

Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee - 12 October 2021

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD - on 12 October 2021 at 7.30 pm.

Present: **Councillors:** Clarke (Chair), Heather, a Bell-Bradford, Jeapes, Khondoker and Russell

Councillor Tricia Clarke in the Chair

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

Apologies were received from Councillor Weekes.

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

There were no declarations of substitute members.

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

There were no declarations of interest.

497 **MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING (Item 4)**

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 14 September 2021 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them.

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

The Chair informed the meeting of the second informal working group meeting, which was held on recycling. The next meeting of the informal working group will be held on food waste in early 2022, members will be advised of the meeting date.

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

The order of business would be B1, B4, B2, B3 and B5.

500 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item 7)**

None.

501 **ANNUAL REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR INCLUSIVE ECONOMY AND JOBS 2020/2021 (Item B1)**

Councillor Asima Shaikh, Executive Member Inclusive Jobs and Economy was present, together with Caroline Wilson, Director of Inclusive Economic Development for discussion of this item and made a presentation to the Committee, copy

interleaved. Councillor Asima Shaikh highlighted the following points in relation to supporting businesses during the pandemic:

- How local economy officers were re-deployed to every part of the borough with the task of contacting businesses to check on their status and find out what support they needed.
- On sustained regular meetings of the Town Centre groups, moving them online, to ensure that independent business owners could stay connected to others in their locality and to explain what council support they needed during the emergency phase.
- The Council devised a public-access emergency business directory, profiling businesses and services still open
- A business bulletin was developed and linked to government websites to keep businesses informed about support available to them. The bulletin is now circulated to 5,000 businesses in the borough.
- Members were made aware of a series of 'Shop Local' initiatives, including the distribution of 1000s of 'Open Safely' packs to local businesses and regular e-bulletins to over 5,000 businesses.
- The 'My Virtual Neighbourhood' app will provide a platform for Islington businesses to promote themselves to local people, anchor institutions and businesses online.
- The Council distributed a Discretionary Grant of just over £3m to over 1,000 SMEs in Islington. Payments between £500 and £25,000, with 58% of grants awarded to businesses whose owners or directors who identified as BAME or female.
- It was stated that employment support services across different organisations in Islington was fully co-ordinated through the Islington Working Partnership led by iWork.
- Islington launched its own local jobs portal in February with immediate impact and the borough became a Living Wage Place in July. The initial target of supporting 600 residents into jobs was surpassed by achieving nearly 1,000 residents into jobs over 12 months.
- The innovative programmes brokered during the pandemic to address precarious employment included: Home Cooks programme, with 7 Islington chefs, to become self-employed and deliver food to local people; and a new delivery co-operative, Wings, as an ethical alternative to other platform companies. Both pay the London Living Wage (LLW) and offer workers more secure terms and conditions.

On Building back better for an inclusive, fairer, greener, more creative local economy through promotion of series of business support initiatives, including:

- Promotion of Black-owned businesses on the high street and online, to increase footfall and spend with local businesses
- Continue Shop Local campaign – shop window displays and other promotional activities.

On Building back better for an inclusive, fairer, greener, more creative local economy through promotion of sectoral interventions:

- Tech and Knowledge – the council is a lead partner on LIFT (Leading Inclusive Futures through Technology), a £7.4m project to deliver jobs and training in tech and digital-related jobs.
- Creative Production - building strong partnerships with creative production companies such as Film London and the N7 business cluster to plug local residents into new opportunities

Councillor Asima Shaikh highlighted the actions completed:

- Offering digital skills training during lockdown for residents.
- Starter opportunities offered in conjunction with vocational training. A Living Wage Action Plan was agreed with partner employers from across the borough, and launched Islington in July as a “Living Wage Place”.
- 'Affordable workspace' is space that: generally secured through the planning process; and charges at below-market rates (generally 80% or less) in return for the delivery of social value
- Already secured approximately 4,000sqm of affordable workspace including prestigious locations include the White Collar Factory at Old Street, and The Ray in Farringdon Road, as well as £2m through the Good Growth Fund project
- FC Designer Collective retail space launched on Sept 2020, with 13 businesses received support and training (30% minority-owned) plus an online training programme (apprenticeship programme and sewing masterclasses), facilitated by Adult Community Learning
- New affordable workspace contract signed for Ray Building, Farringdon with City, University of London to provide business support to Social Enterprises and community businesses – with Social Value targets integrated into contract management framework
- New affordable workspace operator commissioned for White Collar Factory and 160 Old Street with Town Square Limited to locally owned micro businesses and inspire community enterprise start-ups.

The Chair thanked Councillor Asima Shaikh for the presentation and welcomed members to raise issues and ask questions.

On businesses within Low traffic neighbourhoods (LTNs) and the support of vehicles like cargo trikes, members heard there was a commitment to support businesses within Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs). Work has been done on supporting the implementation of cargo bikes, with a pilot in Highbury west for food delivery. It was suggested that more support for businesses is required as the council develops LTNs further.

On the response on the capacity from organisations and individuals taking up Affordable Workspaces within office buildings across the borough, members were informed that the way workspaces have been used has changed. But there is a desire from organisations to get back into the office, to work in collaborative ways, to get away from online meetings. Action: Officer to come and discuss Affordable Work spaces at a future meeting.

On community wealth building, members heard about the Preston Model and keeping local money within the locality, via anchor organisations and new local businesses. The London Living Wage is an example of a scheme that organisations that want to support residents within the borough can use to make a difference by employing locally.

On the future scope of inclusive economy initiatives and social value for the community, the committee heard about Wings, the worker co-op delivery company. This is an example of what the council can support, in the form of a cooperative development agency, which the council will be working with. The council is keen to support cooperatives and community businesses in different sectors.

On the conceptual idea of more creative local economies, the committee was made aware of the work the council has been doing with partners in the creative sector and targeting young people not in education, employment or training (NEETs).

It was requested that officers attend to discuss Affordable Work Spaces at a future meeting.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted

502

NET ZERO CARBON PROGRAMME - NATURAL ENVIRONMENT (Item B2)

Sally Oldfield, Nature Conservation Manager, and Andrew Bedford, Head of Greenspace and Leisure Services was present, together with Barry Emmerson Park and Open Spaces Manager for discussion of this item and made a presentation to the Committee, copy interleaved

The **scope, challenge, objective and deliverables** of what the council wants to achieve across the natural environment in the next twelve months were reported. The following points were highlighted:

- On **Scope**, the whole borough is in scope. The council needs to look at how we can create greening opportunities and developments across every part of the borough. This included parks, Highways, housing (private and council owned) and commercial land.
- On **Challenges**, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) , 9th August issued "code red for humanity" Without deep carbon pollution cuts now, the 1.5°C goal will fall quickly out of reach. Climate Vulnerability Mapping produced City Hall and Bloomberg Associates, Bloomberg Philanthropies' pro-bono consultancy for cities, shows that six London boroughs are at particularly high risk from the effects of climate change. Islington is identified as one of those boroughs at high risk. Greening the borough will cool microclimates, absorb carbon and aid in flood risk mitigation as well as offering up many more benefits

- On **Objectives**, the Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) was highlighted, along with the need to identify new opportunities to increase the amount of green infrastructure on all council public realm developments. And the increase tree canopy cover in Islington from 25% to 30%.
- On **Deliverables**, the following achievements were noted:
 - Launched consultation of the new BAP in spring 2020, receiving 175 responses.
 - Published final BAP September 2020.
 - Provided opportunities for local residents to learn about and enjoy nature, through events, volunteering and education, e.g. 6,500 children benefitted from activities provided by The Garden Classroom during the past year.
 - Seek to maximise benefits for biodiversity through the emerging Greening the Borough Programme.
 - Engage with new audiences to ensure equal access to nature for all, e.g. through a new programme of activities aimed at improving mental health.
 - Work with Bright Lives to deliver environmental education activities for under fives plus a training programme to skill up the Bright Start team with accredited forest school training.
 - Planning applications are carefully scrutinised for their biodiversity impacts and developers are challenged to improve their contributions to the natural environment.
 - Proper consideration for tree protection and tree mitigation through the planning process, with a dedicated tree officer commenting on planning applications and strong tree protection policies in the Local plan.
 - The adoption of the new Local Plan will include clearer and more robust biodiversity requirements for developers.
 - New legislation on Biodiversity Net Gain comes into force in 2023 and the Council will provide guidance to developers on how to comply with this.
 - Set up a Greening the Borough Task Group to develop an action plan with the aim of accelerating the delivery of greening the borough.
 - Completed a review of Community Gardening and Food Growing in the borough which will support the development of the Greening the Borough Action Plan.
 - Secured funding and appointed a new dedicated Project Greening the Borough Programme Manager.
 - Secured funding to develop a master plan of greening opportunities on the public highways.
 - Secured an addition £140K per year to invest in greening improvements on the highways.
 - Identify and deliver training programs for current staff to support the delivery of more green infrastructure in Public Realm Projects.
 - Complete the Master Plan of greening opportunities in the public realm.

- Secured £150K of funding for a new Housing Community Gardening Team to improve the planting/biodiversity on estates and supporting/develop community gardening.
- Commissioned reports to understand the baseline tree data and allow for focused tree planting
- Secured a central tree planting budget to enable a minimum of 430+ trees annually to be planted on public land via Capital Programme.
- Continued tree mitigation for tree loss to development.
- 161 trees planted in conjunction with Forest of Change and Islington Clean Air Parents
 - 680+ trees planted in the 21-22 tree planting season
- Implement online tree planting donation process
- Develop a tree warden scheme to encourage resident engagement and promote private tree planting
- Seminars on tree management and tree walks delivered for the climate festival

The Chair thanked Sally Oldfield, Andrew Bedford and Barry Emmerson for the presentation and welcomed members to raise issues and ask questions.

On funding concerns, members were made aware of the transformation funding that the council has obtained that will help towards greener infrastructure. This will be done in a collaboration with the GLA.

On getting greater resident engagement in green council projects, members were made aware of efforts that have gone into programme management around residents getting involved in keeping green spaces open for everyone.

On trees in council run estates, members were reassured about the work that is done to maintain trees within the borough, but as there are over 40,000 trees on public land, it was suggest that a lot more can be done. Action: Officers to detail how many residents do not have access to nature and green spaces within the borough.

It was requested that officers report back on how many residents do not have access to nature and green spaces within the borough.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be noted

503 FUTURE PARKS ACCELERATOR - PARKS FOR HEALTH UPDATE (Item B3)

Barry Emmerson, Park and Open Spaces Manager gave a presentation to the Committee, copy interleaved. The following points were highlighted:

- On the vision, Islington's public parks and green spaces are used, enjoyed and maintained as health assets for the whole community. The intention is for

everyone to feel welcome in our parks. More people than ever before visit and stay for longer - enjoying nature and taking part in activities which make them healthy and happy. Our parks are at the heart of community life.

- On transforming the parks, four points were highlighted:
 1. Establishing the distinctive role parks have in supporting people's health and wellbeing
 2. Transforming the parks experience and maximising inclusion
 3. Embedding health and wellbeing in every aspects of our park service and ultimately all our parks
 4. Ensuring that the lessons of Covid-19 pandemic and the importance of urban green space translate into future investment in parks to the benefit of all.

- On examples of changes already realised, intergenerational events at the Gillespie park local nature reserve and funding being secured from Public Health England for Prevention and Promotion for Better Mental Health, among others were noted.

- Members were made aware of the transformation of the workforce, to ensure the council has the right staff in the right roles to deliver the long term outcomes of the Parks for Health (PFH) strategy, including
 - Greenspace Communications Officer
 - Parks For Health Partnership Manager
 - Gardening Volunteer Development and Training Supervisor
 - Fundraising and Grant Application Support Officer
 - Park based gardeners

The Chair thanked Barry Emmerson for the presentation and welcomed members to raise issues and ask questions.

On criminal activity around hedges in parks, officers responded that while hedges are an important part of biodiversity of the borough, efforts have gone into signposting, so the community is able to raise concerns around criminal activity in community spaces.

On using areas like Highbury Fields as educational spaces, members were informed about the current activity that happens in parks within the borough, highlighting the work of the One O'clock Club.

On littering and the appropriate use of community spaces, officers highlighted the Council's communications campaign that was carried out on community love for parks. There is a long term strategy on how to ensure that well-used natural spaces are developed. This will require engagement with the local community.

On corporate volunteering in green spaces, members were informed about the schemes the council currently offers and how community partners are worked with.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be noted

504 **EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE REPORT
2021/2022 (Item B4)**

Councillor Asima Shaikh, Executive Member Inclusive Jobs and Economy and Caroline Wilson, Director of Inclusive Economy were present and outlined the report.

Councillor Asima Shaikh and Caroline Wilson highlighted the reducing levels of long-term unemployment and worklessness, bringing members' attention to indicators including residents in paid work through Team Islington, Parents with children supported into paid work, and residents supported through apprenticeships. Members were made aware of the Affordable Workspace Programme - Social Value Performance Report 2021/2.

The Chair thanked Councillor Asima Shaikh and Caroline Wilson for the presentation and welcomed members to raise issues and ask questions.

On performance indicators, members were informed of the challenges that schools and adult community learning faced through the Covid-19 Pandemic lockdown. However, the academic year reports differently to the financial and civic year, so there is a slight impact on how these figures are reported.

On the target of 1000 Islington residents into paid employment, officers commented that the different elements of what is considered "good work" will be checked against these jobs.

On apprenticeships for Islington residents within council suppliers, members asked for a report to come back to a future committee meeting on Council apprenticeships. Action: HR Officer to attend to present on apprenticeships, with a report.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted

505 **WORK PROGRAMME 2021/2022 (Item B5)**

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted

The meeting ended at 10.00 pm

CHAIR