London Borough of Islington

Environment, Climate and Transport Scrutiny Committee - 3 December 2024

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment, Climate and Transport Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on 3 December 2024 at 7.30 pm.

Present:	**Councillors:**	Clarke (Chair), Hayes (Vice-Chair), Bossman-Quarshie, Jeapes, Heather and Russell
Also Present:	**Councillors:**	Champion

Councillor Tricia Clarke in the Chair

40 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item A1)

Apologies were received from Cllrs Gill and Graham

41 DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item A2)

Cllr Heather as a Substitute for Cllr Gill

42 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item A3)

None.

43 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Item A4)

RESOLVED:

Deferred to the next meeting.

44 CHAIR'S REPORT (Item A5)

The proposed joint meeting with the Environment, Climate Change and Transport, Corporate Resources Screening Committees, and Thames Water is set for 23rd January 2025. Additionally, the chair had written to the Secretary of State for Environment and Rural Affairs, Steve Reid MP, and Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, urging action to protect London's water supply. Finally, there are several events happening in Islington's parks, including Carols on the Green at Islington Green on 15th December at 1:30 PM and the Menorah Lighting at 2:00 PM on 26th December. More details can be found on the Parks and Green Spaces website.

45 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item A6)

Public Questions were taken after each Agenda item.

46 SCRUTINY REVIEW - CLEANER, GREENER, INCLUSIVE STREETS - WITNESS EVIDENCE (Item C2)

The committee received a presentation from the Octopus network group on their nature neighbourhoods project.

A network of 14 large multi-purpose community centres in Islington, which had been running an urban growing programme for around 14 years, participated in the Nature Neighbourhoods project. This initiative, coordinated by the RSPB, National Trust, and WWF, involved 18 community groups, with Islington being the only participating area in London. The project emerged from the People's Plan for Nature, which advocated for

greater community involvement in nature conservation and decision-making. In Islington, the focus was placed on Tufnell Park, a neighbourhood identified as deficient in access to nature and facing high levels of economic deprivation.

The project began with a walk and talk event in February, where residents, local organisations, and council representatives explored existing green spaces and areas for potential improvement. Participants used an approach called photo voice, capturing images of local nature and spaces they felt could benefit from greening initiatives. This event generated discussions about how public spaces could be better utilised for nature conservation and made residents think differently about their local environment.

Following the walk, a series of six community conversations were held, focusing on themes from the People's Plan for Nature, such as the need for nature to be accessible on people's doorsteps, not just as a destination. Key topics discussed included the importance of local organisations (referred to as "anchors") that could help sustain greening projects in the long term, and the need to capture the history of local green spaces. Participants also raised concerns about the lack of diversity in the green sector and expressed interest in creating pathways for young people, especially those from Islington, to pursue careers in this field.

The outcomes from these discussions are now being used to develop a framework for the Nature Neighbourhoods project, which will guide future community efforts to integrate nature into urban spaces. This framework will be based on the core themes of the People's Plan for Nature and aims to create a lasting impact on the local environment, ensuring that nature is a visible and accessible part of everyday life in Islington.

The conversation cantered on the challenges and strategies involved in engaging local communities in the development and use of green spaces, particularly in areas like Islington. One of the main issues raised was the perception of green spaces on estates, where historical restrictions (such as signs forbidding sitting or playing on the grass) had created a mindset that these spaces were not for community use. A key example shared was of a young mother who faced abuse for simply sitting on the grass with her baby, highlighting the lingering negative attitudes towards public green spaces.

Another challenge discussed was the potential for antisocial behaviour, particularly on estates like Tufnell Park. However, it was noted that consistent presence and engagement from community groups, such as the community plant nursery, helped to mitigate these issues. These groups, built trust with local youth and residents, demonstrating that ongoing involvement led to positive outcomes in terms of safety and engagement.

Regarding future steps, it was confirmed that the community conversations were just the beginning, with more planned to ensure wider engagement, particularly with underrepresented groups. A volunteer from the community had been recruited to help create an engagement plan and connect with other local organisations to broaden the project's reach. The project was set to continue until next September, with efforts focused on refining a framework for what a "nature neighbourhood" could look like, incorporating ideas generated from the community.

The conversation also explored ideas for fostering community campaigns and reclaiming green spaces, with suggestions to work collaboratively with various stakeholders, including private housing authorities. The importance of anchor organisations, such as the community plant nursery, as these groups provided stability and continuity. Additionally, learning from other cities like Manchester and Birmingham, where community-led initiatives had been successful, was mentioned as an important part of shaping future efforts in Islington.

47 **DEALING WITH E-WASTE - MER-IT (Item C4)**

The committee received a presentation on dealing with E-Waste from MER-IT.

The United Kingdom was on track to become the worst offender of electronic waste globally, with only 30% of electronics being recycled. One of the main reasons for this was the lack of infrastructure, including limited drop-off points, home collection services, and inadequate information on data wiping. Many people hoarded their electronics, either due to repair costs, uncertainty about disposal, or the belief that old devices might have future value. Emotional attachment, such as holding onto a broken phone with irreplaceable photos, also contributed to the issue. Furthermore, people often felt their old devices had financial value, even though the market value had decreased significantly. As a result, much of the waste was stored in homes until it became obsolete or too small to repair, eventually ending up in landfills.
The problem was also exacerbated by the scale of the issue, with large recycling organisations overwhelmed by the sheer volume of electronic waste. Despite some investment in CO2 capture, the budget allocated for repair and reuse efforts was significantly smaller. The lack of a clear definition of what constitutes electronic waste made it difficult to assess the value of different devices, further complicating recycling efforts. Proposals to grade electronic waste based on factors like repairability, recycling value, and environmental impact were introduced, suggesting that devices should be valued according to their potential for reuse or recycling, rather than just their monetary worth.

Another significant barrier to repair and reuse was the financial viability of repairs. The cost of spare parts often exceeded the price of a new device, making repair economically unfeasible for consumers. The repair market was also fragmented, with competition among shops leading to a lack of transparency about the use of refurbished parts. A system was proposed where refurbished parts would be standardised and valued appropriately. Additionally, the idea of turning electronic waste into currency was suggested, where people could exchange old electronics for credits towards new devices, thus incentivising recycling and repair. Lastly, the need for a centralised platform was emphasised, where consumers could track the environmental impact and financial value of their old devices, with a voucher system supporting the process.

In conclusion, a more generalised and community-cantered approach to electronic waste management was recommended. This approach could involve designing a platform with input from younger generations, as they were the primary users of technology. The platform would allow people to trade in old devices for vouchers that could be used for purchases, promoting a circular economy and reducing the environmental impact of electronic waste.

The issue of electronic waste was raised by residents, with many unsure of how to dispose of or repair old electronics, often resulting in these items being stored in homes. One suggestion was for the council to collect more waste items in specific categories, such as mobile phones, and focus on improving recycling efforts. Another proposal was to set up repair cafes to help people extend the life of their devices. However, there were concerns about the economic viability of repairs, with the cost of spare parts often exceeding the price of new products. Some also wondered if a supply chain solution, involving trusted recyclers and businesses, could address the problem on a larger scale.

In response, it was emphasised that while council involvement is essential, a community-driven approach would be more effective in creating lasting change. A potential pilot programme was suggested in the Nags Head area, which already faced the impacts of climate change. This programme would involve community centres where people could drop off old electronics and receive vouchers in return, which could be used for shopping or purchasing repaired items. Repair parties could also be organised by repair shops to help

build relationships between the community and local businesses. However, concerns were raised about the sustainability of vouchers and the role of companies in addressing e-waste.

Several ideas were proposed, including the potential to use the community's involvement alongside policies to help reduce waste. It was suggested that companies should be held accountable for managing the disposal of their products, and the idea of transforming old electronics into art was introduced as an alternative solution.

48 **ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE ACTION - Q1 AND Q2 PERFORMANCE REPORT (Item C1)**

Councillor Champion, Executive member for Air Quality, Environment and Transport, and Martijn Cooijmans, Director for Climate and Transport presented this item. They reflected on the earlier presentations from Octopus, MER-IT, noting the importance of addressing the existential threat to the planet. They emphasised Islington's role in the global effort, highlighting the need for local leadership in tackling these challenges, particularly given the area's relative wealth and resources.

The report covered performance in quarters 1 and 2. It highlighted Islington's work, particularly in planning and retrofitting, aiming to guide private homeowners and tenants through eco-friendly measures, especially in conservation areas. It mentioned supplementary planning guidance, which will provide practical advice, set to go out for consultation in January. It acknowledged the need to engage private homes, as these represent a significant portion of local emissions, and mentioned hiring a specialist officer to assist with retrofitting.

Community energy efforts were noted, including collaborations with organisations like Power Up, which helped install solar panels in schools. The importance of district heat networks, a cost-effective way to decarbonise heating in densely populated areas was mentioned.

They praised the Shine programme for its long-standing work in reducing fuel poverty, and highlighted district heat networks as a means to balance net-zero goals with affordability. Efforts to decarbonise council homes included pilots funded by the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund. New builds, while challenging, were recognised as an opportunity to implement net-zero standards.

Active transport initiatives included the progression of Liveable neighbourhood projects and the success of the TfL Travel for Life programme in local schools. It was acknowledged the progress in electric vehicle charging and bicycle infrastructure. Environmental efforts included the Islington Greening Together programme, the planting of 981 trees, and community-driven greening projects.

Specific challenges included the high cost of implementing low-carbon heat sources like heat pumps and the need to fund insulating buildings to reduce energy costs. Heat networks were being explored as a potential solution, contingent on finding sustainable funding mechanisms. Climate adaptation measures were also being integrated, addressing issues such as extreme heat, flooding, and other climate-related risks.

Further discussions highlighted the SPD (Supplementary Planning Document), which was set for public consultation in January, with an opportunity for councillors to provide feedback early in the process. Questions arose about retrofitting efforts, the percentage of homes expected to be retrofitted by 2030 across various housing sectors, and whether specialised planners would handle retrofit cases. A training programme aimed at increasing climate awareness among council staff had faced delays due to staffing issues but remained a

priority. The report also emphasised aligning all council decisions with climate considerations by incorporating climate and environmental implications into organisational processes. However, the scale of retrofitting depended largely on available funding, with district heat networks being a potential focus for broader implementation.

The Shine Energy Advice Service has been recognized for exceeding its targets and delivering significant financial benefits to residents through initiatives like the energy doctor program. Questions were raised about the service's ability to expand capacity, especially during a harsh winter and amid the ongoing cost-of-living crisis, which may drive more residents into energy poverty. Concerns about whether the service can continue scaling to meet increased demand were addressed, noting that seasonal fluctuations influence workload, with peaks in winter and a quieter period in summer. Additional staff have been hired during busy periods, and the team remains committed to supporting vulnerable residents.

Discussions about housing highlighted the challenges of retrofitting flats above shops, often due to difficulties engaging landlords and tenants. It was suggested that better data collection and closer collaboration with small and medium enterprises (SMEs) could help incorporate business owners into sustainability programmes.

Tree planting efforts have been ramped up in recent years, but there are ongoing challenges in ensuring their survival. Factors such as vandalism, natural causes, and damage by contractors have affected newly planted trees. A three-year watering programme is in place to support young trees, and additional measures, including collaboration with estates and communities, are being explored to find suitable planting locations and enhance green spaces. Concerns were raised about private developments removing trees, prompting calls for stronger protections through Tree Preservation Orders and conservation area rules.

The Retrofit Handbook, which complements the Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), was discussed as a key tool for guiding sustainable development. Unlike the SPD, which is a fixed legal document, the handbook can be updated regularly, ensuring it remains responsive to new developments. A dedicated planning officer will be available to handle retrofit applications and provide direct public support, addressing concerns about accessibility and guidance during the application process.

Finally, the importance of stronger controls on tree removal from private land was emphasised, with calls to lobby for greater protections at the local and national levels. This aligns with broader efforts to develop an urban forest management strategy that considers both publicly and privately managed trees.

49 **RECYCLING IN ISLINGTON (Item C3)**

Matthew Homer, Jean Hughes, Pawel Ryczan and Krisztina Vamos Presented this item. The recycling performance was reviewed, focusing on team efforts, policy development, and plans for reducing waste. Recycling rates stood at 30.4% last year, consistent over time. Residual waste per household had decreased, showing positive trends. Dry recycling remained strong compared to other North London boroughs, while composting rates were lower due to limited garden waste collection. Efforts were directed at improving dry recycling and addressing contamination issues, with contamination rates rising across all boroughs but remaining lowest in Islington. Measures included enhanced recycling enclosures, signage, crew training, and landlord engagement.

Innovative technologies, such as cameras in recycling vehicles using AI to identify contamination sources, were trialled to target problem areas. Food waste collection

expanded to purpose-built blocks and flats above shops. Trials on Holloway Road proved promising and plans to extend the scheme borough-wide awaited government funding. Campaigns like “Do Amazing Things with Your Food Waste” promoted food waste recycling through social media, events, door-knocking campaigns, and direct distribution of recycling materials. Newly acquired electric vehicles enhanced service efficiency with onboard weighing and bin-rinsing capabilities.

Estate recycling improvements received a £2 million investment over three years. Case studies showcased new bin enclosures designed to balance recycling and refuse capacity, improve fire safety, and support sustainability with features like green roofs and bug hotels. Resident feedback indicated that these changes made recycling easier and estates more presentable and safer. Trials on flats above shops introduced grid-style bins and designated collection points, supported by extensive community engagement. Results showed compliance rates above 70% and doubled recycling outputs. Sustaining these improvements required ongoing communication and delivery of recycling materials.

In partnership with ReLondon, lessons from trials aimed to enhance performance on flats above shops and apply successful interventions to other areas. Overall, these efforts reflected a commitment to increasing recycling rates, reducing contamination, and advancing sustainable practices across the borough.

Concerns were raised about the need for better data separation in reporting recycling rates. Suggestions included introducing key performance indicators (KPIs) for dry and organic recycling to improve tracking and analysis. It was highlighted that while dry recycling appeared to be improving, challenges with contamination persisted. Additionally, the effectiveness of the North London Waste Authority (NLWA) in supporting local recycling initiatives was questioned. However, the NLWA was acknowledged for its engagement efforts and resources allocated to community outreach and waste minimisation.

The estate reuse trial and chute closure initiatives were detailed as early-stage efforts aimed at improving recycling rates and reducing waste. The reuse trial involved setting up designated areas for reusable items on estates, while the chute closure trial focused on phasing out refuse chutes to encourage more responsible waste disposal. Concerns were expressed regarding potential issues with chute closures, such as increased rodent activity, fire hazards, and general resistance from residents. The importance of thorough engagement with tenants and residents’ associations, as well as careful monitoring, was needed.

Suggestions of broader engagement efforts, including the use of community centres and faith-based organisations to promote recycling initiatives were discussed. Enhancing resident engagement was recognised as a key barrier. Officers currently engage with residents through door-knocking campaigns, community events, and newsletters but acknowledged the need for further outreach and communication improvements.

Accessible bins were praised for their inclusivity and usefulness, benefiting children, disabled individuals, and older residents. Plans were discussed to integrate these bins more widely, especially in new developments, as part of accessibility and planning guidelines.

A recent trial for food waste collection along Holloway Road was considered successful but highlighted the need for adaptable models to accommodate different areas. This trial aligns with upcoming legal requirements to roll out food waste collections for all households by April 2026. Funding for these efforts was noted as a critical factor, with capital already allocated and additional government support anticipated.

On contamination issues the council received detailed data from waste facilities, identifying problematic materials such as black sacks, textiles, and food waste. While rain was noted as a factor affecting paper and cardboard, it was not deemed a primary cause of contamination. The was a need for better data scrutiny and targeted interventions to reduce contamination.

The discussion also touched on innovative uses of AI in waste management, such as processing visual data from waste streams to improve sorting and targeting efforts. While AI was seen as promising, its current application was limited to specific tasks, with broader use seen as a longer-term goal.

50 **COMMITTEE WORK PLAN (Item C5)**
RESOLVED:

That the work plan was noted.

The meeting ended at 10.00 pm

CHAIR