

LOCAL AUTHORITIES SET TO LEAD ON CLIMATE ACTION

Local authorities need to develop a more concentrated effort in meeting their climate action targets and to engage and empower others to act to mitigate climate change. The CCMA, in collaboration with the Climate Action Regional Offices is developing a strategy to meet the scale and ambition of the Local Authority Climate Action Charter, writes David Mellett, Climate Action Regional Co-ordinator for the Atlantic Seaboard North.

The potential for local government to influence and deliver climate action at a local level is well outlined in the Climate Action Plan 2019, which notes: *“Our 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.”*

Local authorities have a critical role to play in managing climate risks and vulnerabilities, due to their essential local knowledge of the natural and man-made environment. They also deliver over 1,000

services to the public either directly or in partnership with other government departments, each of which offers a significant opportunity for climate action.

As evidenced in the joint CCMA/LGMA publication in January 2020 (*Climate Change – Global Issue, Local Leadership*), the sector has already taken considerable action to address the climate challenge and is uniquely placed to drive forward the transition to a low-carbon climate resilient and environmentally sustainable society.

Local authorities have a huge ambition for what the local government sector can achieve and the Local Authority

Climate Action Charter, signed by all local authorities, commits signatories to be advocates for climate action in policies and practices.

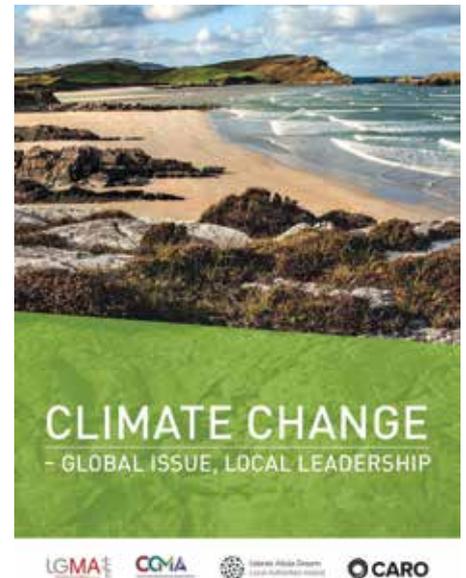
The Charter also ensures that they play a key leadership role locally and nationally in delivering an effective transition and behavioural change among citizens.

MEETING THE TARGETS

To meet this increased ambition for climate action, a more concentrated effort is now needed from the local authority sector to meet its own climate action targets and to engage, motivate and



Pictured (l-r) at the launch of the LGMA/CCMA publication ‘Climate Change – Global Issue, Local Leadership’ in January 2020: Paddy Mahon, Chair of the CCMA Environment and Climate Action Committee; Dr Bernie O’Donoghue Hynes, Head of LGMA’s Research Unit, and Ciarán Hayes, Chairman of the National Local Authority Climate Action Steering Group.



As evidenced in the LGMA/CCMA publication, the sector has already taken considerable action to address the climate challenge and is uniquely placed to drive forward the transition to a low-carbon climate resilient and environmentally sustainable society.

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empower businesses, industry, communities and individuals to act to mitigate climate change.

To address this, the CCMA in collaboration with the Climate Action Regional Offices (CAROs) is developing a strategy to meet the scale and ambition of the Charter and identify how local authorities could deliver much wider change in the years ahead.

The key pillars to meet this ambition:

- Internal Change Management – Building a Culture of Climate Action
- Climate Adaptation
- Energy and Carbon Emission Management
- Community Capacity Building and Behavioural Change
- Biodiversity and Land Use Planning

INTERNAL CHANGE MANAGEMENT

The Local Authority Climate Action Charter requires the sector to be “Advocates for Climate Action”, and the Climate Action Plan notes that as well as adopting some of the centrally designated frameworks, such as Green Procurement, “the challenge must be internalised”.

The new goal for local authorities is to embed climate action into the vision of Local Government to ensure that the sector plays its part in the national transition objectives and to be promoters of change across society.

A paradigm shift in the way local authorities currently deliver all their functions is required to mainstream and internalise the challenge with a coordinated, resourced and consistent

programme of citizen engagement integral to achieving wider societal change.

The creation of such a culture of climate action within local authorities should ensure that the sector alters the way it operates, is valued as a role model for climate action by society and opens itself to opportunities for partnerships with organisations and businesses with similar visions and goals.

CLIMATE ADAPTATION ACTIONS

Climate change impacts are manifested locally, and the local authority sector is at the coal face of responding to these impacts. All 31 local authorities delivered their Climate Change Adaptation Strategies/Action Plans by September 2019, as required under the National Adaptation Framework.

A range of adaptation actions (green, grey and soft) were identified across all local authority departments for implementation in the short to long term to offset these adverse impacts and to take advantage of any opportunities presented by these changes.

The adaptation strategies and the Charter place a huge burden of responsibility on the sector to act early, plan well for adapting to climate risk and undertake preparatory actions that will decrease significantly the eventual costs of climate change impacts.

Implementing the adaptation strategies and actions will be a dynamic process and local authorities will need to build knowledge through research, data collection and monitoring of the risks, opportunities and impacts at a local level.



Mayo County Council and the Eco-Congregation organised the ‘Climate Fest’ – a day of talks, workshops, performances and conversation aimed at helping communities to make simple changes to their day-to-day lives to help tackle the climate emergency.

CONTACT WITH DEPARTMENT AND AGENCIES

The sector will also need to closely liaise with the department and agencies, which have a responsibility for implementing the various sectoral adaptation plans that were submitted to the Government in September 2019.

The sector will need to change the way it delivers services and develop new standards, codes, plans, policies or programmes to take account of future climate changes that enables incremental but effective change over time. Local authority departments will need to communicate

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Pictured (l-r): Chief Executive Ann Doherty, Lord Mayor Cllr. John Sheehan, Fergus Gleeson, Senior Engineer, David Joyce, Director of Services (Operations) and Cormac O'Sullivan, Senior Executive Engineer following the announcement that Cork City Council is gearing up to roll out 76 electric vehicles.

across functions and with other agencies to develop compatible and synergistic policies that translate into concrete programs and project activities that support adaptation measures or build adaptive capacity.

As well as risks, there can also be positive effects of climate change and the sector needs to look at the ways in which can support communities and businesses to make the most of these opportunities.

This could be through the introduction of new activities or services delivered through the LEO, or infrastructure projects to support projected tourism increases due to warmer summers in the future, or innovative products from companies in relation to responding to extreme weather events such as IT solutions or flood protection.

ENERGY & CARBON EMISSIONS

Local authorities have made significant

advances in terms of improving energy efficiencies in recent years. Under the National Energy Efficiency Action Plan the public sector was required to improve its energy efficiency by 33% by 2020. By year-end 2018 the sector had achieved 25% energy efficiencies which represents substantial energy savings for the sector (relative to 2009 baseline).

More recently, the Climate Action Plan 2019 set more onerous targets on public sector bodies regarding energy efficiencies, whereby they must achieve energy efficiencies of 50% by 2030 relative to 2009 baselines.

In addition, local authorities are also tasked with additional measures under the CAP, including:

- Delivering a 30% reduction in carbon emissions by 2030.
- Improving the energy efficiency of public sector buildings by 50% by 2030.

- Upgrading of public housing stock more than 40 years old to a B2 equivalent Building Energy Rating (BER) by 2030.
- Demonstrating leadership in low emission transport options.

There are, therefore, significant challenges ahead for the local government sector to achieve the 50% energy efficiency target by 2030. Greater investment and bundling of energy projects, such as that being delivered under the public lighting project, will be needed in the future.

COMMUNITY CAPACITY BUILDING

'Putting People First – Action Programme for Effective Local Government' identifies the need for Local Government to build strong relationships and gain the interest of local people to provide for better engagement with citizens.

As part of the ambition of local

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authorities to mobilise change, the approach to engage citizens must go beyond the range of communication, consultation, awareness raising, and citizen participation mechanisms used in the past. The challenge of transitioning the country to a low carbon climate resilient society is significant and requires meaningful actions and ongoing, long-term, deep engagement at local community level.

Community action and support will be about enabling people to build their capacity to shape the society of which they are a part and to help communities become better able to address climate change and make the necessary changes in lifestyle.

The sector needs to build capacity and resources to support local people to understand the impacts and opportunities of climate change in each community, the urgency of the situation, and to promote and collaborate on local actions which go beyond volunteerism.

It is important that use is made of the existing structures and functions within each local authority including the PPN, community groups, tidy towns etc, but the scale of the challenge will require dedicated resources on the ground that understand local issues and constraints and can adapt the message and supports accordingly.

BIODIVERSITY & LAND USE PLANNING

Spatial planning is considered to be one of the key policy areas with leverage in both mitigation and adaptation to climate change and arguably can be the strategic framework through which both are positioned in the broader perspective of sustainable development.

The potential for the natural environment to act as a balance to climate change serves a wide variety of



Mayo County Council has installed an 84kW solar PV array on Aras an Chontae, Castlebar. The 301 PV panels will provide over 11% of Aras an Chontae's electricity usage and will offset over 30,000kg of CO₂ per year.

important functions including but not limited to; provision of habitat, increased biodiversity, ecological corridors, climate change adaptation and mitigation, water treatment, water retention, local amenity provision, air quality improvement, cultural and heritage preservation, a mentally restorative environment and flood mitigation.

The application of green infrastructure and nature-based solutions planning at local and regional level provides a strategic planning approach that recognises interdependencies, protects and enhances the networks of natural assets and delivers best outcomes for biodiversity and climate.

Nature-based solutions and green infrastructure also offers an opportunity to develop integrated strategies around economic development, place-making and rural development. These policies also achieve other social objectives. For

example, safe cycling options are good for enhancing human health and the mobility of young people, and local food sourcing can provide an opportunity for the kind of community engagement that the localism and health agendas are seeking to foster.

IN CONCLUSION

Moving towards a low-carbon climate resilient and environmentally sustainable society is the greatest challenge and opportunity of our times. It requires decisive action now and investment in resources, research and innovation to redesign our society.

The local authority sector has already demonstrated its strength and ability to lead on climate action and has the potential and ambition to bring people, communities and industry through this necessary transition in a way that opens up opportunities and leaves nobody behind.