

CORPORATE ADVISORY GROUP

Monday, 15 February 2021

Report to Cabinet

PRESENT: Councillor M Gannon (Chair)

MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillors: C Donovan, J Adams, R Beadle, D Bradford, L Caffrey, M Charlton, A Douglas, S Gallagher, M Goldsworthy, T Graham, L Green, S Green, G Haley, M Hall, M Hood, H Haran, H Kelly, J Lee, K McCartney, J McElroy, E McMaster, B Oliphant, M Ord, I Patterson, J Raine, J Simpson, J Turnbull, and K Wood

OFFICERS PRESENT: Peter Udall, Anneliese Hutchinson, Grant Rainey, Neil Wilkinson and Sonia Stewart

1 PURPOSE OF MEETING

The Group received a presentation on the outcome of an environmental audit which has been carried out during the lockdown. The audit was undertaken by an external consultant. The work was undertaken following the Council Motion declaring a Climate Emergency in May 2019. The actions from the audit will form an Environmental Action Plan for Gateshead which will be taken to Cabinet and Council.

2 SUMMARY OF COMMENTS

- It was queried whether there was a budget for this work. It was noted that there is a budget which is being used for some additional staff and studies but it is actually about embedding the consideration of carbon neutrality into everything that we already do.
- It was noted that we have a very active community and some groups have formed a climate alliance. The Council have employed Connected Voice as a group who are separate to the Council and the aim is for them to work with community groups from across the Borough. There is also a regional group being set up by Vonne under the NECCO, the North East Climate Coalition. Community groups will be able to access grants which may not be available to the Council.
- It was queried as to how are we going to make sure, for example within planning, issues can be incorporated into our policies to make sure developments meet our environmental targets. It was noted that there are often competing priorities which is sometimes where the issues arise. For example, if there is an issue of viability, given the ceiling price for buying a home, the cost of making the home meet energy conservation due to the cost of the new innovations sometimes may be difficult. It is expected that over time as there is more accessibility and innovation the unit price will come

down. National policy will also change eg building regulations. We need to identify areas, such as housing, planning, education and have a debate about policy and environmental issues.

- Given THRIVE it makes sense that we make sure there is consistency in policies around housing, given for the most vulnerable groups affordability is key with the need to make sure the cost of heating their homes is minimal which also has both health and environmental benefits.
- Scandinavia was given as an example where good insulation and excellent standards of building negates the cost of heating.
- It was also noted that energy price caps have been recently lifted by 3% and this will lead to an increase in the cost of people heating their homes. It is important that we invest in insulation in homes so people don't have to pay so much for heating. We also need to recognise the challenge there will be for planners when its costly to build a passivhaus. The challenge is getting lower value land built to high standards.
- Councillors asked for regular updates to be provided on what has been achieved and what it still to be achieved.
- It was suggested that a toolkit be developed for Councillors in order to help them to be equipped to be ambassadors for this change.