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

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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
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)
- 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
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
• 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!