

How do Councils tackle the climate emergency in a post-pandemic era?



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NFLA All Ireland Sustainable Energy Forum webinar
April 2021



NFLA – at the heart of climate policy

- NFLA has advocated low carbon local energy since the early 1990s
- Look at national / international LA low carbon best practice
- A large suite of reports on decentralized energy
- Calls for more powers and central resource to Councils
- Also advocates Councils to look and follow best practice
- Renewables, battery storage, smart energy, local energy and energy efficiency – our energy policy
- Recent reports Green recovery, 100% renewables and White Paper reports
- New report on LA climate emergency plans in a post-pandemic era





Green recovery – build back better

- **Around the world \$12tn committed to recover from the pandemic - Bloomberg 0.2% of it for low carbon work**
- **Strong green stimulus could help net zero plans**
- **A ‘green recovery’ could deliver new jobs, empower citizens, improve public health & drive innovation**
- **Local & Combined Authorities are critical to provide a local lead to such positive policies**
- **LA’s need to develop partnerships with energy networks**





However,... LA limited powers

- **Lack of LA powers being seen as a real barrier to creating low carbon transition across the Irish and British Isles**
- **UK Energy White Paper notes this / Ireland also heavily centralised**
- **Polly Billington – All Councils cannot reach net zero without more local devolution of powers**
- **Pandemic has decimated LA budgets**
- **Green Alliance report recommends new framework –**
 - **agreed methodology on emissions reporting**
 - **single contact in central govt for LA decarbonisation**
 - **strategic approach to gaps and national green jobs strategy**
 - **stable funding and reforms to planning for sustainable needs**





Moving on to the hard bits of decarbonisation



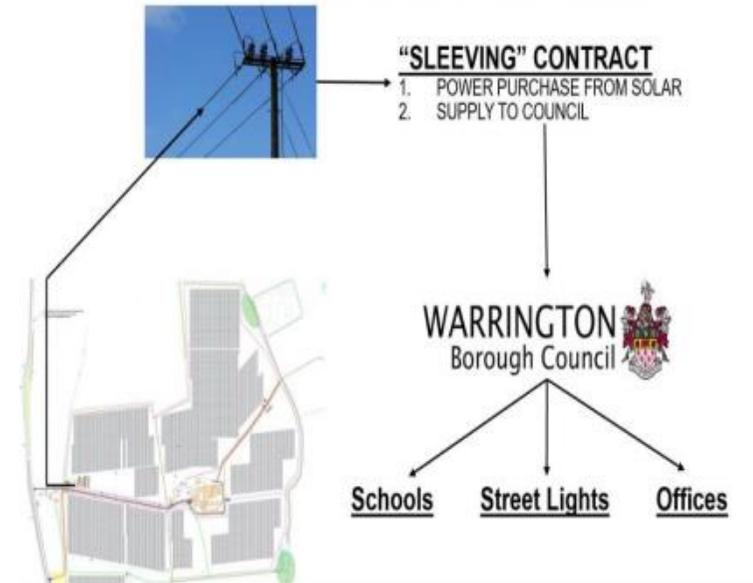
- Progress on decarbonising electricity very successful – large amount of renewables on grid
- Decarbonising heating & transport much harder
- Local knowledge essential – local transport patterns, housing stock, pockets of fuel poverty
- Next phase of decarbonisation needs to be consumer and local-friendly
- It will have to be FAIR
- It will need the devolving of power within it



Why Councils are good for green recovery

- Globally, more than 10,000 Councils have committed to climate action
- 60% of over 1,000 European cities are on track to meet climate targets
- Over 320 UK & Irish Councils have climate emergency resolution plans
- All target net zero between 2035 - 2050

FROM YORK AND HULL >> WARRINGTON





Devolving power

- **Market reform – e.g. removing VAT from energy saving equipment, incentivise carbon reduction**
- **Enable local government to deliver & support heat decarbonisation – give residents a share**
- **Ask your residents what they want – citizens assemblies – discussing with them how to live**
- **Reports from such bodies have been far more radical than expected**
- **Give local government a local target as part of real devolution**





Climate emergency declarations

- **Over 75% of UK & Irish local government made them**
- **Need to include Local Area Energy Plans**
- **CCC report welcome this and recommends LAs to:**
 - **develop energy efficiency & heat strategy and act in 2020s**
 - **update carbon reduction plans for council estate**
 - **talk and engage with residents on these matters**
 - **identify areas for low carbon heat clusters**
 - **deal with 5% of homes off gas grid as such heating will be phased out**
 - **support smart meter roll out**
 - **implement planning policies on new build that encourage net zero**





CCC LA report and transport

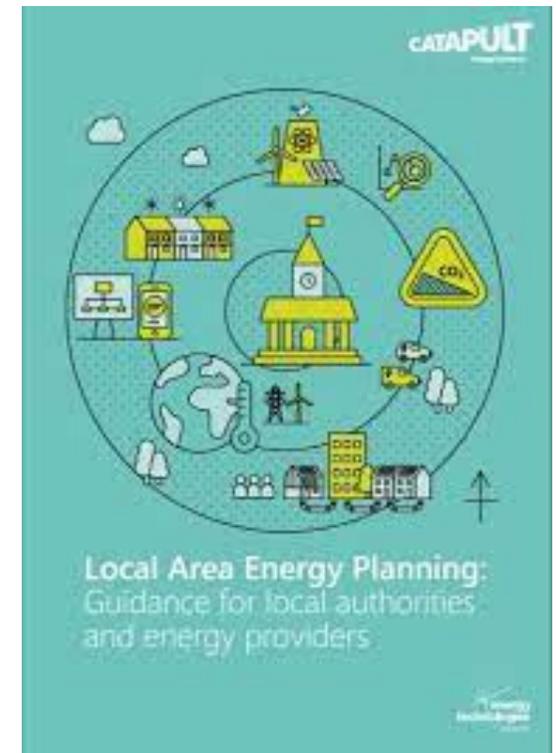


- **Promote walking, cycling and public transport plans**
- **LAs need a good Local Walking & Cycling Plan**
- **Work with bus companies on low carbon buses with fair fares structure**
- **Promote EV uptake**
- **Use traffic powers to reduce HGV emissions**
- **Work with other LAs and network providers on local area energy plans that quantify transport / heat needs**



Local Area Energy Plans (LAEP)

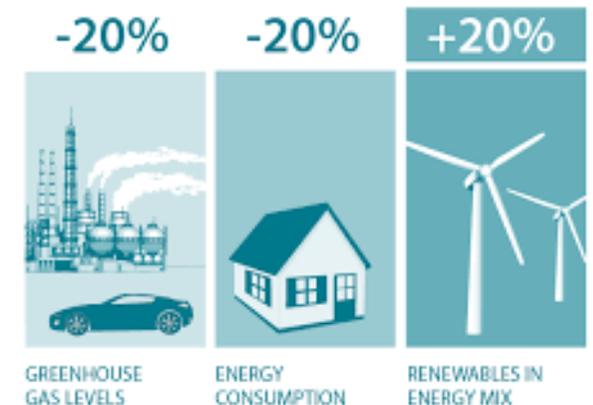
- **LAEP should be used to build a map of the current energy system, model future transition pathways, work with local stakeholders and identify priority projects**
- **See report from Energy Systems Catapult**
- **Combine it with transport, food and biodiversity plans can create a local target to the national Net Zero plan**





Support from central government

- SEAI produced methodology for Irish Councils to develop renewable energy strategies (LARES)
- <https://www.seai.ie/publications/Methodology-for-Local-Authority-Renewable-Energy-Strategies.pdf>
- Includes training to engage and consider local needs
- NI Department of Economy preparing new Energy Strategy to replace Strategic Energy Framework
- New powers around Local Heat and Energy Efficiency recommended – more should follow





Campaign for a Green Recovery

- **Group of 24 Mayors and local leaders set up a Resilient Recovery Taskforce**
- **Recommended:**
 - **Net Zero Development Bank to work with LAs**
 - **Renew grid for smart decentralised energy**
 - **Huge retrofit programme**
 - **Speed up low carbon transport schemes**
 - **Expand local powers to take action through an enhanced devolution settlement**





Finding the money – UK issues



- In past decade LA budget has dropped by up to 38%
- CCC say decarbonisation cost £50bn a year
- Fivefold increase of funds required
- Abundance Investments – raised £100m with LAs through green municipal bonds
- Bring in strategic partners to attract investment
- See LGA advice for grants, borrowing / Salix finance
- Community energy co-ops can also help and create good partnerships



Challenges for Irish & NI Councils



- **2018 Citizens Assembly report called for radical political leadership on climate change**
- **While Climate Action Plans urges action there are huge issues in decarbonising agriculture, transport, housing and industrial sectors**
- **Ireland (& N Ireland) is heavily centralised inhibiting innovation and effective local delivery**
- **Councils are responsible for developing climate adaptation plans**
- **Powers across the island still too limited to allow Councils to play a more focal role**



Action still possible

- **Sabrina Dekker, Dublin City Council – despite their limited roles and finances, Irish Councils can deliver climate action – also learn from overseas**
- **Funds though really would help deliver more urgency**
- **Climate Change Action Plan within the Dublin Energy Agency adapts to flooding, sea level rise, extreme weather, 40% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030**
- **All 31 Irish Councils Climate Charter should be used to take action and work together**
- **Needs full cooperation with central government**





Recent Snapshot of Council Activity

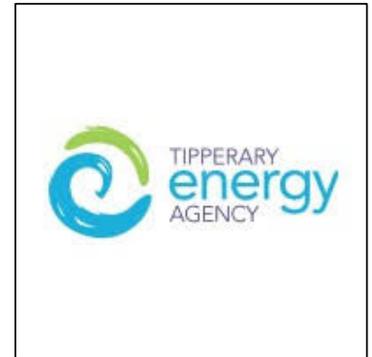


- **Less than half of Irish / NI Councils use electric / hybrid vehicles**
- **Councils have invested more than €120m / £125m in energy efficiency projects – reducing 60,000 tonnes of CO2**
- **280,000 streetlights upgraded to low carbon LED**
- **Only half of LAs have met energy efficiency targets**
- **20 Councils piloting near zero energy building projects**



Tipperary Energy Agency

- Promoted previously by NFLA All Ireland SE Forum
- Driving energy transition
- Focuses on energy innovation and best practice
- Since 2017 12.5k tonnes of CO2 reduced, 650 jobs and €33m local low carbon investment
- Paul Kenny, CEO, now Government Advisor – “A network of local energy agencies ... could be replicated, steered by the local civic organisations with funding programs tailored to specific sectors.”
- TEA Director Marie Donnelly now Chair of Climate Change Advisory Council
- Need to replicate similar model across Ireland & NI





Irish Climate Change Bill March 2021

- **Net Zero target by 2050 / 51% reduction by 2030**
- **CCAC strengthened role**
- **Government determine carbon budget across all sectors**
- **LA's prepare individual Climate Action Plans with mitigation and adaptation measures**
- **Local Authority Development Plan must be aligned to Climate Action Plans**
- **Consultation open till 18th May – NFLA AISEF will call for more powers, responsibilities and funds for local authorities using our knowledge of decentralised energy in England, Scotland and Wales as examples**





NI Assembly Climate Change Bill



- **Cross party Bill (Greens, SF, SDLP, UUP, AP) calls for net zero by 2045 – devised by Climate Coalition NI**
- **Edwin Poots - Government Bill using CCC advice of 82% cut in emissions by 2050 in NI**
- **Major challenge will be reducing emissions in agriculture**
- **Over time could the 2 Bills be merged with consensus?**
- **Either Bill likely to place duty on NIE to prepare Climate Action Plan with targets, carbon budgets and sectoral plans**
- **Establish NI Climate Officer and Commissioner**
- **NI Councils lack capacity in this area and need support, funds and new responsibilities as well**



Conclusions



- **Devolution to local government of powers and responsibilities on climate action is urgently required**
- **Councils will need adequate funding to meet climate objectives**
- **Still ways to fund transformation via grants, borrowing and investing, and new vehicles like Municipal Bonds and energy co-ops**
- **Key start is a good plan worked on with partners and the local community – the people need to be brought with you!**