recent annual review of the state's progress towards its earlier target, (80% by 2050) government advisers at the Climate Change Advisory Council concluded that Ireland was "*completely off course*" and described future projections as "*disturbing*": (2)

Ireland is one of the few member states expected to miss its EU emissions reduction targets for 2020 – and the one expected to miss by the widest margin. Before the latest Climate Change Plan, Ireland had pledged to reduce emissions by 30% on 2005 levels by 2030. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) said the country would miss this target by a wide margin unless it introduced more radical policies. The country is already set to fall 75% short of its 2020 emission targets, which commit to a 20% reduction on 2005 levels. It will achieve only a 5% reduction by next year. (3)

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Almost €87 million has been spent on carbon credits to “pretend” Ireland is meeting its emission targets, according to Seán Fleming, chairman of the public accounts committee. He said the country’s attitude toward the environment and its international climate obligations was a “charade” and that the state was spending large sums of money to “*buy our way out of pretending*” climate targets were being met. Purchasing carbon credits has formed part of Ireland’s strategy to comply with its 2020 EU emissions reduction targets. The move can help it avoid larger fines for failing to meet the targets. The Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment expects it may have to pay another €6 million to €13 million between now and 2020. (4) In fact it might have to spend as much as €150 million on carbon credits to make up for missing its 2020 target. (5)

According to An Taisce projections for the transport and agriculture sectors are “alarming”. The Government has been overly reliant on electric vehicle uptake, which isn’t materialising. Policy measures need to be broadened to significantly invest in clean public transport and cycling. (6)

3. Plan Launched

In June 2019 the Irish Government launched the Plan setting out a number of targets, including a pathway to zero emissions by 2050. “*Climate action presents enormous opportunities*” according to the Irish Taoiseach Leo Varadkar. “*New jobs, new business and new wealth created through renewable energy, building insulation and forestry, reduced imports of fossil fuels and maybe even the possibility of Ireland becoming an electricity exporter.*” (7)

Under the plan, the sale of new petrol and diesel cars will be banned by 2030. Oil boilers will not be allowed in new homes by 2022 or gas boilers by 2025, and 400,000 heat pumps will be installed by 2030. The plan aims to have 950,000 electric vehicles on the road by 2030, a near doubling of the previous commitment of 500,000 by 2030. The Government will invest in a “nationwide” charging network and by 2025 at least one recharging point will be required at new non-residential buildings with more than 10 parking spaces.

There are 180 measures in the Climate Action Plan, including a target to implement an EU-wide ban on non-recyclable plastic by 2030, and up to 500,000 homes are to be included in a “retrofit plan” to make them more energy efficient with householders being offered easy payback methods. The plan also envisages a rise in carbon taxes, from €20 to €80 per tonne by 2030 – a politically fraught exercise that will require cushioning poor people and rural dwellers from higher fuel and heating prices - and a number of other measures to change behaviour by institutions, companies and individuals. The use of renewable sources for electricity generation will increase from 30% to 70%. New onshore and offshore wind turbines are expected to replace peat- and coal-powered power stations. (8) The plan would add 12GW of additional clean energy capacity including at least 3.5GW of offshore renewable energy and up to 8.2GW of new onshore wind capacity. Renewable sources contracted under corporate power purchase agreements (PPAs) should also meet 15% of Ireland’s electricity demand by 2030. The Irish Wind Energy Association (IWEA) described these targets as “*ambitious, but absolutely achievable*”, adding that “*new battery technologies, greater interconnection and a stronger grid*” would help Ireland meet the target. (9)

Opposition parties have given a cautious welcome to the plan, but some claimed it lacked detail and did not focus strongly enough on public transport. The Green Party and Sinn Féin both called for more investment in public transport infrastructure, while Fianna Fáil complained that the plan was not costed.

Green Party leader, Eamon Ryan, says there are 3 areas where there is a lack of ambition. Firstly the Government says it will go zero carbon by 2050 only if Europe agrees. Secondly the National Development Plan (NDP) which was only agreed last June: didn’t have any climate assessment before it was agreed – Ireland can’t continue with the current NDP which was all about roads. And thirdly there needs to be a new land-use plan. Where are the forests going to go? Where are we going to preserve the bogs; what type of farming is going where? The phrase “*consideration will be given*” or similar is used 67 times in the report. Looking through a lens of particular projects – Is the airport expansion going ahead – yes; is the Galway Outer By-Pass going ahead? – yes. Are we going to have more buses – it doesn’t seem so.

Green Party Dublin Councillor Clare Byrne - one of the key authors of the City Climate Plan says Dublin's Climate Action Plan is way more ambitious but in order to deliver it the City will need the support of the Government. Councillor David Healey said what is positive about the plan is that it recognises the need for a transition and that large changes need to be made, but then when it gets down to the detail those changes aren't there. For example for rural public transport the strategy is to produce a strategy. (10) Minister for Climate Action Richard Bruton rejected claims that measures on public transport in the plan are "woeful". (11)

Friends of the Earth's director, Oisín Coghlan, was more upbeat describing the plan as "*the biggest innovation in Irish climate policy in 20 years. The key is not simply the measures themselves, but the new mechanisms to ensure we actually deliver them.*" He highlighted critical features including "*the legally-binding five-year limits on total pollution; the delivery board chaired by the Taoiseach's department, the external Climate Action Council to advise and monitor government, the powerful Oireachtas committee to call Ministers and top officials to account, and the promise to put our 2050 target into law*". If these governance reforms had been adopted 12 years ago, Ireland would not now be missing our 2020 targets by a large margin. (12)

On 13th June the Dáil passed a motion calling for the National Development Plan to be revised in line with emissions targets. (13) Despite the climate emergency, the government still proposes to spend more on roads. (14)

4. The Government's Climate Action Plan, where it might impact on local government includes:

- Plans to put in place a coherent support scheme for micro-generation with a price for selling power to the grid;
- Opening up opportunity for community participation in renewable generation as well as community gain arrangements;
- Designing a policy to get circa 500,000 existing homes to upgrade to B2 BER (Building Efficiency Rating) and 400,000 to install heat pumps;
- Deliver two new district heating systems, and implement a roadmap for delivering District Heating potential;
- 100% of all new cars to be EVs by 2030;
- Make growth less transport intensive through better planning, remote and home-working and modal shift to public transport;
- Set targets for the conversion of public transport fleets to zero carbon alternatives;
- Embed energy efficiency, replacement of fossil fuels, careful management of materials and waste, and carbon abatement across all enterprises and public service bodies
- Develop coherent reduction strategies for plastics, food waste, and resource use;

The Plan also proposes a big step-up in our engagement with citizens and communities through more coherent mobilisation of existing structures and initiatives to inform, engage, motivate, and empower people to take climate action.

The Government has established a pilot micro-generation grant scheme for solar PV, targeting self-consumption, which provides a grant of around 30% of the installation costs for individual homes. Building on the pilot, an ongoing support scheme will be in place for microgeneration by 2021 at the latest, focusing on a number of key pillars, including: equity and accessibility for all, ongoing technology cost and remuneration analysis, addressing technical barriers and planning constraints, a clear grid connection policy, and supporting community participation in micro-generation. This will be further supported by measures in building regulations. Change will be made to the electricity market rules in early 2020 in order to enable micro-generated electricity to be sold to the grid. This should include provision for a feed-in tariff for microgeneration to be set at least at the wholesale price point.

5. Buildings

Speeding up work to make buildings climate resilient will require new collaborative approaches across Government, Local Authorities, Enterprise, Finance and Communities to deliver. A Task Force will be immediately established to develop the model and a new delivery structure for retrofitting.

Local Authorities will upgrade their housing stock under Phase 2 of the social housing retrofit programme to bring dwellings more than 40 years old (30% of the social housing stock) to a B2 equivalent BER (Building Energy Rating).

The Government is committed to a deep energy retrofit programme for pre-2008 schools. 17 schools nationwide were selected for energy efficiency works in 2019, which includes installation of renewables. The detail of this plan will now be developed.

The Public Sector Energy Efficiency Programme supports public bodies in achieving a 33% energy efficiency target by 2020, this will be increased to 50% for 2030.

The Plan says the establishment of 256 Sustainable Energy Communities has been a significant success in encouraging local actors to work together. It is underpinned by SEAI mentors and grants for a Local Energy Plan. (See: <https://www.seai.ie/sustainable-solutions/community-projects/community-network/>) They have been able to undertake quite ambitious changes across multiple locations in cooperation with the Energy Obligated Companies. There is a huge opportunity to build on this model and to work with the new Climate Officers in Local Authorities to mobilise more such networks with a target to reach 1500.

The Government is planning two district heating pilot schemes to develop experience and knowledge that can promote and inform further schemes nationwide to facilitate greater uptake of district heating through self-financed heat networks. It will then identify a set of potential early mover projects beyond the first two pilot schemes.

6. Transport

The Government wants to provide good public transport, cycling and walking infrastructure, so people are less reliant on their cars, cutting congestion. It has already committed to an additional 500,000 public transport and active travel journeys daily by 2035.

The Government is committed to transition to LEVs, including electric buses, for the urban public bus fleet, with no diesel-only purchases from 1 July 2019, and will set a roadmap for all public PSO urban bus fleets to become LEVs by 2035.

7. Climate Action Charter

In 2019 the Government wants to agree a Climate Action Charter with Local Authorities (which will amongst other things deliver a 50% improvement in energy efficiency by 2030 on the 2009 base). The Government says it will support local authority leadership.

The Climate Plan says “Local Authorities occupy a pivotal role in their respective local communities and can act to demonstrate public sector leadership on climate action in their areas as well as key mobilisers of action at a local and community level. Four Climate Action Regional Offices have already been established to assist the Local Authority Sector in building capacity to engage effectively with climate change, including developing and implementing its own climate action measures. While this has focused to date on the development of robust Adaptation Plans within the Local Authority areas, there is scope for this network working through Local Authorities to act as a catalyst for much wider change, and under this plan they will be required to develop an annual programme with measurable impact.”

Resources from the Project Ireland 2040 Funds will be mobilised to support local authority ambition on climate action, including measures to encourage refurbishment and regeneration and the local development of low-carbon, climate-resilient economic activities.

To further develop the community engagement role of local authorities, the Government plans to pilot ‘climate action community engagement’ offices in a number of Local Authorities which will become key partners and enablers of an expanded network of Sustainable Energy Communities across Ireland.

8. **Dublin's Climate Change Action Plans (2019-2024)**

The four Greater Dublin Local Authorities have produced Climate Action Plans in conjunction with the Dublin Energy Agency, Codema. All four plans are fairly similar. Codema was set up as a not-for-profit limited company by Dublin City Council in 1997 under the SAVE II Programme of the European Union. It was one of 14 local energy agencies set up around Ireland to help local authorities meet their energy performance targets through professional development and implementation of good and best practice. <https://www.codema.ie/about-us>

The important point to note is that the four Climate Plans only cover a five year period to 2024. A Dublin Region Energy Master Plan is being developed over the next two years with support from SEAL's Research, Development and Demonstration (RD&D) programme. This will create evidence-based, realistic, and costed pathways for the Dublin Region to achieve its carbon emission reduction targets to 2030 and 2050.

Compared to many other countries, local authorities in Ireland are limited in their service delivery and direct legal capacity, and key decisions are often made at the national rather than the local level. The focus of the four plans is, therefore, on climate-proofing the areas for which it has direct responsibility. In areas outside its remit, DCC will work to support the implementation of the sectoral adaptation and mitigation plans developed by, but not limited to, the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG), the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (DTTAS), the Office of Public Works (OPW), the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM), and the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCAE), thereby supporting the whole of government approach to climate action.

Local authorities are actively working in consultation with the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment (DCCAE) to develop a regional approach to climate action through the establishment of four Climate Action Regional Offices (CAROs). The proposed approach groups local authorities together based on similar geographical characteristics so that they can address the threats and impacts of severe weather events and ongoing climate change risks within their region. These Regional Offices have so far concentrated on the mitigation of climate impacts such as flooding.

9. **Dublin City Council**

https://dublinclimatechange.codema.ie/f/50477/x/c3c6a2de97/dublin-city-council_draft-climate-change-action-plan.pdf

Dublin City Council has reduced its emissions by 24% in the last 10 years. In addition, the Council has improved its energy efficiency by 29.8% and is currently on track to meet its 33% energy efficiency target by 2020. For the Dublin City area the sectors that produced the most emissions were the residential, commercial and transport sectors, accounting for 34.7%, 33.2%, and 24.8% of total emissions, respectively.

But given that the Council's buildings, operations and social housing account for less than 5% of the total emissions in Dublin City, the Dublin's Climate Change Action Plan highlights the need to tackle the remaining 95% of emissions produced citywide. In recognising this challenge, Dublin City Council will work with key stakeholders to influence and support carbon reduction initiatives across the City's transport, commercial and residential sectors.

Five key areas for the plan are:

- Energy & Buildings
- Resource Management
- Transport
- Nature-based solutions
- Flood resilience

The four targets of the plan are

- A 33% improvement in the council's energy efficiency by 2020
- A 40% reduction in the council's greenhouse gas emissions by 2030

- To make Dublin a climate resilient region, by reducing the impacts of future climate change-related events
- To actively engage and inform citizens on climate change

10. District Heating

Through the North Lotts and Grand Canal Dock and the Poolbeg Strategic Development Zones, DCC is developing the Dublin District Heating System (DDHS) to supply low-carbon heat to houses and businesses in these areas. Waste heat will be taken from the Poolbeg Waste-to-Energy Plant and delivered through insulated pipes to the buildings connected to the system, replacing fossil fuel heating systems and therefore reducing air pollution and GHG emissions.

Civic Offices have reduced electrical energy consumption from 5,220 megawatt hours (MWh) in 2012 to 3,770 MWh in 2017 with measures such as boiler upgrades, new pumps and rooftop solar (PV) generating 43 MWh per year.

PV panels also installed on three libraries.

The Council is also planning on retrofitting a number of additional buildings throughout the City, including its homeless facilities, senior citizen units and social housing complexes. These upgrades will include measures such as insulation, window and door replacements, gas boiler replacements, heating controls, LED lighting, solar PV panels and heat pumps.

A number of deep retrofit projects for social housing are also planned.

11. Energy Performance Contracts

DCC, in partnership with Codema, has been using what is called Energy Performance Contracts (EPC) to improve the energy use and efficiency of its sports and fitness centres across the City. Under these agreements an Energy Service Company (ESCO) guarantees energy savings over an agreed period of time. In 2016, DCC awarded its first EPC for the upgrade of three of its largest leisure centres (Markievicz, Finglas and Ballymun Sports and Fitness Centres). These upgrades included the following measures:

- New LED lighting;
- New or refurbished combined heat and power systems to efficiently heat the swimming pools;
- Improved building control systems for effective management of all equipment.

Based on this successful model, Codema is now developing a second EPC project with DCC, which will involve an upgrade to the existing lighting, heating and ventilation systems across seven Council buildings.

12. Council Depots

The Council is planning to consolidate various depots into two large-scale depot facilities. These will be designed and constructed to Nearly Zero Energy Building Standard (nZEB) (15) resulting in savings of 2.1 GWh of primary energy and 672 tonnes of CO₂ at the first new depot.

Up to 5,500 street lights have already been replaced with LEDs. By replacing a further 4,000 of these SOX lamps by 2020, DCC could achieve savings of 1.7 GWh of and 388 tonnes of CO₂. This would have a significant impact on the Council's 2020 target.

13. Home Energy Saving Kits

Dublin City Council's Public Libraries partnered with Codema to pilot the Home Energy Saving Kits in a selection of library branches in 2016. The kits contain six tools for householders to assess how energy-efficient their homes are and were available for the public to borrow free-of-charge from these libraries.

14. Transport

Examples of main actions include:

- Converting council fleet to low emission vehicles; The Council has 980 vehicles in its fleet, which are broken down into 24 different vehicle types, including cars, vans, lorries and road sweepers. As transport accounts for 12% of DCC's overall energy use, the Council is steadily replacing the fleet with newer, more fuel efficient vehicles, including electric vehicles.
- Constructing segregated cycle ways and footpaths;
- Staff mobility hub in civic offices; Give staff access to bikes, electric bikes and electric cars so that they can move efficiently from one Council building to another.
- Implementing or supporting walking and cycling campaigns;
- Expand bike sharing schemes;
- Working with stakeholders to improve bus routes.
- DCC is working with the National Transport Authority and its neighbouring local authorities to implement the Greater Dublin Area Transport Strategy 2016-2035, which sets out a strategic vision for transport in Dublin. With private car journeys currently accounting for 32% of the modal split, the Strategy aims to double trips made by walking, cycling and public transport, while significantly reducing private car journeys by 2030.

15. Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown County Council Climate Action Plan

https://dublinclimatechange.codema.ie/f/504777/x/e97306716a/dlr-county-council_draft-climate-change-action-plan.pdf

This plan has many similarities to the Dublin City plan. However, there are some differences. For instance DLRCC is trialling a smart lighting system. DLRCC is the first local authority in Ireland to trial charging points for electric vehicles on street lamps, with a pilot street lamp up and running.

16. Fingal County Council Climate Action Plan

https://dublinclimatechange.codema.ie/f/504777/x/6bac7586cb/fingal-county-council_draft-climate-change-action-plan.pdf

Another similar plan produced in conjunction with Codema. FCC says it wants all public lighting converted to LEDs by 2021 (unlike DCC and DLRCC). It says all new public buildings will be built to near zero energy building standard.

17. South Dublin County Council Climate Action Plan

https://dublinclimatechange.codema.ie/f/504777/x/a7b4cd9771/south-dublin-county-council_draft-climate-change-action-plan.pdf

The last of the four plans produced in conjunction with Codema for the Greater Dublin authorities. The plan highlights the Tallaght District Heating scheme. Codema is working with SDCC to develop Ireland's first large-scale district heating network involving its County Hall and other public and private buildings in the surrounding area. The Tallaght District Heating Scheme has recently gone out to tender and is estimated to save the Council 1,736 tonnes of CO₂ on full system roll out. The proposed system seeks to utilise a low temperature waste heat source from a data centre through a large-scale heat pump, in order to supply space heating and hot water to a cluster of local buildings.

18. Conclusions

The four local Climate Action Plans are heading in the right direction, but as they only cover the next five years are fairly limited in ambition. With the correct vision and involvement of the community local authorities will need to achieve so much more if their activities and those of the wider community are to achieve net zero carbon emissions by 2050. Local Authorities in the Dublin area and the rest of Ireland should use the opportunity presented by the development of the Dublin Region Energy Master Plan, to push for more powers and financial resources to allow them to play a major role in meeting Ireland's Net Zero Carbon ambitions.

It would be instructive to look at what a handful of the more innovative local authorities in the UK and elsewhere in Europe have been doing to meet their climate ambitions and look in more detail at what new legislation might be required to allow the same actions to take plan in Irish Local Authorities.

Nottingham City Council, for instance, has established its own energy company – Robin Hood Energy. The Council’s ambition is to become the first carbon neutral city in the UK. It has built over 40 renewable energy projects with a capacity of 12MW. It has been carrying out dramatic green makeovers of some council houses using the Dutch “Energiesprong” system which has cut tenants’ energy bills in half. The Council is going to trial new electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure, including battery storage and bi-directional chargers, as part of an EU-funded vehicle-to-grid (V2G) project. The Council plans to embrace a revolutionary concept of using stationary vehicles as energy stores to resupply the power grid. On average, domestic cars sit idle for 95% of the time, and this project allows them not only to be charged, but also to feed electricity stored within their batteries back to the grid or nearby buildings generating an new source of income for the local authority. Nottingham has also pioneered the workplace parking tax which is helping to fund public transport improvements throughout the City.

Further examples are available here:

http://www.nuclearpolicy.info/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/A300_NB187_Climate_emergency_renewables.pdf

It is clear that Ireland, north and south, needs a rapid push to challenge the ‘climate emergency’ in a way that has become so prevalent across the Irish Sea in England, Scotland and Wales. The UK report noted above reported of some positive work from some Northern Ireland Councils, but like with the south, a more limited remit means they have not had as much as an impact as most councillors would want. This report calls on the Irish Government and the Northern Ireland Executive to bring Councils much more into the core activity of promoting renewable energy and policies to mitigate climate change.

This report has shown the island of Ireland, despite its great renewable potential, is lagging behind most EU countries in its approach to definitively reducing carbon. The promotion of decentralised energy across the island by the governments is urgently required and the NFLA calls on a dynamic change of approach.

19. References

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