

Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee - 18 April 2023

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held as a Virtual Meeting on 18 April 2023 at 7.00 pm.

Councillor Tricia Clarke in the Chair

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)

Apologies Received from Cllr Weekes.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item 2)

None.

3 CHAIR'S REPORT (Item 3)

The Chair, Cllr Clarke, updated the meeting on the work the council had accomplished over the last year, she explained this was the 4th Annual special meeting since a climate emergency was declared in 2019. Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee had worked hard over the last year to scrutinise the council's Net Zero Carbon Strategy and all workstreams surrounding this. The committee had also considered period waste, last mile deliveries and residual waste and recycling. The committee had also received presentations from external organisations and speakers such as the North London Waste Authority, as well as presentations on urban food growing and affordable and sustainable energy community groups. As well as this the committee had hosted various working groups to hear from community groups on the likes of retrofitting and community energy.

4 REACHING OUR 2030 NET ZERO CARBON TARGET (Item 4)

Cllr Clarke invited the Executive Member for Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee, Cllr Champion to address the meeting and give a presentation, a copy of which can be found on the Democracy Website. The following main points were made:

- A Climate emergency was declared in 2019 which had a huge impact on Islington residents and people's lives; Islington was a particularly vulnerable borough and was 1 of 6 boroughs most susceptible to climate change due to very little green space and the heat island effect where heat is radiated off surfaces and little absorption of rainfall.
- The Council's main priorities fell under these categories: Housing, buildings, and infrastructure; Transport; Sustainable and affordable energy; Green economy; Natural environment and waste; Planning; Engagement, empowering and partnering; Finance. Each of which workstream was headed by Senior Officers. There was an aim to reduce the Council's environmental impact to help the Borough overall.
- The Executive member made it clear that a top priority for the Council was to engage with residents in all avenues and workstreams to reach the Net Zero Carbon 2030 target. The council welcomed any feedback from residents and would be happy to hear from those with ideas and concerns.
- **Housing, buildings, and infrastructure:** the corporate energy savings programme is forecast to save more than £5 million on energy bills over three years; the council secured £3.5m in grant funding to bring energy efficiency measures

to 403 homes; the Energising Small Business Grant scheme has awarded a total of £160k to 128 businesses, saving 161 tonnes of CO₂.

- **Transport:** Air Quality had improved from 2019 to 2022; School Streets are set to be introduced at secondary schools from 2023/24; Liveable neighbourhoods will see new green spaces, community enhancements, and public realm improvements to make Islington more resilient to climate change.
- **Sustainable and affordable energy:** solar panels were being installed on five council buildings, including the Ecology Centre, and Laycock Building; Seasonal Health Intervention Network (SHINE) supported 3,014 residents in 2022/23, saving 651 tonnes in carbon.
- **Green Economy:** £60k Defra funding being used to deliver Smarter Greener Logistics programme, including potential shared e-cargo bikes programme.
- **Natural environment and waste:** working to create a zero emissions waste-collection fleet by 2030.
- **Planning:** Developing a new net-zero Supplementary Planning Document. Directly engaging with residents and businesses on this.
- **Engaging, empowering, and partnering:** Supported the Islington Environmental Alliance, Islington Climate Centre, and Union Chapel in delivering the borough's first Circular Economy event in September 2022; Launching Go Zero
- **Finance:** Raised more than £9m through external grants in 2022/23, and the council is working with partners including the Green Finance Institute to realise its net-zero carbon ambitions.

Cllr Tricia Clarke invited the Corporate Director for Environment and Regeneration, Keith Townsend to address the meeting and give a presentation, a copy of which can be found on the Democracy Website. The following main points were made:

- The council had continued to be committed to engaging with residents and external stakeholders on creating a road map to 2030
- The Corporate Director commented on highlights from the last year, and reported that an officer had been appointed to develop a Net Zero Carbon Supplementary Planning Document (SPD).
- A green construction officer was to be appointed to enable in house and external capacity to deliver retrofit.
- The council was working with Green Finance Institute and others to explore alternative funding mechanisms including loans and property linked finance.
- The council was also working with community energy organisations such as Cally Energy, to look at opportunities of how they could be part of the solution alongside retrofit.
- The Mayor of London was to issue a 'green bond' in due course; this would bring inward investment on top of council's own investment.
- The council had introduced a food waste trial for flats above shops. A new Islington Food Strategy had been published and the council was working with ReLondon via London Councils on Eat Like a Londoner campaign.
- The council was seeking to increase engagement with residents through the participation and engagement team, a new online consultation programme and a new digital engagement tool to support residents.
- The Corporate Director summarised the work to set up a Let's Talk Net Zero citizens panel model.
- The Anchor Institutions Network was launched October 2022 with 9 founding members. Driving Net Zero Engagement was launching April 2023 where residents, partners and staff encouraged to consider greener lifestyle choices.
- There had been a sports equipment reuse recycling event with Arsenal FC who were actively participating with the council to produce positive outcomes.

Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee - 18 April 2023

- Overall, there had been huge progress over the last few years since the launch of NZC2030 but more change is needed to reach the 2030 target with collaboration and behavioural changes playing a key role in achieving this.

Cllr Clarke thanked both the Executive Member for Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee, Cllr Champion and the Corporate Director for Environment and Regeneration, Keith Townsend for their presentations and moved the discussion to smaller breakout groups. Key Points raised in each group were:

Group 1: Supporting retrofit and low carbon development in our borough – introducing the Net Zero Carbon Supplementary Planning Document and how you can shape it.

- The Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) was planned to build on the existing local plans and where necessary replace or revise existing guidance so that it became in line with new technologies and policies implemented. The new local plan would have provided the strategic policies and the SPD would provide more detail.
- The planning team had invested funding for further resourcing, meaning they had more capacity to offer free advice to residents who needed it. A simple English guide to permitted development rights had also been prepared which had been available on the planning website, this guide explains when planning permission is or isn't needed.
- Concerns were raised over how to fit Air Source Heat Pumps (ASHP) and Ground Source Heat Pumps (GSHP) in housing with no gardens or flat blocks where multiple residents would have to agree to the installation or there were not the facilities to install either style of pump. Officers understood the concerns and wanted to work with residents to address these. A suggestion from a resident was to allow residents on terrace streets to make joint applications.
- Officers explained the SPD aimed to remove uncertainty prior to applications being submitted.
- Officers explained the Council had a large and diverse property stock and a lot of work had been done to bring properties to a decent energy standard, with the majority of properties now up to a band C
- The council had applied and been successful for two waves of Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund and the council would prioritise key areas.
- As well as helping the council reach Net Zero, retrofitting also had economic benefit and could have made bills cheaper for residents by making their homes more energy efficient. However, the implementation of retrofitting is costly and not a burden all residents would be able to bear. A resident suggested the council providing grants or a repayment scheme.
- Overall residents need to be given clear advice as to what is able to be implemented and the cost is the main barrier as to why many people can't implement retrofit measures.

Group 2: Resident Perceptions of Net Zero – how can we all engage with our networks in a way that has most impact and ensure that the programme meets the needs of local people?

- Over the last year the council has aimed to provide good news comms around the environment, the main focus of which had been on: Planting schemes, recycling, electric vehicles, low traffic and liveable neighbourhoods.
- There had been many events held, the highlight of which included Repair Week, resulting in positive engagement with the community to repair furniture, tech, bicycles and many other things.
- Earth day and the GoZero campaign had launched in collaboration with the Anchor Institutions. Arsenal Football Club had also held an Earth Day event to encourage local people and fans to upcycle and reuse trainers.
- New skilling up teams created to better understand and act on climate change.

- A new online consultation platform had been produced to help increase and modernise engagement.
- There had been a communications audit on the Net Zero Carbon target which had the following aims: Visual identity for net zero needs unification and further development on branding is needed to clarify the mission; improvement in narrative to encourage engagement; develop tools to support colleagues on good climate engagement.
- Islington had commissioned Hackney Council to support brand work, the focus groups looked at: waste and recycling, transport, and Energy.
- From the commission, individual benefit messaging was the most effective way for engaging residents, people engaged with ways to save money. For branding, people preferred simple messaging with no jargon, financial messages were key and photos of people instead of graphic images.
- The Council wanted to create a Citizens Panel with a purpose of allowing residents to provide an ongoing scrutiny function. This would consist of around 40 people with a high level of diversity to represent the diversity of the borough, to seek a diverse perspective and understand the real-world challenges surrounding the climate emergency.
- Residents had concerns that 40 people would not have been a high enough number. Officers explained that after research they believe 40 is the right amount to represent diverse views and is a manageable size but this was an estimate and not the final number.
- On suggestions of taking an approach similar to Camden Council of a 'rotating' panel system of smaller groups of 15 people, officers responded that eventually this is a model they would have liked to follow and hope to reach this point once the original panel had developed. They would also support increased engagement through the new digital model which would have facilitated exchanges of information.
- Officers explained that while Islington has many Champions Groups, they were considering how best to mobilise these to be able to do more and better engage.
- Officers also explained the work of the Green Spaces Teams, a small team that help residents on estate with green initiatives and explained they wanted to build on this but would require goodwill and help from residents.
- On Delivering the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) officers explained it had been difficult to gain access to people's homes but as wave 3 begins they would need to engage with people to help them understand the importance of the project.
- Overall, the Council had explored barriers to waste and recycling, active travel and retrofit and had put together demographically diverse groups to open engagement, capture feedback and act on outputs

Group 3: How do we move to a more Circular Economy? How do we motivate people to reuse, repair and reduce waste? How to support businesses to adopt more sustainable practices?

- Residents gave high praise to the repair workshop the Council had put on and said it was a really good event and they would like to see more of a similar thing on a more regular basis. The Council was looking at ways to expand on more regular schemes such as the repair workshop due to the huge success this was.
- Residents suggested a 'Circular Economy Showcase Event' which would allow circular businesses, including the businesses that the Council had given grants, to demonstrate how they were committed to the Circular Economy. This would provide residents more sight of how the Circular Economy works and what was already being done in Islington.

- One major barrier for residents was a lack of understanding on how to make technology last longer.
- Mer-IT offer free repairs on Fridays; however, people seem to have had a distrust in free services.
- Residents also raised concerns that there was an image barrier to reusing as for young people fast fashion and social media has led to vast amounts of overconsumption. Moreover, historically there had been 'class' implications to reusing and this is an issue that needs to be addressed.
- Residents raised the point that it was important to identify key barriers to different types of re-use, for example people have different apprehensions over reusing a mattress compared to reusing a mobile phone, identifying the barriers is the first step, breaking these barriers down is paramount to helping achieve Net Zero Carbon and address the Climate Emergency.
- An idea put forward consisted of a service via supermarket or somewhere where people spend a lot of time before coming back. This removed the pressure from individuals having to find extra time and make extra journeys to be able to access this.
- One key thing the Council had been doing was working with the NLWA to see what opportunities there were to make materials available from the site to local businesses instead of sending these out of Islington.
- While the Council didn't have a strong insight into leasing technology, a business model that had been considered was lending laptops and being able to swap these when needed.
- Overall, more information on better explain how and what the Circular Economy is needs to be readily available to Islington residents and businesses and the council need to work on breaking down the barriers that may stop businesses or residents in participating in this.

Group 4: Changing the way we travel - how we can step up the move to active travel in the borough?

- The Council had been creating infrastructure to enable active travel to happen, such as, – liveable neighbourhoods, cycleways, new crossings and bike parking. As well as ongoing support of active travel through, bike training, bike maintenance and working with schools.
- More however, needed to be done to motivate people to travel more actively and the council had continued to work to support people but realised there were still barriers to this.
- Some barriers included: cycling was still not perceived as safe, there needed to be more cycling infrastructure; health issues could inhibit people from forms of active travel; lack of facilities for storing bikes and the cost of these; lack of imperative to change, to some people it does not feel like there is an emergency; lack of understanding and engagement to the effects of motor vehicles; around 1/3 of residents still saying they would not want to give up their motor vehicles.
- Suggestions for overcoming these barriers included: Join up living neighbourhoods with bike and walking paths and green spaces; greater focus on those who have largest impact; working with schools and community businesses such as GPs and those that people would actually take advice from; organise more car free days and mobilise support for 'play streets'; Evaluate the roaming scheme, that enables people to travel between 11am and 3pm with less restrictions; more bike spaces near heavily used areas such as shopping areas, the good spaces are already full so this needs expanding; pedestrianizing some roads and areas.

Cllr Clarke thanked everyone for attending and their participation in this year's Special Meeting and encouraged residents to attend other Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee Meetings which were all held in public.

The meeting ended at 8:55pm

CHAIR