

TITLE OF REPORT: Gateshead Climate Change Emergency and Environmental Audit

REPORT OF: Peter Udall, Strategic Director Economy, Innovation and Growth

Purpose of the Report

1. This report provides an update for Cabinet of activity carried out and proposed in response to the Climate Emergency.
2. Cabinet is requested to
 - a. note the outcomes of an independent environmental audit of the Council's activities, including the Silver Accreditation awarded and
 - b. recommend that Full Council approves an environmental policy for Gateshead Council.
 - c. approve the publication of an action plan that will set out the Council's action needed to meet zero carbon

Background

3. Following the Climate Emergency Declaration made by Full Council on 23 May 2019, Cabinet agreed that officers should commence an environmental audit of the Council's activities. Cabinet also agreed to the preparation of a climate emergency strategy and action plan, and to the development of a programme of engagement. This report updates Cabinet on the progress made in taking forward this programme of work.
4. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected some of the activity the Council has been able to carry out in addressing the Climate Emergency. Lockdown and subsequent social distancing requirements have limited engagement with the public, business partners and stakeholders in the way that was envisaged. However, despite these challenging circumstances considerable progress has been made in 2020 as identified in Appendix 1.
5. Over the course of the summer an environmental audit, following the Investors in the Environment (IiE) accreditation system, has been carried out by independent consultants Capability North East. The audit is the most comprehensive review of the Council's environmental impact to date. The audit provides a detailed carbon footprint of the Council's current activities and establishes a baseline at a

point in time of the Council's climate emergency and environmental journey.

6. The environmental audit has resulted in Gateshead being awarded a silver level accreditation, with a score of 70% against the liE assessment framework. Capability North East have provided the Council with a Sustainability Audit report (see Appendix 4), which summarises the findings of the environmental audit, and recommends measures the Council should implement in order to reduce its carbon emissions.
7. Officers continue to explore and implement projects that will contribute towards addressing the Climate Emergency while also complementing Thrive objectives. The activities listed below are among those that have been taken forward in recent months across different Council services, with co-benefits for decarbonisation and details can be found in Appendix 1.

Proposal

8. It is proposed that the Council adopts a new environmental policy to support its climate and ecological ambitions. The draft environmental policy is provided at Appendix 5. The draft policy has taken into account the key recommendations from the environmental audit and has also had regard to findings from the stakeholder workshop and responses to the online residents' survey. Cabinet is requested to recommend that Full Council approves this policy.
9. It is proposed that the Council publishes the independent Sustainability Audit report on its website. The recommendations made by the audit have been reviewed by officers and used to inform a summarised Action Plan that, subject to Cabinet approval, will be published to ensure transparency and accountability, and which captures the 10-year ambition of all relevant services within the Council to become Zero Carbon. Progress in reducing the Council's environmental impact and its carbon footprint will be monitored and reported on to ensure appropriate progress is being made.
10. It has not been possible to continue the programme of events originally envisaged with our business and community groups but a programme of online events and meetings over the coming year will be developed to ensure progress and support continues where possible.

Recommendations

11. Cabinet is recommended to:
 - i. Note the findings of the independent environmental audit of the Council's activities, including the Council being awarded the silver level accreditation using the Investors in the Environment assessment framework.
 - ii. Recommend that Full Council approves the Environmental Policy, at Appendix 5.

- iii. Agree to publish the Audit report and a Council Action Plan setting out the actions necessary for the Council to meet zero carbon
- iv. Agree to the development of a programme of community and business engagement that may be implemented when conditions allow.

For the following reasons:

- i. To recognise the significant progress made by the Council in minimising its carbon emissions and environmental impact, and the opportunities for further improvement.
- ii. To establish an up-to-date and comprehensive environmental policy that reflects the Council's ecological and climate change ambitions, and guides the actions taken in response to the Climate Emergency.
- iii. To provide transparency to the public on the Council's actions being taken to meet zero carbon.
- iv. To support engagement with our partners and the wider community that will ensure a Gateshead-wide approach is taken.

Policy Context

1. On a local level, the work being carried out has potential to directly contribute towards several objectives within the Thrive agenda, as follows:
 - Put people and families first.
 - Tackle inequality.
 - Invest in our economy.
 - Opportunities for employment, innovation and growth.

2. In addition, the scheme will contribute to other key priority areas for the Council:
 - Climate Emergency
 - Air quality
 - Nature recovery

Background to Climate Change Action in Gateshead

3. Gateshead Council has recognised the emergency caused by Climate Change for more than a decade, and has acted as follows:
 - We created in 2010 a Climate Change Team comprising 7 energy / sustainability officers, to lead the borough's efforts against Climate Change.
 - Later in 2010, we published our Climate Change Strategy, seeking to reduce borough-wide carbon emissions by 40% by 2025.
 - We signed the EU Covenant of Mayors on Climate Change in 2011, and published our Sustainable Energy Action Plan in 2012, with an interim target of 20% reduction by 2020 - and have been delivering against those actions since then.
 - As an organisation, the Council adopted its own Carbon Management Plan in 2010, which sought to cut carbon emissions by 50% by 2020. This has been achieved.

4. Key progress as an organisation:
 - The Council has invested over £60m installing and building energy saving and low-carbon systems, for its own operations, and for the community.
 - Gateshead's streetlights, thanks to investment in LED lighting and dimming, now use 60% less electricity than they did 10 years ago.
 - The Council's vehicle fleet, which has won numerous green transport awards, now uses 25% less fuel than it did 10 years ago.
 - We installed 2MW of solar panels across 35 buildings and schools, and solar energy now provides 5% of power for all Council buildings and schools.
 - As a result, in 10 years, the Council's own carbon emissions from all its operations and services has fallen by 55% since 2010 and continues to fall.

5. Key progress as a borough:
 - For housing, the Council has invested significantly in regional partnerships, such as the Warmzone, and more recently, Warm Up North. This has seen over 40,000 insulation measures installed in homes across Gateshead

- As a social housing provider, the Council's Decent Home programme and energy efficiency work has seen major investment in new boilers, new windows and solid wall insulation to Council homes.
 - As an example, the Council invested £22m in the Gateshead HEIGHTs scheme to install new low-carbon heat networks to 620 high rise homes.
 - As a result, the investment in home energy conservation has seen the number of homes classed as energy efficient increase from 15% in 2003 to 56% in 2018 - our target is 100% by 2030. Housing emissions have reduced by 39% since 2005.
 - Employers account for 30% of carbon emissions in Gateshead. Energy use and emissions from employers has reduced by 46% over the past 15 years, but without any drop in jobs and employment.
6. There are several examples of leadership from employers in the area, for example:
- Lanchester Wines operate one of the region's largest minewater energy schemes, to provide renewable heat for their wine storage warehouse
 - Henry Colbeck collect and recycle waste cooking oil each year, to supply as renewable fuel blends into aviation industry.
7. The Council and the Gateshead Energy Company are now a generator and supplier of low carbon and renewable energy, supplying this to Council buildings, homes and other buildings across the town centre, through a 4km heat and power network.
8. The transport network has seen emissions fall by 16% since 2005 due to a number of reasons. The rise in traffic volume that has occurred in previous decades has ceased, with traffic volumes falling 2% since 2005, due to sustainable transport initiatives. The efficiency of vehicles has increased, thanks to UK policies and improvements from vehicle manufacturers. All UK transport fuels now contain 5% biofuels, which continues to increase.
9. These local initiatives, supported by national policies, has seen the borough's carbon emissions fall by 36% since 2005, exceeding our target of 20% by 2020, and on target to meet the 40% target by 2025.

Declaring Climate Emergency in Gateshead

10. The Paris Agreement on Climate Change, signed in 2016 by all UN member states, was a major international step, committing countries to:
- Limiting global temperature increase to 2°C this century, and aiming for 1.5°C.
 - See global emissions peak as soon as possible, and start declining, so that net zero emissions are achieved as close to 2050 as possible.
11. The UK was the first member state to commit to legally binding targets to reduce emissions by 80% by 2050. In May 2019 the UK Government, following the advice of the Committee on Climate Change, committed to achieving net zero emissions by 2050.

12. However, throughout 2018 and 2019, the international significance of Climate Change and the need to accelerate action has become far greater. In particular, the UN Emissions Gap Report raised some alarming facts:

- Current global plans to reduce emissions by 2030 are now not sufficient to halt temperature increase to 1.5°C
- Global emissions continue to grow and show no sign of peaking. Emissions by 2030 need to be 25% lower to remain on track to limit temperature increase to 2°C, and 55% lower to reach 1.5°C

13. To respond to this, Gateshead Council declared a Climate Emergency at Council on 23 May 2019 which outlined the following commitments.

- Item 1. The declaration of a 'Climate Emergency' that requires urgent action.
- Item 2. Make the Council's activities carbon neutral by 2030
- Item 3. Achieve 100% clean energy across the Council's full range of functions by 2030
- Item 4. Ensure that all strategic decisions, budgets and approaches to decision making are in line with a shift to zero carbon by 2030
- Item 5. Support and work with all other relevant agencies towards making the entire area carbon neutral within the same timescale.
- Item 6. Ensure that political and chief officers embed this work in all areas and take responsibility for reducing, as rapidly as possible, the carbon emissions resulting from the Council's activities, ensuring that any recommendations are fully costed.
- Item 7. Work with, influence and inspire partners across the borough to help deliver this goal through all relevant strategies, plans and shared resources by developing a series of meetings, events and partner workshops
- Item 8. Request that the Council and partners take steps to proactively include young people in the process, ensuring that they have a voice in shaping the future.
- Item 9. Call on the UK Government to provide the powers, resources and help with funding to make this possible, and ask local MPs to do likewise.

Engagement activity

14. Important initial engagement activity was carried out early in the year: in February 2020 the Council hosted a Climate Emergency Workshop with relevant stakeholders from across the borough, while an online residents' survey was carried out between January and May 2020, gauging attitudes towards the Climate Emergency.

15. The stakeholder workshop supported a number of connections between different groups in Gateshead and identified several actions the Council can take to support decarbonisation. A summary of the workshop's key findings is provided at Appendix 2. The residents' survey received a strong response, with 942 responses in total. A large majority of respondents (86%) were concerned about the impact of climate change, while 81% supported the Council taking action on climate change. A summary of the results from the online residents' survey is provided at Appendix 3.

Environmental audit

16. Over the course of the summer an environmental audit, following the Investors in the Environment (IiE) accreditation system, has been carried out by independent consultants Capability North East. The audit has been supported and informed by Council officers from relevant services and is the most comprehensive review of the Council's environmental impact to date. The audit provides a detailed carbon footprint of the Council's current activities and establishes a baseline at a point in time of the Council's climate emergency and environmental journey.

17. The environmental audit has resulted in Gateshead being awarded a silver level accreditation, with a score of 70% against the IiE assessment framework. Capability North East have provided the Council with a Sustainability Audit report (see Appendix 4), which summarises the findings of the environmental audit, and recommends measures the Council should implement in order to reduce its carbon emissions.

Environmental policy

18. One of the key recommendations from the Sustainability Audit is that the Council adopts a new environmental policy to support its climate and ecological ambitions. The draft environmental policy is provided at Appendix 5. It has taken into account the key recommendations from the environmental audit and has also had regard to findings from the stakeholder workshop and responses to the online residents' survey. Cabinet is requested to recommend that Full Council approves this policy.

Ongoing activity

19. Officers continue to explore and implement projects that will contribute towards addressing the Climate Emergency while also complementing Thrive objectives. The activities listed below are among those that have been taken forward in recent months across different Council services, with co-benefits for decarbonisation;

Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES). Review case studies and best practice for a just energy transition

20. In May 2020 Gateshead Council was approached by the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) with an offer to take part in research that aims to

develop good practice in anchor strategies for delivering a just energy transition. This approach was prompted by CLES's involvement with Gateshead's progressive procurement practices and their knowledge of our work in tackling the Climate Emergency, including our focus on retaining Thrive principles in all of our activities.

21. This research project, led by CLES and the Carbon Coop, will review case studies of good practice in a just energy transition over the summer, followed by workshops for local authorities to share knowledge, and the publication of a toolkit in early 2021. The toolkit will support local authorities in ensuring the transition to low carbon energy optimises benefits for local communities.

Cycling and walking

22. Triggered by the need to allow our businesses to function safely and effectively during the pandemic, the Council is implementing pavement widening schemes in local centres across Gateshead. Reduced traffic in our town centres also has resulted in improved air quality and reduced carbon emissions associated with vehicle use during the lockdown period. At the same time cycling numbers have increased significantly. The Council has been successful in receiving some funding from the Government's emergency active travel fund and has submitted a bid to the second tranche of funding, which will be available later this year; this funding is to improve cycling and walking infrastructure and support recovery from COVID-19.
23. Gateshead's bike donation scheme, implemented during lockdown, has been highly successful this year, redistributing more than 60 unwanted bikes to new homes with our most vulnerable and in-need residents and tied in with work in the community hubs.
24. Gateshead has launched the Love to Ride app, which provides a community for cyclists across the UK, and awards points and prizes for achievements. The app also supports Cycle September, a global bike challenge which helps people realise the benefits of riding a bike. In addition, a programme of Dr Bike sessions will take place at locations across the Borough.
25. Following the return of children to schools, we have introduced Be Cool, a toolkit to encourage safe journeys to school, including promotion of active travel and safe parking around schools.

Energy

26. The Council is exploring ways to support an equitable transition to clean energy sources that will achieve significant carbon reductions. The Integrated Gas and Electricity Research Laboratory (InTEGReL) is a partnership project between the private sector, public sector and academia based in a site at Winlaton Mill. The site provides a rare opportunity for research into decarbonising gas, electricity and transport. The Council is working with partner organisations to secure funding for this important project, that could facilitate growth across the low-carbon energy sector.
27. Gateshead Council is a UK leading authority in delivering heat networks. The

Council recently secured a Heat Networks Investment Project grant of almost £6m, and a further £7.5m of Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme, to extend the energy network to the east of the town centre, potentially supplying heat to around 1,000 new houses and other buildings. The funding will also help to install 3MW of urban solar farms, and a 6MW water source heat pump, which will extract heat from the water in underground mine workings 150 metres beneath Gateshead town centre. This could form the largest minewater heating scheme in the world.

28. The Council is working with the Coal Authority to progress this and other projects, which are in detailed feasibility (Birtley, Kibblesworth, Chopwell) with funding being sought to further explore other heat network areas, in some of Gateshead's large Council Housing estates.

Woodland and Nature Recovery

29. Woodlands in Gateshead cover approximately 15% of the total area of the borough. This compares favourably with the national average for England (11%) and neighbouring authorities:

- Durham = 6%
- Newcastle = 5.7%
- North Tyneside = 3.3%
- South Tyneside = 3.4%
- Sunderland = 7.5%

30. Despite this, Gateshead Council has a long and successful track record in delivering and directly supporting the creation of new woodland, including the recent extension of the Woodland Trust's 93.61ha (231.31acre) Hedley Hall Wood in 2017/18 and the creation of a new community woodland on Council land at Path Head in 2019/20. The production of the More and Better Woods Action Plan to be completed by June 2021 will provide a roadmap for the delivery of the Council's ambition to increase woodland cover in the borough by 2% (250ha) by 2050 and to bring all of the Council's 500 hectares of existing woodland into positive management by the same date. Consideration is currently being given to the creation of a dedicated woodland officer post to drive forward the Council's ambitions. Consideration is also currently being given to the submission of a joint bid to the England Community Forests Trust for the creation of a new North East Community Forest.

31. Wetlands are also recognised for their potential to sequester and store atmospheric CO₂ and support biodiversity. Since 2018, and with the support of Gateshead Council, Durham Wildlife Trust has been developing a new wetland nature reserve at Blaydon providing valuable habitat for declining wading birds and wildfowl. Again, with significant support from the Council, Durham Wildlife Trust has recently secured over £400,000 of funding through Defra's Green Recovery Challenge Fund to support the restoration of priority habitats and species. The Healing Nature project will see the Trust working across five sites in Gateshead.

Meat-free Mondays

32. The new school meals in Gateshead schools now include “meat-free Mondays”, providing benefits including a significant reduction in the carbon footprint of this service. This is an example of the Council taking on board its role in reducing carbon emissions in a broad spectrum of services.

Community engagement

33. Social distancing requirements, and the Council’s focus on supporting communities and businesses through the COVID-19 pandemic has prevented much of the planned community and business engagement that would have supported action on climate change across Gateshead. However, community engagement remains an important component of the Council’s response to the Climate Emergency and will be necessary if we are to deliver significant carbon reductions across the whole of Gateshead. Officers will continue to explore opportunities to facilitate community-level and business action across the Gateshead and will seek to engage more closely with residents when it is safe to do so.

34. Connected Voice have agreed to support the Council in the development of a community response to the Climate Emergency and we will continue to work with them and other partners as appropriate. Engagement with partners including the Woodland Trust, Durham Wildlife Trust and Tyne Catchment Partnership has continued throughout the pandemic to progress a raft of environmental initiatives including the continued development of new woodland sites (e.g. Summerhill Community Wood), the launch of the Healing Nature Project and the production of the River Team Catchment Vision.

35. It is vital that we start re- engaging with our communities as well as partners and local businesses that we have been less able to reach, to start preparing a Gateshead wide climate strategy that will help guide the whole of Gateshead towards zero carbon.

Consultation

36. In preparing this report consultations have taken place with the Leader, Deputy Leader, and Portfolio Holders for Environment and Transport, and Housing and Economy.

37. On 15 February 2021 a Corporate Resources Advisory Group meeting was held to discuss the Climate Emergency and Environmental Audit. A note of the meeting is provided at Appendix 7.

Implications of Recommended Option

38. Resources:

a) **Financial Implications** – The Strategic Director, Resources and Digital confirms that the revenue and capital resource implications arising from the strategy will be considered as part of the approach to budget and

the medium-term realignment and investment of targeted resource towards achieving thrive priorities and outcomes.

b) Human Resources Implications – Additional posts are required to meet climate emergency targets (subject to budget considerations)

c) Property Implications – The development of a Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan may identify actions that have implications for the operation of properties.

39. Risk Management Implication – There may be risks associated with the actions identified through the development of a Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan. Any risks will be considered through the preparation of the strategy as part of the options appraisal, and measures will be applied to minimise or manage any potential risks.

40. Equality and Diversity Implications – A programme of community and stakeholder engagement, carried out equitably, will have positive implications for equality and diversity in Gateshead. An equalities impact assessment is attached at appendix 8 and further assessments will be prepared to accompany any new policies that emerge.

41. Crime and Disorder Implications – No crime and disorder implications have been identified.

42. Health Implications – Implementation of measures aimed at addressing and mitigating climate change will have positive health implications; for example, by improving resilience to extreme weather events.

43. Climate Emergency and Sustainability Implications – Preparation and implementation of a Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan are anticipated to contribute to long-term environmental, social and economic sustainability by improving Gateshead's resilience to the effects of climate change.

44. Human Rights Implications – Implementation of some actions could impact upon the amenity of some residents. Effects will be minimised through engagement with residents, ward members and relevant stakeholders.

45. Ward Implications – All wards will be affected.

Background Documents

Climate Change Strategy 2010

<https://www.gateshead.gov.uk/media/2507/Climate-change-strategy-document/pdf/ClimateChangeBooklet2010.pdf?m=636391887477970000>

Appendix 2 A Climate for Change: Workshop Harvest:

<https://www.gateshead.gov.uk/media/23685/A-Climate-for-Change-Workshop-Harvest/pdf/Appendix 2. A Climate for Change Workshop Harvest.pdf?m=637479713615300000>

[Appendix 3 Climate Change Survey 2020: Summary of Results:](#)

<https://www.gateshead.gov.uk/media/24358/Climate-Change-survey-responses-2020/pdf/Appendix 3. Climate Change Survey responses.pdf?m=637479714682370000>

[Appendix 4 Sustainability Audit report](#)

[Appendix 5 Environmental Policy](#)

[Appendix 6 Gateshead Council Climate Emergency Action Plan](#)

[Appendix 7 Note of Corporate Advisory Group Meeting 15 February 2021](#)