

London Borough of Islington

Environment, Climate and Transport Scrutiny Committee - 29 July 2024

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment, Climate and Transport Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on 29 July 2024 at 7.30 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Clarke (Chair), Bossman-Quarshie, Hayes, Heather,
Jeapes, Russell and Weekes
Also Present: **Councillors:** Champion

Councillor Tricia Clarke in the Chair

1 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item A1)**
Apologies received from Cllr Graham

2 **DECLARATION OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item A2)**
Cllr Heather was a substitute member.

3 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item A3)**
No declarations of interest were made.

4 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING (Item A4)**
RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the previous meeting of the committee of Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny were noted.

5 **CHAIR'S REPORT (Item A5)**

The Council was once again recognised as a top borough in London for healthy streets and won overall for the first time. This showed the ongoing efforts to establish greener, healthier streets for all residents. Islington was acknowledged as the leading borough across the capital. This marked the fourth consecutive year that Islington ranked first in inner London, recognising the remarkable work done to create environmentally and people friendly and streets.

Community conversations about nature neighbourhoods were scheduled, starting with one on September 18th at Hilldrop Community Centre focusing on regulation and implementation. On October 24th, the discussion would shift to food systems at Whittington Park Community Centre, followed by a session on access to nature on November 23rd at Hilldrop Community Centre. Rosie Apperley, the Project Coordinator for nature neighbourhoods, would be happy to attend and address the Committee.

Regarding climate initiatives, the Chair attended the final two sessions of the first phase of the climate panel in July. This panel consisted of randomly selected residents who collaborated with officers to develop proposals benefiting the borough. The Chair invited the strategy and engagement team of the panel to join the Committee and provide their insights.

6 PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item A6)

Public Questions were taken after each item.

7 MEMBERSHIP, TERMS OF REFERENCE AND DATES OF MEETINGS (Item C1)

The membership and terms of reference as set out in the report were noted. It was also noted that Cllr Craig had stepped down and Cllr Gill would replace them.

RESOLVED:

That the report was noted with the replacement of Cllr Craig to be Cllr Gill.

8 UPDATE ON THE CLIMATE ACTION SUPPLEMENTARY PLANNING DOCUMENT (SPD) (Item C3)

Officers from the SPD team gave a presentation to the committee. They explained that they had decided to introduce additional documents by splitting the original into two separate ones. The first was the Climate Action Net Zero Carbon Supplementary Planning Document (SPD), which provided detailed guidance on implementing sustainable design and climate adaptation policies from the Local Plan in an accessible and user-friendly manner. Alongside this, the Retrofit Handbook, which served as a practical guide for homeowners looking to improve the energy efficiency of their homes, while also addressed heritage, technical, and practical considerations to support them on their retrofit journeys.

The Climate Action Net Zero Carbon SPD included information on retrofit approaches, a section on environment and nature focusing on biodiversity, and guidance on achieving biodiversity net gain. Additionally, it covered sustainable urban drainage, flood risk, air quality, adaptation for cooling, and considerations around climate action for the public realm. The document also retained a crucial energy efficiency section, addressing renewable energy generation and supporting the monitoring of our policies' efficiency measures. It further included sections on the circular economy, whole life-cycle carbon, and sustainable design standards, such as BREEAM from the Building Research Establishment.

The Retrofit Handbook was a flexible guidance document that could be updated as needed, considering the rapid advancements in retrofit technologies. It detailed when permissions were needed, what would be required, and offered an illustrated guide to various retrofit measures. These included information on draft-proofing, re-roofing, loft, wall, and floor insulation, window and door replacement, thermostatic radiator valves, LED lighting, ventilation, cooling measures, solar PV or thermal panels, air and ground source heat pumps, and transport infrastructure. It also included clear illustrations as guidance on acceptable arrangements for solar panels on roofs.

Regarding progress, work on the SPD had been ongoing, despite a brief hiatus. From the project's inception, public workshops were held for local residents, businesses, suppliers, architects, planning agents, and housing associations. There was a formal consultation on scoping the paper last year, a Members workshop was conducted, and ongoing engagement with other council services was ongoing. They had also commissioned a technical study to explore and evaluate a range of retrofit measures specific to Islington housing typologies, which informed aspects of the SPD.

The timeline towards adoption was: drafting of the SPD would continue until the end of August. From August to October, internal reviews would be conducted. A six-week formal consultation would take place in late October, followed by amendments and further internal reviews, with the aim of adopting the document around April 2025.

Concerns were raised on the data gathering process and identified gaps in the representation of certain demographics within the Islington community. Previous engagement efforts had included various community representatives, local businesses, councillors, and residents, but were primarily attended by homeowners. There was particular concern about the underrepresentation of tenants, especially those in social housing. It was important to ensure demographic representation, including the involvement of young people, Black Africans, Caribbeans, women, and the working class. It was agreed that additional data and efforts were needed to better include these groups.

The importance of considering council-owned properties and housing associations in the retrofit strategy was highlighted, emphasising the significant implications for the Council. There was a suggestion to consider more accessible formats like videos and leaflets instead of a lengthy handbook. The council acknowledged the need for accessibility and ongoing efforts to make information user-friendly.

The issue of finding trustworthy suppliers for retrofit work was addressed, with a discussion on the need for a central registration system for suppliers. Officers recognised the challenges of cost and funding in implementing retrofits on a large scale. Concerns about the practical implementation of retrofit measures, particularly in council-owned properties, were expressed. Officers confirmed that they were working to integrate retrofit work into existing cyclical maintenance where possible.

Challenges related to retrofitting Victorian terraced houses, especially in conservation areas, were acknowledged. Plans were outlined to provide clear guidance on acceptable measures in these areas, including the potential use of air source heat pumps and solar panels.

It was estimated that approximately £1.5 billion would be required to retrofit council-owned properties. The current strategy involved integrating these efforts into cyclical works.

There were concerns about the impact of fluctuating electricity and gas prices on the affordability of retrofits. If electricity and gas prices had decoupled, it could have affected the cost calculations and potentially made retrofits less affordable for residents. The council explored different funding models and had recently submitted a bid to investigate alternative financing options for retrofits. Innovative examples, such as retrofitting Grade II listed buildings, were mentioned, highlighting the technical complexity of such projects.

The potential role of third-sector organisations in providing support and funding for retrofit projects was suggested. Challenges in timing and the transitional period for energy networks were noted, with the understanding that this could impact individuals' decisions on whether to repair or replace their heating systems. The reuse of water in new developments was identified as an area for improvement, with a suggestion to incorporate grey water systems.

A public question about holding private sector suppliers accountable for retrofit work was raised. It was noted that while most suppliers would come from the private sector, a national quality assurance scheme could help ensure standards were met.

9

SELECTION OF NEW SCRUTINY TOPIC 2024/25 (Item C2)

The committee discussed the potential for a new scrutiny topic for 2024/25, focusing on the greening and cleaning of streets.

The suggestion to explore cleaner and greener streets received support.

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It was suggested to investigate the impact of different bus-stop designs on accessibility for disabled people, particularly those who used white canes. This idea aimed to understand the practical implications of design choices on pedestrian spaces and accessibility.

Another point of discussion was the need to protect and improve pedestrian spaces and address issues such as pavement deterioration. The concept of "safer streets" was proposed as a broad term.

Members expressed interest in enhancing civic pride and encouraging community involvement in maintaining cleanliness. Concerns were raised about the effectiveness of current recycling and maintenance practices, and the issue of littering was highlighted. It was suggested that more robust enforcement and community engagement were needed to address this problem.

Additional comments included the importance of considering disability access in the development of new street designs and the need for better communication with residents about ongoing and future projects. The use of artificial intelligence to guide street improvements and the adaptation of council staff to new transport methods were also discussed.

In conclusion the committee decided that the scrutiny topic for the municipal year would be 'Cleaner, greener and safer streets'.

10 SCRUTINY REPORT: ACTIVE TRAVEL SCRUTINY REVIEW 2023-24 (Item C4) RESOLVED:

That the report be deferred to the next meeting.

11 WORK PLAN 2024/25 (Item C5)

The committee suggested some possible reports that the committee could receive alongside the main Scrutiny review. These included a report on local leisure services, considering how well they serve the community post-pandemic. A report or presentation from Thames Water focusing on the quality and cleanliness of water. There was also interest in examining the growing presence of dockless e-bikes in the borough, and their accessibility. Other topics mentioned included recycling rates, community engagement on waste management, and the potential for some Task and Finish Groups for specific issues.

RESOLVED

The work plan was noted.

The meeting ended at 9.03 pm

CHAIR