

London Borough of Islington

Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee - 3 October 2022

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on 3 October 2022 at 7.30 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Clarke (Chair), Heather (Vice-Chair), Jeapes, Craig, Gilgunn, Hayes, Zammit, Weekes and Jegorovas-Armstrong

Councillor Tricia Clarke in the Chair

38 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)

None.

39 DECLARATIONS OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item 2)

None.

40 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item 3)

None.

41 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item 4)

RESOLVED:

The minutes of the meeting in September would be taken to the meeting in November

42 CHAIR'S REPORT (Item 5)

The Chair reminded the Committee of the informal Working Group held on 17 October 2022, which regarded sustainable and affordable energy. Chetan Lad, Interim Head of Energy at the GLA attended the Meeting that took place in November.

On 15 September 2022, the Chair attended the pesticide action that works meeting on pesticide-free boroughs and the speakers from Manchester and Hackney explained that becoming pesticide-free was best done slowly and was an on-going learning process for Local Authorities. The chair asked the committee if they would like a member of pesticide action to be invited to a future committee meeting. The committee agreed.

Finally, the Chair reminded the committee about the thriving neighbourhoods annual investment programme that opened on 26 September 2022, and it closed on the 31 October 2022. Anyone who lived on an Islington council estate was part of an Islington estate-based community centre or worked for the council, could submit applications. The meeting was invited to put forward ideas and asked to reach out to residents for their suggestions. The Chair highlighted that this was a good opportunity and there was money available to be used for promising ideas.

43 **ORDER OF BUSINESS (Item 6)**

John Ryan presented first on item B5 Islington Trees and Drought Update. Item B2 had been deferred to the next committee meeting in November. The remaining items were as per the order in the Agenda.

44 **EXTERNAL SPEAKERS (Item 7)**

None.

45 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item 8)**

To be taken with the relevant items.

46 **ISLINGTON TREES AND DROUGHT UPDATE (Item B5)**

Jon Ryan, Arboriculture Manager at London Borough of Islington, presented this item to the Committee. Key points in the discussion were raised:

- In response to questions about funding and resources, Jon explained they were waiting for a grant funding result which would provide funding for two years. He explained he had also spoken to Tony Ralph on the issue of staff resources to see if parking charges can help fund a tree-planting officer.
- He also explained that he wanted to increase engagement and make the process more streamlined and systematic.
- He explained they had been overwhelmed with enquiries and complaints over location and size of certain trees but reassured members the tree policy was very strong, and this dictates which trees can be cut and pruned and they would not stray from this.
- The dead-tree hunt next week would reveal how many trees from the forest for change project. As these were put in a nursery before planting, they would still fall under a guarantee from the contractor so they should have all survived or would be replaced if they had not.
- Mature trees managed during drought conditions due to their broad spreading roots. If there was a species that start to struggle with increasing climate change symptoms, these trees would not be watered and unfortunately it would have to be accepted that some species would not survive climate change conditions.
- If medium trees grew into large trees, and continued to flourish, this would provide even more canopy cover in the borough.
- Subsidence was a major risk to large healthy trees; Islington was renowned in the insurance industry for robustly challenging subsidence claims and there was an officer whose primary job was to deal with insurance claims of this nature.
- More droughts led to more insurance claims which in turn put trees on a 'maintenance cycle' which uses a large amount funding.
- There was a manifesto pledge for 600 net trees per year and repurpose 1.5 hectares of space into green spaces.
- Trees would need to be planted on buildings due to the lack of ground space available.
- An update on the programme of spraying, and the use of glyphosate in the borough had been sought and a response was being awaited on.

RESOLVED:

Members noted the presentations

47 **SCRUTINY REVIEW- COUNCIL BUILDINGS AND HOMES (Item B1)**

Matt West, Director of Housing and Property Services, presented this item to the Committee. Key points in the discussion were raised:

- On green jobs, in terms of funding, with a £1.5 billion gap, every penny counted. Three grants had been applied for to date and any opportunity that arises to apply for a grant or bid was taken.
- There were schemes looking at heat networks across the board. Looking into cross-borough boundary heat networks. Matt explained he would come back to the committee with more information on heat networks, especially the NLWA. Keith Townsend explained there was a collaborative project currently with all North London boroughs to see if it was possible to connect heat networks using the NLWA. There had also been talks with the Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy and the GLA to support funding.
- There were not currently plans to offer grants to landlords for retrofitting schemes but would signpost available government grants and launch an accredited supply list of local traders and builders.
- In response to concerns from members over the level of detail included, Matt explained this report was an update on the annual report which provided more details on the plans to achieve net zero carbon.
- He explained housing associations can be hard to deal with and different ones provide various levels of detail on their strategies. Moreover, they were currently more focused on their safety strategies.
- Currently it was difficult to give feasible figures on the level of disruption to Bevin Court during the works, it will mostly likely be on the boiler room and they were working to minimise disruption.
- The higher the grant received the less charge was put on leaseholders and the more schemes can be run.
- UCL had done modelling to energy costs with retrofitting provisions, this was quite granular so could be picked up on different schemes. It has been challenging to model these costs due to the continued rising fuel costs.
- He explained all council properties had feasibility studies done and looking at options of retrofitting for these.

RESOLVED:

Members noted the report

48 **Q1 PERFORMANCE REPORT (2022/23) - LIBRARIES AND HERITAGE (Item B2)**

Deferred.

49 **Q1 PERFORMANCE REPORT (2022/23) - NET ZERO CARBON PROGRAMME (Item B3)**

Sarah Hitchcock and Keith Townsend, Corporate director for Environment presented this item to the Committee. Key Points in the discussion were raised:

- The chair raised issue with some of the wording used in the report.
- Sarah Hitchcock explained in terms of skill strategy, work was undertaken in tandem with other boroughs to ensure strategy was aligned. As well as heavily incorporating and exploring further opportunities for green skills.
- The Action Plan was grouped into different sections from the core strategy and aimed to ensure local businesses had access to a skilled local workforce.
- The community forum had been delayed due to recruitment issues.

- They plan to make the action plan and what was needed clearer as well as the introduction of KPIs to see what can be delivered more accurately and better. It was hoped that an increase in community engagement will run alongside this.
- In terms of score cards, the Council came out strongly in engagement planning but had sadly fell short in other areas.
- There were plans to do stakeholder mapping with work steams to understand who they work with and how they collaborate with them. This would allow a more targeted approach for the delivering of work.
- In response to questions on Citizens assemblies it was explained they were very costly so the best ways to engage with citizens was being identified and it was hoped the new strategy would help identify these.
- There had been challenges with decarbonising machinery due to it being unreliable and very costly to do so. There would not be commitment to machinery until it could be ensured that it would be reliable.
- Work was undertaken with the pensions and investment teams to understand the decarbonisation of the pension fund and more frequent updates have been requested.
- In response to questions from the public, it was explained that there had not been enough progress made in terms of engagement. There was not currently the infrastructure to facilitate this, therefore ways to make engagement more inclusive were being investigated. Sarah also explained that an SPD officer was being recruited and thanked the resident for their contributions to the work surrounding SPD.

RESOLVED:

Members noted the report

50

EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT - ANNUAL PERFORMANCE REPORT (Item B4)

The Executive Member for Environment and Transport presented this item to the Committee. Key points in the discussion were raised:

- The Executive Member began by reflecting on the progress over the last two years, explaining there had not previously been a net zero carbon team or programme and the progress made as well as embedding net zero carbon across all of Council activity had been a great achievement for the Council.
- The climate crises had affected Islington in many ways with increased temperatures and heat episodes, as well as surface water flooding.
- The Council were trying to tackle these issues with different policies such as people friendly streets, retrofitting and creating greener spaces. These issues had become more urgent with the imminent climate crisis.
- The net zero policies would also help tackle other crises such as energy crises and cost of living crisis. Retrofitting for example would lower energy costs and help make bills cheaper.
- Organisations such as SHINE had an increased workload with the increasing crises and their help with residents had been so important and useful.
- Projects such as GreenSCIES should come to fruition in the coming year.
- WHO had issued guidance reducing guidance on what was an acceptable level of air pollution
- While the report was promising there had still been a lot of work to do.
- In response to questions from Members, the Executive Member explained the planter scheme had morphed into a half a million-pound Islington together scheme.

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- There needed to be a paradigm shift on waste and recycling, but this had been extremely difficult. There needed to be more recycling on estates and there had been a greater focus on these areas, but the recycling team did not have the capacity to do more audits or make this more sustainable currently. Two officers had been recruited to now do this. Reducing food waste was crucial in helping with overall waste and recycling policies.
- The Executive Member explained that recycling figures had dropped across London whole residual waste had increased. But these had both decreased across North London, however it was hard to know the exact reason why. The priority for the council was reduced waste overall and increased recycling.
- SHINE was being reviewed as part of the Renewable Power for London programme partly through the GLA and partly through energy companies' renewable commitments. Demand had risen for such companies and therefore the council had explored how to best help organisations such as SHINE.
- The Mayor of London had launched a London wide advice service about energy and retrofitting through the energy saving trust.
- There had been issue regarding Cycle Hangars in the borough due to manual handling of systems, a new IT system was needed which unfortunately takes time but once this was in place it should be a smoother operation.
- Islington had received Gold Status in Islington in Bloom.
- There had been encouragement of parklets, but this would require community help to look after these as the council did not have capacity to do so.
- The executive member explained the links between air quality and climate change, and health was being explored and there would be an update to committee once more information was available.

RESOLVED:

Members noted the report

51 WORKPLAN 2022/23 (Item B6)

RESOLVED:

Members noted the workplan

The meeting ended at 9.44 pm

CHAIR