

THE LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN

At a meeting of the **CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held on **MONDAY, 13TH JANUARY, 2025** at 6.30 pm in Committee Room 2, Town Hall, Judd Street, London WC1H 9JE

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE PRESENT

Councillors Awale Olad (Chair), Sharon Hardwick, Matthew Kirk, Izzy Lenga, Rishi Madlani and Stephen Stark

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ABSENT

Councillors Nina De Ayala Parker and Shiva Tiwari

ALSO PRESENT

Councillors Linda Chung (remote attendance) Sabrina Francis (Cabinet Member for Jobs, Young People and Culture) Adam Harrison (Cabinet Member for Planning and a Sustainable Camden)

The minutes should be read in conjunction with the agenda for the meeting. They are subject to approval and signature at the next meeting of the Culture and Environment Scrutiny Committee and any corrections approved at that meeting will be recorded in those minutes.

MINUTES

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence was received from Councillor Tiwari.

2. DECLARATIONS BY MEMBERS OF STATUTORY DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY INTERESTS, COMPULSORY REGISTERABLE NON-PECUNIARY INTERESTS AND VOLUNTARY REGISTERABLE NON-PECUNIARY INTERESTS IN MATTERS ON THIS AGENDA

Councillor Hardwick declared in relation to item 7 (Annual Report of the Cabinet Member for Planning and a Sustainable Camden) that she subscribed to the borough's Garden Waste scheme.

Councillor Kirk declared for transparency in relation to the same item 7 that he held shares in Power Up North London.

3. ANNOUNCEMENTS (IF ANY)

The Chair announced that the meeting was broadcast live by the Council to the Internet and could be viewed on the website for six months after the meeting. After that time, webcasts were archived and could be made available on DVD upon request. Those who were seated in the room or participated via Teams were deemed to have consented to their contributions being recorded and broadcast and to the use of those sound recordings and images for webcasting and/or training purposes.

4. DEPUTATIONS (IF ANY)

There were none.

5. MINUTES

RESOLVED –

THAT the minutes of the meetings held on 11th November and 9th December 2024 be signed as an accurate record.

6. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR DECIDES TO TAKE AS URGENT

There was none.

7. ANNUAL REPORT OF THE CABINET MEMBER FOR PLANNING AND A SUSTAINABLE CAMDEN

Consideration was given to the annual report of the Cabinet Member for Planning and a Sustainable Camden.

Members made the following comments:

- For future annual reports of the Cabinet Member for Planning and a Sustainable Camden it would be useful to have an analysis of Council owned properties that could and could not be upgraded and information about the money required to upgrade them to government target EPC ratings.

Action By: Cabinet Member for Planning and a Sustainable Camden

- The figure of 6,000 properties being used as short term lets or Air B&B in the borough, which was about 8% of the Council's housing stock was a huge figure. It appeared that the scale of the Council's enforcement action against such a huge challenge was unimpressive. It also seemed that enforcement action could be self-funding.
- The report was welcomed and it was pleasing to see that in areas such as Goldhurst Terrace in South Hampstead, greening projects such as sustainable urban drainage appeared to be addressing the historic flooding problems in the area.
- It was good to see the trends for tree planting in the borough going up year on year.
- The Cabinet Member was congratulated on a comprehensive report noting that the Council efforts on climate change and air quality were very visionary and were supported.

In response to questions, Councillor Adam Harrison (Cabinet Member for a Sustainable Camden, Richard Bradbury (Director of Environment and Sustainability) and Oliver Jones (Director of Recreation) made the following points:

- With regards to a full list of Council owned properties and their energy performance certificate (EPC) ratings in comparison to government targets, this information was available and used to focus the Council's priority investments and would be circulated to the Committee.
Action By: Director of Environment and Sustainability
- The planned energy efficiency improvements (paragraph 2.32, page 50 of the agenda) timescales in locations such as Mayford and Spedan Close would be clarified.
Action By: Cabinet Member for Planning and a Sustainable Camden
- With regards to the retrofit funding model and energy efficiency savings, this related to the Council creating a mechanism that raised finance for energy efficiency or power production like solar rays. The marginal gains from energy efficiency and renewable energy were used for the benefit of residents.
- The seed money used was a blend of Council and external money.
- In terms of self-funding of enforcement action against short term lets or Air B&B in the borough, planning enforcement was a non-statutory function. This function was required to be funded from elsewhere, so the Council always welcomed opportunities to receive funding from various sources.

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- The difficulty for local authorities in enforcement in this area was the deregulation act which required proof that a property had been let out for 90 days within a calendar year.
- Although the Council was taking enforcement action against some properties in the borough, the threshold for conviction was high and it was difficult to see where the self-funding would come from.
- The Council had lobbied previous governments and continued to lobby the current government for new forms of legislation to make it easier to prosecute these types of breaches and to lessen the impact to the supply of housing in the borough.
- With regards to a short term let property in West Hampstead ward being advertised as a hotel, officers would need to look at the evidence to determine if there were any breaches and whether enforcement action could be taken.
- In terms of the Council's Tree Strategy and reaching its target. The Council was on track to plant 600 trees by March 2025 having already planted 425 trees this planting season.
- The Council was in preparatory stages for the next 5-year Planting Strategy. This included understanding requirements, funding availability and determining whether the targets could be improved to achieve the required canopy cover desired.
- The various Council departments and teams, Green Spaces, Highways, Planning and Design had worked together in areas such as Goldhurst Terrace as well as other areas in the borough to respond to flooding, heat and biodiversity issues. Some of the work had also included the highway greening accelerator where limited investments had been used to make the biggest improvements.
- In terms of whether recycling rates could be split by ward, the Council did not collect this information on an ongoing basis because it was constrained due to it being collected in rounds as well as the demographic and housing makeup impacting a wards recycling rate.
- In terms of Camden's recycling rate data in comparison with other London Boroughs this information was available and would be circulated to the Committee.

Action By: Director of Environment and Sustainability

- The Committee could also be provided with the Council's Recycling Reduction Plan which looked at the work the Council did in terms of communications and engagement at a local level to make sure the service was easy to use and understand. The service was provided in all areas.

Action By: Director of Environment and Sustainability

- In terms of the recycling rates target for next year the Council was looking to increase this.
- With regards to the Healthy Street Schemes, members and residents should be reassured that trial periods would be proper trial periods and with schemes such as the Christchurch Scheme changes were made directly in response to feedback from residents during the consultation which improved the scheme.
- The Southend Greening Group were very proactive, the Cabinet Member asked Councillor Chung to send him details of the costs and activities related to south end.
- The Climate Fund was more to do with direct insulation and direct carbon emissions reduction. It was good if the information about the Climate Fund could be more widely circulated as the Council wanted more people to take it up. The Cabinet Member agreed to find out if any other funds were available for environment improvement purposes.
- With regards to people feeding pigeons and issues this caused, there were a number of problematic locations in the borough, the Council's Community Safety teams did engage with individuals, however it was found that many of the individuals that fed the pigeons over a long period of time had some level of mental health issues which made it difficult to take legal enforcement action against or get them to change their practise. It was helpful that this issue continued to be reported although there was not much the Council could do.
- With regards to the removal of phone boxes, some of the successful reasons for removal included the impact that they were likely to make, being poorly maintained, they were inappropriate as it was in a conservation area or next to a listed building.
- In terms of the cost of defending the Selkirk House Planning decision at court, officers would provide the Committee with this information.

Action By: Chief Planning Officer

- With regards to the Colourful Crossings and the London wide review being conducted by the GLA, an update had not yet been received but this could be checked with GLA.

Action By: Director of Environment and Sustainability

- In terms of car ownership reduction data by ward, and demographic breakdown of increase in cyclists, this information can be circulated to the Committee.

Action By: Director of Environment and Sustainability

- The Bloomsbury Vision was a collection of stakeholder views and work done in the area to support and promote the planning work and development in the area. This was to enable developers to understand various stakeholders' vision of an area.
- The Bloomsbury Vision was not intended to become a planning document but was a vision backed by the Council to encourage investment in the area, the Holborn Vision on the other hand would become a formal planning document and development guide towards greater investment in community facilities in the area.
- In terms of reliability of vehicles, compressed natural gas collection vehicles had some issues, the Council would be looking to use more electric and hybrid vehicles in the future.
- With regards to staff shortages, waste services across London had issues with shortage of drivers due to a shift in the economy and more opportunities available for long distance drivers following Brexit. The Council had put in place more internal recruitment measures to up skill the workforce and improve benefits for its drivers.
- On the cycle infrastructure the Council had an action plan which provided an indication of where the cycle infrastructure was likely to be built. The decisions over the years had been based on such factors as available funding as well as building up a connected network to ensure everything was joined up as much as possible.
- The Council provided free cycle training classes for everybody from beginners to more advanced level intermediate level 1.
- With regards to cycle hangers and increasing the occupancy rates, the Cabinet Member would check to see whether officers had done any work on this.

Action By: Cabinet Member for Planning and a Sustainable Camden

- With regards to food growing spaces, there was the food mission which was available to work with communities on a case-by-case basis.
- In relation to green space investment West End Lane was being considered for more active greening opportunities.

The Cabinet Member for Planning and a Sustainable Camden and Officers were thanked for their work, time taken to attend the meeting and their responses.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted.

8. CLEANER, SAFER CAMDEN

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Public Safety.

In response to questions, Patrick Coulson (Head of Community Safety), Toby Daynes (Community Safety Enforcement Manager) and Councillor Adam Harrison (the Cabinet Member for Planning and a Sustainable Camden made the following points:

- With regards to walking a fine balance between removing rubbish and being compassionate with not removing homeless peoples' possessions, it was within the remit of the Enforcement Team to carry out support work and provide support to rough sleepers.
- The work of the team was very much tied together and where it came to spaces that were impacted by waste that may be associated to rough sleepers and rough sleeping encampments, Council officers were sensitive and did not conduct enforcement in these cases.
- The Council had a good relationship in the Bloomsbury area with the Business Improvement Districts, local businesses and the landowners to ensure that where there were issues around cleansing these were picked up as quickly as possible to avoid using enforcement measures.
- In terms of the three top hot spots for commercial waste and fly tipping across Camden, it was mainly the town centre areas and Bloomsbury ward which had the highest level of waste issues.
- Tottenham Court Road was the hot spot for individual littering offences and issuing of fixed penalty notices.
- All businesses were required to have a commercial waste contract to dispose of waste.
- It was difficult to determine the number of businesses in the borough that did not have a commercial waste contract as the information was not owned by the Council and there were numerous providers that businesses went to for commercial waste contracts.
- Officers estimated that about 30% of businesses did not have a commercial waste contract in the borough.

- In terms of whether the public could be informed about persistent commercial waste offenders, it would depend on whether the prosecution was successful. If it were then it would be in the public domain; however, if it were an ongoing prosecution legal advice would need to be sought.
- Officers agreed to provide members with a report updating them on enforcement activity across all wards in the borough.
Action By: Head of Community Safety / Community Safety Enforcement Manager
- The Cabinet Member for Planning and a Sustainable Camden highlighted the issues with a minority of businesses that did not have a waste contract but had a big impact on the street, by cheating the system putting out their waste knowing that it would be collected. Noting that these were the businesses that needed to be challenged.
- The Council did not have the resources or legal capacity to check all the businesses in the borough for commercial waste contracts at the same time, however a proactive plan had been devised to check this over a 10-year cycle.
- There were lots of businesses in the borough that were not aware they needed a commercial waste contract and only when enforcement action was taken did they become aware.
- The process would be education and compliance first followed by enforcement where it was necessary.
- With regards to putting black bags outside charity shops a whole project on this issue had taken place in West Hampstead, officers could restart this by displaying the posters, working with charity shops and educating people.
- In terms of Grip Bins in West Hampstead it was the responsibility of Veolia and the monitoring officer to clean out these bins, enforcement officers also checked the bins for commercial waste left in there, which could then lead to enforcement action being taken against perpetrators.
- The Council also had a good relationship with the monitoring officer who would notify the Council if any evidence of commercial waste were found in the Grip Bins.
- Any business found to be creating waste nuisance would receive the normal fixed penalty notice as well as a section 34 notice requesting them to provide a copy of their waste contract.

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- With regards to overt enforcement activity there were two sides. There was the Kingdom Contract with Kingdom issuing fixed penalty charge notices for individual littering offences and then there was the Community Safety Enforcement side which dealt with commercial waste, fly tipping and compliance work.
- With regards to littering, it was difficult to improve the compliance messaging because Camden was a transient borough for lots of people with hotspots around Bloomsbury and the south of the borough.
- The Kingdom contract was managed by Camden officers who looked through the 1300 fixed penalty notices every month to manage the standards of fixed penalty charge notices issued.
- The volume of fixed penalty notices that the Council issued versus the number of complaints and issues that end up in court showed that the Council was getting the balance right between prioritising engagement and enforcement. An example last month was out of about 1310 fixed penalty notices issued, 1 was successfully appealed in court which showed a compliance rate of 99.7%
- On the Commercial Waste side, the Community Safety Enforcement Team issued warning letters or a visit to the premises to discuss and explain the issues first and compliance enforcement took place where there was further non-compliance. Officers were confident that the right safeguards and balance were in place across all areas.
- In terms of allowing discretion of officers working on the frontline, the work done across both the enforcement team and kingdom team was data driven with the production of maps every month to highlight where everybody had been, what tickets had been issued as well as this being mapped against information reported.
- In terms of Operation Waste Watch, when collections had been suspended the information had normally been conveyed to stakeholders such as Councillors to make sure they were aware within their communities because it happened so infrequently. It had not previously been an issue that the information had not been circulated to residents.

A Committee member commented that the increased enforcement was welcomed.

The Committee thanked officers for the report and attending the meeting.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted.

9. CAMDEN COUNCIL CULTURAL PROGRAMME UPDATE REPORT

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Economy, Regeneration and Investment.

Members made the following comments:

- It was really good to see South Asian Heritage month incorporated into the Culture Programme and watching it grow within the borough had been really interesting. There was a lot of interest and members were keen to see how residents could get involved.
- Delighted to see the filming piece around the generator project that Film Fixer were doing. Proposals had been put forward on how they could reduce the diesel generators around this.
- The Queen Elizabeth Park site used by Black Pride was no longer available and they were now looking for a site for August 2025, it would be an opportunity for the Camden Culture Team if they could find a site for the group given the way Camden was able to rescue the Queer British Museum.
- Recently there appeared to be less consultation with residents in some areas of the borough and in some instances, they felt that events had taken over. Could the Council ensure that there was good consultation with residents on staging events in their areas.
- There were a few venues in Hampstead Town such as Henderson Court and the church where it would be good to work with Camden's Culture Team to organise some events in the area.

In response to questions, Zerritha Brown (Head of Culture) and Councillor Sabrina Francis (Cabinet Member for Jobs, Young People and Culture) made the following points:

- With regards to Camden support for UK Aids Memorial, the Council was in dialogue with them while waiting for them to get planning consent for the site. Once the site was confirmed the Council would open up conversation around community engagement and involvement of the wider community.
- In relation to Pride, the LGBTQ+ History Month was happening next month, the Council teamed up with organisations such as Queer Britain and UK Aid Memorial to create awareness and do a series of talks at the event. Although nobody from UK Aids Memorial was available this year it was hoped this could be picked up with them next year.
- Queer Britain as a rainbow network who were exploring how the Council could get more involved in terms of more engagement and more programming in relation to trans pride, black pride and the other smaller pride events. The conversation between Queer Britain and the Council was ongoing.

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- London Pride Family Zone in St Giles Gardens was an always an important event and activity which the Council continued to be involved in. Even though they were no longer in the borough, the Council continued to programme activity in St Giles Square for Pride.
- Camden's Culture Programme had a lot of events to fit in over a 12-month period, so it was a challenge to find the right balance of how much could be done while working with partners in the year.
- With regards to Community Festival Grants, the Council does a light touch evaluation in terms of the numbers that attended the event and whether it went well. A further review would be carried out to determine what improvements could be made. It would be evaluated to ensure the money was spread wider as the same people appeared to apply each year for the grant.
- The Council would be working on widening the pool for the Community Festival Grant next year.
- With regards to South Asia Heritage month one of the things the Council was looking at doing was working with the Art Gallery in Swiss Cottage and other partner organisations such as the Old Diorama Arts Centre. Additional activities were being considered for the programme including walking tours, the Council was also talking with the organisation about what further support could be offered.
- With regards to Film Fixer the Council met quarterly with them and continued to have ongoing conversations encouraging them to think about green energy.
- The Council continued to work with all its Cultural Partners on various events and exhibitions such as the Windrush Programme. A lot of Camden's Cultural Partners approached the Council when they had activities which would then be pushed through to the community.
- In terms of the Cultural Education Learning Support Fund and the ability of organisations to carry on once the funding ended, the fund-raising landscape at the moment was very tough, a lot of these organisations had to think more entrepreneurial about how they could stretch their assets a bit more and generate income. When the fund was launched it was made clear to the organisations about the limited funding and the need to have conversations about future funding.
- The Council had been in discussion with some of the art and culture groups who had been talking about how they might be able to work together to save money, by sharing staff, changing how their budget worked and working out new business plans.

- In terms of interaction with the elderly, this was very much in line with the Council's thinking particularly in relation to the cultural strategy and social isolation. Examples of this was the Council working with the Camden Black History Group who put a tea party on for Caribbean elders as part of Windrush which went down really well.
- In terms of outreach, a majority of museums and galleries would have an educational outreach or learning team with part of their role being to connect with schools to deliver outreach opportunities.

The Cabinet Member for Jobs, Young People and Culture and the Head of Culture were thanked for their work, time taken to attend the meeting and their responses.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted.

10. ADVERTISING BOARDS (A-BOARDS)

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Environment and Sustainability.

In response to questions, Tracey Hogan (Streetworks Authorisation and Compliance Manager) made the following points:

- There were a number of issues highlighted during the walk about of the borough streets with the blind resident. Apart from furniture such as tables and chairs causing obstructions for disabled residents, there were issues with pathways, structures and a whole host of other things preventing easy access for disabled residents.
- These issues had been reported to the various Council teams with responsibility for the various areas to look into.
- A further invite had been sent to the blind resident for a further visit in the area to review access issues. Officers agreed to update members on feedback received from the resident.

Action By: Streetworks Authorisation and Compliance Manager

- The walk about visit with the blind resident highlighted a lot of things the borough delivered but residents were not aware of, as the information was communicated to the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB) rather than directly to the register of officially impaired or blind individuals.

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- The Council's Adult Social Care team held this data which residents in the borough were signed up to. As well as incorporating this information into the trial pilot project, the various Council Teams were now looking to use this information to communicate directly with residents in a format they preferred.
- The Council was also working with the RNIB to improve data capture and deliver to customers and residents information in a way that could be understood.
- The reason the trial project was being conducted in Goodge Street rather than Hampstead was because of the support and engagement of the Business Investment Districts (BIDs) in this area. There was no BID in Hampstead to help with the trial.
- It was a process of re-educating and working with businesses to make them understand that the highways were needed for everybody and the forms of advertising they were using were ineffective.
- The primary focus of the trial was to bring businesses on board and use innovation to bring about change through education. The aim was to make it work for residents, users of the service and the business community which would make the streets easily accessible.
- It was hoped that the learning and information collated from the trial with the engagement of RNIB and businesses would show what worked and what did not.

Members commented that it was an interesting piece of work and would like to see the outcome of the trial and asked for a report back from officers in the next year or so.

Officers were thanked for the report and attending the meeting.

RESOLVED –

THAT the report be noted.

11. UPDATE ON JULY'S RESPONSE TO CIRCULAR ECONOMY PANEL

Consideration was given to the report of the Director of Environment and Sustainability.

In response to questions, Richard Bradbury (Director of Environment and Sustainability) made the following points:

The Council was always open to looking at new opportunities to work with the University district on any issue. A fundamental problem with reuse was storage an example being the Furniture project in Kings Cross some years ago, which had to move to a different area because of rents. However, the Council would work with the World Living Project and partner boroughs to take forward opportunities with University districts.

In terms of Council departments thinking about its waste streams, repair and reuse, as part of the Council's procurement work depending on what was being purchased, the messaging about reuse and repair was factored into the procurement process.

Resolved

That the report be noted.

12. CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2024/25 AND ACTION TRACKER

Consideration was given to the report of the Executive Director Supporting Communities.

Members discussed the work programme deciding to prioritise reports for 24th February meeting agreeing that the following reports should be considered in February:

- Annual report of the Cabinet Member for New Homes and Community Investment
- Thames Water Update
- Lime Bike/Scooters -Update

The other items either to be considered at an additional meeting or later in the year. – The Committee would decide whether an additional meeting would be scheduled this municipal year.

Subject to these changes it was,

Resolved:

That the report be noted

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

There was none.

The meeting ended at 8.40 pm.

CHAIR

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MINUTES END