Framework for the Community Climate Action Programme

Strand 1: Action: Building Low Carbon Communities

October 2025

1.1 Climate action in Ireland

Ireland is aiming to become a climate neutral economy and resilient society by 2050. This means that the amount of greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere is dramatically reduced and is balanced by the amount removed by our land, forestry, or technology. In line with EU ambition, Ireland has committed to achieve an average 7% per annum reduction in overall greenhouse gas emissions from 2021 to 2030. Becoming a climate resilient society will help us to cope with the impacts of a changing climate.

The Climate Action and Low Carbon Development (Amendment) Act 2021 will support Ireland's achievement of a climate neutral economy by no later than 2050. It establishes a legally binding framework with clear targets and commitments set in law and provides that the necessary structures and processes are embedded on a statutory basis to ensure we achieve our national, EU and international climate goals and obligations in the near and long term. Successive Climate Actions Plans will set out how we propose to achieve these goals.

Our transition to a climate neutral economy will impact on all of us. We are committed to achieving this future through a just transition, meaning all voices will be heard in a fair and equal manner, and that new opportunities will mean no one is left behind.

1.2 Climate Conversations

The Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment (DCEE) undertook a substantial consultation process to collect the views of people on how Ireland could make the necessary transformation, and how individuals and communities could be supported to take their own positive climate actions. Climate Conversations engaged with over 4,700 people, collecting valuable information, and giving an insight into both community action and ambition.

Based on the outcomes from the climate conversations, it is clear citizens want to do more, to step up local climate action. It is also clear from the conversations that communities require support for this local activation.

In response, the Minister for Climate, Energy and the Environment launched the Community Climate Action Programme, which will see over €65 million from the Climate Action Fund invested in community climate action projects and initiatives, and capacity building over a few years.

1.3 Local Climate Action

Through leadership, example and mobilising action at a local level, the local government sector has developed an agreed vision and mission to deliver transformative change and measurable climate action across our cities and counties, as well as within our own organisations, as outlined in Delivering Effective Climate Action 2030 (DECA). Local authorities' (LAs) wide remit, which provides over one thousand services, positions the sector well to work alongside communities and businesses to drive the change necessary to address climate adaptation and mitigation.

The Strategic Goals (SG) within DECA 2030 neatly align with the Climate Action Fund in that they set out that LAs want to:

- SG 1: "…build capacity and readiness in relation to working with communities and other strategic partners to effect transformative climate action in each city and county".
- SG 2: set out the ambition to develop investment strategies for transformative decarbonisation projects.
- SG 3: "…seize the opportunities from climate action by enhancing our natural environment, buildings and infrastructure to increase the climate resilience of… our communities"
- SG 4: engage and empower communities, with one of the objectives of this SG being to "seek out and develop partnerships with external agencies to catalyse climate action projects at community level".

The measures outlined in DECA are required to ensure LAs meet carbon budgets, collaborate effectively and work collectively as a sector to achieve Ireland's 2030 and 2050 targets. They align with the commitments made by local government in the Climate Action Charter, to cultivate and participate in partnerships with the community in relation to addressing climate impact.

1.4 Community Climate Action Programme 2022-2027

1.4.1 Objective

The overall objective of the Programme is to support and empower communities, in partnership with their LA, to shape and build low carbon, sustainable communities in a coherent way to contribute to national climate and energy targets. The Programme aims to support small and large, rural and urban communities to take climate action. This programme supports direct engagement with communities to both promote and assist in the scale up of community climate action from the respective starting points of the communities.

In addition to providing funding opportunities for relevant community projects and initiatives, the Programme also aims to provide education and information to communities to help them develop projects.

1.4.2 Overview

The Community Climate Action Programme has been developed to address direct climate action.

- Strand 1 is entitled "*Action: Building Low Carbon Communities*" for €50.9 million.

1.4.3 Strand 1: Action: Building Low Carbon Communities

€26.9 million is being provided to LAs under Strand 1 Phase 2 to work in partnership with communities, large and small, rural and urban, within their areas of operation to build low carbon communities in a considered and structured way.

The projects will address the following five themes:

- Community energy
- Travel
- Local Food Production

- Circular Economy and Waste Reduction
- Local climate and environmental action.

2 Strand 1: Action: Building Low Carbon Communities

2.1 How will it work?

Strand 1 funding will be provided to each LA to fund relevant projects in communities/areas within their area of operation.

- **Small scale projects**: 10% of the funding allocated to LAs will be made available for funding small projects of €20,000 or below. Communities should submit applications to partner with LAs on these projects. These proposals should be considered against the criteria set out in the evaluation criteria for small projects section below.
- **Medium scale projects**: 40% of the funding will be allocated for medium sized projects valued between €20,000 - €50,000. Communities should submit applications to partner with LAs on these projects. These proposals should be considered against the criteria set out in the evaluation criteria for medium and large projects section below. Example projects can be found for each theme in the five programme themes section below.
- **Large scale projects**: 50% of the funding will be allocated for larger projects between €50,000 - €100,000. Communities should submit applications to partner with LAs on these projects. These proposals should be considered against the evaluation criteria for medium and large projects section below. Example projects can be found for each theme in the five programme themes section below.

LAs should work to apportion the funding across the three tiers, as outlined above. Every effort should be made to invest in suitable projects within these three tiers. However, if there is insufficient take up of appropriate projects within any of these tiers, the funding may be reallocated to support other suitable projects in the other tiers.

2.2 Eligibility

2.2.1 Community organisation eligibility

Community organisations meeting the requirements listed below are eligible to apply to partner with the Local Authorities to implement a project under this Programme, they:

- must be a not-for-profit organisation
- must be located in the operational area of the LA to which it is applying for funding
- must submit a completed application form on or before the specified closing date and time
- must be registered with a PPN or connected with other collectives such as the Wheel, Tidy Towns and /or a community group with Articles of Association or a Constitution, which hold an AGM, and for which approved minutes are available.

Furthermore:

- The project applied for must be in line with the aim/purpose of the funding as set out in the section on Projects eligible for funding below.
- Only one application per organisation may be submitted for consideration – projects proposed could cut across several of the themes and be bundled together as part of a single application.

In developing projects, LAs and communities should also consider how their projects contribute to progress in relation to relevant Sustainable Development Goals.

The following are not eligible to apply:

- Private individuals
- Commercial undertakings (including sole traders)
- National community and environmental organisations.

2.2.2 Projects eligible for funding

The types of projects/initiatives, within communities, which are eligible for funding under the Programme, should seek to demonstrate the delivery of national climate action at local level by:

a) Reducing or supporting the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions

b) Increasing the production, or use, of renewable energy

c) Improving energy efficiency

d) Increasing climate resilience

e) Identifying nature-based projects that enhance biodiversity and seek to reduce, or increase the removal of, greenhouse gas emissions or support climate resilience in the State

f) Assisting regions in the State (including communities in those regions) and within sectors of the economy impacted by the transition to a low carbon economy

g) Involving potentially innovative solutions to address the above asks.

2.2.3 The five programme themes

More specifically, projects must also be developed to take climate action across as many of the following five programme themes as possible. A project may therefore comprise several of the suggested project types as set out in themes 1 to 5 below. While these themes provide suggestions for the types of projects which may be funded, applicants are not limited to selecting these project types and are encouraged to explore innovative projects that meet the objective of the Programme. The 5 themes are as follows:

- Theme 1: Community energy
- Theme 2: Travel
- Theme 3; Local Food Production
- Theme 4; Circular Economy & Waste Reduction
- Theme 5: Local climate and environmental action

2.2.3.1 Theme 1: Community energy

Many Irish buildings have very low energy ratings and high running costs, mainly due to heat loss. How we heat our buildings, and the heat lost account for 10% of Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions. How we build, heat and run our buildings can play a big part in reducing Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions. We can make our buildings more energy efficient by retrofitting them (e.g. insulation), switching off and using low energy lights/ appliances, and using smart controls.

We are interested in projects which reduce the climate impact of buildings in communities by using less energy, utilising renewable energy and avoiding heat loss. This can include small community renewable energy projects (solar, hydro, wind), retrofitting community buildings, LED community lighting or community EV charging point(s).

2.2.3.2 Theme 2: Travel

How we travel is one of the main areas where behaviour change can have a rapid and real impact on achieving our climate goals. Transport accounts for approximately 20% of Ireland's greenhouse gas emissions. We know that changing our means of travel is not simple, and often dictated by previous planning and housing choices, particularly in rural communities, which has led to a high car dependency. However, there are real alternatives emerging. Working from home due to COVID 19 showed the potential to drastically reduce the travel related emissions in 2020.

We are interested in projects which contribute to emissions reductions related to travel. This can include reductions in carbon footprint in services, improving access to cycle ways, cycle parking, safe or active travel routes to schools.

2.2.3.3 Theme 3: Local Food Production

It takes a lot of resources to put food on our tables. Growing, processing and transporting food all use large amounts of energy and materials. It is estimated that a third of the food we grow is wasted and food waste accounts for 10% of global emissions. The 2021 Climate Action Plan has set a goal for the agricultural sector to reduce their climate impact in producing food and there is a national commitment to reducing food waste by 50% by 2030. Some changes which people are already making to reduce their climate impact include reducing the amount of food they are wasting, as well as including more plant based and lower carbon proteins in their meals. While being mindful that different circumstances such as the culture, religion, health, abilities and tastes can affect the decisions individual people can make; at a systems, community and lifestyle level there are opportunities to connect and engage people in action on food, waste and climate change (see more at stopfoodwaste.ie).

We are interested in projects that reduce food waste. This can include developing community gardens to promote local food production, allotments, food markets, or community composting facilities.

2.2.3.4 Theme 4: Circular Economy & Waste Reduction

What we buy has a major contribution to emissions in terms of how they are made, transported, used, reused and recycled. Ireland is moving towards creating a circular economy, making products that last longer, can be repurposed, reused and eventually recycled more easily. One of our climate goals is to increase the amount of waste that is recycled and to make all packaging reusable or recyclable by 2030.

As shoppers we have the power to influence how our products are made, and to look for sustainable options. People are changing their shopping habits by buying products that last longer or repurposing clothing or furniture. People are also planning what they will do with things when they are finished using them, recycling as much as possible, actively segregating their waste for collection and using recycling centres and services near to them (see mywaste.ie).

We are interested in projects that increase the variety and number of recycling facilities in the local community; initiatives aimed at reducing, reusing and recycling, community repair hubs, swap shops, water filling stations or single use plastics elimination in communities.

2.2.3.5 Theme 5: Local climate and environmental action

Ireland also has an abundance of natural resources, from our bogs and forests to our rivers and oceans. These natural resources need to be protected from climate change, and in return, they will help us by absorbing carbon, reducing the risk of flooding, increasing flowers and wildlife, and acting as places for us all to reconnect with nature. How local communities come together to take action is an important part of the Climate Action Plan, and some of the best ideas for environmental action begin in the heart of communities. Community action can take many forms from simple clean-ups to community energy schemes, to making plans to adapt to the changes already happening.

We are interested in projects that take a holistic approach to managing the local environment, including in relation to climate action. This can include for example, mini forests, forest schools, dispersed orchards, community gardens, roof gardens, pollinator projects or climate resilience projects.

2.3 Application process

2.3.1 Small grants

- This element encourages participation by communities wishing to start out on their low carbon transition. In terms of considering applications, LAs will have regard to the eligibility criteria in the evaluation criteria section below.

2.3.2 Medium and large grants

The following are the key steps in progressing medium and large projects:

- LAs will inform relevant community development organisations about the opportunities to activate communities for the purposes of this funding.
- LA will invite applications from communities interested in being a project partner with the LA.

- As part of the engagement with local groups, LAs will issue guidance on the types of projects that may be funded under the Programme and identify who may be eligible to partner with the LA.
- Relevant community development structures and organisations will be encouraged to support local communities in the development of their projects; but the community groups will be the lead.
- In terms of considering expressions of interest, LAs will have regard to the eligibility criteria in the evaluation criteria section below.

2.4 Mandatory requirements for projects

- Projects must be eligible for funding from the Climate Action Fund as set out in the Eligibility section above for strand 1.
- Projects must comply with all statutory requirements in relation to planning, building regulations, Health and Safety, and Fire Codes, if applicable.
- Prospective partners are required to self-certify that they do not have the funding available to undertake the work without support, or alternatively that the support will enable them to undertake more, work which they otherwise would not be able to afford.
- Prospective partners must be able to demonstrate their ability to carry out the proposed works.

2.5 Funding and eligible costs

Eligible costs will be considered on a case-by-case basis. However, the following general conditions will apply:

- Costs submitted must be for the sole purpose of implementing the project and shall not relate to any other purpose.
- Duplicate public funding must not have been received, or will be received, from other sources for the same purpose.
- Costs must be verifiable e.g. by evidence of public procurement, an invoice and receipt for payment.
- LAs will be advised if some costs have been deemed ineligible from the outset. This will be taken account of in the grant amount recommended and the amount awarded and included in the grant agreement for the proposal.

- LAs or their partners cannot include the cost of using their own equipment or premises.
- Up to 100% funding may be provided from the Climate Action Fund. Other funding may be leveraged for projects (e.g. with LEADER, Tidy Towns, Town and Village Enhancement funding, etc.) although that is not a requirement of this programme.
- Funding must comply with State Aid requirements.
- It is the responsibility of the administrators of/body responsible for any other funding scheme or programme to ensure that using this Programme to co-fund a project does not contradict the rules of that other scheme/programme.

2.6 State Aid Requirements

The application forms will require both the partner and community groups to assess whether any funding received for their project would constitute state aid. In the cases that involve state aid the groups will be asked to declare previous De Minimis State aid received and any funding will be aid offered through the De Minimis Regulation (Commission Regulation (EU) No 1407/2013), provided it would not breach the relevant De Minimis ceiling.

2.7 Evaluation of Proposals

- All expressions of interest under this programme will be reviewed and assessed by each LA, in line with the criteria set out at evaluation criteria for medium and large projects section below in the first place to determine suitability for funding.

- The Minister will approve payments to projects as provided in section 37B of the National Oil Reserves Agency Act 2007 (as amended). The LAs should highlight to applicants that success at the evaluation stage is not a guarantee of funding due to the competitive nature of the programme.
- The LA will issue a letter of offer to successful applicants, which must be followed by a letter of acceptance from the applicants to participate in the project.
- If an applicant is awarded a lower funding allocation from what was initially sought, the applicant may submit a revised programme of works to the satisfaction of the LA. It is envisaged that there will be engagement with the LA in the preparation of same.
- The LA reserves the right to withdraw from a project if all requirements are not met within a reasonable period.

2.8 Evaluation criteria for small projects

Projects should be evaluated under the same criteria as the medium and large projects; however, consideration should be given to the smaller scale of the project. Projects should still be relevant and demonstrate impact. Thought should also be given to the potential for replication in other communities, but they do not need be innovative or scalable. Value for money is a key consideration and can be achieved by applying a 3-quote minimum rule, however, there is no requirement to choose the cheapest option. Communities must also consider green procurement where possible. The projects must be achievable and standard governance arrangements will apply.

Where 3 quotes for a particular product/service is not possible or is overly burdensome in the case of multiple project components, the requirement for 3 quotes per item may be waived and the application may be evaluated on the quotes available. Documentary evidence should be provided showing efforts made to obtain 3 quotes where possible. The LA must be satisfied that the application represents value for money and that the applicant has engaged with suppliers in developing their trading online proposal.

2.9 Evaluation criteria for medium and large projects

This programme aims to ensure that projects are selected by LAs in a transparent and fair manner, according to clear criteria where due consideration is given to all eligible expressions of interest. Applications will be assessed inter alia on the following criteria. The maximum overall score is 100. Applications that score 50% or above and meet the minimum score required under selected criteria as set out below, will be considered for a project partnership with the LA.

Selection criterion	Weighting	Min. required	Basis for assessment
Relevance and impact	30%	15%	The project meets the objective of strand 1 to shape and build a low carbon community and can clearly demonstrate the impact of the project in contributing to Ireland's climate and energy targets.
Innovation and scalability	20%	-	The project contains practical innovation/(s) and/or approaches. It has the potential to be scaled up or replicated in other communities' post funding. The project has a lasting impact.
Value for money	20%	10%	The costs applied for are reasonable, represent an efficient use of resources and are commensurate with the quality and nature of the activities proposed. Realistic, specific and relevant outputs and outcomes are identified, which are commensurate with the level of investment.
Achievability	10%	5%	The organisation/partnership has the appropriate expertise to deliver the proposed project. The proposal is clear and coherent and is deliverable within the timeframe. Key milestones are specified with an explanation of how these will be monitored.
Partnership approach	10%	-	Any Partner/Consortium roles and responsibilities are clearly outlined with partnership agreements in place (where applicable). The proposal demonstrates how all key stakeholders will be involved in the planning and implementation of the proposal.
Governance arrangements	10%	5%	Any necessary governance and financial management systems, controls and processes are in place to meet the requirements of the programme. Where applicable, evidence of tax compliance and registration with relevant bodies is supplied. Details of track record in managing other state funding is supplied.
	100%		

3 Governance

3.1 Grant agreements

Grant agreements will be put in place with each LA. In signing their grant agreements, each LA will agree to the following:

- Compliance with the Climate Action Fund Financial Guidelines.
- Compliance with Circular: 13/2014, from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.
- Compliance with Public Procurement guidelines in relation to the purchase of all goods and services.
- Agree to retain all documentation for 7 years
- The provision of data and information on the actions funded as may be requested by DCEE.
- The maintenance of separate accounting records for its projects.
- The funding is subject to audit by DCEE.
- Vouched receipts, photographs of completed works (where appropriate), and other documentation as necessary may be sought by DCEE.
- Site visits: The Department or its agents may carry out unannounced site visits to verify compliance with Programme terms and conditions.
- The contribution of the 'Government of Ireland, must be acknowledged in publicity, promotions and signage, and other relevant matters as appropriate.

3.2 Reporting requirements

Reporting Requirements will be set out in the grant agreement. In addition, LAs will be required to submit an annual profile of expenditure and expected drawdowns. Progress reports will accompany drawdown requests.

3.3 The Code of Governance for Community and Voluntary Organisations

Community partners are encouraged to adopt the Governance Code, a Code of Practice for Good Governance of Community, Voluntary and Charitable Organisations, which will assist in achieving excellence in all areas of their work. The Governance Code asks organisations to agree to operate to key principles in order to run their organisation more effectively in areas such as leadership, transparency and accountability and behaving with integrity. Further information on the Code is available at www.governancecode.ie

3.4 Partnership funding agreements between local authorities and communities

Once the Minister's approval has been issued to the projects, the Community Climate Action Officer will engage with communities to finalise the agreed actions, outputs, outcomes, milestones etc. A letter of offer will issue from the local authority to the community and a funding agreement setting out the terms and conditions will be put in place by each local authority with each of the communities.

In signing their funding agreements, each community will agree to the following:

- Compliance with the Climate Action Fund Financial Guidelines.
- Compliance with Circular: 13/2014, from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.
- Compliance with Public Procurement guidelines in relation to the purchase of all goods and services.
- Agree to retain all documentation for 7 years
- The provision of data and information on the actions funded as may be requested by DCEE and/or the local authority.
- The maintenance of separate accounting records for its projects.
- The funding is subject to audit by DCEE.
- Vouched receipts, photographs of completed works (where appropriate), and other documentation as necessary may be sought by DCEE.
- Site Visits: The Department and/or the local authority may carry out unannounced site visits to verify compliance with Programme terms and conditions.
- The contribution of the Government of Ireland, and Department of Climate, Energy and the Environment must be acknowledged in publicity, promotions and signage, and other relevant matters as appropriate. If signage or other materials are produced, they should note that the project is funded by the Government of Ireland under the Community Climate Action Prog and include the logos provided by the Department.