

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

Climate Change and Ecology Policy and Accountability Committee Minutes



Tuesday 28 March 2023

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Nicole Trehy (Chair), Ross Melton, Laura Janes, Stala Antoniadou and Jose Afonso

Guest: Dr Gary Fuller (UKRI Clean Air Champion, Environmental Research Group, Imperial College London)

Officers: Bram Kainth (Strategic Director of Environment), Geoff Cowart (Head of Communications), Mark Thomlinson (Climate Engagement and Behaviour Change Lead) and Debbie Yau (Committee Coordinator)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Wesley Harcourt (Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Ecology).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED

The minutes of the meeting held on 31 January 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

4. AIR QUALITY AND WOOD BURNING

At the invitation of the Chair, Dr Gary Fuller ((UKRI Clean Air Champion, Environmental Research Group, Imperial College London) briefed members on wood burning and air pollution, including health impacts of air pollution in the UK, the use

of solid fuels on open fires to heat homes, the Kantar (2020) survey, impacts on indoor pollution, mapping new types of air pollution hotspots, transect walking winter 2022/23, use of open fires by Londoners, solutions: what's been tried and what's work, wood burning was not carbon neutral, reducing sources, and tackling air quality and climate change together.

Councillor Jose Afonso asked about the number of H&F households using wood burners and the source of fuel. Dr Fuller advised that only London-wide data was available.

In reply to Councillor Afonso's further question, Dr Fuller said that the introduction of ultra-low emissions zone (ULEZ) to Central London was highly successful and there was a reduction of nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) from vehicles near roads by more than 40%. It was estimated that following the expansion of ULEZ across inner London, near road NO₂ would be reduced by just over 20%.

On Councillor Afonso's concern about the correlation of air pollution in H&F with asthma, Dr Fuller referred to international studies on asthmatic and air pollution which suggested that children were more susceptible to air pollution in the onset of asthma. He undertook to provide the report on research done by his colleague with data on asthma cases across the London boroughs.

Dr Fuller further noted an on-going in-depth study on the indoor and outdoor air pollution exposure of 100 selected homes in White City which aimed to recruit families with asthmatic children. At this juncture, Caroline Kelly, a member of the public, disagreed that there was a correlation between air pollution and asthma because of the level of emissions was ever changing. Dr Fuller pointed out that it was hard for the related study to detect early-stage asthma as people usually endured the day-to-day suffering until it was sufficiently bad to seek medical advice. Hence, the underlying chronic health data was often missing in the studies. The Chair considered it might be worthwhile to study the prevalence of asthma before and after the enactment of the Clean Air Act in 1956. She would also solicit the assistance of Councillor Ben Coleman, Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board to identify suitable families for the exposure study.

Councillor Laura Janes asked about the enforcement of the Clean Air Act and the penalties, if any, imposed. Dr Fuller said as he understood, there were almost no fines for the last 10 years, except for a couple of cases taken up by Camden Council. He considered that effective policies might not necessarily involve enforcement which could be stressful and time-consuming. Communications and public engagement might be more effective and valuable and behavioural scientists played an important role in breaking down the barriers to changing people's behaviour. Responding to Councillor Stala Antoniadou's enquiry, Dr Fuller highlighted the behavioural change campaigns run by the Environment Canterbury Regional Council in New Zealand which had been successful in helping people to burn warmer, cheaper and smoke-free fire. Councillor Antoniadou urged schools to educate the younger generations so that they could bring home the message of smoke-free burning.

The Chair noted that according to the Kantar (2020) survey in 2018/2019 involving some 50k homes UK-wide, among the 8% homes using solid fuel for wood burning, 46% burnt for “traditional” or “aesthetic” reasons. She was concerned about the wording used in the survey questions. Dr Fuller remarked that the survey was conducted professionally via focus group, in-depth interviews, and telephone survey sampled weekly throughout the year.

Councillor Ross Melton referred to the recommendations under the slides on “Tackling air quality and climate change together” (p. 38 - 40) and considered that some of them were beyond the power of the Council requiring national input while some others might not be practicable. Dr Fuller explained that as a scientist, he had laid out the evidence for the stakeholders’ interpretations and actions. Councillors and officers might be in a better position to shape the way forward which, for instance, could be doing things under the existing policy and legal framework or raising awareness through education. In response to Councillor Melton’s question about enforcement in other areas, Dr Fuller stressed that it was more effective to start changing the narrative from “wood burning is carbon neutral”, “it is ok to burn wood providing it is dry” to “burning solid fuels on open fires are the most polluting way to heat your homes”. Echoing his view, the Chair considered it was also crucial to target the right people during engagement given 46% of homes were in social grades A and B.

Noting from the Kantar (2020) survey that 27% of UK primary PM2.5 came from solid fuel which nearly doubled that from transport exhaust, Helen Dell (Climate Change Commissioner) sought information on the same comparison for London. Dr Fuller advised that for London, wood burning was still the most significant source of particle pollution even though it had more transport than other parts of the country. As the air people breathed in London mixed with those coming from other places, the proportion of polluted particles from wood burning in the air was thus lower, say, about 7% to 8%. That said, it remained an essential task to identify air pollution hotspots and prevent the neighbours using solid fuel for wood burning in winters.

5. CLIMATE CHANGE COMMUNICATIONS

Mark Thomlinson (Climate Engagement and Behaviour Change Lead) briefed members on the Council’s role in “Climate Action Together”, including an overview of the emissions pattern in the borough, perceptions towards climate and trends on actions, enabling climate-friendly behaviours, inspiring community climate action and collaboration with business and alliance members through communicating, informing and listening to the under-represented voices.

The Chair was keen to note how to kick-start engagement in respect of wood burning, and whether data should be collected via a survey or through group analysis. Geoff Cowart (Head of Communications) explained that in fixing a problem with residents, it was first necessary to understand the problem through the scientific data and devise solutions to address it. Communications should then hit the target residents who were burning solid fuel at homes which were identifiable through the house styles and the air quality in the neighbourhoods. After obtaining the demographic profiles of the homeowners via the social platform *Next Door*, an

effective educational and informative campaign about the danger of using solid fuel for wood burning could be created for the target audience.

Geoff Cowart referred to the Global Action Plan undertaken by the Mayor of London which noted through *Next Door* that the age group of 55 to 64 was most responsive to the wood burning campaigns already run in other boroughs. While it was always useful to obtain more data from extra studies, the profiles represented by this age group could be used as a starting point for the campaign in H&F. He stressed the importance of the timing that the campaign should start around late summer/early autumn when people began considering the kind of fuel to buy.

Replying to Councillor Laura Janes' enquiry about linking with neighbouring boroughs in tackling wood burning, Dr Gary Fuller, while sharing the difficulties in changing people's behaviour, reiterated the need to change the narrative to "wood burning is not carbon neutral" and "it is not acceptable for your neighbours to equivalently moving six lorries up and down outside your home". Geoff Cowart remarked that as showed by the data, London had a problem associated with wood burning and the Mayor of London had started and led a campaign to reduce it. He highlighted that those campaigns advocated through social media network usually worked well. With reference to the implementation of the Clean Air Neighbourhoods trial schemes and the collection of scientific data along the journey, the campaign did bring about behavioural changes and tangible effects cumulative over time.

Mark Thomlinson responded that the question raised by Councillor Ross Melton about measurable metrics involved many departments and bodies within and outside the Council, including transport, education, and TfL. He advised that certain metrics would be available from the sustainability champions pilot such as the number of people recruited as volunteers and number of workshops held. On measurable impacts reflecting the policy outcome such as the Clean Air Neighbourhoods, it was necessary to analyse the traffic data which could be an arduous task. At the request of Councillor Melton, Mark agreed to provide metric data of the sustainability champions pilot after the meeting.

ACTION: Mark Thomlinson

Summing up, the Chair thanked Dr Fuller and officers for their presentations. The Committee looked forward to an action plan devised by the Communications Department to educate and inform residents against the use of solid fuel for wood burning.

ACTION: Geoff Cowart and Mark Thomlinson

6. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Committee noted the dates of future meetings:

- 18 July 2023
- 21 November 2023
- 6 February 2024
- 23 April 2024

Meeting started: 7.04 pm
Meeting ended: 9.11 pm

Chair

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