

Climate Change: engaging with the COP26 UN climate change conference

Purpose of report

For direction.

Summary

The report sets out the opportunities to participate in the COP26 UN climate change conference. It also sets out the opportunities to showcase the work of councils and engage with Government in the run up to the November 2021 conference. In addition, the report updates Members on the LGA's wider climate change work.

Recommendations

That Members consider how best to:

provide strategic oversight to our engagement with Government in this COP26 year

discuss and provide direction on the opportunities to engage with COP 26 with the purpose of strengthening the role of local government as a significant partner in the drive to meet the national ambitions on climate change

Action

Actions will follow from the discussion

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LGA role in the UN climate conference COP26

Background

1. The UK is hosting, for the first time, the next UN international climate change conference in Glasgow from 1-12 November 2021 (COP26). The conference will bring together international delegations to agree on a process to accelerate progress towards the goal of the Paris agreement (to keep the rise in global temperature to within at least 2 degrees, although 1.5 is the current ambition).
2. At present, the Government is planning for a physical conference to take place but remaining flexible in the planning as uncertainties of Covid-19 continue. The LGA is mindful of the options for a physical, virtual or hybrid conference in our planning.
3. The conference itself, and the lead up to it this year, will have five broad themes: adaptation and resilience; nature; energy transition; clean road transport; and finance. The Government is positioning the UK as a global leader in responding to climate change, setting an ambitious new target to reduce carbon emissions by at least 68% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels. According to [PWC's Net-Zero Economy index 2020](#) the UK's average annual decline in carbon intensity between 2000 and 2019 has been faster than other G20 countries.
4. Local government has been active in addressing climate change for some years and the desire to do more was reflected in the many councils that have declared a climate emergency. The LGA also declared a climate emergency at its annual conference in 2019 and has been working through the EEHT and Improvement and Innovation Boards to engage with government and provide support to councils. In this COP26 year there is an opportunity to make sure that local government is recognised as central to the achievement of nation's climate change ambitions, through its leadership of place. To achieve this **the LGA will need strategic oversight of the engagement with Government, which complements the work of the Boards.**
5. This report will cover:
 - 5.1. The role that we should expect in Glasgow
 - 5.2. Opportunities to promote the work that local government is doing to address climate change
 - 5.3. Opportunities to discuss with Government the essential role of councils in addressing climate change
 - 5.4. An update on the LGA's climate work

Local government at COP 26

6. In the past, COP conferences have had local authority and cities days as part of the formal conference. These tend to involve global bodies. For example, the local government and cities day at COP 25, in Madrid in 2019, was undertaken as a partnership between ICLEI (Local Governments for sustainability); United Nations Climate Change Committee on Capacity Building and UN Habitat (which promotes transformative change in cities and towns). Under the overarching notion of 'enabling local action', different sessions in this thematic day were designed to boost capacities of individuals, institutions, and cities to take action. For COP 26 in Glasgow, we understand that there will be a dedicated day for local and regional government, themed as 'Cities and the Built Environment'. This is most likely to take place at the end of the two-week Conference. As yet we have little information on what the proposals are for the day but understand that the objectives for the day will be shaped in the coming months. The Cabinet Office's Expression of Interest process will help to shape the objectives, and it also may follow the pattern of local government days at previous COPs, with the involvement of international local government bodies. **It will be important for us to engage with Alok Sharma MP, as president of COP 26, and other Ministers to ensure that a local government day takes place. We can offer our support in designing the day and also engage on the role that UK local government can play in that day.**
7. Host cities have also been very active in holding events in parallel to the main conference. At COP 26 Glasgow City will have a Host City Hub. The city will be reaching out to other cities and sub-national groupings to sell itself 'as a world leader in the race to net zero carbon'. It will also use the Hub to provide a platform for the city's cultural sector and communities to exhibit their involvement in climate action.
8. The Conference will be delivered across two sites: the Scottish events Campus (SEC), referred to as the Blue Zone, and the Glasgow Science Centre, known as the Green Zone. The Blue Zone is managed by the United Nations (UN) and will host the negotiations. It will bring together delegations from 197 Parties and observer organisations who can hold panel discussions, exhibits and side events. **The LGA applied for observer status last year before COP26 was rescheduled. We will know by August whether the LGA's application to send observers to COP26 has been successful**
9. The Green Zone is managed by the UK Government and is the platform for the general public, youth groups, academia, business and civil society who can host events, exhibitions, workshops, creative installations and other activities.
10. The Cabinet Office has launched an Expression of Interest inviting proposals from a range of organisations, including councils, to participate in the opportunities noted above spanning the Blue and Green Zones. The LGA has submitted expressions of interest which are suitable for both the Blue and Green Zones. It has also submitted an expression of interest in partnership with COSLA, NILGA, WLGA, and a number of

international associations including Local Governments for Sustainability (ICLEI) (the deadline for proposals was 5 March 2021). The expressions of interest were agreed by EEHT Lead Members and the political group offices. It is important to note that these are initial expressions of interest and there will be ongoing engagement with the Cabinet office. The Cabinet Office expects the available space to be oversubscribed and is encouraging applications from partnerships of organisations. Further details of the opportunities presented by these zones are set out in appendix A.

11. If we get observer status, we will get automatic access to the Blue Zone. In the event that we get both observer status (or get allocated space in the Blue Zone through the Cabinet Office process) and access to the Green Zone, it is proposed that we take both opportunities. The types of activity we might engage in include:
 - 11.1. Event: to hold a panel discussion with the purpose of generating a debate about responsible leadership and stewardship of place. We would look to engage research institutions, think tanks, representative bodies such as SOLACE and regional and local leaders to form the panel discussion. Experts from the COP26 Presidency themes will also be identified to inform a holistic debate on the importance of stewardship of place to deliver on the UK's path to net zero. Guidance published by the Cabinet Office on the EOI process suggests audiences of up to 200 people for events.
 - 11.2. Exhibition space: to host a stand for 2 weeks modelled on the LGA Annual Conference Innovation Zone. The stand will promote local government and showcase good practice by councils on climate action. It could also provide opportunities for the public to engage in new experiences in low-carbon behaviours. The zone could be interactive and could consider using a number of creative channels, for example, film, live streaming, simulation, augmented and virtual reality. Showcasing will be themed around the five Presidency areas outlined above
12. **We would welcome suggestions on the type of activities Members would like the LGA to take forward.**
13. An additional option is that the LGA could host its own event running parallel to COP26 in another venue. This would allow the LGA full control of the content, branding and audience. There might be an opportunity to align a parallel event with a local government day if this is pursued by Government.

The local path to net-zero: role of local government in addressing climate change

14. Local government is already tackling the challenge of climate change. The [examples](#) that the LGA has gathered demonstrate the breadth and depth of that work. The run up to COP 26 provides an opportunity to showcase and build on that work. The table in Appendix B maps out our planned activity for this year against the five themes of the COP 26 conference and the national and international events that are also taking place

this year. This includes webinars on key themes, a series of think pieces from stakeholders, partners and think tanks, 'talking heads' (mini podcasts) with industry experts and case study videos showcasing good practice by councils. This is part of our [Local path to net zero work](#).

15. We have already published a practical guide to [financing green ambitions](#), which was commissioned from Local Partnerships and held a financing green ambitions webinar again with Local Partnerships. We have also done a substantial amount of work, with the University of Leeds, on [decarbonising transport](#); a set of briefings for councils on decarbonising transport has been published and a series of seven webinars covering aspects of decarbonising transport were held from September to December 2020. In both these cases we have been able to showcase the good work of local government and share that practice across the sector and with Government.
16. Throughout the remainder of the year we will be focusing our activity and events on nature-based solutions, adaptation and energy transition. We will be working with councils, other partners, think tanks and academia to showcase good practice and help support councils as they develop further their own climate change plans.
17. We also intend to bring all these themes together in a final podcast to coincide with the COP 26 event itself. **Members might want to use the work this year to underpin an offer to Government that we participate at one of the main conference sessions.**
18. **We would also welcome your suggestions for further activity throughout the year.**

Key issues for discussion with Government

19. The pandemic has pushed many other important policy issues into the shade. However, the LGA has continued to work behind the scenes to develop policy and support councils we have: undertaken research on green jobs, green finance and transport decarbonisation; engaged with Defra on adaptation at the EEHT Board; continued our work on ensuring that the Environment Bill and subsequent regulations will be fit for purpose; and developed and are implementing a substantial climate improvement programme.
20. With the prospect of recovery, and COP 26 happening at the end of the year, climate change is set to emerge as one of the key Government priorities. This presents the opportunity to reengage with Government. One of our key concerns has been the lack of a strategic framework and joined up approach across Whitehall (there are rumoured to be 40 separate groups of civil servants working on climate change). We have previously sought a Ministerial/local government task force to: consider the respective roles of national and local government; to consider a strategic framework and funding; and to support coordinated delivery. Some progress has been made. The Chairman is a member of a group of sub-national leaders, chaired by Alok Sharma, which is focused on COP 26 (the next meeting takes place on March 15 and will focus on one of the specific

campaigns that the Government is initiating this year). We are also involved in roundtables with officials in March. However, **political engagement and coordination is still needed and Members are asked to consider how best to achieve this.**

21. There are a number of issues that need to be addressed through political engagement in a task force including:
 - 21.1. **Community leadership:** Throughout the pandemic local government has shown exceptional local leadership and this will be required as we emerge into recovery. [Research](#) commissioned by the LGA from BritainThinks has shown that communities want to get back to a pre-Covid normal. These findings suggest that 'the idea of the pandemic as an opportunity to do things differently is therefore not intuitive' and that the climate dividend could be short lived. Local leaders will need to be proactive agents of change and help communities to navigate these tensions.
 - 21.2. **Green Jobs:** The pandemic has taken its toll on employment. As of December 2020 there were [2.6 million Jobseeker's Allowance and out of work Universal Credit claimants](#). As of 31 December 2020 (the latest data) there were [3.8 million employments furloughed](#). The economy is expected to grow by about 5% in 2021/22, but the future for jobs remains uncertain. The LGA's 'Work Local' proposals would help national and local government work more effectively to address the immediate challenges of those experiencing unemployment. However, in the medium to longer term we need to take advantage of the job opportunities associated with moving towards a greener economy. Work by the LGA on the future of [Local Green Jobs](#) has estimated that areas such as low carbon electricity and heat, alternative fuels; energy efficiency; and clean transport could generate nearly 700,000 jobs by 2030 and 1.2 million jobs by 2050. We need to work with Government on making this a reality and to ensure that jobs are in the right places to enable communities to transition.
 - 21.3. **Siloed Government:** the responsibility for climate change is held across a number of Ministries and Government departments focused on meeting their own policy objectives with little coordination. Funding too is siloed as our [fragmented funding report](#) shows. We need to push for a more strategic approach, while acknowledging that it is only local government that can pull these various strands together and coordinate delivery at the local level.
 - 21.4. **Community capacity building:** our ambitions for a net zero economy will only be achieved with our communities as partners; there are many examples of councils co-producing low carbon schemes with communities e.g. working with volunteers on tree planting schemes. Our behaviours as individuals and communities will be influential in determining climate outcomes and local government has an important role in supporting communities to build capacity to address these issues. The pandemic has highlighted the inequalities in our society, and it is probable that climate change and the transition to a cleaner economy will have a differential impact that could exacerbate these inequalities. Community capacity and cohesion

issues will arise, and it is only at the local level that these can be addressed. Local government will need to support communities to meet these challenges.

21.5. **Funding:** A strategic framework to address climate change must be accompanied by adequate funding. The transition costs will be substantial, and they will fall across both the public and private sectors. For example, work that the LGA has commissioned from Savills indicates that the cost of retrofitting councils' own housing stock will be nearly £30bn. To date the Government has set aside £3.5bn (only £50mil has been allocated for pilots). We need a better idea of the cost of addressing climate change, where these costs fall and how they will be paid for. This is an issue that the Task Force could begin to address.

21.6. **Capacity of councils:** Knowledge and action will be required across all council activities and services. In particular, building skills and capacity in key areas of council responsibility such as planning and housing, flooding and protection for nature and biodiversity will be necessary as these areas of work are set to grow and change in response to climate change, the Environment Bill and planning reform. These capacity issues for councils need to be recognised and discussed with Government as the climate agenda progresses.

The wider work of the LGA

22. Throughout this report we have highlighted a range of work that has been commissioned by the LGA to aid our discussions with Government and to provide information and support to councils as they plan and implement their own climate change responses, including transport decarbonisation, green finance and local green jobs. Through our survey work and engagement with councils we know that they have a range of continuing concerns including: retrofitting; low consumption behaviour change; and connections to the energy grid. We will continue to pick these issues up in our policy work.

23. The Environment Bill will continue its passage through the Lords early in the next session of parliament. It is still Defra's intention to consult on the detail of the Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) scheme, and Deposit Return schemes in Spring 2021. These reforms are connected to climate change through the circular economy. We will want to ensure that we get the right EPR scheme, one that ensures producers cover the full cost of recycling.

Climate Change Improvement and Support Programme Update

24. The LGA has a significant [climate change improvement offer](#) for councils. Its aim is to help councils and residents to reach their local carbon reduction targets by adapting and mitigating the effects of climate change. Components of the programme include:

- 24.1. **[Net-Zero innovation Programme](#)** – The programme is delivered through a collaboration between the Local Government Association (LGA) and University College London (UCL). The Net Zero Innovation Network brings together local authorities, universities and other stakeholders to address climate challenges at the local level, and seeks routes to achieve council's net zero commitments.
- 24.2. **Councillor workbook** – we have commissioned CAG Consultants to produce self-guided learning materials for local authority councillors on the actions that councils can take to meet net zero targets and support a green economic recovery. This will be published in the Spring.
- 24.3. **Communications and behaviour change guides** – improvement colleagues have commissioned a supplier to create new guidance for councils on engaging with their communities, activists and Government on the issue of climate change. This is due to be published on 26 February 2021. The LGA has also written an online resource for councils to work with their communities on Behaviour change and the environment | Local Government Association
- 24.4. **Creating local green jobs** – following the [LGA green jobs report](#), the LGA is currently delivering action learning sets for both officers and Members. This will help to work through the issues of green economic recovery with local authorities in similar positions. The learnings will be made available to all councils.
- 24.5. **Measuring scope 3 emissions** – to accompany the [Greenhouse Gas Accounting \(GHG\) tool](#), colleagues in improvement are developing sector led guidance to measure scope 3 emissions. Sector specific guidance will help with providing clarity in interpretation of the GHG Protocol and support improved accuracy and robustness of reporting, which is currently inconsistent.
- 24.6. **Leadership essentials climate emergency** – the course has been successfully delivered to 60 councillors so far.
- 24.7. **Sustainable procurement guide** - the LGA is currently engaging on and writing guidance on sustainable procurement which will be available in April 2021.
- 24.8. **Webinars** – a series of webinars have recently been delivered on digital solutions to climate change, locking in positive behaviours and the co-benefits of a green recovery and, planting trees. Further climate change webinars on behaviour change techniques and community engagement are also scheduled.
- 24.9. **Design in the Public Sector Programme: Our Design Programme** is focused solely on climate change for 2020-21. We are currently working to equip councils with design skills and techniques to apply to their toughest challenges.

Implications for Wales

24. Councils in Wales are working with the Welsh Government on a net zero strategy for Wales. We are working with the Welsh LGA to identify opportunities for joint working.

Financial Implications

25. There are no immediate financial implications, but there will be a cost to having a physical presence at COP26.

Next steps

26. The next steps include:

- 26.1. Submission of our expressions of interest and continuing engagement with the Cabinet Office
- 26.2. Engagement with Ministers on establishing a Climate Change Ministerial Task Force
- 26.3. Developing our approach to COP 26 in more detail following direction from Members

Appendix A: Tiers of access

Table: Four tiers of activity during COP26 and opportunity to engage

COP26 activity and location	Audience and access	Potential for LGA to engage
Closed spaces for the negotiations Location: Scottish events campus	Restricted to national delegations, media and observers Access and activities controlled by the UN	The LGA has applied for observer status. If approved this will provide access to the formal opportunities to observe the negotiations
Blue zone Scottish events campus	Controlled by the UN, with limited event spaces allocated by the Cabinet Office The UNFCCC will release space in the Blue Zone to their accredited parties and organisations in Summer 2021	LGA has applied for observer status. If approved this will provide limited access to the Blue zone. The Cabinet Office has space available in the Blue zone and is inviting expressions of interest to host events by 5 March 2021.
Green zone Glasgow Science Centre	Controlled by the UK Government This is a broader, public facing space. The green zone will showcase arts and culture activity exhibitions, with facilities to host gardens and an IMAX cinema	The Cabinet Office is inviting expressions of interest by 5 March for a range of activities including events and exhibition spaces
Host city activity Various venues	Volunteering, fringe events	Glasgow City Council

1. Submitting an expression of interest in UK Government Controlled spaces at COP26 could secure a presence in the Blue zone but it does not guarantee access to UN and UK senior influencers. Examples of potential LGA activities in UK Government controlled spaces include:

Appendix B; Calendar of pre-COP events and LGA activity

A LOCAL PATH TO NET ZERO		KEY													
COP26 Programme of Activity Nov 2020 - 2021		Timescale													
		In Progress													
		Complete													
LGA ACTIVITY	STATUS	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21
INTERNATIONAL/OTHER ACTIVITY					UN Environ Assembly, Nairobi	UN Environ Assembly, Nairobi	NZ Cities Forum, Japan		CDP16 Biodiversity, China	UN World Env Day, G7 Climate Summit, Cornwall			UN Youth Summit, Milan	UN Pre-COP Summit, Milan	CDP26, Glasgow
Finance															
Publish practical guide to financing green ambitions	Complete							NAO report							
Financing Green Ambition webinar with Local Partnerships	Complete			Dec-02											
Publish think pieces	Complete				Feb-22										
Clean Transport															
Decarbonisation of transport webinars	Complete														
Publish think pieces	Complete					Feb-22									
Publish talking head	Complete					Feb-22									
Publish case study video	Complete					Feb-22									
Nature-based Solutions															
Publish think pieces	Complete								May 17-						
Publish talking head	Complete								May 17-						
Rewilding - nature based solutions (improvement)	Complete								May 28						
Publish case study video	Complete								May 17-						
Biodiversity action learning sets	Complete								May 17-						
Energy Transition															
DIPS energy webinar	Complete									Jun-16					
Publish think pieces	Complete									June 11-					
Publish talking head	Complete									June 11-					
Publish case study video	Complete									June 11-					
Adaptation															
Green economic recovery webinar (improvement)	Complete												Sep-15		
Publish think pieces	Complete												Sept 30-Oct 2		
Publish talking head	Complete												Sept 30-Oct 2		
Publish case study video	Complete												Sept 30-Oct 2		
FINAL PODCAST															
Collation of all talking heads and case study videos	Complete														PRE-COP
OTHER MILESTONES															
UK100 Climate Change Summit	Complete									TBC					
London Climate Action Week	Complete									June 26 - July 4					
LGA annual conference	Complete										July 6-8				
Comprehensive Spending Review	Complete												TBC		