



THE SOCIAL HOUSING TENANTS' CLIMATE JURY

RESPONSE TO CENTRE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE INQUIRY INTO SOCIAL HOUSING DECARBONISATION



About the Social Housing Tenants' Climate Jury

The [Social Housing Tenants' Climate Jury](#) was commissioned by the Northern Housing Consortium (NHC) in partnership with five Housing Associations: First Choice Homes Oldham, Karbon Homes, Salix Homes, Thirteen Group, and Yorkshire Housing.

The overarching theme of the Jury was to explore how to tackle, in homes and neighbourhoods, the incredibly challenging and complex issue of Climate Change.

Prominent within this inquiry was the current and pressing issue of retrofitting homes in social housing with materials and technologies to improve energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions.

In June 2021 seven thousand five hundred letters were sent out to randomly selected households from the tenant bases of the five Housing Associations to register interest in taking part in the Climate Jury. From those that responded a final thirty tenants were recruited by random stratified selection.

The profile of the Jury membership reflected the diversity of the population of tenants from across Housing Associations in the North of England. Over ten sessions from the end of July to the end of September 2021 the group met to answer the question "How can tenants, social housing providers, and others work together to tackle climate change in our homes and neighbourhoods?"

The jury worked hard, listening to each other and sharing experiences and opinions. To help them with their task, they received presentations from nineteen 'commentators' (similar to expert witnesses in a legal jury) as well as Housing Association representatives and tenants sharing lived experiences.

In order to ensure the process was robust, fair and unbiased, an Oversight Panel was formed to agree the recruitment methodology, the overarching question and the identity of the commentators. This panel met parallel to the jury and was made up of a range of project partners and stakeholders and experts representing national, regional and local governance, the civil service, the tenant voice agenda, retrofit practitioners, academia, and the charitable sector.

The process was designed and facilitated by the social enterprise Shared Future. The Jury's Statement is set out below. A full report is available, which explains the process followed and, in their own words, the conclusion of the Jury responding to the Jury question in the form of a statement and a series of recommendations.

The Jury Statement

In the final session, Jury members were given the opportunity to join a Jury statement writing group. With the support of a facilitator, the group shared their thoughts on what should be included. Their draft statement was shared in the plenary with the entire Jury membership to go over and edit together and then to check for support (through an anonymous Zoom poll). The statement was included in the final voting booklet. The Jury statement received 100% support in this voting. Of 23 Jury members who completed the voting, 22 participants strongly supported it and 1 participant supported the statement, which is set out below.

"WE ARE A GREAT AND DIVERSE VARIETY OF INDIVIDUALS FROM THE NORTH OF ENGLAND THAT HAVE JOINED TOGETHER VIRTUALLY IN OUR OWN HOMES TO LEARN ABOUT AND DISCUSS CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS IMPACTS ON OUR LIVES, OUR FUTURE, AND THE FUTURE OF THE PLANET.

WE HAVE ALL BEEN AWARE FOR A LONG TIME THAT CLIMATE CHANGE IS A PROBLEM, BUT THIS PROCESS HAS BROUGHT THE ISSUE TO THE FORE AND MADE US ALL UNDERSTAND THE URGENCY OF THE SITUATION.

IT'S BEEN AN EDUCATION AND IT'S BEEN EYE OPENING.

CLIMATE CHANGE NEEDS TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY, NOT JUST FOR NOW, BUT FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS. WE FEEL THERE IS TOO MUCH TALK AND THE TIME HAS COME FOR ACTION.

WE, THE SOCIAL HOUSING TENANTS JURY, HAVE BROUGHT TOGETHER DIFFERENT LEVELS OF KNOWLEDGE, EXPERIENCE AND DIFFERENT OPINIONS TO CREATE SHARED UNDERSTANDING AND SHARED SOLUTIONS IN THE FORM OF RECOMMENDATIONS THAT WE HAVE ALL WORKED HARD TO CREATE AND AGREE UPON.

WHEN YOU LOOK AT OUR RECOMMENDATIONS, GO FORWARD WITH AN OPEN MIND, LISTEN TO WHAT WE HAVE TO SAY AND ABOVE ALL – LET'S TAKE ACTION AND ACT TOGETHER.

THIS IS REAL. THIS IS URGENT. LISTEN TO THE PEOPLE. WE HAVE SPOKEN."

The Social Housing Tenants' Climate Jury, September 2021



About this response

This response was drafted by Juror Steve Mackenzie, with support from the Northern Housing Consortium team. We have made clear below where statements come from the Jury's report, or have been informed by consultation with the NHC and their members.

- The Jury report can be accessed at : <https://www.northern-consortium.org.uk/the-social-housing-tenants-climate-jury/>
- Jury sessions can be watched again at: <http://www.northern-consortium.org.uk/the-social-housing-tenants-climate-jury/jury-sessions/>
- A full set of appendices, including more comments from Jurors on our recommendations, can be accessed here: <https://www.northern-consortium.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Tenants-Climate-Jury-Appendices.pdf>

We would welcome the opportunity to engage further with the CSJ, and suggest that an online roundtable with Jury members and landlords might be a useful way for you to gather further views.

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Responses to the CSJ Questions

1. How confident are you in the social housing sector meeting the EPC C target by 2030 and subsequent Net Zero targets by 2050?

“Currently I am not confident. There are 2 separate issues here, EPC C and Net Zero. An energy efficient home does not necessarily mean fewer carbon emissions and extra, additional work may be required to meet Net Zero targets. If there was the target to reach EPC C only, I would be more confident but with the additional target of net zero by 2050 resources and attention has been ‘distracted’. The extra target has driven landlords to look at both at the same time, but on different paths.” – Jury Member Steve Mackenzie

The Northern Housing Consortium tell us they estimate that at least 40% of the North’s social housing (over 514,000 homes) will need retrofit work to come up to EPC C. While work to switch homes to renewable heating will be required in almost all the North’s 1.3 million social homes.

Landlords are in a dilemma. Do they only retrofit those below EPC C, to bring them up to target, while also working on the others needing improvement? This option would give the best use of finances to try and meet targets, but then not all sub-EPC C homes are grouped together. Or, do landlords take a business decision to spread the costs practically to get the most ‘bang for their buck’ even though targets may be missed?

The Jury called for landlords to go faster with retrofit, but emphasised the need to get things right. Our recommendation on retrofit technology said: *“There is a need to take into account the urgency of the issue of climate change and installation programmes need to be quicker. Protocols need to change to speed things up. (Whilst also taking the greatest of care that mistakes are not made which would have to be undone later on)”*. Jury member comments on this recommendation:

- “Time is crucial but there is only one chance to get things right and so care has to be taken to ensure the programming goes right the first time”
- “The quicker the job of retrofit is completed, the happier tenants would be. But optimum standards must be maintained when doing the job.”

2. Which challenges and opportunities has the journey to Net Zero presented in your work?

The Jury was established to ensure that tenants’ voices were at the heart of the journey to Net Zero. Social landlords told us they were keen to understand the challenges and opportunities it presented for tenants. They saw getting ‘buy in’ from tenants as an important part of their journey to net zero.

Commentators the Jury took evidence from told us that emissions from homes must be addressed, with housing responsible for around 20% of the UK’s carbon emissions. This proportion is higher in much of the North.

Opportunities that were highlighted to the Jury by those who gave evidence included:

- The chance to control energy bills by making homes more energy efficient, tackling fuel poverty
- Insulating homes should make them warmer, delivering health benefits for tenants
- Some forms of external wall insulation can have regeneration benefits – making homes and streets look better externally ([we saw good examples of this from Hull City Council](#))
- The work needed to be done to homes is labour-intensive and offers the chance to create local jobs, as well as jobs in the manufacturing supply chain.
- There are clear standards for retrofit, like EnerPhit. Using these would reassure tenants. Monitoring devices can also be used within properties to make sure things are working as they should be.
- There are particular opportunities to reduce bills for tenants whose homes are heated by gas or oil – this is often the case in rural ‘off grid’ properties. Here air source heat pumps can be good options, [and the Jury heard from residents in North Yorkshire who already had these in their homes](#).
- The chance to go ‘beyond the front door’ and make neighbourhoods climate-ready and more attractive – for example through increasing green space, or planting trees
- There is a huge opportunity for councils and housing associations to learn from each other. It is important they are open about what’s worked and what hasn’t.

Challenges we were told about included:

- The cost to landlords of delivering these upgrades to their homes. We were concerned that rents might have to rise as a result.
- The disruption that works can cause. We heard from landlords and tenants who had learnt from experience that clear and timely communication is essential. Tenants need to have a trusted contact and feel valued. Policies on disruption and compensation are needed.
- The potential for higher energy bills if new technology isn’t used as intended. We heard that some tenants had experienced spikes in bills while they got used to renewable heating systems like air source heat pumps. We recommended landlords earmark a pot of money to help out tenants who experience this.
- Current policy makes electricity more expensive than gas, which means landlords can’t necessarily guarantee lower bills when gas is removed.
- Some tenants have concerns about heat pumps. Questions we had included how much noise comes from the units, how they are secured to prevent theft or vandalism, and responsibility for repairs and maintenance.

Comments from Jurors:

- *“Housing associations and tenants must work together in all aspects of retrofitting; tenants should be told what plans there are and be reassured their interests are taken into account. Full disclosure, from both sides, on all matters will help efficiency, lessen delays and be most cost-effective.”*
- *“It is important for us to see that the changes we make are showing a difference. Also having a certain standard will give peace of mind.”*

- *“I think that housing associations and local authorities should share not only their successes, but also where they have failed. This can save not only time and money, but more importantly, can save our planet.”*
- *There needs to be an independent inspector type person to make random unannounced visits to sites to check that there are no low-rate materials, or substandard workmanship, being used there.*
- *“It’s important that if tenants get the retrofit done that they don’t suffer for trying to save the planet by having to pay more on their bills.”*

3. What are the challenges and opportunities associated with the creation of decarbonisation employment opportunities and ensuring the skills are available to fill them?

The main challenge is there aren’t enough skilled workforce required for the necessary tasks, e.g. surveyors, installers, planners, manufacturers, etc. The Northern Housing Consortium tells us that they estimate the North will need 77,000 people working on housing retrofit by the 2030s. The work they have done with IPPR North sets out actions to ensure the skills system is able to make the challenge: <https://www.northern-consortium.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/Northern-Powerhomes-A-green-recovery-plan-to-decarbonise-homes-in-the-North1.pdf>

There is a fantastic opportunity to upskill the current workforce, such as plumbers to heat pump installers, create apprenticeships, start-ups to manufacture components for the required equipment, etc. These opportunities should be localised around the country giving areas of high unemployment a prosperous outlook and future bringing much needed money into the local economies so prospects of local businesses to generate income giving local taxes improving local economies, etc. Using local manufacturers and workforce would help net zero by reducing travelling and other logistical issues.

The Jury recommended that housing associations be proactive in training and employing their own skilled workforce necessary to complete the work within timescales by 2050 and to allow for any repairs and replacements.

Jury member comment:

- *“If housing associations develop professionals who understand the technologies within their workforce (sharing experience with other housing associations), fitting the specific type of dwelling would stand a better chance of success installing the new technology.”*

Current Government targets are to retrofit 4.8 million homes by 2028, leaving approx. 24 million homes to be retrofitted by 2050. To do this (assuming hydrogen is not available) would need, on average, 1,000,000 heat pumps a year, and this is just for domestic use and not including businesses like small traders, grocers, butchers, PO’s, etc. Creating local, UK, manufacturing would lessen the reliance on imports – saving transport emissions, supply concerns, etc.

Comments from Jury members :

- *“This is a must, new skills are needed in this job sector so best to start now rather than later.”*

- *“Yes, you need to stop cowboys profiting from the scheme and to make sure the constructors have the proper credentials and relevant experience.”*

4. To what extent could social housing tenant communities benefit from new decarbonisation employment opportunities?

All the opportunities in 3 would be open to all residents, whether social, local authority or private residents. BUT, landlords could train residents for repair/maintenance of things such as solar panels, heat pumps, EV charging points, green spaces, etc for which the landlord has responsibility. Landlords can also consider collaborating with other local agencies to work together. The Jury recommended that local traders are given the chance to tender for retrofit works.

Comment from Jury member:

- *“It ensures that skills and money remain in the community, in addition, less travel means less carbon released.”*

The Jury also called for the employment of local people to work in the community, opening up community centres and making better use of green spaces. We saw greater use of green spaces as an opportunity to tackle climate change in our neighbourhoods and improve the local environment.

Comments from jury members:

- *“This would be so nice, funding could be an issue. It has happened before then financial cuts and it is discontinued. Scope perhaps for an energetic person newly retired.”*
- *“Community spaces will enhance the look of the estates.”*
- *“Keep as much local as possible, reduce driving etc and bring back the ‘community’ spirit. Collaborate/work with other neighbouring HA’s and LA’s.*

5. What support could the government provide to upskill people, including social housing tenants, to deliver decarbonisation work in the social housing sector?

The government can provide certified training programmes, apprenticeships and back-up support through the college and university network, to include husbandry in farming, river maintenance, grounds maintenance such as ‘wild flower’ areas, recycling, etc. The government can also restrict planning applications to exclude the big out-of-town stores and shopping halls and encourage localised shops and stores. Increase rents and rates for the big ones and reduce them for the small independents.

6. To what extent is social housing decarbonisation improving the standard of living for social housing residents, and how can this change in the future? (Considering affordable warmth, community cohesion etc.)

Decarbonisation will give residents a warmer, healthier, safer and energy efficient place to live and by creating local job opportunities, local stores and shops can operate profitably, reducing car use, letting people meet in the street. Environmentally friendly

green spaces allows exercise, people to meet in pleasant surroundings. Opportunity for residents to mix and bring back the community and social value.

Jury member comment on use of green spaces:

- *“This can help bring communities together. People young and old can mix and learn from each other. People’s mental health can be uplifted, and where produce is grown, this can help to supplement peoples’ diet and save them money. I think that is a win-win situation.”*

7. Can housing decarbonisation be harnessed to provide a positive future for places with untapped potential? (Concerning whole community plans, local services, employment provision etc)

There is a massive opportunity to bring back local work, local activities etc, especially in the areas not easily accessible to large towns and cities. By making public transport more accessible and ‘local’ friendly, both in routes and regularity, car use will decrease and will bring back community spirit and value.

8. What is the best practice you have witnessed (from your own organisation or others) concerning high quality social housing decarbonisation? Especially concerning practices which support residents and communities alongside meeting Net Zero targets

The Jury heard from a number of councils and landlords who shared their experience, including Hull City Council, Broadacres Housing Association, Connect Housing Association, and our own landlords (First Choice Homes Oldham, Karbon Homes, Salix Homes, Thirteen Group and Yorkshire Housing). Independent experts, including Prof Anne Power of the London School of Economics and Aneaka Kelly of Carbon Coop, also provided examples of positive practice. All our evidence sessions are available to watch online at <http://www.northern-consortium.org.uk/the-social-housing-tenants-climate-jury/jury-sessions/>

9. How will the sector’s (and your own if relevant) decarbonisation plan need to change in the future and what can be done to allow it to be carried out fully? (Funding, focus of policy, national and local government support etc)

The sector’s plans will need to evolve as technology becomes more efficient, changes or as new technologies are developed. Planning application amendments will need to be ‘fast-tracked’ to allow for changes. Technologies in original plans may not be as efficient as those available at construction.

“Government should back-off and a non-political committee should be created to oversee plans to net zero. A committee comprised of scientists, manufacturers, business leaders, planners, financial institutions, tenants, transport and other applicable interested parties. Politicians have other ‘Masters’ to work for and may not be in a position at following elections and governing parties may change the current direction and causing confusion and panic. Whereas the committee would be a long term and consistent solution.” – Jury Member Steve Mackenzie

The Northern Housing Consortium tells us that longer-term funding would help their members plan ahead and convince their suppliers to scale up. Once the current £800m Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund wave is allocated, there is no further funding available. The Chancellor announced £6bn for energy efficiency at the Autumn Statement in November 2022, but the Consortium tell us there is no confirmation of how much of this funding will come to social housing. It would be a huge shame if the programmes which have been established have to wind down before more funding becomes available. As our report says, *'this is urgent'*.

The NHC have also warned that there needs to be tight coordination between Government Departments. The Department of Levelling Up have the remit for housing policy, including the Decent Homes Standard (which is being updated). However, energy efficiency policy is set by BEIS. These policies affect the same houses, tenants and landlords, so need to be joined up.

10. What can other sectors learn from social housing decarbonisation?

Social landlords have residents in communities, whether fractured or not, and so everyone has similar issues and interests around decarbonisation. If landlords work together with their residents, inclusively, no 'them and us' attitude, this would be an example of how others can work together, bring communities together, look out for each other, a sense of belonging.

The Jury was keen to ensure that it is not just social housing tenants who have to make changes to tackle climate change. We recommended that *'All Housing Associations should have their green credentials nailed to the mast so they cannot hide away. There should be a green mission statement from all Housing Associations. This should include how carbon reduction is being achieved.'* This is just as true for other sectors. The Jury also wanted to see that contractors used by housing associations and councils had their own carbon reduction plans in place.

Jury member comments:

- *"Extremely important for the tenants to know their contribution is not all that is being done and that the people asking for it are leading the way."*
- *"I think that the above is an excellent idea. It would be really good to see how contractors are reducing emissions."*



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