

Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee - 25 January 2024

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held at Islington Town Hall, Upper St, N1 2UD on 25 January 2024 at 7.30 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Clarke (Chair), Jeapes (Vice-Chair), Craig, Hayes, Zammit, Weekes and Russell

Councillor Tricia Clarke in the Chair

57 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Gilgunn

58 DECLARATIONS OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item 2)

No Substitutes were declared.

59 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item 3)

There were no Declarations of Interest.

60 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item 4)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the chair be authorised to sign them.

61 CHAIR'S REPORT (Item 5)

The Chair updated the committee, explaining the third and final meeting of our task and finish group on the inclusive economy was to be held in February. It was planned to have a presentation on repair workshops held at the climate centre, and Matthew Homer, the officer leading on the library of things. The Labour Environment Forum were planning a public meeting on Thursday, the 8th of February 2024 in Morland Street. Trade unionists from cross north London discussed how they might network to promote the positive changes needed for a sustainable and fair economy. Finally, the date for our special meeting, held in public on the climate emergency, was moved from the 25th of March to the 11th of March due to the GLA elections.

62 ORDER OF BUSINESS (Item 6)

The Order of business changed so that the B11 Quarter 2 Performance Report (2023/24) - Libraries and Heritage was presented second and B13 Quarter 2 Performance Report (2023/24) – Employment and Skills was presented third.

63 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item 7)

Public Questions were taken after each item

64

ACTIVE TRAVEL EVIDENCE SESSION - WHEELS FOR WELLBEING, JOYRIDERS, TFL (Item 8)

The committee received presentations from Wheels for Wellbeing, JoyRiders and Transport for London as part of the evidence gathering sessions for the Active Travel Scrutiny Review.

Wheels for Wellbeing

Our organisation, a small charity led by disabled individuals, was established in 2007. Initially, our focus was on providing access to cycling for disabled individuals in South London through three inclusive cycling hubs. Over time, our efforts expanded beyond this, evolving into a campaigning and policy-influencing. We began offering training, consultancy services, and publishing materials to advocate for increased mobility justice. Our central aim was redirecting resources towards those with the least access to transport, particularly emphasising the needs of disabled individuals.

Notably, 22% of the UK population identified as disabled, with disabled individuals being 50% more likely to live in poverty compared to the non-disabled population. Moreover, disparities in access to transportation were stark, with 28% of disabled adults living in households without cars, compared to 15% of non-disabled adults. Regarding public transport, 40% of UK stations were inaccessible, a figure that is even higher in certain areas like Islington. Furthermore, only 10% of people with mobility impairments had access to aids enabling a 1-kilometer journey, showing the challenges faced by disabled people to even be able to make short journeys.

Surveys revealed that among disabled individuals who cycled, 53% cited infrastructure as the main barrier, followed by inadequate parking/storage facilities and cost concerns. Abuse incidents while cycling were reported by 24% of respondents, showing safety issues also ranked highly as a barrier.

Despite these obstacles, there was a desire among disabled individuals to cycle, with 33% expressing interest despite not currently cycling. Notably, 60% of current disabled cyclists used standard two-wheelers, challenging stereotypes about cycling accessibility.

With the concept of equity in active travel, it was emphasised the distinction between equality and equity. While equality seeks uniformity in provision, equity aims to provide tailored support based on individual needs, ensuring fair access for all. By focusing on equitable access to mobility, the benefits extend far beyond individual modes of transportation, enriching communities as a whole.

In Islington, positive initiatives were already underway, including inclusive cycling hubs like Pedal Power. Collaborations with organisations like Bike Works aimed to enhance accessibility further, reflecting a commitment to inclusivity. By prioritising the needs of the most marginalised, we argued, society as a whole stands to gain in numerous ways, from improved health outcomes to enhanced independence.

JoyRiders

Let me share a bit about my journey and the work we've been doing. I was born in the Netherlands cycling was a part of everyday life. I rode my first bike at the age of 3 and continued cycling through school and university without giving it much thought. In 2008, I moved to London.

While I didn't cycle much in my early adult life due to health issues, my perspective changed when my children needed bikes to cycle to school. Despite not seeing many cyclists like myself in London at the time, I took the plunge and bought a bike. Cycling became a liberating experience for me, providing a sense of independence in a city reliant on buses and public transport.

In 2017, I discovered JoyRiders, a group of women who rode together. I quickly became involved, eventually becoming a ride leader and trained cycling instructor. By November 2019, we secured our first major funding, and despite the challenges brought by COVID-19, we adapted our activities online, leading to unexpected growth in our community.

One of the key factors contributing to our success, especially in the early days, was the support we received from local authorities, particularly in providing infrastructure and resources. For instance, the provision of cycle hubs, maintained by the council, has been invaluable not only to JoyRiders but also to various other cycling groups in the community.

Looking ahead to 2023, our initiatives have expanded to encompass social bikeways for women across 10 London boroughs and other cities. We've also become a Bikeability provider and launched the Right to Ride program, focusing on marginalised and ethnic minority communities. Outreach remains a cornerstone of our approach, ensuring that cycling is accessible to everyone.

However, we've encountered challenges, notably in the realm of bike parking. Limited and insecure cycle storage poses a significant barrier, particularly for families and residents in social housing. Addressing this issue requires collaboration between local authorities, community organisations, and developers to provide safe and convenient cycling infrastructure for all.

Our work goes beyond simply promoting cycling; it's about creating inclusive and safe spaces where everyone, regardless of background or ability, can enjoy the benefits of cycling. It's about empowering individuals, fostering community connections, and advocating for systemic changes to make cycling a viable option for all. As we continue to grow and evolve, our goal remains clear: to make cycling accessible, enjoyable, and safe for everyone.

Transport for London (TfL)

Cycling levels in London have been steadily increasing, with cycling emerging as the fastest-growing mode of transportation. Despite starting from a relatively low base, we've witnessed a notable rise in cycling, even during periods of reduced travel demand overall. This growth has been particularly evident in areas where new cycle routes have been introduced.

In 2023, there were 1.26 million cycling journeys, marking a 6% increase from 2022 and a 20% surge compared to pre-pandemic levels. This sustained growth indicates a fundamental shift in transportation preferences, with cycling becoming an increasingly popular choice for Londoners. We estimate that up to two-thirds of car trips in London could potentially be replaced by cycling, presenting a significant opportunity to reduce reliance on cars and align with the Mayor's Transport Strategy goals.

While commuting has been a primary driver of cycling growth, we recognise the need to diversify cycling demographics. It's essential to ensure that cycling is accessible to all Londoners for various purposes, including commuting, running errands, and leisure activities. We aim to see greater representation from women,

older adults, disabled individuals, children, and diverse ethnic groups among cyclists, reflecting the diversity of London's population. Despite progress, significant barriers to cycling persist, particularly concerning road safety concerns. Road danger remains a top concern for potential cyclists, with women, parents, and older Londoners citing safety fears as a deterrent. Addressing these safety concerns is crucial to fostering a more inclusive cycling environment. Additionally, various other barriers, including cost, practicality, social factors, and personal preferences, hinder cycling uptake among underrepresented groups. Efforts to overcome these barriers require a multifaceted approach, including infrastructure improvements, targeted outreach, and community engagement. Over the years, we've made significant strides in expanding cycling infrastructure, tripling the size of the cycleway network from 2016 to 2023. Our strategic cycle network plan aims to ensure that 40% of Londoners live within 400 meters of the cycleway network by 2030, it is at about 22% today. This comprehensive approach involves developing orbital routes, enhancing cycle parking facilities, expanding cycle hire schemes, and providing cycle training initiatives. Furthermore, initiatives like low-traffic neighbourhoods have proven effective in promoting cycling uptake while enhancing road safety and reducing traffic congestion and also associated with a 50% reduction in road casualties. By prioritising investment in cycling infrastructure and implementing supportive policies, we aim to create a more cycling-friendly environment that encourages diverse participation and improves overall mobility in London.

Discussion

During the discussion, it was highlighted the importance of promoting cycling as a mode of transportation and addressing barriers to its adoption. One key point emphasised was the significant health benefits of cycling, there was a need to raise awareness about these health advantages and invest in better cycling infrastructure, taking inspiration from countries like the Netherlands where cycling is more prevalent among women. It was also noted that many disabled individuals start cycling for its health benefits and become highly engaged once they begin. Challenges such as traffic lights favouring vehicular traffic, persuading suburban residents to cycle, and adverse weather conditions were acknowledged. Developing cycling groups further was suggested as a way to encourage cycling in all weather conditions and shift cultural attitudes towards cycling. Questions were raised about the utilisation of provided bikes and the accessibility of cycling equipment for disabled cyclists, especially those living in flats. Suggestions were made for boroughs to prioritise addressing these issues and making access to cycles more affordable. In terms of planning, concerns were raised about the timeline for the strategic network plan, with suggestions for expedited implementation. It was suggested that political will and funding could accelerate the process, especially with the increasing prevalence of Low Traffic Neighborhoods (LTNs) facilitating easier implementations. Overall, the discussion showed the multifaceted benefits of cycling and the importance of addressing various barriers to promote cycling as an accessible and sustainable mode of transportation.

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The Executive Member for Equalities, Culture and Inclusion presented this item to the committee.

There had been an uplift in library attendance and online engagement, particularly compared to the previous quarter, which saw lower numbers potentially due to hot weather. This could also be attributed the recent increase to a combination of expanded library activities and the elimination of fines.

Data on PC usage revealed similar trends across libraries, with a shift towards more Wi-Fi usage on personal devices. The importance of digital support, especially for residents lacking confidence in using technology, was emphasised.

The Summer Reading Challenge received positive feedback from both children and parents, with testimonials highlighting its impact on confidence and motivation in reading.

Efforts are underway to collect more detailed data on library usage to better understand residents' needs and preferences. Initiatives like the Youth Employment Hub and adult community learning courses reflect the broader range of services offered by libraries to support various community priorities.

Plans to introduce card payments at all libraries were discussed, with progress being made in negotiations with Barclays to implement a more convenient and efficient payment system.

Overall, the focus is on tailoring library services to meet evolving community needs and preferences, with ongoing efforts to gather and analyse data for deeper insights into usage patterns and trends.

There was a discussion about why Barclays was chosen for implementing card payments at libraries. It was explained that Barclays, being the council's bank, was recommended by the Deputy Director of Finance, as they offered a reasonable deal. There was openness to considering other options if desired.

Concerns were raised about the need to see the negatives or improvement suggestions. It was agreed that constructive feedback would be valuable and brought to the committee's attention. Specific issues highlighted included the speed of Wi-Fi and connectivity, along with a desire to understand areas of potential complaints.

There were questions surrounding the digital offer update, particularly regarding an increase in hours and whether fewer people were utilizing the services. It was suggested that changing habits and needs might be influencing usage patterns. Initiatives such as gadget workshops and improvements in Wi-Fi connectivity were mentioned as efforts to enhance digital services.

Discussions also focused on the demographics of library users and efforts to capture more detailed information. Pilot activities, such as a Windrush event, were mentioned as examples of initiatives aimed at attracting a diverse range of attendees.

Finally, positive feedback was shared about the central library, highlighting the helpfulness of staff and the significance of libraries in the development of young children and infants.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

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QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE REPORT (2023/24) - EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS (Item 13)

The Executive Member for Inclusive Economy and Jobs presented this item to the committee.

Overall employment figures were significantly exceeding their targets. With a goal of 5,000 over four years, they were already at 3,752 halfway through year two, nearly doubling the figures from the previous year.

As for the outcomes related to parents of children aged 0 to 18. There had been challenges in collecting data in this area due to the reluctance of employees to disclose such information, as a result of stigma around having children in the workplace. However, they had made progress in effectively capturing this data. Concerns were raised regarding the Council contracts and the collection of relevant data from external suppliers. While the reported number was 87, there were challenges in motivating teams to collect data effectively, especially when it came to Council-contracted suppliers. Efforts were underway to address this issue in the upcoming quarters.

They also touched focused on the number of living wage and entry-level jobs. Despite fluctuations throughout the year, they were confident of meeting targets, particularly with apprenticeships. The target for living wage and entry-level jobs had increased by 150%, indicating ambitious goals that were still on track to be met. Lastly, they highlighted opportunities brokered through the construction directory. This directory facilitated connections with local construction companies, promoting local business and ensuring skilled work opportunities for residents. The directory, hosted by the council, aimed to support the circular economy by prioritising contractors who paid a living wage and contributed positively to the community giving social value.

The committee discussed the total increase of the London-living wage of 300 since the last assessment, aiming for a total increase of 500 by the end of the year. However, they noted challenges in achieving this target, attributing some of the difficulties to inflation in the labour market. While there was an expectation that accredited employers would readily sign up, they found barriers such as rising costs and questions about the value of accreditation beyond a badge on a website. Regarding the affordable workspace program, they noted that they had exceeded their initial projections, with increasing business-to-business engagement between workspace tenants. They discussed the quantification of social value derived from the program and suggested improvements in tracking costs to better understand the monetary value of different activities.

They also addressed the uptake of the childcare bursary program, acknowledging that it had been more challenging than anticipated. They identified gaps in coverage, such as childcare for those in training or returning from maternity leave and recognised the need for more targeted outreach to reach those who could benefit most from the programme.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

67

BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN REVIEW (Item 9)

Officers updated the committee on the Biodiversity Action Plan. During the presentation on the progress of the biodiversity action plan, it was highlighted that the new plan was launched in 2020, following a requirement for local authorities to produce such plans since the Rio Convention in 1992. The plan's primary focus is on protecting and enhancing biodiversity within the Islington borough, with an emphasis on fostering partnerships between the council, various partner organizations, and the broader community.

Several significant achievements and initiatives were discussed during the presentation. Notably, there has been an uptake in efforts to plant trees, with plans in place to plant 900 trees on schedule. A tree donation scheme was also mentioned, which has successfully contributed to the planting of 66 additional trees, entirely funded externally. This initiative allows residents and businesses to contribute to tree planting efforts, thereby further enhancing greenery in the borough.

Furthermore, various programs, such as the Greener Together program and the Thriving Neighborhoods program, were highlighted for supporting greening initiatives across Islington. These programs provide financial assistance for community-led greening projects, aiming to improve access to nature and reduce environmental health inequalities.

Community involvement was emphasised as a crucial aspect of biodiversity efforts in Islington. Volunteer contributions were estimated at over 25,000 hours, with volunteer groups such as Friends of Parks playing a significant role in carrying out voluntary work in parks and green spaces. This collaborative effort underscores the importance of community engagement in biodiversity conservation.

Efforts are underway to track canopy cover, improve communication about tree planting schedules, and implement sustainable urban drainage strategies to address flooding concerns.

Appreciation was expressed for the Housing Community Gardening Team, with queries about the number of estates they cover and whether it meets demand. The response highlighted the team's role in maximizing green spaces and plans for expansion, though financial constraints may limit further growth.

Another query pertained to increasing complaints about foxes from residents, seeking strategies to address the issue positively and involve residents in biodiversity efforts. The response emphasised education and community engagement to change mindsets over time, along with strategies to discourage foxes from gardens.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

68

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT (Item 10)

The Executive Member for Environment and Transport gave their Annual Update and presented the Q2 Performance report (2023/24) to the committee.

The presentation acknowledged the hard work of various teams, including street sweepers, refuse and recycling crews, and highway and traffic workers, for their contributions in maintaining the quality of life in Islington. Special recognition was also extended to less visible teams such as mechanics and animal welfare workers. The Executive Member highlighted emerging themes, particularly the increasing challenges posed by climate change, such as extreme heat and intensive rainfall. Climate adaptation efforts were emphasised, including discussions on how to integrate climate resilience into housing and infrastructure projects. Public health considerations were also brought into focus, with climate adaptation being recognised as a growing public health issue. Efforts to embed climate adaptation into routine practices, such as implementing larger gutters on buildings to manage intense rainfall, were mentioned.

Collaboration across teams, especially with public health, to promote health and wellbeing through climate-conscious initiatives. The Executive Member expressed pride in the council's efforts to prioritize these issues and praised the dedication of officers across departments.

Lastly, the presentation touched upon initiatives to promote active travel, including partnerships with organisations like Power Up and efforts to raise awareness about cycling groups like Wheel Sisters. Overall, the presentation highlighted ongoing efforts to address environmental and transportation challenges while expanding the scope of community engagement and support.

During the discussion, various points were raised regarding the impact of climate change on public health, particularly concerning the vulnerability of older residents to heat-related illnesses. There was a consensus on the necessity of integrating climate adaptation measures into housing design, with a specific focus on ensuring adequate ventilation to mitigate the effects of rising temperatures.

Furthermore, the importance of implementing energy efficiency measures in housing to reduce both environmental impact and utility costs for residents was highlighted. Questions were posed regarding the availability of future funding opportunities to support such initiatives.

Regarding electric vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure, inquiries were made about the strategic placement of charging points and the potential for residents to contribute to funding. The challenges involved in determining optimal locations for charging points while considering factors such as demand, technical feasibility, and access for residents were discussed.

The backlog of requests for bike storage allocation and efforts to improve communication with residents regarding available spaces. While there had been a significant reduction in the backlog, operational challenges remained, prompting consideration of potential improvements in communication methods.

There was a discussion about promoting green burial practices and eco-friendly initiatives in cemeteries. While proactive measures were not explicitly confirmed, it was noted that spaces for green burials were being made available, and ongoing efforts were underway in this regard. The biodiversity of cemeteries was highlighted. Queries were raised by members of the public, one member of the public expressed scepticism about the existence of man-made climate change. They proposed that policies derived from the assumption of climate change should be reconsidered, particularly regarding taxation and other measures aimed at mitigating environmental damage. The member of the public suggested transforming the upcoming climate emergency meeting on March 11th into a discussion involving experts from both sides of the debate to examine the existence of man-made

climate change and its associated policy implications. Another member of the public raised queries on the supplementary planning document and when the draft of this would be completed by. The Chair explained the SPD would be coming to a future meeting to be discussed.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

69 QUARTER 2 PERFORMANCE REPORT (2023/24) - ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT (Item 12)

Taken with the Annual Report of the Executive Member for Environment and Transport

70 WORKPLAN 2023/4 (Item 14)

RESOLVED:

That the Workplan 2023/24 be noted.

The meeting ended at 9.45 pm

CHAIR