

Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee - 20 September 2016

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held at Committee Room 5, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on 20 September 2016 at 7.00 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** James Court (Chair), Raphael Andrews, Gary Heather, Clare Jeapes and Caroline Russell

Councillor James Court in the Chair

59 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item A1)

Apologies were received from Councillors Mouna Hamitouche and David Poyser.

60 DECLARATIONS OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item A2)

There were no declarations of substitute members.

61 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item A3)

There were no declarations of interest.

62 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS (Item A4)

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the minutes of the meeting held on 24 May 2016 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.
- 2) That the minutes of the meeting held on 27 June 2016 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings subject to the following amendment and that the Chair be authorised to sign them:
 - That Minute 58 – Scrutiny Topics, bullet point 2a be amended to include details of any work the council was undertaking in relation to photovoltaic panels on private roofs.

63 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item A5)

There were no public questions.

64 CHAIR'S REPORT (Item A6)

There was no chair's report.

65 FUEL POVERTY SCRUTINY REVIEW - 12 MONTH REPORT BACK (Item B1)

John Kolm-Murray, Seasonal Health and Affordable Warmth Co-ordinator presented the report back.

In the discussion the following points were made:

- Over 98% of directly managed properties were now rated at Band D or above.
- A current barrier to using environmental health powers to address problems of private landlords not meeting standards was that fines were small and it was not a priority for trading standards. The council was working with landlords to improve standards.
- A lot of time was spent trying to engage with the health sector. It was hoped the health service would realise the impact housing could have on health. Given that

Islington had one of the highest rates of Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD) and one in nine children in Islington had asthma, IT was not considered that there were enough referrals from the health service. There were referrals from the UCH paediatric respiratory department but very few from GPs even though all GPs were aware of the service. Many GPs had stated they did not get time to discuss living conditions with patients and others claimed the evidence was not clear enough and were instead focused on the medical approach rather than considering wider determinants such as housing, poverty and social isolation.

- Community nurses visited patients in their homes but there were very few referrals from them.
- Public Health England had engaged more than NHS England had.
- The Health and Wellbeing Board were encouraged to take more leadership on leading a culture change.
- From 2017/18 the Warm Home Discount would be paid directly from the government to eligible households.
- It was hoped that the Digital Economy Bill would increase the opportunities for more data sharing to take place between energy companies and the council.
- The new Deputy Mayor for Environment and Energy had recently been appointed. The council would continue to work with the Deputy Mayor to deliver the best deal for London boroughs. The council would continue to lobby for 15% of Energy Company Obligation (ECO) funding to be given to London schemes based on population size. As suppliers could choose where they delivered their obligation, they had a reluctance to work in London due to parking concerns, the congestion charge, planning restrictions, the nature of housing stock with 80% of residents living in flats, 50% of homes in a conservation area, many in listed buildings and 60% of housing stock being built before 1919.
- The council continued to share best practice with partners and other authorities. Smart meters were being rolled out.
- The number of debt cases handled by the council energy advisors rose by almost 40% between 2014/15 and 2015/16. There was an 85% success rate in writing off debts.
- The housing voids team contractors now carried out draught proofing to front doors on all properties, unless they were composite uPVC.
- Water bill debt was becoming an increasing problem. The council had an arrangement with Thames Water whereby people on low incomes could apply for a reduction. Small households were encouraged to get a water meter whereas for larger households not having a water meter was generally recommended.
- John Kolm-Murray and his team were thanked for their work.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That the Director of Public Health be invited to a future meeting.

66

COMMUNAL HEATING SCRUTINY REVIEW - 12 MONTH REPORT BACK (Item B2)

Garrett McEntee, Technical Services Manager presented the 12 month report back. In the discussion the following points were made:

- Qualitative research to ask different groups of residents, such as those in work and those at home during the day, how they would use their heating if heat metering was introduced was scheduled to take place by the end of April 2017.
- The compensation scheme had been changed and implemented.
- Work to improve communication with residents on communally heated estates about the responsible use of communal heating systems was ongoing.

- The council continued to apply for Energy Company Obligation (ECO) funding for appropriate schemes. ECO funding was often not available for the types of schemes undertaken as district heating schemes were seen as complicated. ECO could choose which schemes to give funding to and were not keen to work in Islington due to factors such as parking issues, the congestion charge, the type of housing and planning restrictions.
- The council was working towards meeting the EU Energy Efficiency Directive but it was more onerous than expected. It would be completed at block level by the end of 2017.
- The Energy Services Team applied for funding from the £300m Heat Network Development Fund.
- Existing heat networks were updated rather than new systems being installed. Where possible new builds were connected to existing heat networks e.g. Bunhill CHP.
- Concern was raised that £6 a day might not be enough to cover the cost of loss of heating in winter. Members were advised that the Energy Team had concluded that this would cover the cost for the duration the temporary heaters were used.
- Where a block had fewer than 26 units, individual boilers were considered more cost effective. Where there were more than 26 units, communal heating was more cost effective.
- The service had difficulties in recruiting qualified engineers with the correct background. The council was trying to address this.
- In response to a comment that the last three winters had been quite mild and a question as to how the service would cope if there was a cold winter, Garrett advised that having a maintenance programme in place, good dialogue with residents and effective response repairs would minimise problems.
- In response to a member's question about Key Performance Indicators, Garrett stated that there were none but there were weekly reports on plant downtime, some of which was planned and some of which was due to a problem.

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That the sub-committee be provided with data on the plant downtime for the winter period and how many incidents took two or three days to resolve.

67

REGENERATION OF RETAIL AREAS SCRUTINY REVIEW - PRESENTATION AND SCRUTINY INITIATION DOCUMENT (SID) (Item B3)

The Scrutiny Initiation Document was discussed.

In the discussion the following points were made:

- The Town Centre Management Team was moving from the Chief Executive's department to the Environment and Regeneration department.
- An introductory presentation to the topic would take place at the next meeting.
- It was recognised that the topic was broad so the review had to be focussed on the tools for achieving the overall aim. It could be possible to undertake a supplementary scrutiny review the following year if the sub-committee considered that other aspects of the topic should be reviewed.
- As there was a lot of evidence to be considered, the witnesses should be grouped into batches of three with the witnesses providing a written briefing in advance of the areas they would cover to help members formulate their questions.

RESOLVED:

That the SID be noted subject to the following amendments:

- That the overall aim be amended to read, 'To encourage the regeneration of retail areas by making Islington more attractive for customers and potential business and to maximise future income under the recent business rate changes.
- That the list of witnesses be amended to included Councillor Asima Shaikh.
- That the list of visits be amended to included attendance at a Town Centre Management Forum meeting.

68 WORK PROGRAMME (Item B4)

RESOLVED:

- 1) That the visit to Gillespie Park and the Ecology Centre be undertaken in Spring 2017.
- 2) That the visit to Bunhill Heat and Power Energy Centre be arranged for a Friday in the near future.

The meeting ended at 8.55 pm

CHAIR