

London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham

The Economy, Arts, Sports, and Public Realm Policy and Accountability Committee Minutes



Wednesday 27 July 2022

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Rory Vaughan (Chair), Liz Collins, Adam Peter Lang, Ashok Patel and Jackie Borland

Other Councillors:

Councillor Sharon Holder (Cabinet Member for Public Realm)

Officers:

Jonathan Pickstone – (Strategic Director The Economy)
Joanne Woodward – (Chief Planning Officer)
Bram Kainth – (Strategic Director of Environment)
Annie Baker – (Assistant Director Street Environment Service)
Richard Shwe – (Assistant Director of Environment Operations)
Charles Francis – (Committee Services)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Andrew Jones (Cabinet Member for the Economy).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the Economy, Housing and the Arts Policy and Accountability Committee meeting held on 25 January 2022 were approved.

4. COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE (TO NOTE)

The terms of reference of The Economy, Arts, Sports and Public Realm Policy and Accountability Committee were noted.

5. CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES FOR THE ECONOMY

Jon Pickstone, Strategic Director of the Economy, provided an overview of the challenges and priorities for the Economy Department.

He explained the Economy comprised of the following key services: Economic Development; Regeneration; Operations, Property and Asset Management, Planning; and Housing. It was noted that Housing had its own specific committee – the Housing and Homelessness Policy and Accountability Committee but that new housing development was of interest to this Committee.

Touching on some of these aspects, it was noted that Economic Development supports business, skills and learning, helping people into work, and town centres. The Council also supports Upstream, the Council's partnership with Imperial College London, which focuses on the White City Innovation District. Regeneration is housing focused, including the provision of affordable housing, but also some new schools and other community facilities. The Operations service is varied: including capital investment in our housing stock, the digitalisation of services to improve and enhance housing service delivery and resident interfaces, the civic campus, much of our corporate property management, and contract development and management. Planning focuses on developing planning policy, determining planning applications, masterplanning and s106 and CIL funding agreements. Jo Woodward, Chief Planning Officer, explained that one of the challenges was the forthcoming Levelling Up Bill and changes to the planning system. Other challenges and opportunities included the new powers related to climate change delivery and working on business plans with colleagues in the Environment Department.

Jon Pickstone confirmed the Economy Department took a holistic approach to making Hammersmith and Fulham a global economic hotspot for the benefit of our residents. To achieve this aim, the Council seeks growth in its business base, particularly in higher value sectors. He explained that Council interventions had helped spur substantial growth in high-value sectors related to the Council's Industrial Strategy. Councillors noted that the trick was to create more of these high value jobs and allow residents to have the necessary gateways and skills to access these employment opportunities.

Jon Pickstone confirmed that sustainability was another key theme that underpins the work of the Economy Department. As well as interventions to tackle local aspects of the climate and ecological emergencies, it is important to foster clusters of innovation within White City; new ideas and emerging technologies can meet global challenges. The Committee were provided with details of ongoing and future projects that are revitalising the Borough.

Jon Pickstone explained that the Economy is about place, people and businesses and bringing these factors together, as well as working across the Council and

developing partnerships across the Borough. The world class innovation district at White City should be promoted more nationally and internationally to create more opportunities and enhance growth.

Referring to the Industrial Strategy, Shared Prosperity and Economic Development work being undertaken by the Economy, Councillor Adam Peter Lang asked how this work linked to other areas. Jon Pickstone agreed that important lessons and approaches could be drawn from different (innovation and growth) models from across the world. Jon Pickstone cited a number of business and growth initiatives, most notably those involving our economic MOU with Barcelona (ties between business and education), Imperial College London forging closer links with key universities including in the United States, and the Welsh Government's strong foundational economy approach. Jon Pickstone confirmed it was important business, local government and educational institutions worked together as this was the best way to drive innovation.

Councillor Ashok Patel asked for clarification about the six core values set out at the beginning of the report. In response, Jon Pickstone explained all Council reports used this template and incorporated these six universal values to show how the Department was responding to them. Jon Pickstone highlighted that it was important to consider shared prosperity, co-production and working with residents, not doing things to them. Joanne Woodward, Chief Planning Officer, reiterated that the core values drove all the priorities across the Council, which included the Council's Business Plan to working on Climate Change and responding to the Climate Emergency. Referring the cost-of-living crisis, Jon Pickstone commented it was now more important than ever to ensure a ruthlessly financially efficient approach was taken to all aspects of Council business, as well as a whole Council approach.

Councillor Jackie Borland asked what impact Covid had made on the Borough and how officers perceived these changes. She felt that Covid had completely changed the way in which people lived and worked and explained that now, residents were more likely to prefer a ten-minute bike ride than an hour's commute to work.

In response, Jon Pickstone confirmed that Covid had impacted on the Council's plans, and it had adapted accordingly. He explained that during the pandemic, the Council ran successful business grants programmes, which prioritised key sectors. He referred the effects Covid had on service industries, the hospitality sector and to the amount of empty office space in parts of the borough since Covid. It was noted that post-Covid and Brexit, Heathrow Airport was now finding it harder to engage staff and had changed its relationship with West London economy and engaged more with local partners and Local Government to address this issue and others.

In relation to claimant count rates, it was noted that these were substantially down, but were not at pre-pandemic levels and more work had been done in relation to

employment support and jobs brokerage. Looking to the longer term, Jon Pickstone provided details of current workstreams and confirmed that the Industrial Strategy would be refreshed in 2023.

Joanne Woodward explained (in the face of the pandemic) the Borough was still changing. She confirmed the immediate responses focused on the empty office space, where a more flexible approach was required. In the longer term, there was more emphasis on understanding the importance of public space, public realm and ensuring the planning regime could deliver this. Joanne Woodward explained that residents' outlooks had changed since the pandemic and cited the Earls Courts Development as a case in point. In the post-Covid period, residents were looking more locally, to 15-minute neighbourhoods and there was a clear inclination to remain local rather than travel further afield.

Councillor Jackie Borland commented that as a result of the pandemic, there was more opportunity to focus on localism and opportunities for small business districts for services such as legal advice and lettings. Jon Pickstone concurred that as many people now worked from home, it had become the new normal to commute fewer days per week. However, there was also an opportunity to attract fresh talent as workers might commute longer distances for fewer days per week. Joanne Woodward confirmed the Authority was looking to make more affordable workspace, especially for Culture and the Arts and to focus on developing the digital infrastructure so that new ways of flexible working could be supported.

With regards to training and levelling up, Councillor Liz Collins enquired about the quality and diversity of the training available. To enable graduates to change jobs and switch careers, she noted that they had been offered NVQ Level 2 training which was not comparable. She asked what was being done to ensure the quality of the training available would enable residents to level up and provide the skills they needed i.e., apprenticeships. In response, Joanne Woodward explained the work of the Adult Learning Service, the progress on this front, and that this topic could be brought back to the Committee in future (should it be requested). Jon Pickstone highlighted that Imperial College were looking at ways of improving its outreach.

Councillor Ashok Patel highlighted how Covid had affected business rates and he noted the number of void office spaces within the borough. The cost-of-living crisis, coupled with rising energy prices meant that some businesses were struggling to find the money to remain viable. He commented, this was why some businesses were choosing to let staff work from home, as an easier route, than address the office space issue directly. He noted that the number of failing businesses was increasing, and asked what local solutions could be found. In response, Bram Kainth, Strategic Director of Environment, explained that Business Rates Support was led by the government and the Local Authority acted as a passport to the funding which had

been made available centrally. He confirmed the Council was looking at ways of helping but reiterated that business rates were determined by government policy.

The Chair thanked officers for the report which provided a good overview of the Economy Department and what the Department was taking forward. He noted that the Committee wished to investigate topics further in the future, such as the Cultural Strategy, the development of affordable social housing, and the Civic Campus.

The Chair enquired about the Industrial Strategy, and when this was refreshed, he asked what the indicators of success would be to show what progress had been made on matters such as shared prosperity, job creation, and working with education and students.

In response, Jon Pickstone confirmed that the Council had developed an Industrial Strategy dashboard (80% completed) which recorded progress, as well as being a management tool. The Chair thanked officers for this information and confirmed it was good to articulate how this area moves forwards.

The Chair confirmed he was keen that the Committee looked at the Cultural and Industrial Strategy moving forwards and for these topics to be time-tabled so that residents could be invited and engaged at the appropriate times.

RESOLVED

That the Committee note the priorities and challenges.

6. CHALLENGES AND PRIORITIES FOR THE PUBLIC REALM

Challenges and Priorities for the Public Realm. The following key points were noted:

- The scope of the services provided by the public realm include:
 1. Street Environmental Services
 2. Highways
 3. Transport
 4. Parking
 5. Climate and Ecology
 6. Arts and Culture
 7. Sports
 8. Parks

The report provided details of the priorities and challenges within these eight areas and the actions in place to improve services.

Different aspects of service provision were highlighted, and the following key statistics were noted:

- Over 3.5M Waste and recycling collections per year
- 20 parks and open spaces in the Borough
- 5th lowest waste per person
- 18,800 Miles Streets swept
- 110,000 Library issues
- 16,580 Street works inspections
- 35,000 parking interactions per day
- 10 litres of water needed per tree every week
- £47M Parking business turnover
- 25,000 Trees, 240 Km roads, 213 Hectares of greenspace
- 96% highways waste is recycled

At the conclusion of the presentation, the Chair encouraged the Committee to ask questions on the report.

Councillor Jackie Borland asked if fly tipping was within the Department's remit; how much it cost to collect efficiently and whether resources might be better used in prevention, rather than reaction (removal and collection). In response, Bram Kainth, Strategic Director of Environment, confirmed that fly tipping was covered by the Department. He explained that due to the transient population within the borough and the high turnover of tenants (in rented properties), it was commonplace for mattresses to be discarded on streets (rather than tenants incur costs for dedicated removal). As a result, there was always a balance to be struck between enforcement and collection (costs). To improve the street scene, he confirmed that Environment were working in partnership with the Council's Law Enforcement Team (LET) to take remedial action as appropriate.

Bram Kainth confirmed that fly-tipping collections had improved recently, with the new waste contract due to come into force in February 2023. This meant that more fly-tipping collections would be collected more efficiently in future. Annie Baker, Assistant Director Street Environment Service, confirmed the Department was trying to clear fly-tipping waste more quickly, and given there was a volume of waste; being given longer (more time) to clear this, did not necessarily change the volume. What was important was the resilience of the service so that it could process peaks of high demand. Bram Kainth observed that each instance of fly tipping, created more fly-tipping, so it was seen as a self-perpetuating problem. Annie Baker reiterated that the Department was working with LET, so perpetrators were aware incidents of fly-tipping were being actively investigated.

Councillor Jackie Borland commented that fly-tipping was a form of blight, which in some cases, was as simple as residents putting their domestic waste out on the wrong collection day. She suggested that matters might be improved through an awareness campaign. In response, Annie Baker confirmed the Department could do a mail-box awareness campaign, as well as use a variety of other platforms such as social media. In many cases, it was noted that most progress was made when neighbours spoke to each other about local issues which touched the community as a whole.

In relation to Arts and Culture, Councillor Adam Peter Lang commented that he had recently attended the Windrush Day and Bob Marley's birthday celebration which he cited as good examples of bringing multi-generations of the community together. And speaking in general terms about parks and open spaces, he noted that many residents did not have gardens and there was an opportunity to actively promote and use the parks within the borough (given their increased usage during the Covid period). He also noted the Sports Strategy and how important this was as a vehicle to engage the community.

In response, Bram Kainth acknowledged the increased use of parks and the important role these had played as safe spaces for residents during the pandemic. He confirmed that a future of parks strategy was currently being developed. Councillor Adam Peter Lang highlighted the strong links between green spaces and improved mental health and the opportunities to use parks creatively in the future.

With regards to street works inspections, Councillor Ashok Patel highlighted these remained a major issue for commuters and residents. He suggested a mechanism should be found to publicise the details of forthcoming works. In response, Bram Kainth explained that most street works were statutory undertakings over which the Council had limited control, such as those done by Thames Water or Internet firms laying optical fibre. The Council is responsible to coordinating and monitoring streetworks within the borough. Councillor Ashok Patel confirmed street works were a source of considerable case work and reiterated that residents would welcome a degree of prior notice.

Councillor Sharon Holder, Cabinet Member for Public Realm, confirmed the Council did have a weekly list of planned closures and works, which also included the contact details of the various contractors undertaking the works. She confirmed she was aware of the impact of streetworks, and this was being investigated.

The Chair, Councillor Rory Vaughan noted the different categories of works and probable timescales, so enquired if a dashboard could be produced so the resident notification process could be simplified. In response, Bram Kainth explained that in relation to Highways, contractors had a statutory duty to notify the Local Authority. However, if it was a contractor such as Thames Water or a Gas Supplier, these statutory undertakers needed to inform and update the residents. The Chair asked Bram Kainth if officers could investigate this issue in more detail.

Resolved – That officers investigate the issue of the street works inspection notification process and report back to the Committee

Commenting further on street works inspections, Councillor Liz Collins noted how contractors used fluorescent paint to mark the location of utilities (for health and safety) but in many cases, failed to remove these unsightly markings. She also highlighted the issues of old street furniture (signage) on lampposts, the prevalence of weeds and how neglected areas often attracted litter and disused vehicles. In response, Bram Kainth agreed that the usage of these paints appeared over-zealous at times, and if Councillors identified a particular area of concern, then officers could be tasked with investigating the area and conducting a signs audit. In relation to

weeding, Bram Kainth confirmed this was a constant challenge which depended on weather conditions and the method/s used to control the weeds.

Speaking in general terms about future work areas, the Chair confirmed the Committee needed to revisit sports provision / Sports Strategy and how this was being developed, as well as progress on the Arts and Culture Strategy and the topic of Parks. Further topics for consideration included: Parks and improving the borough's Green Flag status.

RESOLVED

That the future work programme include: Sports provisions, Arts and Culture development and Parking.

The Chair also suggested that Parks and improving the borough's Green Flag status could be investigated and he enquired how tree preservation orders (TPOs) were determined. In response, Bram Kainth provided details of how these were determined and offered to provide further information to the Committee on this topic.

RESOLVED

That officers provide further information pertaining to the determination of TPOs

In relation to transport issues, the Chair asked if more funding was available for additional bike hangers. Bram Kainth confirmed it was a priority to provide further bike hangers and to raise the funding for them, as demand was increasing all the time.

With regards to the statistics on waste management in the report, the Chair enquired whether the fifth lowest waste per person was pan-London or nationally and how recycling rates might be improved in the future (as well as how recycling rates were measured). Annie Baker confirmed this was the fifth lowest rate per person in England. In relation to recycling rates, Bram Kainth commented that as household waste was so low, it was a challenging statistic to significantly improve and so the Authority needed to focus on: 1, food waste and containerisation and 2. garden waste.

Annie Baker provided a detailed response on how waste rates were calculated and explained that recycling rates were easier to calculate. However, waste minimisation was related to economic performance and how the wider (global) economy was performing. Richard Shwe, Assistant Director of Environment Operations, confirmed that when the containerisation pilot was conducted, recycling rates increased from 25% to 40% and the Environment were working with residents and had changed the service dynamics which had increased the Council's performance rates. A technical explanation was provided concerning street or multiple household collections and the ramifications these had on containerisation rates.

The Chair asked about recycling rates in general terms and what plans there were to improve these. The Committee requested a report on the Council's Waste Strategy,

covering waste reduction and recycling to the 28 November 2022 meeting. The Chair confirmed that reducing waste was as important as improving recycling rates.

RESOLVED

That officers provide a report on the Waste Strategy, covering waste reduction and recycling to 28 November 2022 meeting.

Concluding the item, the Chair thanked officers for their helpful overview of the Departments remit, which had served as useful introduction the Environment Department.

RESOLVED

That the Committee note and comment on the priorities and challenges

Meeting started: 7.00 pm
Meeting ended: 8.42 pm

Chair

Contact officer: Charles Francis
Committee Co-ordinator
Governance and Scrutiny
☎: 07776 672945
E-mail: Charles.Francis@lbhf.gov.uk