

Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee - 29 June 2020

Minutes of the Virtual meeting of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held on 29 June 2020 at 7.30 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Poyser (Chair), Khondoker (Vice-Chair), Clarke, Convery, Jeapes and Russell

Councillor Dave Poyser in the Chair

362 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)

Apologies were received from Councillors Graham, Hamitouche and Ozdemir.

363 DECLARATIONS OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item 2)

There were no declarations of substitute members.

364 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

365 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item 4)

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 9th and 16th March 2020 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

366 CHAIR'S REPORT (Item 5)

Cllr Poyser expressed the Committee's thanks to council officers for all their efforts in ensuring that work was carried out during the lockdown period, and for updating members.

The Chair informed members that he had written articles in the local press and on a national website about Covid-19 and global warming with the hope that this would result in everyone taking up the opportunity to address the environment challenges that lie ahead and recognising society's responsibilities going forward.

The Chair had also written a description of the Environment Committee's meeting in public about the 2030 carbon neutral target in Hazards Magazine

informed the meeting that Ben Griffiths of Extinction Rebellion had submitted written questions relating to the development of the new incinerator in Edmonton. The questions had been circulated to members and officers of both North London Waste Authority (NLWA) and Islington Council were in attendance to respond.

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

The order of business would be as per the agenda.

368 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item 7)**

The Chair invited Ben Griffith of Extinction Rebellion (XR) to address the Committee. Mr Ben acknowledged that written questions had been submitted and he added the following comments.

Mr Griffiths questioned the rationale of building an infrastructure with a capacity to handle 700k tons of waste a year an increase of 30% to its current arrangement, that will be in place for 30-40 years. The incinerator will result an increase of fine particles into the environment and only result into concerns about global warming and not in sync with the council's commitment to reduce carbon emission and that the data to which the proposal is based was questionable.

In response Martin Capstick, the Managing Director of NLWA acknowledged the questions raised by XR as important, reassuring members that NLWA continues to work hard with the London boroughs, reminding members that presently the capacity of the unit is unable to deal with the volume of waste with the result that tons of waste is currently being transported outside the London area for disposal. The decision to proceed has gone through the statutory requirement and has been consulted upon and that 195 responses were received of which only 3 were against the proposed facility. The proposal was advertised in Islington local papers, government development consent was given and the proposal is going forward.

The Managing Director reassured members that the needs of the facility will remain under review and issues of global warming will be addressed. Members were informed that although the facility will generate over 300,000 tons of gas, however it is important to note that the facility will supply power to over 127,000 homes and importantly avoid the need of transporting waste across London which is to be welcomed .

The Corporate Director of Environment and Regeneration acknowledged the work of NLWA, reminding members that in as much Islington Council is keen on building on the work it is currently doing in terms of increasing recycling, there is recognition that residual waste is still on the increase.

In response to how the facility fits into the Council's zero carbon draft strategy, the meeting was reminded that the Council's priority is currently focussed with addressing emissions produced within the borough, however as the strategy evolves scoping will be extended to addressing emissions produced outside the borough. Members were reminded that although the Council has taken on board the impact of the project in its draft strategy, it is important to note that the borough's huge residual waste needs to be managed effectively, reiterating the environment benefit of NLWA to the borough in comparison to having vehicles transporting waste across London to dispose.

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QUARTERS 3 & 4 PERFORMANCE INDICATOR REPORT (2019/2020) - EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS (Item B1)

Councillor Shaikh, Executive Member for Economic Development presented the Quarter 3 & 4 Performance Indicator Reports 2019/2020.

In the discussion, the following points were made:

- The meeting was informed that prior to the Covid-19 lockdown, the Service was well ahead in meeting its Q3 targets among its priority groups such as residents with long term conditions, parents of young people in the 18-24 age group and hard to reach groups such as BAME. Measures are in place to continue encouraging parents to seek employment support.
- Members were advised that since the Covid-19 pandemic, it was noticeable within the Quarter 4 figures that in the last 3 months there had been an increase in the number of unemployment claimants in Islington, so the Service has had to expand the support among its priority groups.
- Executive Members informed the meeting that since the pandemic, the Council's iWork, ACL and Library Services had to quickly adapt on how they delivered their day to day tasks contacting their residents online or over the phone, which is to be commended. The Service recognises that some residents are digitally excluded but have taken a blended approach by getting people to phone the library service staff on their behalf.
- With regard to employment support, the Service has been supported by colleagues in social services to recruit staff for those affected in retail and the hospitality sector. The Service in the initial 6-7 weeks period was inundated with requests for support from its residents, however this has now dwindled.
- Services have continued online, adult residents have been encouraged to sign up to ACL courses online and an increase in new learners interested in improving their personal circumstances by retraining and re skilling themselves to prepare for other types of employment or careers post pandemic has been noticed.
- With regards to young people, the Service has kept in contact with those identified by schools as being at risk of being NEET by continually engaging with the young people and their parents either by phone or Skype.
- The meeting was informed that within a short period of the commencement of lockdown, the online library service has been expanded, and that residents are now reading books and literature online. The switch to online library service has demonstrated that going forward the future prospects for libraries is promising.

- The pandemic has resulted in an increase in Universal Credit claimants, and with the furlough scheme coming to an end soon, the meeting was advised of an expectation of an increase in unemployment. The Council is having conversations within its Employment board on what type of support available in conjunction with the other 17 Employment Support Partners (Team Islington).
- In addition to the above the Service continues to work with its skills partners such as Camden and Islington college, London Met university and City university, especially as the Service recognises that support will be required for young people when schools resume in September 2020. The Director, Employment and Skills, advised that a report will be brought back to Committee in the Autumn updating members on how the Service is supporting its adult residents.
- The Executive Member informed the meeting that as a result of Covid-19 and its devastating economic impact, the Service received £90,000 from the GLA's Skills for London fund. The funds will be used in the re-skilling of its adult residents who presently receive unemployment benefit. Members were advised that it is important to recognise that certain sectors will be seriously affected by job losses and some sectors will take a while to come back fully. As a result of job losses, the Council is keen on supporting residents who are interested in seeking careers in both the technology and creative industries.
- On the Strategic Investment Partnership, the meeting was informed that the Council, in partnership with 3 other boroughs, is considering at means of addressing youth employment, school leavers and adult retraining. The Partnership is focussed largely on the knowledge economy, a recognition that despite having economic clusters within their boroughs, residents have little access to the opportunities 'out there' so partners have devised a programme on how to resolve it.
- The meeting was informed that despite support from government to businesses, it is important to note that lots of businesses in the borough are not eligible for financial support, so the Council has stepped in and is currently offering business support such as discretionary grant to micro businesses in the borough.
- On the continued closure of the libraries, the Executive Member advised that the Council's priority at the moment is to ensure safety not only for its users but also its staff and that in libraries, being closed spaces, it is important to adhere to scientific evidence and social distancing rules. The meeting was informed that although the Council will be keen for users to return books, there are other pressing issues which still need to be addressed such as quarantine rules. Cleansing regimes need to be put in place prior to opening as users handle books and use computers which are ways that infections can spread.

- With regard to businesses ineligible for business support due to government's strict criteria, the meeting was advised that the offer is only available to businesses that pay business rates which is not the case with micro-businesses in the borough whose rates are included in the rents paid to private landlords. The council will provide discretionary grants for businesses such as market traders, child-care providers, business to business suppliers and businesses that work in co location spaces.
- Members were informed that in addition to the above, the Council will continue to lobby central government to raise its threshold for business rate relief so that inner London borough businesses would be eligible for government support.
- On the continued closure of the Leisure centres, the Director acknowledged that although there was an expectation that gyms would have been opened, a new opening date is likely to be late July. Members were reminded that the council is working on a detailed plan on how and when the facilities will be opened however issues such as social distancing, cleaning regimes around the exercise equipment with hard surfaces will have to be addressed before it is open.
- The Director acknowledged that although the Council is confident in GLL plans going forward, it is important to note viability concerns, especially with no income being generated during this lockdown period.
- In response to a question on whether support existed for local businesses such as cobblers, hairdressers who rely on office staff footfall for their businesses and especially as government directive continues to encourage staff to work from home, the Director Employment Skills and Culture acknowledged that immediately lockdown commenced, the council reached out to small businesses in the 4 established town centre areas, and encouraged to consider creating an online presence. In addition, the Council's Inclusive Officers set up an online directory service on the Council website, an interactive tool.
- In addition to the above 3 business webinars with local businesses were facilitated by Council officers, an opportunity to discuss issues relevant to businesses for example on how to take payment online, how to improve their businesses etc. Feedback from businesses involved in the webinars was positive and importantly the service has ensured that the support is not restricted to physical businesses on high streets but businesses that work from home.
- The Director informed the meeting that in the last few months the Service has adapted and learnt quickly, moving some of its services online, noting that although ACL courses have been moved online, the Service recognises that issues with accessibility still exist amongst some priority groups so the offer is backed up by providing one to one tuition over the phone, providing bite

size chunks and in some instances packs have been printed and posted to residents so that they are not left unsupported.

- Members were reminded that although ACL Courses have always been delivered on library premises, the lockdown period has suddenly brought about a rethink on how the Services can be delivered differently, while still recognising that some residents still have issues of affordability and not having devices.
- In response to a question on whether the Council had been able to identify and reach out to small micro start-up businesses, especially those without a presence on the high street, the Executive Member acknowledged the enormous task for the Council, acknowledging the £2.8 million received from government although this would only offer support to 4,000 of the 20000 businesses within the borough so the Council will continue to lobby the government for more funds.
- The Council is in partnership with Capital Enterprise, a start up network which operate across London to help identify micro businesses in the borough. The partnership has assisted in designing the discretionary grant scheme for businesses in co working spaces.
- A member enquired whether in light of the pandemic and associated travel risks, workplaces would need to be redesigned so as to meet social distancing rules. The member also enquired whether this period represents an opportunity for the Council to promote its inclusive economy agenda where residents would be encouraged to walk and cycle to work.
- It was also noted that perhaps the Council's focus should now be on how to grow more local businesses , and that the challenge for the future is to revitalise the economic health for both the business within in the borough and for the residents.
- The Executive Member acknowledged the challenges ahead in light of the pandemic reminding the meeting that prior to Covid-19, the Service was in the process of commissioning a skills strategy and that a piece of work was being undertaken to identify what is the need of the local market, what sectors are viable and which sector's residents are employed or working in and welcoming the opportunity to revisit this piece of work in the future.
- The Executive Member acknowledged that going forward a holistic approach would be required, for example, in addressing any economic responses as issues with regards transport will need to be considered.
- On the issue of youth employment the Director acknowledged that prior to the pandemic the service had concerns about young people falling into NEET and were in discussions with City and Islington, and London Met, to address

this issue but now it looks more worrying.

- The Director Employment Skills and Culture reminded the meeting that members were presented with figures of over 2,500 unemployed youth at the last committee meeting, and although measures had been put in place to address this with additional resources and funds, however, in the light of the pandemic this issue would now require a broader plan along with the intervention of the team with the aim of improving educational training and employment outcomes.
- The meeting was informed of the Council's bid for some European underspends which will augment the council's work with young people, and that it is important to give the young people bursaries to stay in education. This is being considered by the Council's Human Resources department putting together a programme that starts with the Council itself, as the borough's leading employer, and then eventually convincing other employers in the borough to follow suit.
- In response to a suggestion about the name of the Committee being changed to Environment and Inclusive Economy Scrutiny Committee, there was a general consensus amongst members that this be considered. The Chair informed the Clerk to notify Democratic Services of members an interest to change the name of the Committee.

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, expressed thanks to the Executive Member and Officers for the enormous work ensuring that services to the residents have continued during these challenging times, welcoming the funds received so far and looking ahead as the Service bids for potential European funding.

370 WORK PROGRAMME 2020/2021 (Item B2)

It was noted that as meetings are now being held remotely, it is important that items be managed well to allow members sufficient time for full consideration of the agenda.

Member raised concerns about too many items being scheduled for the September meeting and requested that in light of the public interest in transport and road closures, that it be the only item for the meeting and that Cllr Shaikh's Annual Report be rescheduled later in the year.

A request for Democratic Services to send out potential dates for the Council's AGM to councillors to avoid clashes of meetings was noted.

RESOLVED:

That Cllr Shaikh's report be considered later in the year

That the People Friendly Streets be considered at the September meeting

The meeting ended at 9.15 pm

CHAIR