

Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee - 15 July 2021

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD - Islington Town Hall on 15 July 2021 at 7.30 pm.

Present: Councillors: Clarke (Chair), Heather (Vice-Chair), Bell-Bradford, Jeapes, Ozdemir, Russell and Weekes

Also Present: Councillors: Champion and O'Sullivan

Councillor Tricia Clarke in the Chair

472 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Khondoker

473 DECLARATIONS OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item 2)

There were no declarations of substitute members

474 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest

475 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item 4)

RESOLVED:

That, subject to the addition in minute 468 paragraph 2 the addition of the words, in line 4 – there is also the need to look at the installation of planters and greening of areas where there are flytipping - the minutes of the meeting held on 8 June 2021 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

476 CHAIR'S REPORT (Item 5)

The Chair referred to the fact that items on GLL Leisure and NLWA would be added to the work programme for the Committee in September and November respectively. The Chair added that the first meeting of the informal working group on NLWA incinerator would be taking place on 20 July at 6.30 p.m. by Zoom and any Members who wished to attend could be sent the link

The Chair added that she was pleased to note that part of Highbury Fields was not being mown and she welcomed this

477 ORDER OF BUSINESS (Item 6)

The Chair stated that the order of business would be as per the agenda, and that evidence would be received from Professor Clarke from Westminster University and Councillor O'Sullivan Chair of Housing Scrutiny Committee

478 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item 7)**

The Chair stated that due to social distancing requirements and the limit on the number of people attending the meeting that any public questions should be directed to the Clerk following the meeting, as the meeting was being webcast

479 **SCRUTINY REVIEW: NET ZERO CARBON PROGRAMME- HOUSING (COUNCIL, PRIVATE OWNER OCCUPIED AND RENTED HOUSING) (Item B1)**

Simon Kwong, Director, Housing Property Services, Councillor O’Sullivan, Chair of Housing Scrutiny Committee, and Professor Linda Clarke, Westminster University were present and made witness submissions to the Committee. During consideration of the submissions the following main points were made –

- Professor Clarke stated that the main issue in terms of achieving net zero carbon in housing was the lack of a trained workforce, that more training needed to be undertaken in order to skill up the future workforce. In addition she noted that as the larger contractors often sub-contracted work out, they were not directly responsible for skilling their workforce.
- More training opportunities at college and also work experience should be made available, noting that the workforce in this industry tended to be more male dominated. Professor Clarke advised that this is an opportunity to look at models in Canada and Europe to ascertain best practice, and was concerned that presently there were not enough trainers to train the numbers of staff required. In addition a number of European staff, who were well trained had left after BREXIT which further exacerbated staffing shortages
- Meeting was advised that Islington should take advantage of its situation especially as it has a directly employed DL workforce, to train them up to broaden expertise and build a multi-skilled workforce. It was noted that workforce capacity in the DL workforce was an issue that was being looked at, in view of the speed of training and costs that this would involve. The current level of qualifications also needed to be raised and there needed to be a better understanding of the requirements of other trades when such workforce was trained
- Reference was made to the GLA construction hubs, that Councils should engage with them, and enter discussions with larger contractors to skill staff up, as well as ensuring that DLO workforces were engaged as well
- It was noted that with regard to retrofitting, London Councils are looking at this and there was a meeting the following week where this could be raised
- It was noted that LBI with its variety of housing stock, which presented a number of challenges, there is a need to balance the requirements of tenants and leaseholders, and the Council were looking at a workforce ‘roadmap’
- Noted that work was being undertaken by the Council in terms of employing apprenticeships and that evidence on this could come to the Committee
- Noted the initiative at Glasgow City Council which employs 2200 staff, and trains 60 apprentices, and focusing on building green homes and retrofitting. Also noted that the Holloway Prison site where discussions were taking place

with the GLA. It was felt that the Council could start a pilot to look at a fuel poverty estate and train up the workforce

Presentation by Simon Kwong

- Scope – residential homes, commercial and industrial buildings – commercial and industrial buildings c.323k tonnes of CO2 – 48% of all emissions. Residential homes c,246 tonnes of CO2 36% of all emissions, and new build Council homes, existing Council stock including street properties, Housing Association properties, and privately owned properties
- The Challenge – reducing carbon emissions from residential buildings which consist of 172,324 tonnes from gas 79%, 72434 tonnes from electricity 29%, 1726 tonnes from other fuels 1%. Mitigating fuel poverty – lower energy efficiency of a home drives increase in fuel costs
- Objectives – to reduce carbon emissions from our buildings - have to replace communal gas heating with low carbon alternatives where feasible, maximise energy efficiency of buildings through retrofit of fittings, change the technical standards that we use to design and construct new buildings. Encourage behaviour change from, and provide support to owners of residential homes, to reduce carbon emissions from their properties. As it is unlikely the Council would be able to assist financially for those able to pay, there was a need to have an engagement and communication strategy in place and this was being looked at
- Deliverables – key priority to change the technical standards that are used to design and construct new buildings. Achieved to date - a comprehensive review of how our new build programme can meet the net zero carbon target, developed a decarbonising new homes strategy with agreed implementation strategy, introduced new measures to ensure that development plans, wherever possible, make a positive contribution to the protection, enhancement, creation and management of biodiversity and improved carbon absorption
- Deliverables – what we want to achieve in the next 12 months – develop a design compliance process to ensure net zero carbon strategy is being incorporated throughout all stages of build development. Produce technical specifications for incorporation into Islington’s new homes design requirements. Implement a post-construction building performance data management strategy, better support occupants of new homes to ensure they understand new, unfamiliar systems, and to promote/encourage greater energy efficiency
- Deliverables existing Council housing stock – key priorities to replace gas heating with low carbon alternatives, where feasible, and retrofit all domestic buildings to an average level of EPCB where feasible
- What has been achieved so far – worked with UC London to complete an analysis of retrofitting and energy changes to existing Council housing stock. The work sets out a summary overview of existing, and future technologies, in the net zero market, how technologies can help deliver the required emission reductions, alongside the benefits and draw up different options. Also the strategic level of opportunities and costs associated with taking different routes toward net zero carbon. The work assists the formation of

the Council strategy to ensure Council homes support the delivery of the 2030 net zero carbon target

- Deliverables – what we want to achieve in the next 12 months – feasibility study into delivering a large scale trial of low carbon heating solutions on a pilot estate. Commission appraisal of building elements, lighting, heating pipework insulation, lifts, to determine most effective areas for retrofit investment. Purchase of a building stock model that identifies the most feasible improvements to residential properties in order to eliminate emissions. Ongoing feasibility studies for minimising the carbon footprint of larger housing estates
- Deliverables – Privately owned homes – emerging offer funding support for eligible property owners, support for able to pay private property owners, access to borrowing/loan schemes, compliance and enforcement. Activity in this area includes – delivery of green homes grant, ECO flex scheme to identify households to qualify for grants under the Warmer Homes schemes, development of a realistic offer for able to pay private occupiers, loan schemes, working with landlords of privately rented homes to ensure that their properties are compliant with Minimum energy efficiency standards. Investigating the possibility of setting a higher energy efficiency standard for licensed rented housing, and delivery of a landlord awareness/engagement programme
Empowerment, engaging and influencing others to achieve net zero carbon – 4% of the borough's carbon emissions are generated by the Council, 9% are generated by other activity. Residents, businesses community groups and borough partner organisations must all play their part, with the Council leading by example. Other priority activities for engaging and influencing – stakeholder engagement plan with a priority focus on residential homes and commercial businesses, Islington Climate Change emergency festival, London Council climate change programme (Retrofit), COP 26 opportunities
- Other opportunities included – green jobs and skills e.g. retrofitting, Green SCIES and Bunhill 2 e.g. connection opportunities, greening the borough, adoption of the new local plan
- A Member referred to the greening of Andover Estate and that this had made considerable improvements and assisted in reducing carbon at a relatively low cost. It was stated that work is taking place on a number of schemes, and Public Realm were also looking at ways to green the borough. However work is also taking place to reduce carbon in housing by looking at the use of heat pumps, and replacing individual gas boilers. However there was a need to balance the costs involved for the HRA and for tenants and leaseholders and achieve an equitable balance
- Reference was made to the UCL report, that this should be made available to Members when finalised
- In response to a question it was stated that it was not possible that every property could be retrofitted, that it is essential initially to retrofit properties with the most impact on carbon reduction
- It was noted that although most properties could achieve ECPB status, however it might not be economically viable to achieve this status in some properties

- The Council needs clear guidance from the Government as to what funding opportunities would be made available
- The Chair of Housing Scrutiny Committee stated that in his view the first thing that should be considered was insulation of properties, and other possibilities included double/triple glazing, underfloor heating, thermostatic valves on radiators, storage heaters, metering, solar panels, thermometer valves, and that most of these technologies were well advanced. He added that at present there is a lack of knowledge and training for the workforce in the construction industry. In his view the most important measure to introduce with the most impact in reducing carbon emissions quickly was installation of insulation. Some of these solutions can be done quickly and relatively inexpensively
- Reference was made to the fact that every effort should be made for easy installation of solar panels, however it was noted that issues existed around its impact in conservation areas, installation problems and maintenance issues, however it was noted that solar roof tiles are now available
- With regards to installation of solar panels on schools, meeting was advised this had been done in some cases, however the Council were looking at all options such as using railway embankments, and schools to maximise solar power

RESOLVED:

That the UCL report be circulated to Members of the Committee when available

The Chair thanked Professor Clarke, Councillor O'Sullivan and Simon Kwong for attending

480 WORK PROGRAMME 2021/22 (Item B2)

RESOLVED;

That the report be noted

The meeting ended at 9.20 p.m.

CHAIR