

Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee - 10 November 2022

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Town Hall, Upper Street, N1 2UD on 10 November 2022 at 7.30 pm.

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

Councillor Tricia Clarke in the Chair

52 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Item 1)

There were no apologies for absence.

53 DECLARATIONS OF SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS (Item 2)

There were no declarations of substitute members.

54 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

55 MINUTES (Item 4)

Addition to the minutes - item B3, Q1 Performance report (2022/23), that a member raised the issue of whether local collection centres for residents could be devised for items that are recyclable but could not be put into household recycling bins but have been told to drop it at the Hornsey Road Recycling centre.

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 September 2022 be confirmed as an accurate record of proceedings and the Chair be authorised to sign them subject to including the added comments above .

56 CHAIR'S REPORT (Item 5)

The Chair informed the meeting of the 1st Informal working group on sustainable and affordable energy held on 17th October 2022. Members received a presentation from James Wilson, Islington's Energy and Sustainable Consultant Manager on how council is working on the public sector decarbonisation scheme. Mark Hewitt, the CEO of Icax, a company that specialises in renewable energy system will be attending the next informal meeting along with Chetan Lad , the Interim and Deputy Mayor Head of Energy GLA on 21 November.

The Chair thanked Cllr Gilgunn for circulating information about a workshop which is titled ' working together in local government for public accountable social housing retrofitting' to be held at University of Westminster on 18th November

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

The order of business would be as per the agenda.

58 **EXTERNAL ATTENDEES (Item 7)**

The Chair invited Emma Pavans de Ceccatty of Pesticide Action Network (PAN) to give an overview of their work, highlighting the harms caused by the use of pesticides. The following points were raised:

- PAN is the only UK charity whose focus is solely on tackling the problems caused by pesticides and promoting safe and sustainable alternatives in agriculture, urban areas, homes and gardens.
- The charity works with and puts pressure on governments, regulators, policy makers, industry and retailers to reduce the impacts of harmful pesticides to both human health and the environment.
- PAN's work includes campaigning for change in policy and practices at home and overseas, co-ordinating projects which help smallholder farming communities escape ill-health and poverty caused by pesticides, and contributing our wealth of scientific and technical expertise to the work of other organisations who share our aims.
- PAN strives to eliminate hazardous pesticides, reduce dependence on pesticides and promotes ecologically sound, and socially just, alternatives to chemical pest control
- PAN publishes independent information on pesticide use and impacts for governments and decision makers, researchers, media, concerned citizens and other interested groups.
- The charity also undertakes research to promote better understanding of the cause and effects of pesticide problems.
- In addition to the above PAN undertakes projects to demonstrate that growing food and textiles, and managing amenities, is possible without the use of hazardous pesticides.
- The charity promotes effective and progressive policies to eliminate pesticide hazards, representing concerns of users, consumers and exposed communities nationally and internationally.
- Meeting was reminded of the impact of pesticides use on biodiversity, habitat loss and its harm on insects like bees and butterfly which is crucial for the environment.

- Also its impact on the council's personnel health was noted despite the use of PPE and that the spraying of pesticides in open spaces without adequate signage being displayed could be detrimental to the health and well being of residents who use those open spaces for leisure.
- PAN is concerned with pet poisoning as a result of pavement being sprayed in an attempt to remove wild vegetation, it was suggested that this was often unnecessary, especially as not all plant species causes damage to pavements.
- PAN acknowledges Islington's efforts in striving to be pesticide free over the last 10 years but noted that more could be done despite financial constraints.
- Members were reminded that local authorities have a role in protecting the natural environment, and although PAN are not advocating for Council's to allow wild vegetation to thrive, it is important for the council to recognise that damage to pavements is caused by big trees like sycamore. The organisation wanted to increase awareness that not all plant species are harmful as these vegetation/plants can be a habitat for insects such as bees.
- PAN acknowledges Islington's investment in staff training, promoting green industry in the borough and its engagement with residents
- PAN has a 3 year template and tool kit guide which it is prepared to share with Council officers.
- The meeting was advised that plants capture carbon and can help cool down pavements, that Council's should be actually designing its streets in a more biodiverse way, that wild plants capture water thus help reduce flooding.
- It was suggested that councils should think more strategically, as certain areas in the borough will be more suited to certain type of vegetation for example where there is high footfall, the council may not necessarily need to remove vegetation.
- Another suggestion for neighbouring councils to share resources especially mechanical equipment so as to avoid waste and duplication was noted.
- On the suggestion that Hackney Council uses less pesticides, meeting was advised that Hackney is not pesticide free, that its approach is different in that it focusses on hand weeding in general, and in areas of high footfall they use less equipment and wild plants are encouraged on their estates.
- PAN can share examples of case studies and costing with committee if interested.

- The Corporate Director of Environment informed the meeting that although Islington was not pesticide free, pesticide was not used in parks, and was used in a limited and targeted way. The meeting was also advised that there is technology available which targets individual plants, and as the result, there had been a significant reduction in pesticide use over the last three years.
- The Corporate Director also acknowledged a nervousness about genuine alternatives that would work borough-wide, however the Council is prepared to explore this issue further and discuss this with PAN.
- On the question on whether schools are pesticide free, the Corporate Director stated that he would need to check on this and report back.
- The Executive Member for Environment, Air Quality and Transport informed the meeting that hand-weeding was the most ecologically friendly method of clearing weeds, however there was a significant cost element to this. The Committee noted that the Council was committed to increasing biodiversity and improving the natural environment and had made a number of improvements over recent years.

RESOLVED:

The Chair thanked Emma Pavans de Ceccatty for her attendance to brief the Committee and in particular welcome the Corporate Directors' willingness to work with the Charity going forward.

59 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item 8)**

None

60 **SCRUTINY REVIEW OF NET ZERO CARBON 2030 STRATEGY FOCUSING ON THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY AND GREEN JOBS - WITNESS EVIDENCE: NATURAL ENVIRONMENT (Item 9)**

Committee received a presentation on the Natural Environment from the Head of Greenspace and Leisure Services and in particular how it fits into the Circular Economy and Green Jobs. The following points were highlighted:

- The Council aims to develop and deliver a programme to support Greening initiatives across the borough, and this programme would include delivering in in line with the 2020 Environment Bill, Vision 2030 Strategy and Biodiversity Action Plan.
- This will result in tackling Biodiversity Loss, reducing the impact of climate change and reducing Environmental Risks to Public Health. The Council in its first year has delivered the Islington Greener Together Programme with some first schemes evident on the ground and Council is now aiming to deliver its tree planting programme.

- Greener Together programme will include delivering approved greener together projects with housing and highways and development of a pocket park framework.
- With regards to tree canopy cover, the Council will increase Tree Planting and there are plans to combat drought impact through adaptations.
- On Parks & Biodiversity and Engagement with Nature, the Council aims to increase food growing in communities and promote the benefits of green spaces for healthier Communities and introduce education programmes.
- The officer highlighted a number of Green Space targets which include a 26% canopy cover by 2025, and 27% by 2030 which is quite high comparable to neighbouring authorities considering the borough size and dense nature of the borough.
- The Council aims to replace every tree lost by delivering an overall net gain of at least 600 trees every year by 2026 and provide 1000sqm of new green space by 2026. Members were also informed of the increase in volunteer hours and the development of 1.5ha of pocket parking to support new green spaces.
- With regards achievements, meeting was informed of the 38 approved Greener Together projects, funding from NEIR for the development of pocket framework and the Future Parks Accelerator funding to accelerate urban greening and TFL funding for Greening Cally.
- Achievements of the Tree Service include the planting of 701 trees in 2021/22, grant funding for a Tree Officer post has been received to engage with residents on identifying locations for trees and therefore increasing the capacity of the team. The Tree donation process will be launched next month with Trees for Streets.
- Notable achievements with regards biodiversity and engagement with nature, the service has exceeded its target of 250m squared additional habitat space for wildlife in parks and 13,000 volunteer hours in parks and lots of young people engaged in wildlife.
- Officer also highlighted a number of the council's biodiversity work and engagement with nature such as Myawaki Forest, the Islington Bloom projects, the Islam nature walk, school children on Big Cities Butterflies workshop and pond dipping etc.
- Within greener together, risks include lack of capacity for consistent engagement with communities and inability to build trust and lack of potential maintenance budget sources for new green infrastructure.
- Risks identified within the Park Services include the potential lack of support from local community to leave areas of green space wild so as to improve biodiversity as a large number of people still prefer manicured spaces. Also there is a lack of maintenance capacity for new green infrastructure which needs to be addressed.
- Risks within the Tree Service include seeking funds to buy, plant and maintain the number of trees required for the canopy cover and tree number targets and also finding enough space to plant the additional trees on public land.

- The service is embedding circular economy principles by working with community partners and friends of group to create more food growing opportunities in our parks, estates and in peoples own gardens.
- Although all green waste collected in the borough is recycled and used to create compost, the service is looking to develop more local compost facilities. The service has moved away from traditional bedding displays to a model of reusable plans. in addition, The service has been able to decarbonise its fleet of vehicles for example by moving away from diesel machinery to electric controlled units. The service also promotes urban cultivate project creating new clusters of space for urban agriculture using left over open space.
- In terms of green jobs and upskilled green workforce, meeting was advised of its apprenticeship scheme by creating a pipeline for potential new staff, that the service has currently 8 apprenticeships.
- The service is also developing new green skill jobs such as solar panel installers, heat pump specialists and renewable energy engineers by working in partnership with the Parks for London Green Skill Hub to develop employment pathways and training programmes to meet the current and future needs of the industry.
- Upskilling of residents and workforce is vital as there is a recognition of a real skills and resource shortage within the service and locally especially with the ageing workforce, there is a need to have in place clear pathways into the industry for young people.
- The service is considering new procurements to ensure upskilling of residents and workforce, providing volunteer opportunities for local people where they will begin to learn new skills.
- The reduction in pesticide use across the borough was reiterated, that glyphosate is no longer used in Islington parks and open spaces and only used in limited places to treat invasive species such as Japanese Knotweed.
- In response to concerns that some of the schemes introduced have resulted in criticism that residents views were not being taken into consideration, the officer acknowledged the concerns with a particular scheme, that going forward lessons have been learnt and that most of the schemes being planned are community led, that the design team has been increased in terms of looking at the size and location of planters and pocket park and that issues of accessibility are being taken onboard so as not to impact blue badge holders.
- The Executive Member for Environment, Air Quality and Transport reiterated the Council's position, in terms of changing the outlook of Islington Streets, that where possible it will continue to discourage car use.
- On the issue of composting, the meeting was informed that presently this is being taken out of the borough and would be interested in it being done locally but more work needs to be done in terms of the estates in comparison to composting in people's gardens.
- A request for more information and briefings about the projects be carried within Councillors wards be made available was noted.
- Meeting was advised that although tree surgery/maintenance is carried out by external contractors, Council officers monitors works carried out.

- In response to a question, officer advised that the engagement with young people is not an accreditation scheme however the service can consider it going forward.
- A member reiterated the need for Council to promote some of its projects, in particular Gillespie Park which is visited by school children for education purposes, that it is a natural park, good asset for residents of the borough especially in light of improving residents and visitors wellbeing.
- The seeting was advised that the service does not prune trees on a 3 year cycle however trees are inspected and works carried out as and when required.
- It was suggested that there was an inadequate number of green champions for the 38 projects in place. In response, it was stated that the ambition was to have more champions with future schemes.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be noted.

61 **Q2 PERFORMANCE REPORT (2022/23) - INCLUSIVE ECONOMY AND JOBS (Item 10)**

Cllr Santiago Bell-Bradford, Executive Member for Inclusive Economy and Jobs, with Stephen Biggs, Corporate Director of Community Wealth Building was present for discussion of the Quarter 2 Performance report with copy interleaved. The following issues were highlighted –

- The Executive Member wanted to acknowledge officers' efforts of putting more people back to work especially during this period of cost of living crisis.
- On the number of Islington resident parents of children aged 0-18 supported into paid work through Team Islington activity, the meeting was informed that Council services and partners supported 234 parents of children aged 0-18 into employment which exceeded the profiled target of 232 by 1%. It is anticipated that by the year-end the annual target of 580 will be achieved.
- It is important to note that although Council partners are working with a high number of parents, there is an issue with collecting data on parental status as not all of the partners routinely capture the age of client's children, so this presents a challenge for reporting as 90% of employment outcomes are received from partners. Some partners have raised concerns that collecting data on parental status could be seen as discriminatory so the Council is taking action to address this by working with partners to identify how to address this gap in information to ensure that this is available for future reporting.

- Council services and partners have supported 234 residents with a disability/long term health condition into employment exceeding the profiled target of 200 by 17%, however the Council in collaboration with London Metropolitan University has commenced a research project to gain greater insight into this issue. Meeting was advised that the research project will segment the general 'disability and long-term health condition' category and allow the services to see in greater detail the employment circumstances of sub-groups within this category and, in turn, allow services to provide more targeted support.
- The Executive Member highlighted a case study of a client of 3 years who suffers with severe depression, anxiety and has regular panic attacks, and explained how support services were helping him into employment, although recognising the challenges associated with securing long-term employment.
- The meeting was informed that Council services and partners supported 745 residents from Black Asian and Minority Ethnic residents into employment exceeding the profiled target of 480 by 55% and the Council in collaboration with London Metropolitan University has completed a research project on employment among Islington's Black, Asian and Ethnic minority communities. The research has made recommendations for the targeting of support at communities and these recommendations are being addressed. Through the Islington Working Partnership the Council is encouraging other employment support services in the borough to use the research findings to support better targeting of their own support.
- The service has requested other employment support services to provide greater detail on the ethnic breakdown of the residents they are supporting into work which will be reported in Quarter 3 2022-23.
- An outreach worker has been employed specifically to strengthen the relationships with voluntary and community organisations that support Black, Asian and Minority ethnic communities and connect residents from these communities to the range of employment and training provision that's available in the borough.
- The service has identified the issues of sustainment in work as a key measure in assessing the effectiveness of employment support services and have developed this indicator to track clients at 13 and 26 weeks which will be reported annually. This will also be rolled out and embedded across the Islington Working partnership.
- An area of concern highlighted is with the childcare bursary uptake. The Executive Member indicated that scheme was launched in June. In quarter 2, 43 applications were processed, 35 were for parents with employment outcomes and 8 to undertake training opportunities.

- The meeting was advised that with the additional budget allocated, so the Service will be increasing its promotion amongst relevant partners including the additional workspace operators as well as public communications. The service will be monitoring whether the scheme will need to be amended so as to increase reach and benefits to parents/carers. Two outreach posts have been created specifically for parents who will be able to make those links to BAME communities.
- In response to a question why only 11 Islington schools had taken up the living wage, the Executive Member advised that this is very difficult to monitor especially with the living cost crisis acknowledging there is more work to be done in this area and in particular whether more schools are actually paying living wage so will look into it and report back to committee.
- A member highlighted a letter he had sent to the Executive Member on the need to regulate the problems with delivery riders and residents, the Executive Member advised that the Council's strategic approach will look at responding to resident's concern but also ensuring that it does not marginalise the exploited employees.
- On whether the research commissioned about people with long term health conditions will take into consideration older people with caring responsibilities, the Executive Member stated that although the focus at the moment is with those with long term health conditions he would raise it with officers on whether with regards to partners a line could be inserted to include carers with health conditions. Executive Member reminded the meeting that council's iWork service have a broader definition which is not necessarily the same with DWP.
- With regards to employment support advice, the meeting was informed that the council is looking to work with its partners on this issue and officers do signpost people to organisation such as CAB and the Islington Law Centre.
- On the reasons why people drop out of employment meeting was advised that data from partners is vital and will help to analyse what the issues are.
- With regards the living wage for jobs, meeting was advised that data collection is important, that of the 1400 jobs in the council, 238 achieved jobs paying the living wage. Members were reminded of the difficulty of obtaining data from partners which is about 90% of outcomes.
- The Executive Member informed Members that following his meeting with the Council's HR officers in September, he was informed that not all the sections of the Council use the services of iWork, that it is important that the Council's gets it's house in order before it extends any suggestion to partners. A further update will be provided to committee following further discussions with HR.

- The Chair thanked Executive Member and the Programme Director for updating the Committee on the Quarter 2 Performance Report

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted

62 Q1 PERFORMANCE REPORT (2022/23) - LIBRARIES AND HERITAGE (Item 11)

Cllr Roulin Khondoker, Executive Member for Equalities, Culture and Inclusion, updated the Committee on Libraries and Heritage Quarter 1 2022-23 Performance Report. Performance data for Quarter 2 was also appended. The following main points were highlighted:

- The meeting was informed that the figure of library visits fell short of the quarterly target of 200,000 in quarter 1, however performance is building back to pre-pandemic levels.
- Libraries have been increasing activities and the offer to the public over the course of the Quarter and take up is increasing. Some resources have transitioned online over the course of the pandemic, a core of users have continued accessing them online which impacts on visit numbers.
- During Quarter 1 West Library was closed for the whole of April for building works (including the installation of a lift) to a first floor office which has been now been converted into a Youth Employment Hub which has impacted visit figures.
- Also the exceptional summer weather may also have had an impact on visitor figures and alongside this there was an additional Bank Holiday closure for the Queens Jubilee which reduced Library opening hours.
- The Council continues to promote library services and run a range of activities, that summer holiday activities programme has witnessed a notable increase in years so hopefully visits will improve for quarter 2.
- In terms of number of residents engaging with Community activities, meeting was advised that this is above target for Quarter 1.
- That all Council Libraries in the borough offer a wide range of activities each week for adults and children, that in persons events restarted in November 2021 which has been gradually increasing. The weekly Baby Bounce and under-fives sessions are particularly well attended as well as a range of wellbeing and learning activities. The service continue to promote them and anticipate that they will continue to be well attended.
- Executive Member informed the meeting that she is looking to review the KPI's going forward, which will enable the committee to scrutinise the performance of the libraries.
- In response to a question about the use of the Library in particular as a warm space, the Executive Member advised that this will be monitored.

- On whether the service is being able to capture remote access to the Library for example downloading audio books, the meeting was advised that this issue will be taken on board going forward so it will be taken away.
- Promoting library activities with traditional method of leafletting posters on community centres, schools and health centres tend to target a certain demographic audience, so other mediums such as social media needs to be considered.
- Meeting was informed that there is a contrast when it comes to regular activities in comparison to activities held during half term and summer time, that they are well attended.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted

63 **WORKPLAN 2022/23 (Item 12)**

The Chair informed the meeting of changes to the work programme, that officers will present the Libraries and Heritage quarterly performance report for the months of both February and March will be considered together at the meeting in March.

RESOLVED:

That the work programme be noted subject to the change noted above.

The meeting ended at 9.40 pm

CHAIR