

Sally Thomas, SFHA remarks for COP26

Session title: Best practices on affordable climate-neutral housing

Time available: 3 minutes

Brief from organisers: “In your presentation we invite you to provide information on a best practice on climate neutral and affordable housing solutions that contributes towards the achievement of related climate targets. It can cover climate policy tools, funding and financial incentives, awareness-raising, and training as well as technological innovations. Please see examples of best practices and an overall framework for the side event discussion in Chapter IV “Climate-neutral housing - Decarbonizing the housing stock in an inclusive and affordable way” of the study “**#Housing2030: Effective policies for affordable housing in the UNECE region**” which is available at <https://unece.org/info/Housing-and-Land-Management/pub/360530>.

“Possible structure of your 3 minute presentation:

- Title and objective of the best practice
- How has the best practice evolved over time (for example, changes in stakeholders, available resources, legislation, regulations, etc.)?
- What advice would you offer to policymakers from another country if they were seeking to adapt or replicate your examples of best practice?”

Remarks

It’s an honour to be here with you today. I’m the CEO of the Scottish Federation of Housing Associations (or SFHA), based here in Glasgow, and COP26 is a once in a lifetime opportunity to welcome the world to our home city, to address the most pressing issue of our times.

As the voice of Scotland’s housing associations and co-operatives, I’m proud of our members’ work to drive down carbon emissions. Over half of Scotland’s social housing stock already achieves a good level of energy efficiency.

Our members are determined to continue this progress, but they are grappling with many challenges. The Scottish Government’s ambition to deliver 110,000 new low carbon homes over the next 10 years is a welcome one, but with heat from buildings accounting for around 20% of Scotland’s greenhouse gas emissions, we know the need to decarbonise existing homes is just as important.

At the heart of this challenge, housing associations need to ensure tenants can still afford to pay their rent and operate their heating once gas boilers have been replaced with cleaner – but often more expensive – systems. A third of social housing tenants in Scotland are living in fuel poverty, higher than the national average of 25%.

I co-chaired a national taskforce recently, Zero Emissions in Social Housing, which examined some of these challenges. The recommendations provide the first steps towards a funding and legislative environment to meet this challenge. They focus on a Fabric First approach to

upgrading buildings, and the need for increased funding to provide a Just Transition to net zero for people and communities.

As an example of the work already underway, I'm going to take you to Aberdeen, one of our great cities and in the north-east of Scotland, as you'll see more about the fantastic decarbonising projects going on in Glasgow in the film later.

Scotland has an impressive and important national programme of Area Based Schemes, which fund local authorities to deliver energy efficiency programmes in areas with high fuel poverty levels.

As part of this scheme our members, Grampian Housing Association, worked alongside Aberdeen City Council to deliver a retrofit programme involving external and internal wall insulation upgrades. This saw the properties improve from a Band D EPC Energy Efficiency Rating to a Band B, and because it was a mixed tenure project, both private owners and social tenants benefitted. The properties are now some of the most energy efficient stock in the country, leading to a dramatic reduction of heat loss and energy bills for tenants.

Grampian also trialled solar panels to provide hot water, which reduced tenants' energy costs, and provided a free energy advice project, helping householders to use energy more efficiently to cut their bills.

I could give many more examples of our members' tireless work to protect their tenants and the planet, including new homes being built to Passivehaus standard, off-site manufacturing of new homes, and supporting community energy projects. But we are short of time. So I will simply draw out some key lessons from the example I've given.

The first is that we need policies which recognise it is the poorest in society who will be hit hardest by climate change, and we must build our response with them and for them so that they don't lose out.

Second, we need policies that emphasise the importance of upgrading existing stock as well as building new homes – giving priority to those people living in fuel poverty and ensuring there is funding available for the highest standards to be achieved.

While in Scotland, some of those pieces of the jigsaw are already in place, there is more to do. Housing associations and the SFHA can't do it alone.

So my final lesson is that partnership is essential: my example involved a housing association working with the local council and with its tenants and communities, as part of a Scottish Government scheme. This kind of joint working, which brings together the national, local and individual perspectives, is what we need.

I hope this has been a useful example to hear, and I'd like to thank you all for listening and for sharing your own expertise. Together, we can meet this challenge.

Thank you.