

# MID EAST COUNTY COUNCILS UNITE TO MITIGATE AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE

As climate change continues to pose global challenges coupled with significant local impacts, Wicklow, Meath and Kildare County Councils have collaborated to address their combined climate mitigation ambitions through the formation of the Mid East Energy Unit, which was officially launched at Wicklow County Council's head office in December 2022.

**T**he Mid East Energy Unit – a new collaborative partnership between Wicklow, Kildare and Meath County Councils – will be supported by the Eastern and Midlands CARO (Climate Action Regional Office) and the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI).

The Unit will provide a platform for the three local authorities to work collaboratively to bring about measurable climate action mitigation and encourage a culture of energy saving and carbon reduction in the region.

Furthermore, in association with the SEAI, it aims to provide support services for energy management, awareness, auditing, opportunity identification, and project development and delivery in the region.

The Government's Climate Action Plan 2021 has set ambitious targets for the local government sector which includes the following:

- 51% Greenhouse Gas Emissions by 2030.
- 50% improvement in energy efficiency by 2030.
- Prohibition of new fossil fuel heating systems in public buildings after 2023.

The three local authorities of Wicklow, Meath, and Kildare County Councils have recognised that climate action needs to be a whole of organisation effort, and in coming together as a region, the potential to effect even greater change is further enhanced.

## MEETING 2030 ENERGY TARGETS

The aim of the proposed Mid East Energy Unit is to support the three local authorities in meeting their 2030 energy efficiency and carbon emissions reduction targets and to fulfil their exemplary leadership role with respect to climate action.

It is intended that the Energy Unit will accelerate the development of an energy management system in each local authority and enhance the investment required to achieve the gap to target in energy efficiency and carbon reduction for the three local authorities in the region by 2030.

The three local authorities are committed to the Energy Unit and to working collaboratively to meet the challenge of the 2030/2050 energy/emission targets. Senior Management in each of the local authorities have acknowledged the exemplar leadership role of the local authority sector in mobilising action in their local communities and being the catalyst for change to a low-carbon society.

Brian Gleeson, Chief Executive of Wicklow County Council, acknowledged the work of the Mid East Energy Unit Steering Group, comprising representatives from the three councils, the Eastern and Midlands CARO and SEAI, whom he said have "done sterling work in devising this exemplar response to the challenges of reaching on our ambitious climate action targets.

"Wicklow County Council, as the lead authority, has also engaged Codema Energy Efficiency Agency who will support the Mid-East Energy Unit in developing our combined low carbon transition. The Eastern and Midlands Climate CARO collaborated with the three local authorities and the SEAI and assisted in driving this initiative."

## CLIMATE ACTION TEAMS

The Energy Unit will be resourced by one full-time regional energy services manager supported by an energy officer in each of the three local authorities, initially for a three-year period. And as the lead authority, Wicklow County Council will appoint and host the Regional Energy Manager at the Council offices in Wicklow town.

"The Council gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Minister Eamon Ryan and his staff at the Department of the Environment, Climate Change and Communications, for sanctioning these posts, along with further posts to enhance the Climate Action Teams in the three local authorities."



*Pictured following the official launch of the Mid East Energy Unit on 8 December 2022: Standing (l-r): Marc Devereux, Senior Engineer, Wicklow County Council; Paul Murphy, Eastern and Midlands CARO; Dara McGowan, Meath County Council; Joe Boland, Kildare County Council; Mary Cahill, Climate Action Officer, Wicklow County Council; and Declan Mealy, SEAI. Seated (l-r): Nick Killian, Cathaoirleach of Meath County Council; Donna Gartland, CEO of Codema; Wicklow County Council's CEO Brian Gleeson, Director of Services Breege Kilkeny, and Cathaoirleach Cllr Tommy Annesley, at the official launch of the Mid East Energy Unit by Wicklow County Council.*

## CLIMATE ACTION



**Pictured (l-r):** Wicklow County Council's Marc Devereux and Mary Cahill; Meath County Council's Cathaoirleach Cllr Nick Killian, Codema CEO Donna Gartland, Wicklow County Council's Rory O'Connor, Lourda Scott, Tommy Annesley, Breege Kilkenny and SEAI's Declan Mealy at the official launch of the Mid East Energy Unit by Wicklow County Council

The establishment of the Mid-East Energy Unit falls within the criteria of the Public Sector Pathfinder Scheme developed by the SEAI. The SEAI Pathfinder Support scheme will assist the three local authorities with resource capability and capital funding support to create a step-change in energy efficiency and decarbonisation. The scheme prioritises complete approaches to building retrofit to at least BER 'B' using renewable heating systems.

The scheme supports shallow retrofit measures including insulation and lighting where such measures are part of a phased pathway to at least BER 'B' rating. The scheme also requires senior management sponsorship of an energy management programme such as ISO 50001.

### SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENTS

Wicklow, Meath and Kildare County Councils have agreed a Service Level Agreement (SLA) for the three-year period of the Pathfinder Scheme with the SEAI that sets out the terms of governance, funding and deliverables between the authorities.

As part of its energy awareness and exemplary role, the Energy Unit will allow the three constituent local authorities provide leadership for businesses and communities with demonstrable achievements in energy efficiency and carbon reduction.

The Unit will accelerate the development of an energy management system in each

local authority and enhance the investment required to achieve the gap to target in energy efficiency and carbon reduction.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been agreed with the SEAI and Wicklow County Council, as the lead authority, that addresses governance, funding, work programmes, project proposals, disputes and reporting mechanisms. The intention is that the partnership with the SEAI will run for an initial three years. The MOU will be reviewed annually and may be renewed after the first 3 years should the development of the pathfinder scheme allow.

### TEMPLATE FOR FUTURE PROJECTS

The Mid East Energy Unit demonstrates the leadership role of Wicklow, Kildare and Meath County Council in mobilising action with respect to progress and delivery of agreed public sector energy efficiency and carbon reduction projects in their respective regions. These projects will demonstrate best practice, build capacity for the three local authorities and allow for scalable models for future projects.

The Energy Unit will work with the local authority energy teams, elected members and senior management to embed the energy agenda as a mainstream element in the functions of the local authority.

The elected members and the chief executives of all three local authorities are

to be commended for their support and commitment to this energy initiative and to all their combined mitigation initiatives. The Mid East Energy Unit was launched on 8 December jointly by Cathaoirleach Councillor Tommy Annesley, Wicklow County Council, Councillor Fintan Brett, Kildare County Council and Councillor Nick Killian, Meath County Council.



**Brian Gleeson, CEO of Wicklow County Council (centre) pictured with colleagues from the three local authorities, the SEAI and Codema at the launch of the new Mid East Energy Unit at Wicklow County Buildings on 8 December 2022:**

- A. Declan Mealy, SEAI; Cllr Tommy Annesley, Cathaoirleach of Wicklow County Council.
- B. Meath County Council's Cathaoirleach Cllr Nick Killian and Dara McGowan.
- C. Kildare County Council's Joe Boland and Wicklow County Council's Breege Kilkenny.
- D. Donna Gartland, CEO of Codema, and Breege Kilkenny, Director of Services at Wicklow County Council.