

Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee - 5 November 2018

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held at Committee Room 4, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD - Islington Town Hall on 5 November 2018 at 7.30 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Champion (Chair), Khondoker (Vice-Chair), Bell-Bradford, Clarke, Hamitouche, Jeapes, Nathan and Russell

Councillor Rowena Champion in the Chair

229 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Clarke-Perry.

230 DECLARATIONS OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item 2)

There were no declarations of substitute members.

231 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

232 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item 4)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 10 September 2018 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

233 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item 5)

The Chair informed the meeting that public questions will be taken during consideration of each item on the agenda.

234 CHAIR'S REPORT (Item 6)

None

235 SCRUTINY REVIEW WITNESSES - GARDEN CLASS ROOM & OCTUPUS NETWORK (Item B1)

Marnie Rose, Director of Strategy & New Programmes of The Garden Classroom, and Julie Parish and Anita Gracie of Octopus Network, informed Members of the work carried out by their organisations, its challenges and future plans.

During discussion the following main points were made.

- Julie Parish informed the meeting that Octopus Network, a small charity, initially carried out most of its activities in community centres, offering and hosting a range of services and events. Over the years, however, it has expanded into the use of

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open spaces and parks. Julie Parish welcomed the support provided by the Parks Department.

- The meeting was informed that Octopus Network had received more than £900,000 external funding over a number of years, which enables it carry out a range of activities across the borough. It supports residents in designing gardens and open spaces, growing food to eat and running workshops in community centres for residents. One of the notable and successful activities is the Environmental Summer Schools, which are run in partnership with Islington Green Space for Children, from ages 5-11, and their families.
- The “Trail Blazer”, which is run in partnership with Islington Community Hubs Network, aims to create unique living/learning spaces that provide new outdoor learning environments for local communities to develop, design learning activities, manage and enjoy.
- In response to a question about promoting “Urban Wild Places” in parks, the meeting was advised that, with the support of Islington Parks, Octopus would endeavour to establish an area within the park where wildlife could thrive, so that young children could visit, observe and learn about bees, butterflies, frogs, etc.
- The Garden Classroom (TGC) comprises volunteers who help deliver high-quality hands-on sessions in green spaces across Islington. TGC works with individuals who have an understanding of outdoor life and have a passion for nature and the outdoors.
- TGC works in partnership with Islington Council, and other councils, community gardens, schools and businesses, to bring real benefits to the community, which it believes will boost staff morale, and engage client or customer bases. Members were advised that TGC works with schools to deliver its curriculum through outdoor learning in parks and gardens.
- The meeting was informed that more than 62,000 children had been engaged in various outdoor activities over the years, which accounts for 28.5% of what TGC provides. Since there is a recognition that city dwellers experiencing myriad challenges, such as overdevelopment, pollution and insufficient open spaces, are missing out on outdoor activities, TGC also engages with disadvantaged children and visits schools.
- Although TGC works with other departments, it currently has a positive working relationship with Public Realm: it helps to deliver more than 200 hours of activities in the Ecological Centre, instead of the 60-70 hours agreed in the service-level agreement.
- Challenges include lack of shelter and toilet facilities for schoolchildren in the park. Anti-social behaviour and dog fouling is an issue in some of the parks, there is a noticeable decrease in such activities particularly after community engagement in the space.
- With regard to community engagement of residents on housing estates, the meeting was informed that Urban Wild Places had been able to organise workshops on both the Harvist and Bemerton Estates. Residents had been encouraged to grow their own vegetables and set up garden clubs. The meeting was also informed of the particular success of planting activities on the Andover Estate, but that the

commencement of the new-build programmes had resulted in activities being suspended.

- TGC and Octopus agreed that a Biodiversity Action Plan, together with a budget, would be welcomed and would help to deliver and promote diversity in the borough. In addition, it would be beneficial when funding was sought. In response, the Head of Green Space and Leisure Spaces acknowledged that, although none currently exists, a concise briefing paper that would focus on habitat was currently being drafted.
- Meeting was advised that the Council's Nature Conservation Team continues to ensure that Islington has integrated parks. Members were reminded that a balance needs to be struck between residents who prefer well-manicured parks and those who want wild life to be promoted.
- TGC and Octopus Network continue to welcome the support and recognition of ward councillors since this gives small charities credibility with external funders when applying for financial support.
- On the criteria for identifying which housing estates to work with, members were informed that organisations work with Community Development Officers and the Housing Communities team to identify where to run activities. The level of support varies from estate to estate because some already have garden clubs in place whereas others look for assistance in setting them up.
- On the question of longevity and sustainability, both TGC and Octopus acknowledged the future challenges: since their existence as small charities relies on external funding, their model was based on being facilitators.
- No financial support is provided to community centres or any of their activities, but support would include providing advice about the design of gardens, or planting of seeds to grow food. Members were informed that the essence of any support is to ensure that it provides a living space for its residents to go on and develop their space. In addition, it provides an environment in which skills are cascaded and enables residents to identify areas of interest.
- Cllr Champion informed the meeting that the Committee would like to enquire further on how the third-party sector engages with hard-to-reach groups, and how it could communicate its projects with these groups at a future meeting. In response, both TGC and Octopus Network representatives welcomed a visit by the Committee to observe their projects.

The Chair thanked Marnie Rose, Director of Strategy & New Programmes of The Garden Classroom, and Julie Parish and Anita Gracie of Octopus Network, for sharing their experiences with the committee.

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QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE REPORT (2018/19) - EMPLOYMENT & SKILLS (Item B2)

The Committee considered the Q1 Performance Report.

- Members were informed that the number of residents supported back into work is above target compared with last year. To minimise duplication, partners now share details of their local offer, consult with the partnership when changing or adapting

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delivery, share data on their outcomes, and work collectively to identify and address gaps.

- The Council recognises the essence of supporting parents into work as a means of breaking the cycle of poverty, particularly in light of the very high levels of child poverty that is related to parents on out-of-work benefits. Members were advised that although the Council, with 119 outcomes, has exceeded the profiled target for quarter 1, council services and partners aim to support at least 425 parents into employment this year.
- iWork continues to trial different models of outreach so that support is effectively targeted at the economically inactive residents, including parents who don't claim unemployment benefit, under 25s, and residents on disability benefits.
- It continues to be a challenge to engage unemployed young adults aged 18-25, but council services and partners will continue in the council's aim to support at least 360 young people into employment during the year. The meeting was informed that Network Aspire, in conjunction with employers such as Nando's and Caffè Nero, provides hospitality masterclasses to address this situation.
- In relation to issues around the night-time economy, the Executive Member for Economic Development acknowledged that this had not been looked into but that it would be an area of interest in the future. Members were advised that the Council will continue to encourage employers to introduce the London Living Wage, and increase the skill of its residents to prepare them for better-paid jobs.
- In response to a request for comparison data about the increasing number of apprentices that had moved into further employment or training, the Executive Member for Economic Development indicated that it would be circulated. In addition, the Director Employment, Skills and Culture informed the meeting that a progress report on the Apprentice strategy, which highlights the progress in, and challenges of, retaining apprentices, would be brought to Committee for consideration.
- Members were informed that the Council continues to embed social value in its council commissioning/procurement exercises by creating apprenticeships and entry-level jobs with its suppliers for local residents. Members were informed that a Task and Finish Group, headed by the Corporate Director Housing and Adult Services, is reviewing the number of Islington residents who have gained apprenticeships with council-contracted suppliers.
- On concerns over the low skills and poverty levels of its residents, the meeting was informed that the Council's Adult and Community Learning Service is planning to make lifelong learning more accessible by offering night schools and establishing a Joint Directorate Outreach Team to address the issue.
- In response to an observation that children of West Indian origin, and white working-class children, had not been participating in the summer reading challenge held in libraries, the Executive Member indicated that she would have a look at the issue and report back.
- Members were informed that although two new indicators relating to the number of library visits and the number of children taking part in the summer reading challenge had been included in the quarter report, further analysis would be possible after

quarter 2 data had been reported.

- The Executive Member for Economic Development advised that the Council now provides 100 hours of support for Islington children, a Labour Party manifesto commitment.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

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ANNUAL REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT (2017/18) (Item B3)

The Committee received a presentation on the 2017/18 Annual Report. A copy of the presentation would be interleaved with the agenda.

In the discussion, the following points were made.

- The Executive Member for Economic Development informed the meeting that 1,334 Islington residents had been supported back into paid employment.
- In comparison with other central London boroughs, Islington Council had the highest proportion of school leavers going into apprenticeship schemes.
- The Council had launched its health and work programme, which is co-located with the Council's iWork team at 222 Upper Street.
- More than 43,000 sq ft of space has been secured from developers to support local businesses and entrepreneurs. In addition, the £1 million funds received from the Mayor of London will enable the Council to deliver a £2 million affordable workspace programme in Finsbury Park.
- As a local economic agent, Islington Council continues to initiate internal work to co-ordinate and increase the Council's approach to social value through its procurement process and commissioning services.
- In a recognition that local residents enjoy the benefit of a thriving local economy, a new Inclusive Economy Team had been created to manage the process.
- On the reported 8% of Islington's working-age population that is identified as sick and of ill-health, Members requested a further breakdown of the sickness data to be provided.
- In response to concerns about the increasing gentrification of the market area by neighbouring Hackney Council, the Service Director Planning and Development informed Members that she would raise the issue with her counterpart in Hackney.
- On the question of whether Council data existed on the number of people engaged in the night-time economy, the Executive Member for Economic Development reiterated that, although the Council has no data, it will continue to encourage employers to sign up to the London Living Wage and to consider measures of improving in-work progression.
- In response to a suggestion that the favourable business arrangements of charities in town centres should be reconsidered because other small businesses were

disadvantaged, the meeting was informed that this was a planning policy issue and could be addressed only through national legislation. The Executive Member for Economic Development indicated, however, that she would investigate as to what could be done to support other businesses.

- The meeting was informed that although the Preston Model is recognised as a good example in terms of supporting and revitalising the local economy, and lessons have been taken on board, over the years Islington Council has introduced measures, such as some of its services being brought back in-house, to improve the wages and income of staff. In addition, the Executive Member reiterated that the Council's Planning Policy has resulted in the Council being able to secure a commitment from developers of 50% of affordable housing for residents and of affordable workspace for emerging businesses – peppercorn rents for up to two years.
- It was noted that the Council continues to work with anchor institutions, such as the NHS, large public sectors, and universities, to deliver apprenticeships and offer training. A similar idea should be extended to small businesses and grass-roots venues for smaller outfits. A suggestion was made that the idea of anchor venues that help to revitalise the local economy should be extended similar hubs to attract smaller businesses.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

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ANNUAL REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT & TRANSPORT (2017/18) (Item B4)

Councillor Webbe gave a presentation on the work of the Environment & Transport Directorate. A copy of the presentation would be interleaved with the agenda.

In the discussion the following points were made.

- The meeting was advised that residents should continue to be supported by initiatives such as "Energy Doctor in the Home", "Warmth on Prescription" and "Warm Home Discount", which had resulted in lower energy bills.
- 2,600 residents had switched their energy supplier from one of the six main providers to the Council's Angelic Energy, which was launched in October 2017. In addition, approximately 72% of those who signed up have switched to pre-payment meters.
- In 2017/18, 2,548 vulnerable residents had been referred, with each being offered an average of four to five interventions. Members were reminded that, through SHINE, Islington Council has achieved an estimated average annual saving of £213 and, most important, as a result of its success SHINE funding has tripled and expanded across all London boroughs.
- The meeting was advised that through the Solar Together London initiative, more than 400 residents had registered interest and over 100 properties had accepted the formal offer, thereby increasing solar energy in the borough by 25%. Members were informed that with more than 700 LED light fittings installed at the Town Hall had reduced electricity consumption.

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- Air pollution monitors have been placed outside schools to protect the health of the school children, and the Council, in partnership with Hackney, had introduced the first Ultra-low Emission Vehicle Zone to help tackle the city's air pollution. In addition, the anti-idling campaign is being promoted around a number of key hotspots.
- Members were informed that road junctions in the borough that are identified as dangerous are being transformed: Archway gyratory had been reconfigured and construction around Highbury Corner is ongoing, solely to improve pedestrian safety and to create safer cycle routes. In response to concerns about other dangerous junctions in the borough, the meeting was informed that where a junction is identified as dangerous, it will be included in the schedule of work. The Service Director, Planning and Development indicated that she would look into the Drayton Road Junction.
- The Executive Member for Environment and Transport highlighted the Council's plan to install a further 100 electric vehicle charging points over the next 12 months to add to the 87 units already in place.
- The meeting was informed that although recycling rates fell in 2017/18 from 31.6% to 29.5%, the residual waste per household figure remains the lowest it has ever been. Members were also advised that the new fleet vehicles had resulted in a substantial and consistent reduction in missed collections.
- Members were advised of the new street cleaning service, launched in June 2018, which covers every road in the borough five days a week.
- In response to a question regarding Islington's transport strategy, the Executive Member advised that, despite the Mayor of London's tight submission deadline of February 2019, opportunities would be provided to ensure that councillors and various stakeholders would be allowed to contribute.
- The Executive Member indicated that Council had plans to install more than 100 electric charging points in the next 12 months and 400 in the next four years. On concerns about light-and-noise pollution from units installed in residential areas, members were informed that where that is deemed to be unsuitable, there is a commitment to switch off the fans and lights, but members were informed that discussions are ongoing with the suppliers on the units' design so that it addresses residents' concerns.
- The Executive Member for Environment and Transport acknowledged that it would be ideal if, as the Council develops its Environmental strategy, the Biodiversity Action Plan were to be included and considered, particularly as Islington Parks would be part of the strategy
- The meeting was informed that if road junctions are identified as dangerous, they would be included in the works programme and that councillors should notify council officers if they have concerns.
- A request on whether the quality of the water in the Regents Canal, which looks to be polluted, could be monitored was noted by the Executive Member.
- In response to a question on whether Council was in discussion with the management of Arsenal Football Club about possible mitigation measures on the

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volume of traffic, congestion and pollution on match days, the Executive Member advised that Officers would have another look at match-day access and parking issues around the stadium and report back to the Committee. She reminded the meeting, however, that the council does have a targeted programme that looks at the idling of vehicles on match days and that enforcement officers manage traffic in and around the area.

- On the issue of idling vehicles, particularly council vehicles, members were assured that no preferential treatment is given to council operatives; they are advised to turn their engines off. If, however, council vehicles are seen not to be complying, it should be reported to the enforcement team.
- In response to a question on whether the Council had any plans to deal with sources of litter and refuse, rather than reacting when it had occurred, the Executive Member reminded the meeting that although that is a national issue that requires the involvement of central government and discussions with suppliers of goods and manufacturers, the Council had introduced improved recycling containers and bins to address spillage. In addition, there is a new street cleaning regime in residential areas to ensure that neighbourhoods are clean and tidy.
- With concerns about rubbish and refuse from flats above shops, members were informed that the Council had introduced timed rubbish collection points which have generally been kept to, and that results from surveys by Keep Britain Tidy have confirmed that the borough pavements are generally clear of black bags.
- On how the Council would be addressing concerns about cyclists riding on pavements and the protection of pedestrians, the meeting was informed that part of the solution would be to create safer routes for cyclists, which it is looking to address in conjunction with neighbouring authorities and the Mayor of London.
- In response to a question regarding measures to address air quality in the borough, the meeting was advised that, since Islington is designated an air quality management area, over the years it has implemented a number of measures, such as introducing further parking charges for high polluting vehicles, school streets, school audits and ULEV streets, to mitigate the impact of pollution on the health of its residents. The Executive Member acknowledged that this issue could not be addressed by the Council alone and that it continues to work with neighbouring authorities and the Mayor of London, but that more would be required by central government including enacting legislation to reduce toxic air levels.
- In response to a question on whether the Council had plans to extend the school-streets initiative across the borough, and whether it would be recommending that schools undertake pollution audits, the Executive Member welcomed the 50 audits that had been funded by the Mayor of London, but that they would need to be analysed and any actions would require funding.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted.

The meeting ended at 10.25 pm

CHAIR