

TITLE OF REPORT: Climate Emergency Response

Purpose of the Report

1. To inform HEHC OSC of the work progressing in response to the Climate Emergency declaration

Background

2. The Council [declared a Climate Emergency](#) in 2019. As a result, the Council committed to become carbon neutral by 2030 and to assist the borough in meeting the same targets. The [Climate Action Plan](#) setting out how the Council will work towards net zero was published in 2021 and a Council wide [Environmental Policy](#) was adopted in 2021.
3. The Council commissioned an independent environmental audit of the Council operations in 2020 using the Investors in the Environment methodology, where it received a silver accreditation. The audit helped inform the Climate action Plan and focused the Council's priority actions. The Council received the first annual review of the Environment Audit in 2021. The Council is continuing to achieve Silver level accreditation and has improved its rating from 70% to 75% since the first audit in 2020 despite resources being diverted during Covid-19 in many services. The second review will commence in the coming months.
4. The Council consulted on the Gateshead wide [Climate Strategy](#) from December 2021 to February 2022. The Strategy is set out in themes: transport; energy; economy and consumption; woodland and nature; food; and resilience and adaptation. It sets out some best practice examples and our vision for the future. It is anticipated that this Strategy will be adopted in the spring and that our partners will sign up to it.
5. Part of the consultation on the Climate Strategy was to start developing Ward Action Plans setting out priorities and seeking to overcome barriers in each ward. To keep members informed and enable them to champion actions within their wards, consultation with Councillors for each Ward commenced in March.

CLIMATE ACTIONS

6. In 2021 Sustainability Implications Assessments were agreed at SMG which will be required for Cabinet Reports where a negative implication for sustainability has been identified in the report, or when an Integrated Impact Assessment has been carried out and identified negative implications. This will ensure that climate and the environment are considered in all Cabinet decisions.
7. The Ways of Working group continue to progress towards a Council policy for new ways of working. Any new way of working proposed will be assessed for its

contribution to carbon reduction targets, building upon any savings already made through the increased level of home working during 2020/2021.

8. The Climate Emergency and how this is the responsibility of all staff and teams within the Council has been included within the induction pack for new starters at the Council. In addition, the A and D procedure is being reviewed and how staff are contributing towards out zero carbon targets will be included within A and Ds. In addition the Climate team and Occupational Development are developing a training package for all staff to ensure they are able to contribute towards the Council's carbon reduction commitments in all areas of the Council.
9. The Climate Emergency team are working closely with the procurement team, recognising that a large proportion of the Council's carbon emissions are from our supply chain. Climate is included in the new Social Value toolkit and we are developing ways to support our local suppliers as we transition to a lower carbon supply chain. In addition we are starting to monitor and report on our supply chain carbon emissions in 2022.
10. The Council has procured a new carbon monitoring tool, SmartCarbon. This tool will enable the Council to monitor carbon emissions more accurately, including those in the supply chain. Improved monitoring and reporting will be required going forward, and this tool ensures the Council can meet any legislative requirements for this going forward. SmartCarbon will also allow us to more accurately determine where the biggest carbon savings can be met. It is intended that the Council will begin publishing its carbon budget in the future.
11. The Council has an award winning track record in its energy projects including the [district energy network](#). More recently major capital funding has been secured for a number of energy efficiency, renewable energy and heat network schemes:
 - The Council issued £7.4m commercial loan to Gateshead Energy Company, to complete a £14m funding package for installation of a 6MW minewater heating scheme to Gateshead District Energy Scheme, and to fund future connections for housing developments and Gateshead Quays
 - A £7.5m grant was secured from Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS) to fund 3MW of urban solar parks, and energy network connections to 4 more Council buildings
 - A further £4.5m of PSDS grants were secured to fund energy efficiency measures in up to 13 schools
 - Grants of £6.3m were secured to fund up to 600 solid wall insulation measures to homes in Chopwell

The Council also set out its ambitions for Zero Carbon Heat by 2030, in a strategy approved at Cabinet in June 2021, with ambitions to

- Install a further £240m of heat networks, to connect up to 15,000 Council homes to zero carbon heat networks
- Support the development of Northern Gas Network's Integrel site, as an energy system demonstrator, and to create conditions for Gateshead to become a first UK pilot for hydrogen distribution in the public gas network

12. *The North East Joint Transport Committee of which Gateshead is a part has committed to enter into an Enhanced Partnership with the bus operators to improve services and grow patronage.*
13. The Council are now engaging proactively in encouraging green travel plans. The Council are developing resources to support businesses in addressing employee travel patterns in their response to climate change. The Council has made improvements the Council's Travel Plan and are adapting it to hybrid working in consultation with the Ways of Working Group.
14. The Council has developed a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) for Birtley and East Gateshead and plans to build on this to improve the facilities in these areas. The Council worked with Go North East to see the introduction of electric buses on the 53/54 route and with partners seen the completion of the Clean Bus Technology Funded bus retrofitting to improve emissions on 100 buses.
15. The transport team are continuing to work with children and schools including the development of the Be Cool toolkit to help schools encourage active travel. We are delivering Bikeability training across Gateshead and Child Pedestrian Training in six of the region's authorities. The Living Streets walk to school initiative is live in 17 schools.
16. The Council are planning how to add to the electric vehicle charging infrastructure across Gateshead and are working with colleagues across the region and NEPO to procure a supplier.
17. The Council have adopted an Economic Strategy. One of the themes within the Strategy is the Green Economy which seeks to maximise the opportunities arising from increased green technology industries as well as supporting a just transition.
18. The Council is pursuing a number of actions to reduce emissions from waste within the borough. Behavioural Change Officers and Recycling Officers are in post and will be retained; these officers roles include work to promote recycling, reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill, and discourage fly tipping. Where possible waste vehicles will be upgraded to electric or hydrogen power rather than diesel. Work to establish and monitor the carbon emissions of the sector is ongoing. A waste audit of internal waste produced by key Council sites will be developed once more normal working patterns resume. Removing food waste from green bins is being considered to reduce domestic waste in the borough, and the Council is working with Get Composting to provide composting bins. The Council have awarded new contracts for both the blue bin material and garden waste material in this period which have local drop off points and NE based processing. Tonnages are reducing from where they were at the height of the pandemic and monitoring is ongoing. A Communications Campaign has been ongoing to drive WEEE (Waste electronic and electrical equipment) and SDA (small domestic appliances) out of the waste stream to reduce the impact of fires and this is feeding in to national best practice. No funding to further this project has been identified, however options are being explored.
19. The Council, in connection with a number of food networks throughout Gateshead, are looking to link the goals of reducing food waste and food poverty/scarcity. In addition the Council's award winning school catering team introduced meat free Mondays into all primary schools in Gateshead, massively reducing its carbon

footprint along with other environmental policies such as locally sourcing food, where possible.

20. The Council is working hard to progress woodland creation and tree planting. The Council has established a working group comprising the Forestry Commission, Woodland Trust and Durham Wildlife Trust, and has commissioned RDI Associates to produce an Action Plan "More and Better Woodland". The Action Plan will set out how the Council can improve the management and sustainability of the Council's Woodland approx. 500ha and identify areas for woodland planting of over 0.25ha on Council owned land to deliver its targets – 100,000 trees by 2030 and 17% woodland coverage in Gateshead. The Council has worked is working with adjoining authorities to create a North East Community Forest. The first initiative for Gateshead at Whitehills has seen public engagement with woodland planting due to start in the near future. The Council has also recently submitted a joint expression of interest with our neighbouring authorities to the Local Authority Treescape Fund to fund amenity tree planting of some 90 heavy standard trees in Gateshead in parks, public open spaces, and cemeteries. If the bid is successful there will be opportunities to plant the trees in association with celebrations to commemorate the Queen's Jubilee. The Council has been successful in working with its partners to create the North East Community Forest and the Treescape Fund application.
21. 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.
22. The Council has commissioned Newcastle University to carry out some evidence in relation to the 20 minute neighborhood concept. This concept is about ensuring our communities are able to meet their day to day needs within a 20 minute walking distance to reduce car use, promote active travel and improve wellbeing, whilst supporting local economies and jobs. This evidence will be further developed and feed into the Ward Action Plans as well as any future review of the Local Plan.

COMMUNICATIONS and PARTNERSHIPS

23. Extensive comms have been carried out to raise awareness about the Council's work on climate issues, and particularly the Climate Strategy. In February 2020 we invited a diverse range of stakeholders from communities, businesses, voluntary groups and the public sector to a workshop on how Gateshead should respond to the Climate Emergency. [The workshop](#) established links between groups, and was an important initial step in determining what a zero-carbon Gateshead will look like. To raise awareness of climate issues among Gateshead's young people, and to encourage responses to the Climate Emergency consultation, presentations were developed that were tailored to primary and secondary school age children. These were shared with schools along with letters to the schools and pupils' parents explaining the Council's aims to raise awareness of climate change, the consultation, and what the borough's young people can do to help. E-leaflets were prepared to share with residents, again to highlight the issue of the climate

emergency, the consultation, and what people can do in their own lives to help. The e-leaflets were shared with members to distribute within their wards. Additionally, members were notified of the consultation and encouraged to discuss it with their ward's residents, particularly harder to reach groups such as young people (under 25) and people from minority ethnic backgrounds. There is a specific webpage on the Council's site on the climate emergency, and the Climate Strategy consultation was included within Council News and shared on the Council's social media.

24. The Council is working to hire additional staff to provide further support in meeting our climate goals. Two new roles will be created; one in project management to oversee our work on climate issues as we continue to add workstreams, and one in engagement to focus on dialogue with residents, businesses, and other organisations in the borough, to improve engagement on climate matters. There is also potential for the engagement role to develop a climate festival to take place during school holidays, which would highlight existing progress being made and provide opportunities to get involved.
25. The Council is working with partners including meeting the top 100 businesses in Gateshead to discuss the Climate Emergency amongst other things, SME training to help them meet their carbon reduction and environmental goals, NEECO, where the Council sits of 3 of the boards, health partners including QE Hospital, Woodland Trust, Metrocentre, and the National Trust. Gateshead Council has worked with leading experts GENEE (Greening the Economy of the North East of England) to ensure a fully funded package of support is available to Gateshead SME's and suppliers to the Council to assist them in meeting the challenges of climate change and manage their environmental impact by helping them identify, manage, and reduce their environmental impacts and carbon footprint.
26. A Guardian Article was published on the 27 Jan 22, titled 'One in five UK councils have no climate action plan, campaigners say'. This article sets out the scores and ranking of Local Authorities in the UK based on their Climate Action Plans, according to research carried out by Climate Emergency UK. The score given to Gateshead is 17% compared to the highest scoring local authority 91% and the lowest scoring 0%. The methodology used to score and rank local authorities in article assesses the contents Councils adopted Climate Action Plan and/or Climate Strategy. At the time the data was collected we had an adopted Action Plan for Council operations, but not an up to date Strategy for the borough, which is currently being developed following consultation. The adopted Action Plan does not contain the detailed actions that are required to meet net zero, however these actions are being implemented and monitored through the annual independent Investors in the Environment audit, which has demonstrated progress towards net zero. The methodology for ranking local authorities does not take into account the amount of carbon emissions saved or the climate initiatives implemented on the ground, both of which would see Gateshead scoring much higher. It is unfortunate that scoring highly is measured by words rather than action. Once we have an adopted and up to date Climate Strategy for Gateshead, hopefully in 2022, we would score more favourably using this methodology in addition to the great work and innovation being achieved in the Council and throughout Gateshead which is helping us achieve net zero.

Proposal

27. It is proposed that the Health and Wellbeing Board endorse the Climate Strategy and provide a partnership of pledges to meet our climate commitments.
28. It is also proposed that Ward Action Plans are developed, which will set out more detailed actions to deliver the Climate Strategy at the local level. The Ward Action Plans link to 20 minute neighbourhoods, covid recovery, and neighbourhood plans. Once developed, the Plans will then be consulted on further with the community, including schools. The Plans will be living documents to be revised and updated as required, and actions will be implemented in the short, medium and long term.

Recommendations

29. The Housing, Environment and Healthier Communities OSC is asked to note the progress of the work being carried out in response to the Climate Emergency and the proposed approach to adopting the Climate Strategy and Ward Action Plans.

Contact: Lucy Greenfield