

## Environment Scrutiny Commission

MINUTES of the OPEN section of the Environment Scrutiny Commission held on Thursday 14 October 2021 at 7.00 pm at 160 Tooley Street

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**PRESENT:** Councillor Margy Newens (Chair)  
Councillor Adele Morris  
Councillor Tom Flynn  
Councillor Renata Hamvas  
Councillor Leo Pollak  
Councillor Leanne Werner

**OTHER MEMBERS  
PRESENT:**

**OFFICER** Tom Vosper, Strategic Project Manager  
**SUPPORT:** Michael Greenhalf, Waste Contract & Strategy Manager  
Julie Timbrell, Project Manager, Scrutiny

**1. APOLOGIES**

Councillor Graham Neale gave apologies for absence.

**2. NOTIFICATION OF ANY ITEMS OF BUSINESS WHICH THE CHAIR DEEMS URGENT**

There were none.

**3. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS AND DISPENSATION**

Councillor Leo Pollock said that would recuse himself from discussion on the District Heat Networks item as he had been the cabinet lead and closely involved with this programme.

Councillor Margy Newens declared an interest in SE24, as a shareholder for one of the community energy projects.

#### **4. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting on 13 July 2021 were agreed as an accurate record with the following amendments:

- Councillor Richard Leeming was present,
- Under the work programme it ought to say the officers, rather than members, ought to push harder for greater carbon reductions on developments,
- There was an action point arising from the Climate Change item to get more information on why the three estates were chosen for the pilot heat pump networks.

#### **5. ENERGY REVIEW: SE24**

Alan Jones, chair and co-founder of SE24, provided a presentation, with reference to the PowerPoint circulated with the agenda.

The chair then invited questions and the following points were made:

- SE24, like other Community Energy initiatives, are able to work with small and medium schemes which are less commercial viable. Community Energy Community Benefit Companies (Ben Com) are able to tap into funding. In addition SE24 bring experience gathered over the last decade plus local knowledge and relationships in the community, which means they are able to engage with stakeholders and they know where the local need is for community benefit projects, e.g. tackling fuel poverty.
- It is important that the council understand what Community Energy can do in terms of action to deliver low carbon and renewable energy. The present Community Energy references in Climate Action plan are quite tenuous. It is unclear where the funding might come from. The Carbon Offset fund is potentially a good source and even a small amount of the 2 million in the fund, and approximately 5 million in the pipeline, would help. £1 investment can generate about £7 in other investment. In addition to part funding projects directly, extra money for administration, including for SE24, would enable more capacity to do more publicity and regular engagement. Other authorities have shared the cost of a dedicated officer.
- There are good tools available to bring about more Community Energy, including the GLA rooftops solar tool.
- Dulwich College was quite challenging to work with as the solar project was quite small and therefore low priority as compared to the school's educational operations that took precedence, particularly in regard to providing site access for contractors. Dulwich College, part of the Dulwich Estate, is taking its environment responsibilities very seriously so that is a relationship worth pursuing.
- The bulk of the investors in Community Energy share offers tended to be higher

wealth professionals though there are also a tranche of investors with less income who invested in part for future beneficial benefit. SE24 lowered the investment amount from £500 to £250. Some schemes have gone lower £100 or even £50.

- Members of the commission brought Alan Jones attention to the Green Buildings Fund cabinet report from Cllr Helen Dennis which sets out how the Carbon Offset fund can be utilised. Members advised Allan Jones to attend and make representations to cabinet, if there is still time.
- In response to a question on how the council can get solar going Alan Jones recommended a focus on the school estate, and in particular the Primary School estate where the council has most influence. There are around 39 Primary community schools. He explained that working with schools would entail promoting Community Energy, both solar and LED, to site owners: from school leaders to governors. The biggest hurdle is legal so standard leases approved by the Local Authority would very useful. Encouragement from the council to work with Community Energy Ben Coms also would be a big help.
- There is also a need to identify the school sites that can be used for solar; the GLA Solar Map is useful for this and also working with school Estate Officers who can assist with surveying , as they will know the condition of the roof. Some sites will become viable if installation of solar is scheduled at the same as roofs being redone.
- In summary the council can help work with schools by:
  - Communicating with schools leaders the benefits of Solar and LED Community Energy
  - Providing standardised legal documents
  - Linking in with school Estate Officers to coordinate surveying.
- In a response to a question on developing the skills and capacity of school Estate Officers to understand solar SE24 said they have an approved list of contractors who are able to install. SE24 could assemble a short list of professionals who could assist ( in conjunction with other Community Energy Ben Coms ) with undertaking the technical surveying with input from Estate Officers, who would have the local knowledge on the right buildings. SE24 also have professionals who can help with the legal issues on ownership of buildings and installation.
- Alan Jones was asked what level of employed support is needed to get Community Energy working on the Southwark school estate. He said that given the current capacity of SE24 there would need to be staffing input across various areas including liaison and legal, which would probably be equivalent to one Full Time Worker. He advised that collaboration with another local borough could help if they have existing capacity.
- Members asked why LED, rather than solar, was used in some schools. Alan Jones said there can be a variety of issues that preclude solar: too much of a steep sloping roof, or the wrong aspect, or shading, or obstacles. One school SE24 surveyed would be viable if combined with re-roofing. He added that it is important to maximise energy use by school, so pretty much all can be consumed on site.

## 6. ENERGY REVIEW: FOOD WASTE

Michael Greenhalf, Waste Contract & Strategy Manager, presented the briefing enclosed with the agenda.

The chair then invited questions and the following points were made:

- Members asked if monitoring of organic waste had identified trends, such as reduction. The officer responded that no trends had been established downward, but there is seasonality. People put more out summer time and Christmas time, which makes it difficult to access trends. The other difficulty is communal collection makes it challenging to know the waste per household. The council is looking at posters and other campaigns to reduce waste and measure impact. Schemes that tend to work well are those with engaged occupiers in community groups such as a TRA, or a housing officer committed to sustainability.
- The officer was asked about linking up compost with the council's commitment to offer allotments. The officer said that there had been a recent focus on the logistics to do this, and now officers are moving to community engagement to be more effective. Officers are now linking up with allotments and communicating the purpose of the climate emergency strategy and the role of waste and compost in this.
- The officer explained that the council do need to keep some food in the mix for the Mechanical & Biological Treatment (MBT) fuel produced by Veolia for energy. Members asked about the threshold for this and the officer explained that we are not near it now.
- Rolling out more food waste collection would also have to factor in the additional environmental cost of collecting the food waste via vehicles on the road.
- There is a need to reduce the amount of waste Southwark residents and businesses produce.
- A members said that constituents have asked how to dispose of the compostable containers that cannot currently be placed in any designated waste place for recycling. The officer explained that while compostable containers are better for rivers and seas longer term as they do not release micro-plastics, realistically they will not break down for a long time without specific conditions of light, heat and humidity, therefore these containers tend toward greenwash. However they can be disposed in the general waste and will contribute to MBT fuel.
- Members are asked about the timescale for food collections to be rolled out and linked with Anaerobic Digestion as many residents are very keen to play their part in this. The officer explained that this work is dependent on government plans being brought forward, including a policy and legal framework and funding. If the council jump ahead then the costs fall on the council only. It is therefore likely that the borough will get more carbon savings from other activities and investments,

until this comes online.

- Members referred to the graph in the briefing and asked if organic waste could be stabilising with more collections but the same amount collected because people are wasting less food. The officer responded that this trend has not been identified through looking at sampling - though food waste caddies do tend to make people aware and mean some reduction.
- Members asked about composting on site in estates with the increase in food growing projects? The officer said there are some studies looking at this, and including garden waste and there is a longer term piece of work with housing, under the Great Estates programme to take this forward, with a dedicated housing and waste group looking at better waste storage. A member referred to a small estate which they are very keen and asked the officer to get in touch.
- Wandsworth Council have community composting, which engages about 100 people. The officer said that Southwark have about 1200 using the subsidised composite scheme, which costs of £10.
- Veolia do not make money from composting. Peat free compost is expensive to buy commercially as the processing is extensive and often has to be done outside of the city because of permits.

## **RESOLVED**

Commission members will visit the Veolia waste processing plant.

## **7. ENERGY REVIEW: DISTRICT HEATING NETWORKS**

Tom Vosper, Strategic Project Manager, gave a presentation covering the below:

- SELCHP expansion project
- Water source heat pump project
- Heat Networks Strategy
- Heat metering

The chair then invited questions and the following points were made:

- Billing will be done via a fixed weekly charge so that the cost is spread equally throughout the winter and summer, and this will be amended if energy use is lower or higher throughout the year. This was a result of the feedback from the consultation.
- The charges will be cost recovery rather than profiting making .The council have not decided yet of the costs will be estate based or pooled.
- Members raised concerns about estates with outages and asked how this will be dealt with. The officer explained that when installing new heat systems the council

have to balance not raising bills, reliable heat provision, and reducing carbon and grant availability. A recent heat pump scheme was only viable because of grants. A new grant is expected that is likely to provide capital costs to install heat pumps, however efficiency work will also need to be undertaken to ensure demand and thus costs, and bills, can be contained, resulting in the same outcome for bills but lower carbon.

- The top priority is reliability, and that can mean that when heating systems are not working then the council are replacing gas boilers where needed, even though these are not lower carbon. Those council estates relying on SELCHP have been 100 % reliable, but there have been problems with estate plant rooms, which ought to not be repeated this winter.
- A member referred to the cabinet report and the possibility of setting up a sink fund to raise capital for installation costs. The officer explained that there are legal difficulties, including use of the HRA and lease charging stipulations. Other options are therefore being considered including setting up a shell fund, which would mean the HRA could contribute on an annualised basis and leaseholders could also contribute and spread the cost. However there are challenges which the council is considering and taking legal advice.
- The extent of biomass and possibility of extending this was asked about. The officer explained that this had been considered but there are problems in terms of carbon and the environment , particularly in the city, including the transport costs of moving biomass sometimes halfway round the world and through the city in HGVs, the storage space required, and pollution that would prevent significant rollout. There is however some biomass, including in Tooley Street.
- The officer was asked about the heat maps diagram in the cabinet report and the difference between open and closed loop heat pumps. The officer explained that an open system extracts warmer water from the London chalk aquifer, absorbs the energy, and pumps cooler water back, approximately 5 degrees colder. There are good opportunities here and the Environment Agency is keen on this as generally the water aquifer temperature has been rising as heat has been deposited, rather than extracted. The closed loop extracts heat from rocks, clay and other sources, but does not circulate water. There is a Thames Water exclusion zone where water is extracted from the aquifers and cannot be utilised, and areas where the underground network prevents extraction.

## **8. ENERGY REVIEW: SCOPE**

The report was noted.

## **9. WORK PROGRAMME**

The chair referred to the work program and said the intention is to hear from developers and landlords next meeting and invited members to send suggestions for people to invite, and any other comments on the work programme, via email.

