



Cumann Lucht Bainistíochta Contae agus Cathrach
County and City Management Association

Submission to the Joint Committee on Environment and Climate Action

Challenges and opportunities for local authorities in climate action

Submitted on behalf of the County and City
Management Association Climate Action, Transport
and Networks Committee

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Presentation to Joint Committee on Environment and Climate Action by Paddy Mahon, Chief Executive of Longford County Council and Chair of the Climate Action, Transport and Networks Committee of the City and County Management Association (CCMA).

On behalf of the County and City Management Association (CCMA) and the Climate Action Regional Offices (CAROs), who support local government and report to CCMA, I welcome the opportunity to meet with the Joint Committee on Environment and Climate Action to discuss challenges and opportunities for local authorities in climate action. The presence of CAROs is important as they provide leadership for the sector, along with offering practical assistance for individual local authorities to deliver their climate action programmes.

Climate change is a global challenge, but one though which the European Union through its Member States can play a leading role. With support, we believe local authorities are well placed to address the climate challenge by embedding climate action in our own operations and leading climate action across our areas and communities. With 31 local authorities across Ireland working towards this ambition, there is opportunity for significant impact nationally.

Over the last number of years, the CCMA Climate Action, Transport and Networks Committee has overseen a number of important developments across the local government sector in the area of Climate Action.

2018

The CAROs were established in 2018 in response to Action 8 of the National Adaptation Framework (NAF) – Planning for a Climate Resilient Ireland. The business case for the CAROs was prepared by LGMA/CCMA and is funded by DECC for a 5 year period from 2018 to 2023. The CAROs were set up to work on climate adaptation and are mandated to:

- drive climate action and build capacity within the sector on climate action
- assist in the alignment of national, sectoral and local climate policy
- mainstream climate action across all local authority functions.

2019

- Preparation of Local Authority Climate Change Adaptation/Action Plans, as required under Section 8 of the National Adaptation Framework
- Preparation and signature of Local Authority Climate Action Charter by all local authorities

- Development of comprehensive Local Authority Climate Action Training Programme for more than 29,000 local authority staff and nearly 1,000 Elected Members.

2020

- Publication of Profile of Local Government Climate Actions (report attached for information)
- Sector achieved its 2020 performance target for energy efficiency of 33%
- Development and publication of sectoral strategy – *Delivering Effective Climate Action, 2030* and funding submission (strategy attached for information).

2021

- Continued sectoral and local authority climate strategy implementation
- Publication of *Local Authority Electrification of Fleet and EV Charging Guidance Document*
- National conference and research on Economic Opportunities and Climate Action
- National Dialogue on Climate Action - Community Climate Conversations including Public Participation Networks and Comhairle Na Nóg
- Active Travel Teams through funding from NTA
- Identification of Decarbonising Zones as per Action 165 of Climate Action Plan 2019
- Continued roll out of public lighting retrofit
- Commenced local authority housing retrofit programme
- Continued Climate Action Training across the sector.

2022

- Preparation of Climate Adaptation of Regional & Local Roads Guidance
- Planning for the Community Climate Action Fund
- Preparation of resources for energy saving advice for local authority housing tenants, within elements of this since also utilised by a major Housing Association
- Engagement with local authorities and assessment of needs for dealing with the urgent issue of sea level rise and coastal erosion

- Preparation of new guidance for Local Authority Climate Action Plans and Guidelines (adaptation and mitigation); submitted to Minister for approval December 2021.

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act, 2021 frames Ireland's legally binding climate ambition in delivering a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of 51% by 2030.

More recently, the Climate Action Plan 2021 has set specific objectives for the public sector, which includes local government, regarding energy efficiencies and emission reduction. These incorporate:

- Improving energy efficiency to 50% by 2030
- Delivering a 51% reduction in carbon emissions from local government operations by 2030
- Each local authority devising their own Climate Action Plan, to be renewed at least once every five years, containing both mitigation and adaptation measures.

Local authority climate action

Along with working towards the objectives above, local authorities are actively engaged in a number of other important climate action areas.

Adaptation and emergency response

Local authorities play a pivotal role in climate adaptation and in responding to climate emergency situations, such as storms and extreme weather events.

Each local authority is implementing their Adaptation Strategy/Plan and they are also classified as 'stakeholders' or 'actors' across each many of the Sectoral Adaptation Plans. Given the sector's close relationship with the community and environment, local authorities have essential local knowledge and input into identifying and managing climate risks and vulnerabilities, as well as implementing adaptation actions with sectoral partners. A particular climate adaptation challenge in the local authority sector is the area of coastal erosion and the need for national strategic leadership in this area. CAROs and the local authority sector are represented on a National Coastal Change Strategy Steering group led by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, and we look forward to further outputs from the strategy development.

Climate action training

We are also committed to providing appropriate climate action training, with the support of the Department of Environment, Climate and Communications, to all of our 29,000 employees and our 942 Elected Members. To date training has been made available to over 16,000 employees and all of our elected members. A summary of the current progress on the Climate Action Training Plan is attached for information to the committee members.

Influencing climate action in community and enterprise

While local authorities are generally responsible for less than 5% of our administrative area's emissions, we are well positioned in our communities with established engagement in climate action to take on a broader role, influencing and facilitating others to meet their own targets. For example, we are a lead partner in the GAA Green Clubs pilot, which aims to have clubs as sustainability champions within their own communities. Whilst The Economic Opportunities arising from climate action Project works with LEO and LCDCs to promote climate action through the lens of opportunity. Initiatives such as the Climate Innovation Fund 2022 and Creative Ireland aim to foster innovative and creative climate solutions at community level.

Supporting a 'Just Transition'

A 'Just Transition' is an essential element of climate action and the transition to a low carbon and climate resilient Ireland. Local authorities already provide a range of socio-economic and community development services and are well placed to enable and support a just transition, identifying ways and means to address the local impacts of climate change and climate policy. National support in terms of community funding, training/ re-training and enterprise opportunities is a key enabler of this transition.

Ambition and strategy to take a lead on climate action

The Local Authority Climate Action Charter, which was signed by all local authorities in October 2019, confirms the sector's commitment to scale up efforts and play a key leadership role locally and nationally in delivering effective climate action.

In 2020, set against the backdrop of an evolving and increasing ambition of national climate policy in recent years, the local government sector has developed *Delivering Effective Climate Action 2030*, a strategy to deliver on the commitments of the Climate Action Charter and to maximise the 31 local authorities' collective impact on Ireland's national climate action targets.

In *Delivering Effective Climate Action 2030*, an overarching commitment on leadership is highlighted to ensure a coherent approach to climate action across the administrative and political structures of all 31 local authorities.

Vision

The sectoral vision identified in this strategy is to leverage the capability, reach and resources of local authorities to effectively lead and coordinate climate action across Ireland.

Mission

The mission of local government is to deliver transformative change and measurable climate action across our cities and counties and within our own organisations, through leadership, example and mobilising action at a local level.

Key goals

1. Foster governance, leadership, and partnerships for climate action
2. Achieve our carbon emission and energy efficiency targets for 2030 and 2050
3. Deliver on climate adaptation and climate resilience
4. Mobilise climate action in local communities
5. Mobilise climate action in enterprise, support the transition to a net zero and circular economy
6. Achieve a just transition.

Resources required

In its annual report in 2021 the Climate Change advisory Council (CCAC) notes the progress being made on climate action by local authorities with assistance from the CAROs. The CCAC also recognised the resource and capacity constraints facing local authorities and the CAROs. Since 2009, the local authority sector has gone from a workforce of approximately 38,000 to currently 29,000. Climate action is a very broad area requiring diverse skill sets across local authority departments. Climate action also requires ‘boots on the ground’, in particular for community initiatives, and implementing adaptation and mitigation projects at a local authority level are urgently needed.

From communication with the sector and feedback to Government Department representatives at the recent CCMA Plenary, it was clear that there is insufficient staff capacity at local authority level to implement the ambition in the national strategy. Similarly at the CARO level, while the CARO regional offices were set up on a climate adaptation footing in 2018, their work programme has expanded rapidly and moved very much into the climate mitigation and energy area, with insufficient staff at regional level to assist local authorities as required in their climate action efforts. The sector seeks clarity from DECC as to the extension of the CARO Business Case post March 2023 when the 5 year temporary period ceases, as well as climate action staff resources across the LA sector.

The CCMA Strategy - *Delivering Effective Climate Action 2030* has identified the following additional resources required within each local authority to deliver on our climate action ambitions and to work with stakeholders to ensure that actions for emission reductions, building climate resilience and behavioural change are designed to be inclusive and make it a transition for all:

- Climate Action Co-ordinator
- Energy and Emissions Manager
- Climate Action Officer
- Green Solutions Specialist
- Community Climate Action Officer

The CCMA has been engaging over the last year, particularly with the Department of Environment Climate and Communications, with a view to securing funding towards the cost of putting these resources in place in advance of the preparation of the Climate Action Plans as required under the Climate Act.

The CCMA is clear that these additional resources need to be in place in 2022 to ensure that local authorities realise our ambition to deliver transformative change and measurable climate action across our cities and counties and within our own organisations through leadership, example and mobilising action at a local level.