

Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee - 23 November 2023

Minutes of the meeting of the Environment and Regeneration Scrutiny Committee held at Islington Town Hall, Upper St, N1 2UD on 23 November 2023 at 7.30 pm.

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

Councillor Tricia Clarke in the Chair

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

No Apologies were received

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

No Substitutes were declared.

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

No declarations of interest were made.

49 **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.

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

The second meeting of the task and finish group on the inclusive economy took place this week. During the meeting, there was a presentation by Joyce, the Head of Affordable Workspace Programs, and Maddy from SPACE4 an Affordable Workspace in Finsbury Park. They invited committee members to visit SPACE4 any Wednesday at 12:00 for a community lunch and a tour.

Additionally, the Labour Environment Forum is organising a public meeting on trade unions, employment, and the environment at the Town Hall on January 24. The Executive Member for Environment, transport and Air Quality, Councillor Champion, was in discussions with Power Up North London regarding a solar panel community project in the borough.

Moreover, there was a festive wreath-making event at a community plant nursery in Islington on Saturday, December 9, from 12:00 to 3:00.

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

The order of business was as per the Agenda.

52 **PUBLIC QUESTIONS (Item 7)**

Public Questions would be taken after each item.

53 **ACTIVE TRAVEL EVIDENCE SESSION - PUBLIC HEALTH, OURBIKE AND LIVING STREETS (Item 8)**

Public Health

Sam Rigby from Public Health presented the key health considerations related to public health and active travel. They discussed how physical activity could reduce the risk of various health conditions. They noted that even small increases in activity could yield significant health benefits, and active travel served as an incremental way for inactive individuals to become more active. Highlighting concerns about unequal access to physical activity, they addressed barriers faced by certain groups, such as those from minority ethnic backgrounds, women, young girls, individuals with long-term conditions, the elderly, and those with lower incomes. Active travel was presented as a solution to address these barriers, providing opportunities not only for health benefits but also for increased social connections.

There were many barriers' people faced regarding physical activity, such as lack of time, access, affordability, safety concerns, and environmental accessibility. Active travel was seen as a solution to these barriers, with examples given of how changes in the built environment, like the People-Friendly Streets initiative, could lead to increased physical activity.

There was a recognised need for adaptations to be accessible to those with sensory and mobility impairments. There was an emphasis on the importance of public health interventions in supporting motivation for active travel, raising awareness of its benefits, and providing targeted support to those at higher risk.

Moreover, the broader benefits of active travel were highlighted, including reducing air pollution, carbon emissions, and noise pollution, the potential positive impact on health outcomes and the environment.

A primary focus was on active travel initiatives, particularly the positive impact of removing bollards on physical activity. Pavement improvement and collaboration with other departments emerged as a critical consideration. The unevenness of surfaces was identified as a significant barrier, stressing the importance of collaborative efforts to address this issue and enhance overall infrastructure. The collaborative efforts with communities, as evidenced by studies from other Local Authorities, demonstrated a significant increase in walking (14/15%) when implemented.

The observation of a temporary dip in activity after initial physical changes suggested a need for behavioural adjustments. This dip was attributed to the community's familiarisation with new spaces and the time required to build confidence in engaging with these changes. The broader issues of social isolation and income inequality were acknowledged as interconnected with physical inactivity. Recognising the correlation between social isolation and inactive lifestyles, proposed strategies aimed to address these issues and promote inclusivity. The strategy of motivational conversations, particularly through the "Every Movement Counts" campaign, was emphasised. Community engagement efforts, including

physical activity opportunities on the Islington website and a "Get Active" service pilot through GP practices, were highlighted to encourage tailored solutions for increased activity.

There were concerns about the seemingly low percentage (7%) of deaths related to pollution. Clarification highlighted that each Local Authority estimates mortality figures, considering various diseases linked to air pollution, notably heart diseases and cancer. The need for a more nuanced understanding of the specific diseases and their prevalence was acknowledged.

OurBike

Alper Muduroglu from Our Bike gave a presentation to the committee. They discussed the "Try Before You Buy" scheme, a subscription model allowing users to hire a bike and potentially own it if they like it. The "Our Bike" initiative was likened to car-sharing services like Zipcar, where users can reserve and use cargo bikes subsidized by the Council for £3 per hour.

The purpose of "Our Bike" was to improve air quality, combat climate change, and promote sustainability. Each bike is associated with a local business (host) within the borough, responsible for managing the batteries. The bikes are named after the host who can advertise on them for free. There would also be training provided to get people comfortable using these bikes.

Affordability was a key focus, with "Our Bike" providing an affordable option for cargo bike usage compared to other services. Monthly reporting to the Council includes details on kilometres travelled, number of trips, hours, and member information. Feedback from users and hosts, showcasing positive experiences and diverse applications, is collected and shared with the Council.

Overall, the initiative aims to make cargo bikes accessible, promote sustainable transportation, and integrate the service into the community to make more people travel sustainably and actively.

There was a suggestion to locate a cargobike on Holloway Road near the Northern Health Centre. A question was raised about why none of the hosts are schools or youth centres, especially given concerns about young people's activity. They clarified that hosts are identified by the local economies department at Islington. They are actively seeking a grant to fund two bikes in local deprivation areas and exploring models to support hosts, including potential sponsorship.

The discussion touched on the challenge of hitting certain groups, such as faith groups, in areas of high deprivation. The speaker acknowledged the need for different criteria to engage with these groups effectively. There were ongoing efforts involve exploring diverse funding models, seeking grants for bikes in deprived areas, and considering a mixed model that combines sponsorship, fees, and potential ongoing funding to sustain and expand the initiative.

Living Streets

David Harrison and Kathe Jacob from Living Streets presented to the committee. They commended the council and officers for their outstanding work, particularly praising the success of the People Friendly Streets initiative. They acknowledged the evidence gathered through research and emphasised the need for physical infrastructure to promote walking. A study of outer London boroughs demonstrated a significant increase in walking time, emphasising the achievement and importance of such initiatives.

They highlighted the equity aspect of promoting walking, especially in a borough like Islington where walking is the main mode of transport. They applauded the creation of spaces for all, including those who don't or can't drive. The success of transforming Dover Court into a great walking route was cited as a world-class example with potential for further implementation in other areas.

Liveable neighbourhoods were praised for their success, particularly mentioning improvements to King Henry's Walk. The potential for green corridors and a new green link as a TfN Leisure Walk were discussed. The importance of addressing the economy and local businesses, specifically in Cross Street, to enhance the walking environment was emphasised.

Digital mapping of footways was presented as a successful initiative, with millions of views for the central London map. They urged the council to use and build upon the work already done, including I-Spy walks and maps to engage children in walking.

They discussed the significance of vision and leadership, citing Councillor Champion's commitment and vocal support for active travel. The involvement of multiple council teams and the integration of sustainable transport into the local plan were highlighted as crucial factors. The need for behaviour change was stressed.

Lambeth's curbside strategy was praised, highlighting an interesting proposal to place trees in the carriageway instead of on pavements. This approach involves build-outs into the carriageway to preserve pavements and reduce the risk of tree damage to properties. The suggestion was offered as a consideration for Islington's People Friendly Streets initiative.

They further commented on Islington's commitment to reclaiming space for walking and wheeling, reducing isolation, and promoting public health. The importance of well-maintained pedestrian areas, addressing street clutter, and the positive impact on mental health were underlined.

Councillors expressed interest in the concept of building out and placing trees in the carriageway to improve safety and prevent slippery pavements. They inquired whether there was evidence or if it was still in the planning stage. The response highlighted the practical benefits and the need for careful consideration in planting trees to avoid future issues with footways.

A Councillor suggested incorporating art walks into the active travel initiatives, especially in areas without extensive green space these could emphasise the interesting architectural features along the route.

The discussion touched on the importance of maintaining pavements, addressing issues such as slippery surfaces and potential hazards. A suggestion was made to invite someone to a future meeting to discuss paving issues, with an emphasis on addressing concerns raised by community members.

Councillors raised additional points, including the consideration of safety measures in pavement beautification plans and the need to prioritise the maintenance of pavements to ensure a safer environment for pedestrians. The issue of implementing more benches and the potential anti-social behaviour and loitering an increase in these could cause was also discussed.

The committee thanked all the speakers for their presentations.

54 UPDATE REPORT ON BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE SCRUTINY (2021-22) (Item 9)

Sarah Hitchcock, Head of the Net Zero Carbon Programme, updated the committee on the Behaviour Change Scrutiny Report (2021-22). They outlined the challenges faced, such as scoping issues, changes within the program, and unexpected events like the energy price crisis. Despite these challenges, efforts were made to review the program, raise awareness, and promote the foundations of behaviour change. The Council secured funding to commission a specialist organisation to identify priority interventions and subsequently commission projects.

The presentation highlighted ongoing activities, including a staff behaviour change campaign during the energy price crisis and workshops addressing barriers to zero-carbon initiatives. The Council also conducted staff training on behaviour change theory. There had been outreach work, such as the Together Green website, themed weeks under the Go Zero campaign, and various activities promoting sustainability.

Future steps involve appointing the specialist organisation, developing the Citizens' Panel, conducting a staff survey, rolling out climate awareness training, and launching a new, longer-term behaviour change campaign. The Council aims to align its program with the Corporate Plan, streamline action planning, build internal capacity, and seek funding for long-term sustainability.

In summary, the Council has made progress in realigning its program, securing funding, conducting staff training, and planning for future behaviour change initiatives. They emphasised the importance of continuous implementation and seeking funding to support climate action initiatives like People Friendly Streets.

In response to queries, Sarah explained, the Citizens' Panel was in development, with the aim of creating a corporate panel that engages with a diverse range of residents. Initially focusing on climate action, the panel will conduct a deep dive into climate resilience. Recruitment would ensure demographic representation, especially of underrepresented groups. The panel, consisting of 30 to 40 people, will undergo onboarding and climate awareness training. Sessions will likely launch in spring, supported by the Let's Talk Islington platform, and aim to engage a wider audience through various channels. Regarding scope, details are being worked out

with a specialist to establish clear objectives and areas of influence for the panel. This will help communicate the purpose to both panel members and the wider community.

The Citizens' Panel is envisioned as an ongoing resource for all services, conducting research into specific topics annually or biennially. It aims to involve the community in decision-making processes beyond a single-service focus. The panel's flexibility allows it to address various issues in subsequent years.

The challenges discussed include difficulties in collaboration with other boroughs due to differences in climate action progress, targets, and priorities. Despite challenges, there is an appetite for collaboration, demonstrated by attempts to submit a joint bid for a behaviour change program.

Additionally, it was recognised the need to engage underrepresented groups creatively, such as partnering with local GP surgeries. Development is ongoing, emphasising transparency, clarity of purpose, and broad engagement.

RESOLVED:

That the committee noted the report

55 QUARTER 1/2 PERFORMANCE REPORT (2023/24) - NET ZERO CARBON (Item 10)

Sarah Hitchcock, Head of the Net Zero Carbon Programme, updated the committee on the Quarter 1 and 2 performance of Net Zero Carbon.

They highlighted several points: The latest carbon data, though two years in arrears, shows a drop in emissions due to the impact of COVID-19. Islington's own emissions data reveals some static figures in transport emissions due to new services and fleet additions. The successful completion of Solar PV installations over the summer, supporting Islington's commitment to renewable energy. Transport schemes have been adopted and made permanent, contributing to the reduction of vehicle use. Progress is ongoing in areas like fossil fuel plant-based machinery, grid improvements, and fleet electrification.

In the Green Economy work stream, a review of objectives was underway, focusing on business engagement, apprenticeships, and green jobs. Initiatives such as the Energising Small Business scheme continue to have a positive impact. In the Natural Environment sector, there have been delays in the delivery of greener together projects, affecting round two. Efforts are being made to start it soon. Tree canopy expansion and biodiversity action plans are scheduled. The development of the Citizens' Panel, aligning with the five missions and focusing on specific outcomes. Public health partnerships are being strengthened, and staff training programs are planned for employees.

In Communications and Engagement, efforts are being made to improve web pages for climate action. The Net Zero festival showcased Islington's work and partnerships with entities like Arsenal and local entrepreneurs. The Finance and Investment sector highlighted decarbonisation efforts reflected in Islington's

pensions and investments. Climate budgeting is being explored, along with collaboration with other boroughs and organisations for private sector investment in retrofit.

There was ongoing work on carbon monitoring, feasibility studies, and baseline establishment to understand the impact of projects. Involvement in the Net Zero neighbourhood concept promoted by the Capital Cities Commission was also discussed.

The protection and enhancement of green spaces in Islington are key considerations within the local planning framework. The local plan serves as a guide for development in the borough, and it includes measures to safeguard existing green spaces and promote the creation of new ones where possible. During the planning process, applications are evaluated with a focus on how they contribute to improving biodiversity and preserving or enhancing green areas.

The Planning Committee plays a crucial role in this process. It carefully reviews planning applications and assesses the impact on green spaces, ensuring that proposed developments align with the borough's commitment to environmental sustainability.

As part of specific initiatives, such as the cycleway project, there are efforts to integrate green elements into the urban landscape. For instance, during consultations with local residents and community groups, input is sought to identify areas along pavements that can be enhanced with greenery. This reflects a community-driven approach to greening public spaces, even on a smaller scale.

RESOLVED:

That the committee noted the report

56 WORKPLAN 2023/24 (Item 11)

RESOLVED:

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

The meeting ended at 9.45 pm

CHAIR