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London Borough of Islington

Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee - 17 October 2023

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held at Islington Town Hall, Upper St, N1 2UD on 17 October 2023 at 7.30 pm.

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

Councillor Tricia Clarke in the Chair

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

Apologies were received from Councillor Russell

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

Councillor Jegorovas-Armstrong was a substitute member.

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

No declarations of interest were made.

34 **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.

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

The Chair updated the committee on the first Task and Finish Group of the year. The topic of this group was apprenticeships focusing on the green economy and women in engineering, speakers included Professor Linda Clarke and council officer Pascal Coyne. The Chair told the committee the Clerk had circulated minute notes from this group. The next Task and Finish group would be in November focusing on affordable workspaces.

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

The order of business was as per the Agenda.

37 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item 7)**

Public questions would be taken after each item.

38 **SCRUTINY INITIATION DOCUMENT - ACTIVE TRAVEL (Item 8)**

The chair introduced the Scrutiny Initiation Document.

RESOLVED:

That the committee agree to the Scrutiny Initiation Document focussing on Active Travel

39

INTRODUCTION TO ACTIVE TRAVEL FROM DIRECTOR OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND TRANSPORT (Item 9)

Martijn Cooijmans, The Director of Climate Change and Transport, gave a presentation introducing the committee to Active Travel and the plans involving this in the coming year. They noted Islington was a top inner-London borough for Active Travel for the third year in a row.

The Council's Active Travel Program was an integral part of the council's overarching strategy, which included the Vision 2030 strategy and the Transport Strategy. These strategies were developed in tandem, underwent consultation, and were adopted in 2020. Active travel and public health promotion were central elements of these strategies. The program revolved around eight objectives, with a strong focus on making walking and cycling the top choices for local journeys, ensuring safety, reducing road danger, and minimising the environmental and air quality impact of travel.

To gauge progress and performance, the council conducted monitoring reports every two years, aligning with the Transport Strategy's objectives. Key aspects related to active travel included increasing the percentage of journeys taken by walking, cycling, or public transport, with a target of 90% by 2041.

The presentation also highlighted various teams within the council, which collaborated to promote active travel. Other areas of focus included promoting bus priority measures and offering cycle training. Additionally, the council sought to provide secure cycle parking, promote the use of cargo bikes, and encourage the adoption of active travel through bike hire and incentive programs.

The council actively engaged with the community to create "People-Friendly Streets," including Low Traffic Neighbourhoods (LTNs) and Liveable Neighbourhoods. These initiatives demonstrated positive results, with reduced road danger and increased cycling levels in the areas where they were implemented.

Efforts were made to motivate and incentivise residents to embrace active travel, including initiatives like school travel plans, festivals, and partnerships with various groups, such as Joyriders, Positive Spin, and Silver Cyclists. The ultimate goal was to encourage physical activity through active travel while creating a safe and accessible environment for all Islington residents. The council remained committed to making active travel a practical and preferred choice for all members of the community.

In response to questions from the committee, The Director of Climate Change and Transport explained, while emergency response time does vary it is overall generally good and there were detailed monitored reports for each low traffic neighbourhood. Additionally, it was clarified that potential alterations to 20mph roads are not anticipated to affect highly urbanised areas like Islington.

Regarding inquiries concerning bike hangars and cycling initiatives, the Director explained that the selection of their locations was contingent upon the demand and wait lists. Where there exists a clustering of demand, these facilities would be strategically placed in easily accessible locations. Furthermore, they conveyed that the team is actively exploring methods to reduce the associated costs, with the possibility of costs decreasing as more individuals make use of these amenities.

Behavioural change was identified as a pivotal factor in encouraging people to adopt active travel. This transformation can be facilitated through more effective communication with residents and resident associations and for example, by encouraging residents of housing estates to reduce their reliance on cars. Furthermore, the council was committed to

empowering minority groups to engage in active travel, and this will involve engaging with various organisations, including Joyriders, Cyclesisters, and Transport for All. The Director also expressed willingness to receive suggestions on how to empower diverse groups to embark on more sustainable travel options.

RESOLVED:

That the report was noted by the committee

40 **ISLINGTON PENSIONERS FORUM - ACTIVE TRAVEL EVIDENCE SESSION (Item 10)**

Dot Gibson from the Islington Pensioners Forum gave a presentation to the committee on active travel for pensioners in the borough.

Dot Gibson explained that while ample preparation and support are typically available for young individuals, the same cannot be said for those who are ageing. There is a noticeable lack of guidance and information provided about the ageing process, unlike the comprehensive guidance offered to school-age children as they grow up. This gap in preparation for ageing is a critical issue that needs addressing to help older people feel confident walking and cycling.

One crucial aspect of addressing these challenges is increasing social awareness. For example, there are concerns about the behaviour of cyclists who may sometimes move too swiftly without being fully aware of pedestrians, potentially leading to accidents. Uneven pavements can cause difficulties faced by older individuals. Therefore, providing social mobility equipment becomes significantly important in enhancing the quality of life for older people.

There was a notable obstacle is the reluctance of older individuals to seek help, as they may fear appearing old and frail. Encouragement and awareness about the available support systems are essential to change this perception and promote the idea that seeking assistance is a positive step.

Moreover, older people often suffer from age-related hearing impairment, which makes it challenging to hear traffic and signals. To address this, it would be beneficial to raise awareness in schools and among young people so that they are more informed about the specific needs of the elderly and can contribute to a safer environment for them.

In terms of urban planning and infrastructure, shared paths should consider the inclusion of appropriate signage to alert users to the presence of older individuals and pedestrians. Implementing services like a "taxi card" can also enhance mobility for older residents. Additionally, installing more benches in the borough so people can sit down and have a break on longer routes they take.

Creating people-friendly streets is another essential aspect of ensuring pedestrian safety, especially for older individuals. This can involve adjusting crossing lights to remain on for longer durations to accommodate the slower pace of older pedestrians.

In summary, recognising the unique challenges faced by older people and implementing solutions that promote their safety and mobility is crucial, and it requires a comprehensive and socially aware approach.

41 **SCRUTINY REPORT: NET ZERO CARBON REVIEW 2022-23 (Item 11)**

The Committee Clerk presented this report outlining the evidence given to the committee over the previous municipal year for the Scrutiny Review of the Circular

Economy and Green Jobs, including any evidence given to Councillors within scrutiny committee meetings, working groups and other public meetings. This had resulted in 8 main recommendations to the executive outlined on page 11 of the main Agenda pack.

RESOLVED:

That the committee noted the report.

42

EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR INCLUSIVE ECONOMY AND JOBS - ANNUAL REPORT (Item 12)

The Executive Member for Inclusive Economy and Jobs presented their annual report to the committee.

The Anchor Institutions Network, which was relaunched this year, was driven by a strategic long-term goal and had the potential for significant impact. For instance, initiatives like Arsenal hired local tradesmen and they have established a local trades directory for these anchor institutions. Steps were taken to reduce their reliance on zero-hour contracts and use progressive procurement policies, such as having a 20% social value in their procurement and strategies.

The Local Economies Officers had done remarkable work, as exemplified by the Archway's successful bid to transform into a Creative Enterprise Zone. This bid not only secured substantial direct investment but also explored innovative ways to utilise these spaces.

In the context of growth sectors, there was a strong focus on creating pathways for working-class individuals to access various industries. This included initiatives like a £250k grant to fund the Health and Social Care Academy, £400k for a net-zero carbon business accelerator that could help improve the Green Economy. Islington was also a lead borough in life sciences.

The LIFT program was designed to empower working-class individuals to pursue long-lasting careers in business-related roles. There was a need to encourage organisations to consider candidates they might not traditionally select, such as those without formal degrees.

Addressing inequalities was a key concern, as exemplified by London Met University's extensive research on BAME communities. For instance, research had identified that East African communities were the hardest to reach, highlighting the need for increased support and a more comprehensive data collection approach.

In response to questions from the committee, the Executive Member explained that there were many billion-pound companies in Islington and on the border in the City. It was important to convince these organisations to increase their social value and think more locally, not just globally. They needed to start providing more opportunities to working-class people. Councillors pointed out that some unions had yet to fully engage with these emerging areas of the economy and saw an opportunity to bring various stakeholders together to explore new models.

Councillors raised questions about the availability of local economy officers and how other wards could benefit from having them. The Executive Member explained that local economy officers were placed based on historical reasons and the need to support areas with a significant business community. The idea of expanding this support to other wards was discussed.

Regarding cultural apprenticeships, the focus was on creating opportunities for young people in the creative and cultural industries through initiatives like the creative enterprise program. There was also a commitment to exposing young people to local cultural opportunities. In addition, the Executive Member mentioned the possibility of getting larger organisations involved in local governance.

The status of childcare bursaries was addressed, with the government's new policy to support parents returning to work being a significant change. The Executive Member indicated that there might be a need to reconsider the allocation of bursary funds to address specific needs and ensure the right parents were being reached. There would also be a future task and finish group on affordable workspaces to address councillors' queries on this in more detail.

RESOLVED:

That the report was noted by the committee

43

QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE REPORT (2023/24) - LIBRARIES AND HERITAGE (Item 13)

The Executive Member for Equalities, Culture and Inclusion presented the Q1 performance report for Libraries and Culture.

The report covered what was managed to happen by adding a few more indicators to bring more detail about how the libraries are performing. There was a trend upwards in terms of visits to libraries, getting back to where they were before COVID. There was also the indicator now for online issues, which was also doing well. There were interesting patterns where the usage dipped during the summer when everyone is enjoying the outdoors and then went back up during the winter when everyone is trying to stay indoors and find things to do.

One area for attention was the indicator for the number of issues made versus the number of library visits. It showed that there were fewer issues compared to the number of people visiting the libraries throughout the year. It indicates that libraries are not just for checking out books or DVDs but also for various activities, sitting down, reading, using computers. They served as important community spaces and warmer places outside of people's homes, where they can come and use free Wi-Fi and computers.

The report provided an overview of the types of events and activities that have taken place in the libraries this quarter, catering to a range of ages and celebratory moments. Libraries are being used by various council directorates for their work, such as consultations for the Sobel Centre, external partners and organisations also use library spaces for their activities, like Age UK.

There's room for improvement. By breaking down how the library spaces are being used, it can be identified where they are underutilised and why. It helps to figure out how to improve or use the space differently.

The committee discussed the positive impact of scraping library fines in encouraging more people to utilise libraries and borrow books, DVDs and other things available. Another significant topic was the Summer Reading Challenge, a program designed to encourage children and parents to read. The challenge involved children reading a series of books and receiving certificates and medals upon completion.

Councillors inquired about the progress of allowing card payments within libraries. It was noted that offering both cash and card payment options is essential to accommodate the diverse preferences of library users.

The "Winter Warmers" program was also discussed, which collaborates with partners like Age UK and other organisations to support vulnerable groups during the winter months. The intention is to extend this initiative across all libraries, with a focus on promoting multigenerational support and community engagement.

Social prescribing, a concept involving working with local doctors' surgeries to engage in social prescribing and recommend library activities to combat issues like loneliness. This approach could help connect libraries with groups not regularly engaged, particularly among older individuals. The councillors discussed potential gaps in outreach and efforts to address them. The role of libraries was recognised as extending beyond offering books. Libraries provide services such as adult learning, archives, and support for residents in need.

RESOLVED:

That the report was noted by the committee

44 QUARTER 1 PERFORMANCE REPORT (2023/24) - ENVIRONMENT & TRANSPORT (Item 14)

The Executive Member for Environment, Air Quality and Transport presented the Q1 performance report for Environment and Transport.

The Executive Member asked for questions relating to the report.

Councillors expressed that while recycling is important, a key focus should be on decreasing the overall production of waste. Economic factors and poverty were recognised as elements influencing waste generation and recycling and the possible increase in waste.

A specific concern was the recycling rate, which was noted as 27.7%. This rate, however, had been impacted by certain factors, including green waste, which contributed to a 1.5% reduction. The councillors highlighted the ongoing efforts to improve waste reduction, such as the introduction of a new technical system. Additionally, they acknowledged the importance of measuring progress and ensuring alignment with goals and grants from various sources.

The committee expressed concern about the cleanliness survey and fly-tipping issues. They questioned whether more attention could be given to specific streets, especially those used by schoolchildren. The committee inquired about the increase in construction and demolition waste leading to fly-tipping incidents. The Executive Member indicated a need to identify the sources of such waste and apply appropriate measures, including potential fines.

RESOLVED:

That the report was noted by the committee

45 WORKPLAN 2023/4 AND TERMS OF REFERENCE (Item 15)

RESOLVED:

That the committee noted the Workplan 23/24 and the Terms of Reference.

The meeting ended at 9.40 pm

CHAIR

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