

PEOPLE SELECT COMMITTEE

SCRUTINY REVIEW OF HOME ENERGY EFFICIENCY AND GREEN JOBS FOR THE FUTURE

1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 This report presents the outcomes of the Scrutiny Review of Home Energy Efficiency and Green Jobs for the Future.

1.2 The overall aim of the review was to understand what funding was available for home efficiency improvements and whether this met the needs of Stockton residents. The review also examined the work that was taking place across the Tees Valley to create a local workforce fit for the demands of a green economy of the future.

1.3 The Committee examined the following key lines of enquiry:

- What financial support is currently available nationally and locally to help with home energy efficiency? Does this support reflect the needs of Stockton households taking into account our property base?
- What has been the take-up of funding available?
- What are the requirements for registered social landlords and private landlords to ensure a minimum energy efficiency standard within their housing stock?
- What opportunities are there for collaboration with key partners and the community?
- Are relevant courses offered by local education providers? What potential other courses could be offered if there was more demand?
- What is being done to encourage young people to consider education/training and careers in new and expanding green industries?
- What loans or grants are available to support adult education and training in green jobs?
- What work is taking place with business to understand local skills shortages in green industries?

1.4 The Select Committee's key findings were as follows:

- Climate change is a global and national issue which impacts the lives of Stockton residents and will continue to do. This issue is also exacerbated by the ongoing energy crisis.
- Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council (SBC) aims to become net zero by 2032, whilst aiming for the Borough to be net zero by 2050. The Council has developed an Environmental Sustainability and Carbon Reduction Strategy. This review has highlighted SBC's four high level objectives to deal with climate change and achieve net zero in line with local and national targets.
- The Government has also committed to improving energy efficiency and achieving net zero. The Boiler Upgrade Scheme (BUS) is one example, examined as part of this review, of a government-led initiative to assist people in making their homes more energy efficient and reducing the use of fossil fuels.

- Previous energy efficiency schemes, such as 'The Warm Homes Fund', have been delivered across the Tees Valley and have provided assistance to residents in receipt of qualifying benefits and fuel poor households. Uncertainty over the level and type of future government funding for these schemes has also been raised.
- The review heard evidence that homeowners are encouraged to take a 'fabric first' approach to home energy efficiency. The aim is to ensure that a home is efficiently insulated before thinking about an upgraded boiler or heat pump.
- Currently, there are several alternatives to fossil fuel based systems which residents could use to make their homes more energy efficient. These include heat pumps (ground source and air source), solar photovoltaic (PV) panels, solar water heating systems, and biomass systems. This review has outlined the advantages of these alternatives and problems, such as cost and a general lack of understanding.
- The review suggested that the Council should concentrate on raising awareness of new home heating technologies and ensure that a communications package is implemented. The aim is to educate the Borough's residents and ensure that uptake of grants is high (regardless of who is delivering the scheme).
- As of 2020, 12.9% of households in the borough of Stockton-on Tees were classed as 'fuel poor'. This is lower than the regional average for Northern England of 14.4%. However, across the Borough, the level of fuel poor households ranges from 30.5% in Mandale and Victoria to 3.4% in Ingleby Barwick.
- This review has uncovered that it is not currently a requirement for new homes to have solar panels, and other energy efficiency/generation measures, to be fitted as standard. Members suggested that correspondence should be sent to the relevant government minister to urge that legislation is passed regarding delivering increased energy efficiency/ energy production standards on new housing through more stringent building regulations.
- Evidence of continuing investment in 'green jobs' on Teesside was presented, including developments in sectors ranging from advanced manufacturing to health and biologics. Members commented that over half of projected 'green jobs' required a bachelor's degree but only a small percentage required GCSEs. There were also concerns over the length of time that 'green technologies' have taken to develop.
- In terms of Stockton's approach to 'green jobs', the Council's Employment and Training Hub is working in partnership with external organisation to deliver workshops, provide training, and host recruitment events.

Conclusion

The consequences of climate change have an impact on each Stockton-on-Tees borough resident and will continue to do so. As part of global efforts to combat climate change, this review focussed on the improvement of home energy efficiency and the development of local employment in green industries.

The ongoing national energy and cost of living crises means that there is an increased need for residential dwellings to be more energy efficient and residents to be fully aware of funding available to make the necessary improvements or changes. Likewise, it is essential that regional investment in emerging green industries continues to provide employment opportunities to address current skills shortages.

Following this review, our recommendations centre on awareness raising of grants and alternative fossil fuel-based systems along with writing to government to urge them to improve energy efficiency standards on new housing developments. The recommendations have also captured the Council's continued commitment to deliver its Environmental Sustainability and Carbon Reduction Strategy and 'green jobs' workshops and training.

Recommendations

1. That correspondence is sent to the relevant government minister to urge that legislation is passed regarding delivering increased energy efficiency/ energy production standards on new housing through more stringent building regulations.
2. That a communications package is implemented to raise awareness amongst residents of new home efficiency initiatives and grants.
3. That Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's (SBC) Employment and Training Hub, and the Business and IP Centre, continue to work with external businesses and agencies to deliver 'green jobs' workshops, training and host recruitment events aimed at all levels including entry level jobs.
4. That there is continued delivery of the four high-level objectives outlined within SBC's Environmental Sustainability and Carbon Reduction Strategy. This includes an overall aim for the authority to be Net Zero* by 2032 and the wider borough by 2050. *Net zero means cutting greenhouse gas emissions to as close to zero as possible, with any remaining emissions re-absorbed from the atmosphere, by oceans and forests for instance.