

# NFLA Policy Briefing No.194



Date: 16<sup>th</sup> December 2019

Subject: The 'top 10' actions for local authorities to tackle the climate emergency – a short guide

## Introduction to briefing

The NFLA has been asked by its four National Forums (All Ireland Sustainable Energy Forum and NFLA Forums in England, Scotland and Wales) to provide a guide of the top 10 initial actions for Councils who have passed 'climate emergency' resolutions to implement now and over the next decade and onwards. With over 250 Councils now passing such resolutions, and the climate emergency being a notable issue in the recent UK (and likely upcoming Irish) general election, this short briefing note tries to cut through all the detail and outline the most obvious areas of change Councils need to focus upon.

This briefing should be read in conjunction with the NFLA's much more detailed suite of Policy Briefings devised over the past two years. Each of these has been developed to give its member authorities and local government in general both an overview of the debate, a series of actions to take now for the future, and the best practice that can be found across the decarbonisation challenge. These reports provide the core ways Councils can, and are, tackling the climate emergency and rapidly decarbonising over the next decade and onwards.

The reports can be found here:

- NFLA Policy Briefing 191 – Climate emergency, the next steps: A NFLA manifesto for dynamic low carbon action (this is a longer and more detailed version of this Briefing 194).  
[https://www.nuclearpolicy.info/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/A304\\_NB191\\_Climate\\_Emergency\\_the\\_next\\_steps.pdf](https://www.nuclearpolicy.info/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/A304_NB191_Climate_Emergency_the_next_steps.pdf)
- NFLA Policy Briefing 189 – Ireland and climate change: isn't it time for a local response?  
[https://www.nuclearpolicy.info/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/A302\\_NB189\\_Ireland\\_and\\_climate\\_change.pdf](https://www.nuclearpolicy.info/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/A302_NB189_Ireland_and_climate_change.pdf)
- NFLA Policy Briefing 187 – 'Climate emergency resolutions and the practicalities in local authority action to go 'carbon neutral'.  
[https://www.nuclearpolicy.info/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/A300\\_NB187\\_Climate\\_emergency\\_renewables.pdf](https://www.nuclearpolicy.info/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/A300_NB187_Climate_emergency_renewables.pdf)
- NFLA Policy Briefing 182 – 'Keeping up with Energy': an overview of the APSE Energy Summit.  
[https://www.nuclearpolicy.info/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/A294\\_NB182\\_Keeping\\_up\\_with\\_energy.pdf](https://www.nuclearpolicy.info/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/A294_NB182_Keeping_up_with_energy.pdf)
- NFLA Policy Briefing 175 – Decentralised energy and the climate change imperative: an update of progress across local government in the UK and Ireland.  
[https://www.nuclearpolicy.info/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/A288\\_NB175\\_Decentralised\\_energy.pdf](https://www.nuclearpolicy.info/wp/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/A288_NB175_Decentralised_energy.pdf)

## 1. Buy only 100% renewable electricity for council use and seek to install renewables on council buildings and council land (and in cooperation with other agencies)

If your own Council is not on a renewable energy tariff – why not? There are a wide amount of energy companies that are offering renewable-only electricity in the market now, so this is a relatively easy and good initial start in emphasising your low carbon credentials. Most Councils already are on such tariffs, but there is a surprising amount of Councils who are not.

**THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT VOICE ON NUCLEAR ISSUES**  
**Councils working for a renewable, safe and peaceful future**

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C/o NFLA Secretariat, Level 3, Town Hall Extension, Manchester, M60 3NY

Tel: 0161 234 3244 E-Mail: [s.morris4@manchester.gov.uk](mailto:s.morris4@manchester.gov.uk) Website: <http://www.nuclearpolicy.info>

In addition, many Councils have in the past decade installed solar panels, onshore wind turbines and 'smart' energy schemes on council buildings and council land, and supported similar developments with local social housing providers and community energy cooperatives. Such schemes were particularly evident during the period when local authorities were able to benefit from the UK Government's feed-in tariff scheme, and NFLA believe it was a retrograde step to have abolished it. It calls on the new UK Government to reconsider such schemes in the light of its climate change commitments. With the ongoing cost reductions of renewables, Councils should still look at ways to fund such internal schemes, seeking to unlock sustainable finance for them – NFLA Policy Briefing 175 gives a detailed variety of options Councils are taking in this area as a guide.

NFLA welcomes the Irish Government bringing in an expanded feed-in tariff scheme and hopes it can stimulate a rapid boost of decentralised renewable energy through local authority and community energy schemes. It encourages Irish Councils to consider taking advantage of such schemes and investigating them within their own Local and Regional Development Plans.

## **2. Develop wider and innovative renewable energy schemes like solar farms, low carbon district heating and heat pump schemes as part of efforts to offset its carbon footprint**

NFLA particularly welcomes new imaginative schemes that some Councils have managed to come up with following the conclusion of the feed-in tariff schemes. Such schemes will assist Councils in partially offsetting their own carbon footprint.

Our reports include some excellent recent examples, including:

- Warrington's innovative financing schemes to develop solar farms and install local renewables (for a useful presentation see: <https://www.apse.org.uk/apse/index.cfm/local-authority-energy-collaboration/apse-energy-events/past-events/warrington-day/>).
- Cornwall County Council was the first Council to develop a solar farm. The Council now produces 8MW of solar PV and has inspired other local authorities and communities.
- West Suffolk Council's solar farm which has provided it with an income of £4 million (see [https://www.solarpowerportal.co.uk/news/council\\_owned\\_solar\\_farm\\_surpasses\\_generation\\_targets\\_records\\_highest\\_incom](https://www.solarpowerportal.co.uk/news/council_owned_solar_farm_surpasses_generation_targets_records_highest_incom)).
- The plethora of energy schemes developed by the Tipperary Energy Agency (see <https://tippenergy.ie/projects/>).
- Portsmouth and West Sussex Councils collaborative 'Solar Power for Schools' programme (see <https://www.portsmouth.co.uk/news/politics/portsmouth-city-council-scoops-top-award-for-schools-solar-panel-scheme-1-9027472>).

NFLA also recommend Councils start investigating the development of solar car-ports in their own car parks. The price of solar PV has fallen so dramatically in recent years that it is worth re-visiting any proposals previously rejected on grounds of cost. Nottingham City Council is a leading authority in this area, using the benefits of its Workplace Car Parking Levy to develop solar car-ports, as well as developing further public transport improvements, such as on its bus and tram network.

Furthermore, Councils should actively be looking to switch to low carbon heating sources such as district heating networks and heat pumps. Some impressive examples to consider are the long-standing district heating networks in the likes of Nottingham, Southampton, Leicester and Aberdeen.

In some of its core reports noted on page 1 of this report, NFLA outline a number of exciting new schemes such as a major expansion to the district heating network in Leeds to its city centre, the Manchester Civic Quarter Heat Network and the work Stirling Council has been developing with heat pumps and linked domestic battery storage. NFLA also notes the positive work of Dublin City Council in pursuing the Dublin District Heating System (DDHS) to supply low-carbon heat to houses and businesses in a number of Strategic Development Zones. Within this scheme, waste heat will be delivered through insulated pipes to the buildings connected to the system, replacing fossil fuel heating systems and therefore reducing air pollution and greenhouse gas emissions.

## **3. Carry out a program of energy efficiency improvements on council properties (including with social housing providers and community energy cooperatives) and enforce building standards to deliver zero-carbon homes and buildings**

A core area of decarbonisation that Local Authorities should lead on is in the development of energy efficiency improvements on all council buildings and in conjunction with local schools, community energy cooperatives and social housing providers.

One of the fore-runners of such programmes was Kirklees Council, who have put considerable resources into an energy efficiency programme for Council buildings and its social housing stock. Kirklees Council had the first ever universally free insulation scheme which insulated over 50,000 homes with cavity wall and loft insulation. The Council is now developing an environmental audit to measure its carbon footprint, identify hotspots and work towards being carbon neutral.

In recent years the London Borough of Islington is a good example of developing dynamic energy efficiency projects on its own buildings, such as the Bunhill Heat and Power Network which is going to use excess heat from the London Underground to warm local homes, the Q-bot, Islington's insulation robot, and upgrading heating controls on the Redbrick Estate to help residents take more control of their heating.

Councils should also seek to enforce minimum energy efficiency standards in the private rented sector – for example Newham Council in London has pioneered the use of licencing to identify rented homes and ensure full cost recovery of proper regulation and the enforcement of housing standards.

Dundee Council has done intensive work to retrofit blocks of flats and other social housing, while Councils as varied as Nottingham, Wolverhampton and Exeter are developing homes, schools and leisure centres to a 'Passivhaus' zero carbon standard.

Local Authorities can use their powers to require higher building standards than current national standards. Ideally all new homes and commercial properties should be zero carbon or even better, built to the 'Passivhaus' standard. Local authorities are unable to mandate this standard. However, thanks to the Green Building Council and the Core Cities group, the UK Government has clarified that "local authorities are not restricted in their ability to require energy efficiency standards above Building Regulations". The Irish Government and Northern Ireland Executive should also reconsider national planning policy to encourage low carbon standards at the local level.

Good examples in this area include Ipswich and Cambridge Councils, who have included a requirement for all new homes to meet a standard equivalent to the 'Code for Sustainable Homes' level 4. This has delivered a 19% improvement on the current national standards.

#### **4. Stop buying fossil fuelled vehicles immediately**

It goes without saying that from the moment a climate emergency is declared, Councils need to adopt a new procurement strategy. A core part of this strategy will be around fleet management and purchasing new vehicles which are not powered by fossil fuels. The NFLA reports noted in page 1 highlight how a wide range of Councils are purchasing and using electric vehicles, hydrogen powered vehicles and other types of vehicles powered by renewable energy. There needs to be a clear policy from the Council to inform fleet managers to start looking at these options instead of simply replacing 'like for like'.

#### **5. Start replacing current vehicle inventory with EVs and hydrogen powered vehicles**

Councils are beginning to replace their current vehicle inventory with renewables, as well as encouraging other sectors in the city to do likewise.

In addition, there are linked actions within this area, including:

- Ensuring the rapid transition of the council's own fleet to electric vehicles including vehicles used by council staff but not owned by the council.
- Using the licensing system to ensure that all taxis are electric by a certain date.
- Introducing a differential charging for residents parking permits depending on the cars carbon emissions.
- Support the development of car-sharing.
- Integrate the need to reduce car use into the local plan – this requires a range of measures, including: ensuring dense housing development with quality walking & cycling; restricted car

parking provision; the provision of transport & delivery hubs to enable the use of cargo bikes and similar for deliveries.

Arguably one of the most dynamic Councils in this area in the UK and Ireland is Dundee City Council. It already boasts the largest number of electric minicabs anywhere in the UK (134 at the last count), a council-owned network of four solar-powered charging hubs capable of taking 78 cars at a time (with sites for another 60 being built) and the highest number of rapid chargers of any Scottish city. It will also be imminently opening a solar-powered rooftop charging hub at a city-centre multi-storey car park.

Dundee's ambition is to be fully electric within 15 years. Dundee City Council has one of the UK's largest local authority electrified fleet, with 117 electric cars and vans in use. It plans to buy 65 more, replacing its highly polluting diesel bin lorries and road sweepers with electric vehicles, and running subsidised electric minibuses in some of its poorest neighbourhoods.

(See <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/aug/16/dundee-green-revolution-charging-hubs-electric-cabs-scotland>)

## **6. Begin a program of installing EV charging points**

A major task of decarbonising transport will be to have an infrastructure that can handle electric and hydrogen powered vehicles.

Councils need to connect with the likes of Passenger Transport Authorities in understanding how this may take place, and the Energy Savings Trust is providing advice to Councils in this area. Gridserve ([www.gridserve.com](http://www.gridserve.com)) have exciting plans for 100 electric forecourts around the country with ultra-rapid chargers, solar panels and electric storage. As they will be providing grid services, the costs of the electricity would be around the same as it is at home.

## **7. Draw up a plan for tree planting in parks, along roadside etc**

The recent UK election saw political parties falling over each other in promises to plant huge numbers of trees for carbon offsetting. Whilst it is important to do so, NFLA sees this as only part of the solution, and not a panacea, as it was often being suggested in the election campaign.

Tree planting should be part of a wider natural environment plan that helps to preserve and nurture green spaces and brings in other useful climate change mitigation work, such as on flood prevention and mitigation.

Glasgow City Council, for example, has convened a review to address existing barriers to tree planting in order to significantly increase the number of trees within the city over the next 5 years. In addition it has called for a formal audit and costed plan by the Council and its city-region partners on the opportunities for much greater tree planting and other ways of harnessing the natural environment to absorb emissions. The review will also identify vacant and derelict land suitable for greening and rewilding, with a view to its change of use as designated open space. Similarly, Belfast City Council has imaginative plans for a tree-planting and wildlife management scheme which will assist in carbon offsetting.

## **8. Switch to locally grown sources for food in schools and council run institutions. Implement plans to introduce more allotments**

In addition to tree planting, Councils have to show leadership in improving the local food supply chain to consider ways to increase the amount of locally grown sources for foods in schools and council run institutions. The 'incredible edible' movement that has taken place in the likes of Todmorden in Calderdale and in Sheffield shows the local popularity of such initiatives.

Local authority allotments have greatly increased in their popularity in recent years. Whilst there are always issues over lack of space, there should be greater consideration of the benefits of increasing allotments as part of a wider campaign of environmental education. Councils should interact with local community groups in the introduction of such schemes.

9. **Prioritise pedestrians and cycling strategies over road building schemes whilst encouraging low carbon transport use**

The idea that all that is required in the area of sustainable, low carbon transport is to simply switch our existing petrol and diesel cars into electric versions and carry on as before is unsustainable. The House of Commons Science and Technology Committee says “*the Government should not aim to achieve emissions reductions simply by replacing existing vehicles with lower-emissions versions ...In the long-term, widespread personal vehicle ownership does not appear to be compatible with significant decarbonisation.*”

Whilst increasing electric and hydrogen powered vehicles is a part of the solution, all ‘zero carbon’ strategies have to acknowledge ways to actively encourage walking, cycling and improved low carbon public transport solutions. The rapid development of air transport and local airport strategies also need to be reconsidered as part of a low carbon transport strategy, including tackling the concept of ‘frequent flying’, in an equitable manner.

10. **Draw up a detailed climate emergency plan in consultation with citizens’ assemblies and large institutions such as health services, universities, sports facilities, large companies, transport operators, etc**

At the heart of all of the above actions, has to be a climate emergency plan that garners wide public consent. NFLA believe Councils, or a collection of Councils, need to urgently bring the public actively into decarbonisation processes to encourage local ownership and support for them. For example, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority ‘Green Summits’ have brought many parts of the local community together to make joint targets for deep decarbonisation. Oxford City Council has recently held a citizens’ climate assembly, following on from the example of Camden Council.

Such initiatives has inspired UK Parliamentary Select Committees to organise a national climate citizens’ assembly. In Ireland, the Dail has recently held a youth climate assembly and it, and the Irish Government are actively taking on board their conclusions. Youth Councils are being asked by many other Councils for their views on climate change given the political activity young people have inspired in 2019, where the young Swedish student Greta Thunberg has just been announced as ‘Time Magazine’ person of the year.

***The final edition of a Council Climate Change Emergency Plan must also be embedded in the Council’s 10 year Local Development Plan. Appendix 1 below gives a useful checklist of some additional actions that a Council might take under a Climate Change Emergency Plan and that would also be suitable for embedding in a Local Development Plan.***

### **Conclusion**

The recognition of the ‘climate emergency’ has arguably been one the key political issues of 2019, and it is likely to remain at the top of the political agenda throughout the next decade. The apparent failure of the COP 25 international climate change talks in Madrid is a warning of the many challenges that come from an increased political and public appetite for radical action on one side with those parts of the economy, and some national governments, resisting such change on the other. It remains concerning that the talks foundered. The COP 26 Climate Change Summit will be in Glasgow, and the Council is the lead member of the NFLA Scotland Forum. This conference now assumes a greater importance for tackling the climate emergency given the failings of COP 25. It will also mean such issues will remain at the forefront of public discourse throughout 2020.

This NFLA Policy Briefing has outlined the core 10 initial actions all Councils should be involved in developing **NOW**. Zero carbon strategies need to go to the core of every Council’s annual plans, and financing them will be difficult but essential, despite years of deep austerity across local government. NFLA will continue to highlight the best practice that needs to be undertaken to deliver radical action, while lobbying all governments in the UK and Ireland to prioritise such action to unlock resources and develop effective partnerships for deep decarbonisation across all sectors.

Of course all of this work prioritises renewable sources of energy for generation, heating and transport. NFLA sees new nuclear as an expensive, waste-laden and overly time-consuming alternative that does not reflect the existing reality of the energy market into the 2020’s. Decentralised renewable solutions led by local authorities and partner agencies could play an

essential part in the local, national and global challenge to deliver carbon neutral societies over the next decade(s).

Climate change is clearly taking place now, and the window of opportunity to mitigate its worst effects is narrowing year by year. It is incumbent that local government plays its part now, and over the next decade onwards. NFLA will do its level best to support its member authorities in this endeavour.

## Appendix 1

### Linking Council Climate Emergency Plans with Local Development Plans

<b>Internal and External Guide for Council Climate Change Adaption Plans</b>		
<b>ITEM</b>	<b>Via the COUNCIL'S OWN INTERNAL ASSETS, REVENUES AND EXPENDITURES</b>	<b>Via the LOCAL AREA / REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN</b>
Buildings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Follow 'zero carbon or 'Passivhaus' codes for all new buildings</li> <li>- Retrofit all old buildings toward zero carbon using PV, heat-pumps, low energy appliances and insulation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use powers to adopt 'Code for Sustainable Homes Level 4 or 'Passivhaus' standard in Council District ahead of regional or National Government</li> <li>- Work with other agencies to accelerate energy efficiency retrofits scheme, using regulation and public funding to support almost all homes and buildings reach at least EPC Band C by 2030 and zero-carbon by 2045 or 2050</li> </ul>
Energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Consider investing in solar energy farms to create substantial sustainable income streams from renewable energy</li> <li>- Put in place plan to ensure all energy consumed is from renewable sources by 2025</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Engage with business and farming interests in the Council District to investigate how dramatic increases in renewable energy can be achieved without increasing overall cost of energy to the consumer through the planning system, grid infrastructure and smarter regulation.</li> <li>- Make retrofitting properties – even in conservation areas – as straightforward as possible from a planning and building control viewpoint</li> </ul>
Transport	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Move Council fleet, including vehicles used by staff with high mileage claims to electric vehicles within 5 years</li> <li>- Incentivise staff to adopt electric cars using mileage rates, cheap loans or grants</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Announce that named major urban centers will be emissions free by 2030 and create inter-agency team to plan towards this</li> <li>- Work with other agencies to dramatically increase walking, cycling and public transport</li> <li>- Ensure local development plan ensures that electric infrastructure is in place for an all-electric transport world by 2030</li> </ul>
Sea Level Rise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Review all Council property less than 4 feet above sea-level and formulate medium term mitigation plans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Review existing town and village development limits likely to be affected by 4 feet of sea level rise – especially where tidal surges are possible – and mitigate in local development plan</li> </ul>
Adverse Weather	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Consider ways local adverse weather may affect the district (too</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Work with interagency partners to upgrade and adapt emergency plans to</li> </ul>

	hot and dry in summer, too cold and wet in winter)	deal with adverse weather issues that arise from climate change
Bio-diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Review tree-planting strategies and wildlife management plans to maximise low carbon outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Work with interagency partners to upgrade and adapt biodiversity strategies accordingly</li> </ul>
Community And staff Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Incentivise the public to suggest ideas to more rapidly move Council / Council districts towards zero-carbon solutions</li> <li>- Incentivise staff to bring forward energy or carbon-saving projects to accelerate Councils towards its goal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Communicate clear statistics for the Council District on local energy consumption across all energy headings</li> <li>- Hold workshops at District Electoral Level to seek public input on how we can achieve zero-carbon within or before target dates</li> </ul>
Overall Target	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adopt an ambitious net-zero carbon target for the Council over the next decade with regular audited milestones</li> <li>- Create full-time qualified senior management resource to plan and deliver it under a program board</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Adopt a zero carbon target for the Council District between 2030 and 2050</li> <li>- Base the Local Area Development Plan on an assumption that an accelerated move to zero carbon is both necessary and desirable and must be reflected with concrete actions</li> </ul>