

Minutes of the meeting of the Scrutiny Panel 2 - 2023/2024: Economy and Sustainability

Date: Tuesday, 5 December 2023

Venue: Committee Room 5 - Perceval House

Attendees (in person):

F Conti (Chair) S Ahmed, K Dhindsa, Y Johnson, M Midha, K Nagpal, I Nijhar, C Summers (Vice Chair) and A Zissimos

Attendees (virtual):

S Ajayi and G Barwick

1 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions

There were none.

2 Urgent Matters

There were none.

3 Matters to be Considered in Private

There were none.

4 Declarations of Interest

There were none.

5 Minutes

Resolved: That the panel agree the minutes of 18th October 2023 as a true and accurate record.

6 Panel Operations in 2023/2024

The Panel discussed the work programme and the chair informed the panel that they would liaise with the scrutiny review officer outside of the meeting to organise relevant site visits for the next meeting.

Resolved: That the panel note the Work Programme

7 Economy and Sustainability - Climate Action Progress

Presentations from officers

Peter George, Strategic Director Economy and Sustainability, invited Alison Parry, Interim Climate and Sustainability Manager, to present the report that could be found on pages 15-36 in the public agenda pack. Peter George stated that since he became the strategic director in his post, climate had become an elevated priority within the council. He notified the panel that there was a climate leadership board from across the council organisation that convened to achieve goals on the climate across the borough.

Alison Parry presented the report, key points included that:

- Climate change was something that had deteriorated and would continue to, largely, as a result of greenhouse gasses, in particular carbon emissions.
- Ealing would be subject to more extreme weather conditions, such as forest fires, droughts, and heatwaves.
- The main policy goals were mitigation and adaption, to limit climate change, but also to be able to adapt to inevitable change.
- The council had pledged to become carbon neutral by 2030. And the government had pledged to achieve this goal by 2050.
- There are many forms of emissions, Ealing's primary emissions source, was household consumption, comprising 40% of the borough's emissions.
- The council had different methods of limitation, through direct control of council owned assets, as well as indirect control through incentives, advice, and regulatory bodies, such as planning.
- The council had put a lot of work into resident engagement around climate change, in many forms, such as: council website, newsletters, events, partnerships and others.
- The top methods for reducing household consumption was to install renewable energy devices, switch to green energy tariffs and make homes more energy efficient.
- The council were aware of the cost limiting factors, and work was being done to give advice on cheap energy reduction measures, as well as energy consumption reduction measures that would save residents money.
- There were financial tools from central government to assist in reducing carbon emissions that residents and the council could utilise.

- There were other important areas to reduce the borough's climate impact, such as food waste – residents were being advised to buy locally produced products and to convert home gardens to food production.
- Residents were being asked to use more renewable travel, such as public transport, bikes, and foot. The council had invested in infrastructure to make these methods of transport easier for residents to use.
- The council had begun a programme of door to door campaigning to engage with residents and encourage them to reduce their carbon emissions.

Peter George, reported to the panel of the aims and the successes of the climate leadership board. He noted that the council had updated their procurement strategies to be more focused on climate, for example stressing local supply chains.

He added that the council had a strong role to play as a leader on climate action leading by example and showing a way forward for other organisations and individuals to follow.

Peter George also noted the success of the regional park. He stated that the regional park demonstrated the council's need to adapt to climate change, the added tree cover from the park would help to cool the borough down and offer shade during hot days.

Questions from the panel

- In Response to Councillor Ahmed, Alison noted that growing food locally at home was an important step on removing the reliance on food from other countries and carbon emitting transport like planes. She also responded that embodied carbon was a way of representing that each product required carbon to create and it was important for residents to be aware of the climate impact each product had.
- In response to Councillor Ahmed, Chris Bunting, Assistant Director Leisure, stated that Ealing was one of the top 3 borough's for allocation of allotment space to residents, with 2,000 allotment holders in the borough. He stated that there were long waiting lists, and the council was working to increase the allotment space within the borough. He noted that the council were looking at inventive ways to increase food production, such as edible orchards in school playing grounds. This had the added bonus of teaching children about food production, as well as providing a food source for school children. He informed the panel that the council had started making community growing spaces, to allow communities to collectively benefit from growing food locally.

- In response to Councillor Midha, Chris Bunting stated that the council pays to take care of fallen leaves during autumn. He noted that, as a result of 2022/2023 scrutiny panels, the council updated the types of trees they were planting and where they were planting them. He stated that the issue was that some of the problematic trees which shed a lot of leaves were over 200 years old. There was a 14 week tree clearance programme run by street services to clear the leaves, however, some years the trees drop leaves over a longer period than the 14 weeks which comes at a cost to the council.
- In response to Stephanie Ajayi, Chris Bunting informed the panel that forest fires had occurred in Hounslow over the hot summer in 2023 and the emergency services had to put in fire breaks, along with other measures to limit risk of fire within Ealing.
- In response to Councillor Dhindsa, Peter George stated that, in regard to retrofitting houses and investing in energy efficient homes, progress could only be made at a national level. A recommendation from cabinet in May was for the portfolio holder, Councillor Costigan, to write to government to make the case for increased investment in retrofitting homes. He stated that the council does not have enough money to be able to make all homes in Ealing energy efficient, only 75 homes were planned to be retrofitted. Without serious investment from the government, no local authority would be able to deliver the retrofit. He stated to the panel that only with co-operation with regional and national partners could the whole project be delivered. He added that the council had to make inroads in all aspects of climate action, via green travel, local grown produce, energy efficiency and to not give up because one aspect of the project seemed insurmountable. Jennifer Peters added that it was partly the responsibility of some residents to retrofit their own houses and the council had endeavoured to communicate the benefits financially for the residents to retrofit their own houses. Chris Bunting added that the council had received £13M grant funding to de-carbonise leisure centres and schools within the borough.
- In response to the chair, Alison Parry stated that the figure given to cabinet was very large and was put as an example of how huge the task was to retrofit homes. She also added that there were small changes that residents could take, such as closing your curtains earlier to regulate temperature, that could help reduce carbon emissions. Peter George added that the green economy would be a growth economy and the jobs created in retrofitting houses would make a significant impact to the national economy. He stated that electric cars were an example of progress for climate action, as more cars were purchased, they would become cheaper and more affordable. Electric cars were also an example of non-carbon emitting technology and behaviour changes not being something that was regressive but forward looking. All countries would have to start embarking on the project of learning new skills and building green industrial sectors.

- In response to Councillor Zissimos, Jennifer Peters responded that a piece of work was needed to be created to find the correct balance between conservation and sustainability. She added that she would have to get back to the councillor in regard to their specific situation of housing in a conservation area.
- In response to Councillor Dhindsa, Peter George stated the council had a skills and employment department, where 1000's were trained every year. Although the council had not started a green skills programme, they were looking into it, as they believed it would be a lucrative project to upskill residents. The council were looking to update an action plan on that. He noted that the council were looking to highlight behaviours that fell within a 'sweet spot' which was both profitable and climate positive to be advertised to residents.
- In response to Councillor Summers, Peter George stated that the council had several policies that need to be considered when deciding specific action. The overarching plan was the council's local plan which encapsulated the highest levels of climate policies in any climate document. He noted, however, that there were a portion of residents who were sceptical about climate change and action had to be collective, therefore it was important to encourage everyone to get behind climate action rather than dictating to them. He added that although the council had to be conscious to bring people along with them to tackle climate issues, climate action was one of the council's top three priorities and the council does recognise that there was a climate emergency.
- In response to Councillor Summers, Peter George stated that the council had to balance priorities of housing and climate action and the council was becoming stricter on developers to make sure that their developments were sustainable. Jennifer Peters added that an updated local plan would allow issues to be better prioritised.
- In response to the chair Peter George noted that, regarding planning policy, the council had doubled the government's targets of improving biodiversity on each site by 10% to 20%. The council allowed developers to be able to buy offsets, if they could not achieve this biodiversity increase on their sites, which would be used elsewhere in the borough, for example in the new regional park. The council also had a retrofit first policy which made developers show that the net gain for the environment would be improved if the developers demolished and built on the site, rather than retrofitting. He stated that it was important to get new housing to be net zero as soon as possible.
- The Chair noted to the panel that it would be best for biodiversity offsetting credits would be best used closer to the development sites rather than all of them to go to the regional park.

- In response to Stephanie Ajayi, Alison Parry stated that the report set out the statistics of resident engagement. She explained the resident engagement events in Northolt at the breaking ground project where the council engaged directly with poorer residents, that generally used less carbon, to see if targeted engagement was an effective tool of the council. She also responded that the council had launched a project called act for Ealing which was a programme designed to get residents to engage locally. Act for Ealing is an example of the council, not just emitting, but involving residents in shaping climate policy within the borough.
- In Response to Stephanie Ajayi, Peter George noted that children were an important part of engagement, not only to teach a new generation of people to be climate conscious, but also as a way of affecting change within their household. He stated that children could be effective at persuading their parents to think more about their actions. He also noted that the council had 120,000 resident email addresses, which was a significant proportion of the borough that could be contacted and informed about climate projects. The council has also advertised the regional park on buses and on billboard, in conjunction with electronic engagement.
- In response to Councillor Ahmed, Peter George noted that a climate competition for children would be a great idea to encourage young people and celebrate their efforts. He recalled the school strikes initiated by Greta Thunberg as a demonstration of young people's anxiety about the future of the climate.
- In response to the chair, Alison Parry noted that face to face communication was effective at informing and persuading residents, she invited councillors to speak at schools to drive up face to face engagement. She responded to another point that there was a cost balancing exercise that has to be done in trying new forms of engagement and measuring the effectiveness of that engagement. Peter George added that the programme of moving cars away from schools was a success, even though cars did change from parking on one road to another, because the cars had moved away from school gates, which was an example of adaption and mitigating the health effects of pollution to children.
- In response to the chair, Alison Parry stated that carbon capture in trees was vital in achieving net zero, and noted the statistic that there was more carbon stored in the peat bogs of the UK than in all the forest of Europe. She stated that this demonstrated that there were many ways for the council to capture carbon, for example through soil management. Chris Bunting informed the panel that there were 234,000 trees in the borough which equated to 26,000 tonnes of carbon storage a year.

Resolved: The Panel noted the presentations and made the following recommendations. That:

1. The council should launch a competition for school children in the borough to reward innovative ways of help the environment.
2. The council should work with educational institutions and businesses to create a strategy to boost skills for green jobs so that Ealing residents can benefit from employment in this growth sector.
3. The council will ensure when assessing biodiversity net gain in planning applications, that the net gain should be on the site of the application or as close as possible rather than being offset miles from the application in a single location like a regional park.

8 Date of Next Meeting

Meeting commenced: Time Not Specified

Meeting finished: Time Not Specified

Signed:

Dated: Tuesday, 12 March 2024

F Conti (Chair)