

London Borough of Islington

Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee - 17 December 2020

Minutes of the Virtual meeting of the Environment and Regeneration Committee on 17 December 2020 at 7.00 pm.

Present: Councillors: Poyser (Chair), Khondoker (Vice-Chair), Clarke, Graham, Jeapes and Russell

Also Present: Councillor Champion

Councillor Dave Poyser in the Chair

408 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)

Apologies were received from Councillors Convery and Ozdemir

409 DECLARATIONS OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item 2)

There were no declarations of substitute members

410 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest

411 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item 4)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2020 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

412 CHAIR'S REPORT (Item 5)

The Chair informed Members that as Councillor Shaikh was unwell item B.4. Quarter 2 Performance Report Employment and Skills would be deferred until the next meeting of the Committee

The Chair added that the issues relating to Clean Air had been followed up since the last meeting, and that in regard to Low Traffic Neighbourhoods and Safer Streets scrutiny had had an involvement in this, and discussions were continuing

The Chair also referred to the special meeting of the Committee arranged with stakeholders and the public, and that this had been arranged for 30 March

413 ORDER OF BUSINESS (Item 6)

The order of business would be as per the agenda ...

414 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item 7)

The Chair outlined the procedure for Public questions

415 LONDON POWER - PRESENTATION (Item B1)

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James Hardy, Head of Energy, London Power, GLA was present, and outlined a presentation to the Committee, copy interleaved

During consideration of the report the following main points were made –

- Background – the Energy market has seen some noticeable changes, but is still not working for large numbers of people, especially Londoners
- 50000 excess winter deaths in England and Wales last year, attributable to cold homes, 4200 in London
- Big 6 energy companies control 75% of the market, and 50% of people have never switched suppliers. London has the lowest level of switching
- Low income households spend 8% of their income on energy, compared to 4% of other households
- Many Londoners are on high tariffs
- Energy Company Obligation is the Government's key plank for reducing carbon emissions from home, and tackling fuel poverty
- In addition to high levels of fuel poverty, and low levels of energy switching, London has low levels of energy efficiency, smart meter installation and installation of solar panels
- London Power has partnered with Octopus Energy so that energy is fair and affordable with no exit fees, customers can move onto the cheapest, similar plan after 12 months, all electricity will be 100% renewable, there is carbon offsetting, world class customer service and reinvestment of profits
- Outlined the London Power offer, and the savings that customers could achieve switching to London Power
- Opportunities for London Power and Islington – Areas for action – Promote across the Borough, promote to social housing tenants to reduce the costs, use void services to give tenants a lower cost start and a fair deal, promote through fuel power and engagement activities to hit those hardest hit by excessive energy costs, promote to staff to get a green and fair deal
- Noted that the pre-payment tariffs were at least 2% cheaper than the price cap, and that this is one of the cheapest tariffs on the market
- Noted that 50% of consumers did not switch suppliers, and this was even more pronounced in London
- A Member expressed view that she had not changed suppliers, as the process appeared difficult, and also enquired if London Power knew where their energy came from, and whether it was all green energy. London Power stated that they had an agreement with Octopus Energy that they could not make excess profits, and London Power had partnered with Octopus Energy, as they had a reputation for excellent customer service, and competitive pricing. London Power added that it was actually easy to switch providers, and that this could be done within a few minutes. London Power also stated that whilst they wanted all energy to be green, and Octopus were investing in solar and wind power, at present there needed to be a blend of gas/nuclear and carbon offsetting, and the Government were actually proposing to invest in more nuclear energy sources
- In response to a question as to burning of rubbish for fuel, and the GLA position on this, it was stated that there were air quality concerns, and that this could be looked at
- A Member referred to the fact that he was on a pre-payment meter, and that on looking at the website he had found it difficult to navigate in order to switch suppliers. London Power stated that they would look into this to ensure that switching is as easy as possible
- Discussion took place as to the situation with voids, and it was stated that an interim solution had been found with the Green Energy Group, who were providing a service

on a not for profit basis, and debts of up to £15 were being cleared, and the 90 days standing charge had been waived

- London Power stated that they were working with 10 London Boroughs, and it was hoped that residents would sign up as Octopus are a competitive, good supplier of energy. London Power added that additional benefits were that it could give advice, and put residents in touch with other organisations, such as SHINE. Members were informed that the contact numbers of SHINE were 020 7527 5267 or a Freephone number is available 0800 953 2121
- In response to a question in relation to the termination of the contract with Robin Hood Energy, it was stated that the Council had not signed a termination agreement with the company on legal advice, however Robin Hood Energy were now going into administration
- Members were of the view that London Power appeared to be a good provider, and the recommendation that they should be a company of choice for residents should be considered by the Executive

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be noted

The Chair thanked James Hardy for his presentation

416

SCRUTINY REVIEW: VOLUNTEERS AND RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT WITH PARKS AND OPEN SPACES -12-MONTH REPORT BACK (Item B2)

Councillor Champion, Executive Member Environment and Transport was present and was accompanied by Barry Emerson, Environment and Regeneration Department and outlined the report

During consideration of the report the following main points were made –

- Noted that the Executive had agreed all the recommendations, with the exception of recommendations 3 and 4, which had been partially agreed
- Noted that work is taking place with L.B.Camden/Islington Public Health teams to establish parks as health assets and support physical and mental health
- Members were informed that the impact of COVID 19 had led to parks being utilised in a different way to in the past, and more people were visiting parks and to exercise and have social gatherings. This would mean that in future consideration would have to be given to more exercising space being provided, and to deal with problems of litter management
- There is a need to have more good quality open space in the borough
- A Member referred to the Octopus project in her ward and that this was an excellent project. It was stated that Parks did work regularly and had a good relationship with Housing to ensure the best use of greenspace is made on housing estates
- Noted that housing estates were a good provider of green space and work is taking place with housing to look at biodiversity and a bulb planting programme

The Chair thanked Councillor Champion and Barry Emerson for attending

417

Q2 PERFORMANCE REPORT (2020/21) - PLACE AND ENVIRONMENT (Item B3)

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Councillor Champion, Executive Member, Environment and Transport was present, and accompanied by Keith Townsend, Director of Environment and Regeneration, and outlined the report

During consideration of the report the following main points were made –

- It was noted that with regard to parking appeals, Islington were in the middle group of London Boroughs, however the parking service was undergoing reorganisation, and there was a need to ensure that the correct resources were in place
- In response to a question on fly tipping and graffiti, it was stated that the situation was being monitored, and that the increase in percentage terms was small
- In response to a question it was stated that whilst staff absence had increased, and additional agency staff had needed to be employed, it had been possible to maintain an effective service. Members congratulated the staff for their efforts during the pandemic
- In response to a question, it was stated that whilst recycling rates had increased there was less commercial waste being collected, as businesses were shut
- A Member referred to the excessive cardboard packaging on online deliveries, and it was stated that consideration needed to be given to how this can be done in this future
- A Member stated that there is a need to provide more Sheffield stands for cycles, and to look at measures to accommodate parking for cargo bikes. It was stated that this issue is being looked at, and that proposals would be submitted to the Executive in the near future thereon, as part of the Budget process

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted, and that staff be congratulated in Environment and Regeneration Department for their excellent work during the pandemic

The Chair thanked Councillor Champion and Keith Townsend for their presentation

418 QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE REPORT (2020/21)- EMPLOYMENT & SKILLS (Item B4)

The Chair stated that this item was deferred until the next meeting

419 WORK PROGRAMME 2020/2021 (Item B5)

Members expressed the view that a future meeting of the Committee, if necessary an additional meeting, should consider items on Regeneration issues, as this is an important part of the Committee's work

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted, and a future meeting of the Committee be arranged to focus solely on Regeneration/Economic Development issues

The meeting ended at 8.50 p.m.

CHAIR