

# COP26

## A briefing for housing associations

10 September 2021

## What is COP26?

COP26 is the 26<sup>th</sup> edition of the United Nations' annual Climate Change Conference, officially titled the Conference of the Parties. Attended primarily by delegates from the 197 member nations of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the conference serves as a forum for negotiation on overarching commitments to mitigating and adapting to climate change globally. COP26 will be hosted in Glasgow between 31 October and 12 November 2021. The aim is to bring parties together to accelerate action towards the goals of the UNFCCC and the 2015 Paris Agreement, one of which is to encourage nations to share respective plans for reaching net zero emissions by 2050.

## What are the goals for COP26?

There are four distinct goals for COP26 negotiations, summarised by the four themes of mitigation (1), adaptation (2), financing (3) and collaboration (4):

1. Secure global net zero by 2050 and keep 1.5<sup>o</sup> warming within reach.
2. Adapt to protect communities and natural habitats.
3. Mobilise finance.
4. Work together to deliver on targets.

## What does it mean for housing associations?

The conference is relevant for housing associations insofar as, through its mitigation goal, it outlines the same carbon reduction targets that the social housing sector is striving to meet – net zero by 2050. Indeed, in the build-up to COP26 the UK government has introduced several consequential measures and revised targets that impact housing associations. These include the acceleration of emission reduction targets to 78% (compared with 1990 levels) by 2035, banning gas boilers in new homes by 2025 and rolling out Wave 1 of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund. It is therefore clear that, whilst COP26 does not offer a direct avenue for progress for social housing in England specifically, the conference has the potential to galvanise government and to prompt ambitious action on policy areas which affect the sector directly.

## What can housing associations do during COP26?

Housing associations can make the most of the national attention that COP26 will draw to support our call on the government for continued investment in and prioritisation of the social housing sector. It is also an opportunity to engage with residents on the implications of net zero, the changes that are required and the opportunities they present. We suggest you:

- Engage with COP26 on social media, emphasise how it could help to prompt further commitment from the government and how its core aims are representative of yours and the housing sector's (On Twitter, follow and include in your tweets: [@COP26](#), [#TogetherForOurPlanet](#), [#OneStepGreener](#), [#COP26](#), [#RaceToResilience](#), [#LocallyLed](#) and keep an eye out for the hashtags that are used most).
- Use social media to plot the [road to COP26](#) to build momentum.
- Blog about your decarbonisation initiatives or share videos and media online to showcase the processes and impact, demonstrate how you are contributing to the four COP26 goals and encourage others to do the same.
- Host webinars and in-person forums with residents and staff to engage them in the reasons for and benefits of the necessary works for the housing sector to reach net zero.

Encourage localised and community initiatives centred on emissions reduction (consider using the [Together for Our Planet fund](#)).

## Key messages

### Housing's role in reaching net zero

- It is critical that making the country's homes more energy efficient is prioritised in order to meet the government's legal target of net zero carbon emissions by 2050.
- England's homes produce [more carbon emissions every year than is produced by all of the country's cars](#).
- England's 25m homes produce 58.5m tonnes of CO2 every year, emitting the equivalent of the average annual use of 28m cars. There are 27m million cars in use in England, emitting 56 million tonnes of CO2 annually.

- Achieving carbon neutrality for all housing association homes would be the equivalent of taking 1.8m cars off the road indefinitely – the equivalent of all of the cars in Manchester and Birmingham combined.
- Social housing landlords often own thousands of homes, can make them energy efficient at scale and have the necessary systems in place and are ready to act.

## **Our expectations of the government**

- Commit the £3.8bn to the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund promised in the Conservative Party manifesto.
- Confirm that housing associations can bid over longer timescales with certainty over the full duration of the fund, unlocking additional investment in decarbonisation, building safety and supply.
- Ensure that housing associations are able to bid directly into the fund as well as in partnership with local authorities.