

London Borough of Islington

**Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee - 16 April 2024**

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held at Islington Town Hall, Upper St, N1 2UD on 16 April 2024 at 7.30 pm.

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

**Councillor Tricia Clarke in the Chair**

**74       APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)**

No apologies of absence were received

**75       DECLARATIONS OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item 2)**

No Substitutes were declared.

**76       DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item 3)**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

**77       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.

**78       CHAIR'S REPORT (Item 5)**

The chair discussed various initiatives, including ecology projects, affordable workspace, and greener jobs. They highlighted the success of the Task and Finish Groups across the year and the annual meeting focused on building resilience against the climate emergency. The Chair thanked all involved in making these efforts successful.

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

The order of business was as per the Agenda.

**80       PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item 7)**

Public questions were taken after each item

**81       ANNUAL UPDATE FROM NORTH LONDON WASTE AUTHORITY (Item 8)**

Martin Capstick, Managing Director of the North London Waste Authority gave an annual update to the committee. They reflected on a series of initiatives undertaken by the NLWA in collaboration with partners to address waste management challenges in north London. They emphasised a proactive approach to waste reduction, reuse, and recycling. Specific efforts included promoting reusable products like period items and collaborating with Islington to conduct food waste

trials. Additionally, the NLWA increased funding for community groups to facilitate reuse and repair activities across the boroughs.

Moreover, the NLWA aimed to expand recycling capabilities by collecting a wider range of waste streams at recycling centres. Initiatives such as carpet recycling and mattress recycling were introduced to address hard-to-recycle items. Despite these efforts, it was acknowledged that the overall impact on recycling rates was limited due to relatively low tonnages.

It was also highlighted there was a campaign aimed at engaging residents in recycling practices. They emphasised the importance of creating a connection between residents and waste collection crews to encourage positive behaviour changes.

However, despite these local efforts, it was noted that waste management levels in Islington remained largely unchanged over the years. They attributed this stagnation partly to national trends, including falling recycling rates across the country. They discussed the challenges of meeting government targets for waste reduction, particularly in areas like Islington, which already started from a lower waste per person baseline.

Furthermore, there were updates on ongoing projects such as the North London Heat and Power project, which aimed to improve waste management infrastructure. The importance of social value in waste management projects, including creating employment opportunities and apprenticeships was also of importance to the NLWA. They mentioned collaborations to ensure the delivery of social value over the project's duration.

Looking ahead, there were ongoing efforts to develop a joint waste strategy informed by public input and community engagement. They expressed hope for progress on national projects like deposit return schemes and wider collection reforms to further drive the circular economy. However, concerns about the messaging surrounding waste management at the national level, particularly regarding the importance of environmental outcomes. Despite these challenges, the NLWA remained committed to addressing waste management issues.

The committee expressed concerns about waste management in Islington, noting that while the borough generated 87,000 tonnes of waste annually, only around 22% was recycled, with the remaining 77% being residual waste. They questioned whether it was feasible to reduce the amount of residual waste being incinerated. They raised the issue of the capacity of the 700,000-tonne burner and wondered where additional material would come from if all seven boroughs successfully reduced their waste.

The committee suggested continuing to encourage residents, producers, and retailers to reduce waste. They discussed the possibility of extracting recyclable materials from residual waste and acknowledged the challenges posed by improper recycling practices and non-recyclable items.

Regarding the North London Waste Authority's (NLWA) waste management facility, it was noted that it had consistently processed around 550,000 tonnes of waste per year. However, the new facility was designed to operate with a capacity of 450-490 tonnes. Contingency plans were in place in case waste volumes fell below this range, with a focus on adapting arrangements to accommodate reduced waste levels, which was the ultimate aim.

The committee also explored factors contributing to Islington's lower-than-average waste generation per capita, considering demographic and socioeconomic factors. They discussed the potential percentage of residual waste that could have been recycled with better messaging and infrastructure, noting challenges such as the recyclability of certain materials like plastics and organic waste.

Concerns were raised about accessibility to waste facilities, such as the signage at Hornsey Street access. The role of retailers and producers in waste management was discussed, with suggestions for initiatives like return schemes and campaigns targeting specific industries like vape shops, where disposable products cause a lot of waste.

Regarding community composting hubs, the committee expressed interest in expanding such initiatives and requested further information on their current status. They also discussed the transportation of business waste and potential increases in borough levies to support waste management infrastructure and maintenance costs.

## **82 DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS - ACTIVE TRAVEL SCRUTINY REVIEW (Item 9)**

Key points raised in the discussion included making amendments to some of the recommendations:

**Maintenance:** There was a recommendation to prioritise repairing pavements that would have the most impact on pedestrians, particularly focusing on areas frequented by older and disabled people. The aim was to ensure that streets are safe to use, with evidence from organizations like Living Streets supporting this approach.

**Equal Access for Cycling:** A recommendation highlighted the importance of infrastructure supporting all individuals, including groups like Cycle Sisters, to make cycling a viable choice. Suggestions were made to inform infrastructure improvements, such as those in liveable neighbourhoods, to facilitate cycling, including considerations for bike storage.

**Relationships between people that walk and cycle:** Recommendations focused on fostering positive interactions between pavement users. This included emphasising education over enforcement, particularly concerning advising rather than penalising individuals, such as food delivery riders. Collaboration with companies and unions to improve conditions for delivery riders and drivers was suggested.

The committee agreed to delegate wording to officers to amend the recommendations.

**RESOLVED:**

That the draft recommendations were agreed with the amendments.

**83**      **QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE REPORT (2023/24) - LIBRARIES AND HERITAGE (Item 10)**

Cllr Khondoker, Executive Member for Equalities, Culture and Inclusion presented this item.

the following key points were raised:

**Positive Trends in Library Usage:** The Executive member expressed satisfaction with the rising numbers across various metrics, including the number of visitors, active members, and event attendance. They noted that the targets set for the year were likely to be exceeded by the end of the year, suggesting a return to pre-COVID levels of library engagement.

**PC Usage Analysis:** The team conducted an analysis of PC usage, particularly focusing on the discrepancy between the number of users and the hours of usage. They found that when normalised against library opening hours, the usage remained consistent, indicating constant PC use.

**Attendance at Library Events:** The report highlighted a high number of events held across libraries, with a balanced attendance between children/young people and adults. Although Central Library attracted the highest attendance, other libraries such as Archway, Finsbury, Mildmay, North, and West also saw good turnout.

**Range of Activities and Events:** The Executive member shared details of various activities and events held in libraries, including repair cafes, energy advice surgeries, community planting events, and book readings.

**Feedback System:** The introduction of a new feedback system for adults was discussed, with positive initial results indicating high levels of participation. The speaker emphasised the importance of collecting feedback, both positive and negative, to inform improvements in library services.

**Payment System Update:** There was a discussion regarding the progress of implementing a payment system, Barclays was chosen due to cost-effectiveness. The issue of corporate banking and environmental considerations was raised, with a need for further follow-up.

**Addressing Negative Feedback:** The Executive member acknowledged the importance of addressing negative feedback, such as concerns about event visibility and the availability of USB ports. They highlighted efforts to investigate and address such issues to improve user experience.

**Prize Distribution:** regarding the distribution of prizes for library activities, particularly the summer reading challenge, concerns were raised about fairness and inclusivity, leading to a decision to withdraw certain prizes and focus on ensuring every child receives recognition with a medal instead.

The committee sought clarification on the progress of implementing the card payment system, particularly regarding the possibility of using options other than Barclays. It was mentioned that the topic had been raised in previous meetings, indicating the significance of resolving this matter. While there was a preference for Barclays due to cost-effectiveness and existing banking relationships with the Council, there was a need to ensure that the chosen option aligned with both efficiency and environmental considerations. The committee wanted to know whether alternatives to Barclays were being explored, it was explained there was to be a review into the Council's procurement.

There was interest in gaining a deeper understanding of the demographics of library users to ascertain their geographical distribution and preferences. This information would be valuable for strategic planning, outreach efforts, and tailoring library services to better meet the needs of diverse communities.

The committee raised questions about the potential for adjusting library opening hours to better accommodate user schedules and optimize resource utilization. While there was recognition of the importance of providing access to library services, there was also a need to balance operational costs and user demand. Additionally, there was discussion around diversifying activities offered at different times to attract a wider range of users and maximise library engagement.

There was acknowledgment of the increasing popularity and convenience of digital library services, such as e-books and online magazine access. Committee members highlighted the importance of promoting these services effectively to ensure that residents are aware and able to utilise them. There was also mention of addressing any challenges or usability issues related to digital platforms. Committee members recognised Central Library's significance in attracting diverse users and serving as a hub for community engagement and learning opportunities.

**RESOLVED:**

That the report was noted.

**84 QUARTER 3 PERFORMANCE REPORT (2023/24) - EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS (Item 11)**

Cllr Bell-Bradford, Executive Member for Inclusive Economy and Jobs presented this item.

The report highlights the council's progress towards fulfilling its manifesto commitment of getting 5,000 people into work by 2026. With more than 4,100 individuals already being helped into work. This success is attributed to the dedicated efforts of the Islington team. Furthermore, emphasis is placed on not just the quantity but also the quality of support provided, ensuring that the right individuals receive assistance.

One notable challenge discussed is the issue of data collection, particularly concerning job outcomes. Efforts are underway to streamline this process by involving the teams managing individual contracts to collect relevant data.

The report underscores the importance of measuring not just the number of people placed in jobs but also how long they remain employed. This focus on job retention serves as a more meaningful indicator of success. The report mentions the introduction of new indicators to track job retention rates over time and highlights the need for baseline data to facilitate future discussions and goal setting.

The council's commitment to London Living Wage accreditation is discussed, along with challenges encountered in achieving this goal. Factors such as the rising cost of accreditation and the emergence of alternative standards beyond just the living wage are noted. Despite these challenges, the council remains committed to uplifting individuals by ensuring fair wages and continues to explore strategies to encourage more organisations to become accredited. The report highlights proactive engagement with stakeholders, including workers and advocacy groups, to promote the London Living Wage. Initiatives such as campaigns targeting non-compliant businesses and partnerships with community organisations demonstrate the council's commitment to advocating for fair wages.

The outlined future strategies, including plans to expand apprenticeship opportunities and embed fair wage practices across the organisation. There is recognition of the need for ongoing efforts to meet targets and ensure that the council continues to lead by example in promoting fair employment practices. Additionally, the report mentions upcoming inspections by external bodies, showing the importance of maintaining positive reviews and accountability.

The committee had recognition of the potential negative impact of pushing individuals into work that may not be suitable for them, especially if it leads to loss of confidence. This highlights the importance of ensuring that employment opportunities are well-matched to individuals' skills and aspirations.

Questions were raised regarding the definition of "good jobs" within the context of recent GLA-funded programs. It was important to clarify what criteria constitutes a "good job" to ensure that employment initiatives are aligned with the desired outcomes. The discussion extended to challenges faced by the hospitality industry, particularly in relation to London Living Wage accreditation. While larger chains may have more resources to comply, smaller family-owned businesses may struggle, highlighting the need for targeted support and engagement.

There were inquiries about progress on cultural apprenticeships and efforts to promote green jobs. These initiatives aimed to diversify employment opportunities and support sustainable economic growth.

The methodology for calculating social value and the impact of the Islington childcare bursary scheme were also discussed. There was an exploration of how these initiatives contribute to broader social and economic outcomes, as well as considerations for future funding allocations and program enhancements.

**RESOLVED:**

That the report was noted.

**RESOLVED:**

That the Workplan 2023/24 be noted.

The meeting ended at 9.45 pm

**CHAIR**