

**HEALTH AND HOUSING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
3 JANUARY 2024**

HOUSING SERVICES CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY 2024-2029

**Responsible Cabinet Member -
Councillor Matthew Roche, Health and Housing Portfolio**

**Responsible Director -
Elizabeth Davison, Group Director of Operations**

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To consider the draft Housing Services Climate Change Strategy 2024-2029 before approval by Cabinet on 9 January 2024.

Summary

2. In July 2019, Darlington Borough Council declared a climate emergency. In relation to our Council housing, tackling climate change and reducing our tenant's fuel bills are high priorities for the Council. We also need to ensure that we meet the Government targets of achieving an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of C for all our homes by 2030 and net zero carbon by 2050. However, this presents significant challenges for the Council.
3. Due to the long-term nature of this strategy and given there are still many unknowns in relation to funding, developing technology and capacity, it is difficult to provide precise targets as to how or when we will achieve net zero carbon for all our homes. Therefore, the Housing Services Climate Change Strategy 2024-2029 at **Appendix 1** covers the initial actions required over the next 3 to 5 years and will be continually updated to ensure we remain on course.
4. This strategy will also be considered by Economy and Resources Scrutiny Committee on 4 January 2024.

Recommendation

5. It is recommended that:
 - (a) Members consider the draft Housing Services Climate Change Strategy 2024-2029 at **Appendix 1** and agree its onward submission to Cabinet.

- (b) Agree to review progress against the action plan contained within the strategy on an annual basis.

Reasons

- 6. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:
 - (a) The Council, as a social housing provider, is required to meet Government targets in relation to climate change, specifically achieving an EPC rating of C for all our Council housing by 2030 and net zero carbon by 2050.
 - (b) The adoption of a formal Housing Services Climate Change Strategy will help to monitor progress towards these goals.
 - (c) Tackling climate change and reducing our tenant’s fuel bills are high priorities for the Council.

Anthony Sandys
Assistant Director – Housing and Revenues

Background Papers

- (i) Darlington Borough Council Climate Change Strategy

Anthony Sandys: Extension 6926

S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no issues
Health and Wellbeing	There are no issues
Carbon Impact and Climate Change	This report supports the Council’s Climate Change Strategy and will have a positive impact on the energy efficiency of our Council homes
Diversity	There are no issues
Wards Affected	All wards with Council housing
Groups Affected	Council tenants and leaseholders
Budget and Policy Framework	The issues contained within this report do not represent a change to Council budget or the Council’s policy framework
Key Decision	This is not a key decision
Urgent Decision	This is not an urgent decision
Council Plan	This report supports the Council Plan to deliver the Council’s Climate Change Strategy and action plan
Efficiency	The delivery of this strategy to meet the Government’s climate change targets represent a significant financial challenge to the Council
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	This report has no impact on Looked After Children or Care Leavers

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

7. In July 2019, Darlington Borough Council declared a climate emergency. The residential housing sector accounts for 22% of the UK's carbon emissions. As the largest social housing provider in Darlington, we are committed to ensure our housing stock (which makes up approx. 10% of all the residential dwellings in Darlington) meets the Government's targets for energy efficiency and net zero carbon.
8. However, this presents a significant challenge for the Council. We need to ensure that we meet the Government targets of achieving an EPC rating of C for all our Council housing by 2030 and net zero carbon by 2050.
9. This strategy sets out our approach to achieving these goals. Due to the long-term nature of this strategy and given there are still many unknowns in relation to funding, developing technology and capacity, it is difficult to provide precise targets as to how or when we will achieve net zero carbon for all our homes. Therefore, this strategy covers the initial actions required over the next 3 to 5 years and will be continually updated to ensure we remain on course.
10. The Housing Services Climate Change Strategy 2024-2029 at **Appendix 1** sets out the actions required to achieve the initial phase of our plans, and covers the following areas:
 - (a) **Data Quality and Validation.** We need to ensure the data we hold regarding our stock and its condition is accurate and up to date, to help shape and inform decisions we need to make to reach our targets. We also need to ensure we fully understand what is required, how we can deliver this and who will do it, so a comprehensive review and validation of data we hold is required.
 - (b) **Fabric First.** A fabric first approach allows for simple changes considering the design, construction and building fabric of a home to produce an efficient and low energy building. The building fabric refers to the roof, walls, windows, floors, and doors of a home. Using this method, we can prepare a programme of work to help us achieve EPC C for all our properties by 2030. We will also be able to effectively deliver measures and engage with our tenants, whilst monitoring the effectiveness of work and re-evaluating where necessary.
 - (c) **Funding, Bidding and Capital Programme.** Significant investment will be required for us to implement our plans and we will need to source this through our own Housing Revenue Account (HRA) resources and our capital programme. This must be managed effectively alongside continually reviewing our energy efficiency budget. We will continue to bid for available grant funding and provide supported matched funding to ensure the delivery of schemes. Our capital programme will be reviewed on an annual basis, and we will consult our tenants about our planned expenditure. This will include a review of existing timescales for the replacement of key building assets

(such as kitchens and bathrooms) and what work can increase EPC ratings to align with our Housing Asset Management Strategy. From this, we will create a new business plan considering new technologies and the lifespans of assets. We will also review funding for the upskilling of internal staff, to compliment the introduction of our energy efficiency measures.

- (d) **Retrofit and Technology.** Retrofit is the introduction of new materials, products and technologies into an existing building, to reduce the energy needed. When retrofitting our homes, we aim to increase their energy efficiency by implementing improvements to reduce energy consumption and provide our tenants with a warm, comfortable home. Retrofitting will include:
- (i) Reviewing new technologies as they emerge onto the market (such as new heating systems).
 - (ii) Reviewing and upskilling our workforce, to ensure we have capacity to install and maintain new technologies.
 - (iii) Ensuring our tenants have the right information and support to use new technologies.
 - (iv) Ensure we have robust supply chains in place for the supply and maintenance of new technologies.
- (e) **Biodiversity.** Biodiversity is the term used to describe all life on Earth, in all its variety. There's a growing mountain of evidence to show that green spaces are good for our mental and physical wellbeing, as well as supporting carbon offsetting. We will consider how we can encourage biodiversity such as wildflower meadows. We will also consider using Housing land, which we are not able to develop, to plant trees and support the Council's Tree and Woodland Strategy, which will make areas more attractive.

Financial Implications

11. The recommendation in paragraph 5 have already been factored into the HRA MTFP. An allocation for energy efficiency work has been accounted for in the 30-year business plan and the annual amounts proposed for 2024-25 onwards is treble that allocated in 2023-24.

Outcome of Consultation

12. The Tenants Panel were consulted about this strategy on 14 November 2023 and have given it their full support.