

Talanoa Dialogue for Climate Ambition
Comments from the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA)

Where are we?

- Global warming represents a significant threat to peaceful and prosperous life for our communities. The task of addressing it is huge and requires societal change as well as collaboration across organisational boundaries and alignment of resources at all levels of government. At the same time, it presents an exciting opportunity to build on a wide range of innovative work streams and put Scotland at the forefront of sustainable development internationally, with multiple economic, social and health benefits to citizens in Scotland and beyond.
- **The 32 Scottish local authorities are politically and operationally committed to mitigating and adapting to climate change, playing a lead role in emission reduction and delivering energy efficiency public services.** Local governments are key actors in delivering action on climate change and an essential vehicle in delivering national government policy. Additionally, local authorities are directly concerned in combatting climate change through their own democratically accountable decision-making processes, and activities.
- Apart from its political function, local government is also a key delivery agency for combating climate change, through its own estate and functions, and through its relations with and support of local initiatives. The responsibilities that local government can bring to the table, and thus opportunities for effecting change, include education, housing, planning, transport/roads, economic development, estates, waste management, community services and strategic planning.
- We are experiencing many local climate changes that require both longer-term and short-term adaptation measures: restrictions on water availability; drought; forest fires; river floods; flash floods; landslides from heavy rain; seaside storm surges; coastal erosion, extreme wind; invasive species.
- However, the lack of resource and access to external funding makes implementation of climate actions difficult. Adaptation requires long-term strategic planning and investment, resilience proofing infrastructure and responding to disasters. Hence it can be costly action that annual budget setting does not always support. This will be an ongoing issue with the continuing reduction trend in municipal budgets.
- We find limited recognition and policy coherence between the issue of climate adaptation and disaster-risk-reduction. In addition to the longer-term political and financial investment, there are common barriers in communicating with the public the importance of climate adaptation, the global consequences of climate change and the issue of Climate Justice. There could be more focus on actions or projects that cover both adaptation and mitigation activity.

Where do we want to go?

- Successful implementation of the Paris Agreement will rest on recognising the contribution of and ensuring national, EU and international support to local governments. Many have committed to go beyond current emission targets (in initiatives such as Covenant of Mayors) and **empowering them to do so will be vital in limiting global warming to 1.5oC.**
- **COSLA supports domestic plans to raise targets for emission reduction from 80% by 2050 to at least 90% by 2050 and for a net-zero target to be set as soon as is practicable.** To achieve total decarbonisation of the transport sector by 2050, we have called for even more ambitious domestic emission reduction targets.
- **Integrating climate change into governance and management structures continues to be important and efforts must continue to meet other local priorities such as urban regeneration, economic growth, fuel poverty, energy security, which helps climate actions be prioritised.** Research better able to inform practice and local decision-making should be supported.
- Equally important is the **availability of dedicated, long-term funding from national government, that allows local government to strategically plan ahead for a number of years, and link action with their own resource allocations.** Real progress needs local government to be empowered to define and deliver projects at a local level whilst remaining true to the national framework and approach.

How do we get there?

- All local authorities already have active strategies in place for carbon reduction, and many are involved in projects, initiatives and networks that link and enrich their local practice with wider European experience, know-how and policy. However, **creating policy synergies, addressing gaps in support and increasing connectivity in energy systems** are all important in allowing local government to contribute fully.
- COSLA welcomes policy focus on cities and urban areas. However, **it is important that Local Authorities are involved regardless of geographic or institutional size.** There may be further opportunity to support non-city authorities that emit less emissions but are able to lead on Co2 removal and reducing emissions from agriculture and land use.
- **Support for the local low carbon and sustainability workforce** is an area that could be improved with more available options to develop local strategies and climate action plans. One local challenge is measuring carbon footprints of projects and there is a lack of expertise in monitoring climate plans. By design, the circular economy would involve integration beyond just the local authority. **Collaboration and integration across sectors** is important particularly regarding energy policy.
- There must be **clearer links to local economic development** and options for financial modelling, whole-life costing and carbon budgeting further established to make climate action more corporately relevant for public bodies. Considerations around budget could look at **redirecting energy spend back to the locality supporting local economic**

development priorities. By looking at financial modelling and link to economic development there may be potential to internalise spend and counteract barriers with short-term budgeting.

- There is need to **raise profile of adaptation measures and make more concrete the link between infrastructure, disaster risk reduction** as well as look at short-term and longer-term measures. Public communication around adaptation needs to be supported. Guidance on **improving socio-economic assessment, reporting and public communication** could allow for clearer articulation of the impact of climate action on society. There could also be a valuable link between community liaison and adapting to climate change that could be explored.
- The role of and expectations on local authorities are often considerable. Local government, if it is to play a full part, needs **long term security over funding**, as well as flexibility over how this money is invested and what it is focussed on. To meet the Paris Climate Agreement long-term strategic investment in critical infrastructure is required and this will not be achievable without the allocation of substantial resources.
- With about 30% of global emissions coming from agriculture and about 70% of land cover change being brought on by food production, we need to **change the agricultural system** over the next decade if we are to see sustainable development and reduced emissions from this sector. There is a **clear role for land management** in terms of minimising release of carbon stock with land use change for example in livestock management.
- The **forestry and landscape sector** can play a huge part in contributing both to climate mitigation and adaptation. We need to better understand the challenge of valuing biodiversity and the impacts on the environment. Agriculture is having a large impact on land use change. Research and support for this sector is very important as there is a lot of innovation within this sector that needs to be encouraged, supported and utilised.
- **Decarbonisation in the transport** sector is most challenging, but with the right support local authorities are well placed to develop active and low carbon travel policies and lead community responses. The sectors that offer most potential are the services sector, including local authorities own estate (offices, school, community facilities etc), and the residential sector, including housing stock and housing association stock.
- Building stock is, next to transport, a major contributor to carbon emissions. Reducing this impact by **increasing the energy efficiency of domestic and residential buildings** is a considerable and costly task. Restructuring energy supply and demand alone has been called the biggest public sector investment challenge. However, we support new domestic targets for 2030 for 50% of Scotland's energy consumption to be met by renewable energy.
- COSLA wants to explore a more **strategic role for local authorities in facilitating community/local ownership of renewable energy** to ensure that greater financial benefit is retained in communities. Local authorities can provide important skills and resources, such as technical expertise, project development, finance and political support.
- **From the UNFCCC and future COP Presidencies, local government requires consistent and ongoing engagement that need to be easily accessible.**

Sources:

[COSLA Response to the Climate Change Bill](#)
[COSLA Response to the Draft Energy Strategy](#)

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