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London Borough of Hackney  
Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission  
Municipal Year 2020/21  
Date of meeting Wednesday, 11 February 2021

Minutes of the proceedings of  
the Living in Hackney Scrutiny  
Commission held at  
Hackney Town Hall, Mare  
Street, London, E8 1EA

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<b>Chair</b>	<b>Cllr Sharon Patrick</b>
<b>Councillors in Attendance:</b>	<b>Cllr Anthony McMahon, Cllr M Can Ozsen, Cllr Ian Rathbone</b>
<b>Apologies:</b>	<b>Cllr Anna Lynch and Cllr Penny Wrout,</b>
<b>Officers in Attendance</b>	<b>Polly Cziok (Strategic Director, Engagement, Culture and Organisational Development), Lucy McMenemy (Cultural Development Manager), Petra Roberts (Cultural Programme Officer)</b>
<b>Other People in Attendance</b>	<b>Cllr Guy Nicholson (Cabinet Member for Planning, Culture &amp; Inclusive Economy), Auro Foxcroft (Village Underground)</b>
<b>Members of the Public</b>	<b>None</b>
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**Councillor Sharon Patrick in the Chair**

**1 Apologies for Absence**

- 1.1 Apologies for absence from Councillors: Anna Lynch and Penny Wrout.
- 1.2 Congratulations to Cllr Sade Etti on her new role as Mayoral Adviser for Homelessness, Housing Needs and Rough Sleeping. This was her last meeting with the scrutiny commission be commencing her role on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2021. The Members of the commission wished her all the best in her new role.

**2 Urgent Items/ Order of Business**

- 2.1 Items of the meeting was as per the agenda and there were no urgent items.

**3 Declaration of Interest**

- 3.1 None.

## 4 Hackney Library Services

- 4.1 The Chair welcomed to the meeting Cabinet Member for Planning, Culture & Inclusive Economy, Cllr Guy Nicholson and Strategic Director, Engagement, Culture and Organisational Development, Polly Cziok from London Borough of Hackney.
- 4.2 Libraries not only offer access to books and other reading material but also provide a valuable service to residents in the form of public computer use for those who do not have access to IT services within their home. Covid-19 has had a huge impact on library services.
- 4.3 The Commission asked for information about the impact of Covid-19 on library services, plans for reopening and their work to mitigate the digital divide in relation to library services.
- 4.4 The Cabinet Member for Planning, Culture & Inclusive Economy commenced the presenting with the following points in his opening statement.
  - 4.4.1 The Cabinet Member placed on record his thanks and appreciation to staff for keeping the library service functioning over the last 12 months. Pointing out staff provided an immediate response to the pandemic and lockdowns.
  - 4.4.2 The report provides information about some of the activities that have been scheduled as part of the phased reopening of the service. This is currently on hold due to the current lockdown.
  - 4.4.3 The service is still focused on a 4 phased reopening strategy. The phases are set out in the report in the agenda.
  - 4.4.4 The Cabinet Member drew Members attention to looking beyond the immediate response to the pandemic; to also consider how the service has been able to engage with residents and provide a service. Looking at the future of library services, what it will look like and the kind of services they could offer.
  - 4.4.5 The Cabinet Member referred to the extraordinary outcome of the last 10 months and the channel shift of library services; operating effectively within the virtual space. Moving book clubs, reading sessions, accessing to information, learning and knowledge online. Noting various strands of engagement have come to the fore whilst the physical space has been closed and the restrictions in place.
  - 4.4.6 The Cabinet Member pointed out this would be a future piece of work. The Cabinet Member suggested the scrutiny commission may wish to think about this as a future work programme item, as the service evolves over the coming 12 months.
  - 4.4.7 The changes being discussed are not about restricting a service, closing or reducing the service; but capitalising on the aspects that have been delivered well over the last 10 months to expand the offer. Whilst supporting and enabling the librarians to be able to engage with that agenda and lead it.

- 4.4.8 An important part of the next 12 months will be to ensure the library staff are leading on the investment they need into their professional careers and what they need to deliver a great service over the next 5-10 years.
- 4.4.9 There is more work to do in relation to this area of work. But this meeting is providing the Executive Members with the opportunity to highlight the ambitions and to set in motion a work programme.
- 4.5 The Strategic Director, Engagement, Culture and Organisational Development added the library services has had a challenging time over the last 12 months. The service experienced a huge impact in the first lockdown when the service had to close.
- 4.5.1 The service transitioned to moving all provisions online e.g., book groups, storytelling sessions, quizzes etc. During this time, they found the uptake of ebooks and audio services increased massively.
- 4.5.2 The paper outlines the work carried out in the black history season.
- 4.5.3 In the summer, the library service was able to recommence the home visits service which is of key importance to the residents who are housebound.
- 4.5.4 The major impact of the first lockdown for the public was that they could not offer computer use. The Council is aware the world shifted services online during the pandemic and for those people who are digitally excluded or effected by digital poverty that free computer usage was essential.
- 4.5.5 Previously the digital divide assumptions were that people could not use the internet or did not have access to the internet. More recently it has been identified that its now related to people who are on really low incomes, who have run out of data on their phone or who are not able to pay their broadband bill. The library PCs service was a lifeline to people trying to sort out universal credit claims, applying for jobs or ordering repeat prescriptions.
- 4.5.6 The Council received a lot of feedback from residents that this was something that they missed extraordinarily.
- 4.5.7 There has been an impact on the service areas income. They have had no income from fees, fines or meeting room hire.
- 4.5.8 The 4 phased approach to reopening was developed with public health and the corporate health and safety teams.
- 4.5.9 The Strategic Director pointed out the library service has done an amazing job to create a covid secure environment. Citing the Director of Public Health saying they are an exemplar in everything they have done to keep staff and residents safe.
- 4.5.10 The Strategic Director put on record her thanks to the service lead (Libraries and Development Support Manager, Sue Comitti), her staff and the corporate Health and Safety Team who have worked hard to protect the staff and public and to provide a service to the public in a safe way. Opening the service as much as they can whilst adhering to the public health guidance.

- 4.5.11 Current government guidance in this lockdown permitted libraries to open for order & collect and public PC use.
- 4.5.12 There were requests among the staff group and from unions to close libraries completely. However the government guidance permitted libraries to be open for public PC use. The Council felt very strongly that whilst the infection levels were high, they did not want staff to come into work who were anxious about putting themselves at risk. Notwithstanding the council had a duty to provide a skeleton service to vulnerable members of the public that needed access.
- 4.5.13 Due to the high infection rates in Hackney they decided to open the libraries that had the highest levels of usage only for order & collect and for PC use. These were Stamford Hill and Dalston. Each library is open 2 days a week with limited opening hours (11-4pm). The aim of reduced hours being to reduce contact for the public while the infection rates were as high as they were. At the same time, the council was of the view they could not completely deprive the vulnerable public of that access.
- 4.5.14 The Council worked closely with the staff to make sure they had enough staff - who had identified as feeling comfortable with coming into work - to cover the proposed hours.
- 4.5.15 The Council was hoping to reintroduce the click and collect service for Hackney Central library. But this has been challenging due to the building management issues.
- 4.5.16 The Council has been able to redeploy library service staff into other areas of the council e.g., telephone contact tracing, business grants administration, electoral services (helping to get the electoral role ready for May) and data recovery work following the cyber-attack.
- 4.5.17 The redeployment has been good for library staff because they can often feel detached from the rest of the organisation. This provided an opportunity to get them involved in the covid effort. The additional under employed staff are hoping to get involved in the vaccination work. The Strategic Director pointed out staff have had a positive attitude to getting involved in redeployment.
- 4.5.18 Currently their work in relation to the digital divide has focused on keeping the libraries open and making sure people can come in and use the PC services.
- 4.5.19 The council highlighted that some of the people using libraries are vulnerable and often ask staff for one-to-one support with things like filling in their Universal Credit Claims. It was pointed out currently staff cannot give this type of support because of social distancing requirements. However, the Council is doing all it can to help and support people from a distance.
- 4.5.20 In reference to the future of the library service. The Strategic Director highlighted they have huge amounts of learning from the pandemic and it has been a very long period since hackney library services had a strategic review. The council is proposing to do a review of library services in the new financial year.

- 4.5.21 In relation to the review there will be a full-time member of staff working alongside the head of service to do the review. The first phase will involve reviewing all the data they hold on current usage both pre pandemic and during the pandemic, footfall, demographics, library usage etc. This information will provide a clear picture of the usage pattern. The review will move to look at how things have shifted during the pandemic and what is sustainable.
- 4.5.22 The next phase will be intensive staff engagement. The council has approximately 100 staff in libraries and many are very creative people with lots of ideas about how the service can grow and develop. The council is hoping to have some face-to-face contact with staff at this point, but this will be covid dependent.
- 4.5.23 Lastly, they will move into the public engagement phase. The council is anticipating this will be around summertime with various engagement methods (face to face, focus groups, online) but this will be covid dependent. This will aim to understand what people get out of using the library service whilst targeting people who do not use them to find out what they might want from the service in the future.
- 4.5.24 Finally, they will be looking across the council to look at what services can be provided out of libraries. The aim is not to turn them into mini customer service centres but to consider genuine co-location of services that will provide a real synergy with library services. This will involve talking to people across the council and looking at where the synergies could work and perhaps ways, they can make the libraries more financially sustainable long term. Using libraries as a springboard for other service provision and as effective community engagement hubs.
- 4.5.25 Taking into consideration that other offices like neighbourhood offices have closed over the years. Libraries remain the single touch point for local resident engagement. Libraries have a presence in all their neighbourhoods, and this is precious and important, they can do a lot more with their presence.
- 4.5.26 After all this work they will develop a Library Strategy in 2022-26 to cover the next administration. At this point they expect to have a clearer understanding of the timings in relation to the capital programmes being planned for libraries and they will be able to have a solid plan with clear strategic objectives.

#### **4.6 Question Answers and Discussion**

- (i) Members referred to the digital divide being mentioned at this scrutiny commission and coming up at various council meetings. Members referred to the explanation given about digital divide being related to poverty and not so much about digital skills and the inability to use digital devices. In reference to libraries Member asked if there was a criteria for residents be able to use the computers and if use was restricted, in timeslots or open for booking.**
- (ii) Members referred to Dalston and Stamford Hill and asked if there were plans to re-open Shoreditch library? Members referred to the libraries currently open and in the planning being at the centre or north of the borough.**

In response the Strategic Director, Engagement, Culture and Organisational Development explained the reasons they chose to just keep the 2 libraries mentioned open after Christmas and during this period is because of the high infection rates locally. They wanted to keep providing a service but a minimal service. In addition, several staff were feeling at risk therefore they chose the 2 sites with the highest level of usage for PC use and click & collect. This was also to ensure they were still serving the communities that needed the service the most.

The Strategic Director pointed out the aspiration is to open Hackney Central library and they will reopen the other libraries when the infection rates decline. This is being monitored. The Strategic Director added they want to re-open Shoreditch library because it has had a refurbishment. It was pointed out libraries will reopen taking into consideration public health advice which gives notice that it is a safe and sensible to do so.

The Strategic Director pointed out the council does not want anyone to come into work who is clinically vulnerable, has a long commute or are at risk. Currently they have enough staff who live locally and who can walk to work and feel safe, to staff the current service offer.

The Strategic Director pointed out the infection rates are declining, and all the information indicates things are moving in the right direction as residents get the vaccine. It is anticipated they will return to full opening over the next couple of months in line with Government advice.

The Strategic Director, Engagement, Culture and Organisational Development confirmed there is no criteria for PC use and a resident can just book. The Strategic Director explained there was a discussion at a national level (Chief Librarians Association) about essential use, but they decided they would not define what is essential use. Some people find their computer activity good for their mental wellbeing. In addition, Librarian did not want to police this activity.

The Cabinet Member for Planning, Culture & Inclusive Economy emphasized about social distancing in the libraries. One of the key challenges with Hackney Central is the access arrangements for the library and the inability to implement effective social distancing. This is of great concern to everyone working in the service and for the council managing the public health impact of covid on the local community. This supported the rationale for why some libraries were open and some are closed. It is anticipated this will be the position for the next 6 months as they adapt.

The click & collect offer is available for users of the service and eBooks remain unaffected.

The Strategic Director added for Hackney Central the design of the building is inappropriate and access is very dependent on lifts for accessibility. Pointing out it is hard to run lifts in a covid safe way. Their plans are to implement an order & collect service on the ground floor. Although this site will not be open for PC use residents will have access to order and collect. The challenge lies with the building management arrangements and this has been hard to negotiate. The Council hopes to resolve this very soon.

In response to the question in the chat by a Member asking if the home delivery service is open. The Strategic Director confirmed the home delivery service is still open via the community library service. This service is still delivering to a few hundred residents although fewer than normal because many of the residents who use this service are clinically vulnerable and they have declined to use the service to limit contact with people.

**(iii) Members commented the feedback noted from residents who are shielding is that delivery of books is appreciated.**

In response the Strategic Director confirmed they still operate home delivery for books.

The Cabinet Member for Planning, Culture & Inclusive Economy commended the community library service who have continued to operate throughout the pandemic with a very short interruption to the service at the beginning. The Cabinet Member pointed out they have had to redesign the way they deliver the service and managed to keep that momentum. For those who are using the service it has been of great comfort and support to their quality of life over the last 10 months.

**In response Members commented some cancer patients cannot go out and are very comfortable to receive home delivery and this has been great.**

**(iv) Members referred to Hackney Central Library being filled with people using the computers, particularly students. Members asked as there are only 2 libraries open has the service been able to cater for students or is this not a possibility?**

In response the Strategic Director, Engagement, Culture and Organisational Development confirmed they are unable to cater for student's computer use. Pointing out Hackney Central will continue to be a challenge due to the design of the building. Pointing out that in the Town Hall building the lifts have been switch off due to covid.

It is anticipated that the refurbishment of Clapton and Shoreditch libraries will provide more workspace for people. Currently the only service they can offer under government guidance is PC use (this is booked for 1 hour at a time) and order & collect. Therefore, even if they opened more libraries, they would not be able to allow people to come in and study there for hours, browse or do any other activity they would normally do in a library. The Strategic Director pointed out as the guidance changes; they will be able to open some more of the provision. This will be in close working with support and advice from their colleagues in public health and the corporate health and safety team.

**(v) Members asked if there are any timescale for reopening a service that caters for students. Noting schools will reopen on 8<sup>th</sup> March 2021.**

In response the Strategic Director confirmed there was no definite timings or dates. But assured Members the council will open services as quickly and as safely as soon as possible.

**(vi) Members asked if the Council records the usage of library services.**

The Strategic Director, Engagement, Culture and Organisational Development confirmed they have a detailed record of service usage. The Strategic Director offered to provide this data if required to the Commission in a briefing note.

**(vii) The Chair commented that the review sounds interesting and was pleased to hear they will be reviewing the service to make improvements. Commenting several boroughs have cut their library services due to austerity. Members were pleased the Council made a commitment to keep their libraries open. The Commission welcomed being kept informed about the library service review.**

**(viii) In relation to the service review Members welcomed the aim to speak to all users and asked how the council was going to engage with non-library users to get their views to feed into the review.**

In response the Strategic Director, Engagement, Culture and Organisational Development advised they will use their current communication and consultation methods. They can also use common place, public events and have stalls in parks etc. Highlighting there are a range of ways they can talk to people generally.

The Strategic Director pointed out for the review they do not just want to talk to very active users who are in the library user groups. They want to talk to everyone in addition to looking at the data they hold on usage. There has been a lot of feedback from the Hackney Young Futures Commission about libraries and how important they are to young people. This data can feed into the review.

In terms of non-users, they want to understand why they are not users of libraries services. For example, there are parents who were avid users of the library when their children were small but then they stop. The council wants to look at how to keep those customers. Also, understand what will attract people into the libraries. Considering the events to hold and the community work they could host. They will talk to voluntary sector partners and everyone.

The Cabinet Member added the success from engaging with the community through consultations like the Dalston conversation gives a good platform to reach out to the wider community including those who may not use the service, to really connect and engage to get their feedback and ideas. This will be a major exercise, but the library service has a great future ahead. The pandemic has provided a platform that demonstrates the flexibility of the service and the ability of the service to be able to respond to quite difficult environments and how to continue a service. The next 12 months should be a great opportunity for the service.

## **5 Hackney Arts and Culture Services**

- 5.1 The Chair welcomed to the meeting the Cabinet Member for Planning, Culture & Inclusive Economy, Cllr Guy Nicholson; Strategic Director, Engagement, Culture and Organisational Development, Polly Cziok; Cultural Development Manager, Lucy McMenemy and Cultural Programme Officer, Petra Roberts



from London Borough of Hackney. Also in attendance was venue operator Auro Foxcroft from Village Underground.

- 5.2 At a previous discussion (January 2020) about Hackney Carnival by the Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission they provided some challenge about the inclusivity of the event. This discussion is to provide an update on how the Council addressed the concerns raised about inclusivity. The specific questions the Commission asked related to this update are outlined on the cover sheet for item 5 in the agenda.
- 5.3 The 3 lockdowns have had a significant impact on the operation of arts and culture in the borough. The Commission decided to look at the impact of Covid-19 on arts and culture and the recovery plans for this sector in the borough.
- 5.4 This discussion covered:
1. Hackney Carnival
  2. Impact of Covid 19 and Recovery Plan for Culture
  3. Impact of Covid-19 on Cultural Services and the digital divide.
- 5.5 The presentations from LBH Cultural Development Manager outlined the following main points from the report in the agenda.
- 5.5.1 In the context of the pandemic their initial planning for the Hackney Carnival in September 2020 ceased in March 2020 following the cancellation of the live event.
- 5.5.2 Prior to this announcement they had started to act on the recommendations from the LiH Scrutiny Commission. Namely increasing levels of community engagement. The team was reaching out to various groups in Hackney and lined up a number of new organisations and council services to participate in the carnival with a view to raising some funding from the Arts Council. This was to develop a new and exciting community engagement strategy for the event. This work can resume in the future.
- 5.5.3 After reviewing the options of what could be achieved, they decided to produce an online carnival.
- 5.5.4 They worked with Hackney Carnival groups to create videos that reflected the work they do to summarise some of the out puts from the programme. E.g., presentations of cultural traditions and videos about reflections on carnivals and what it means to Hackney's communities. Also covering the impact of the pandemic.
- 5.5.5 There were also videos on how to do carnival crafts at home. These videos were viewed by many people online. In total 21 short films were made, and these were placed on the Hackney Carnival Facebook page.
- 5.5.6 There was a team of co-curators who helped to develop specific projects. In addition to the films by the carnival groups there was a film about the health and wellbeing effects of taking part in the carnival.

- 5.5.7 They also delivered a Hackney Carnival at Home Weekender. This was a celebration on the weekend when they would have had the physical carnival. This was a live stream event in 2 parts. Part 1 was a sound system event on the Saturday and part 2 was the livestream event on the Sunday.
- 5.5.8 They created a mentorship opportunity for a young person. The young person worked with one of the carnival curators and focused on digital content production. This was successful and they would do it again.
- 5.5.9 Two of the curators worked together to create a new archive of Hackney Carnival. This consists of a lot of interviews with carnival artists and volunteers and they reflected on the meaning of carnival to them, the history and heritage. The officer pointed out this has developed into an interesting resource which can be built on. This is on the Love Hackney website.
- 5.5.10 The aim of the programme was to support Hackney's carnival groups in developing new digital skills. The feedback received from the groups was that this was useful in helping them develop their online presence. It was appreciated that the online version had helped to keep the carnival spirit alive.
- 5.5.11 The how-to videos were appreciated by the public and they had positive feedback.
- 5.5.12 They had started to think about their preparations for Hackney Carnival 2021. They had hoped they would be able to do a live event this year and started the round of carnival commissions for carnival groups to apply for. They were giving access to funding earlier than usual to start thinking about what they would do for Hackney Carnival 2021. This was to enable them to consider their themes and to help make their workspaces covid safe.
- 5.5.13 The number of people who accessed the carnival online amounted to almost 39k views of the 21 short films by the carnival groups.
- 5.5.14 There was a smaller number of people who engaged with the sound system day on Real Rebels radio station. They had 372 listeners.
- 5.5.15 On the Sunday for the live stream on the Hackney Carnival Facebook page attracted 22,000 views and a high number of engagements. People enjoyed interacting with the host Pax Nindi. That was successful.
- 5.5.16 The carnival dance challenge project was a piece of work that the young person doing the mentorship worked on. They put a call out to the public to take part and come up with a dance in response to a soca tune developed especially for the project. This had 6000 views. This was a good outcome for a new event.
- 5.5.17 There was good press coverage (the full list is in the report) and they had positive response from various media outlets that reported on the carnival.
- 5.5.18 The live stream had clips from carnivals of previous years and messages from other carnivals, DJ sets and competitions that allowed the host to interact with the audience in various ways.

- 5.5.19 Regarding the Hackney Carnival event, it was announced today that they had taken the decision to not proceed with the outdoor carnival event in September. This was due to the ongoing concerns about the pandemic. The focus would be on building on the successes of the digital event last year. The Council will review the situation because it may be possible to have some pop-up carnival activity in public spaces nearer the time. In the meantime, they will focus on creating a fun, interesting and meaningful online carnival.
- 5.5.20 The aim is to develop a new website for Hackney Carnival. Last year some of the content was on the Facebook page and some was on the Love Hackney website. It was a little scattered. The desire is to create a bespoke website that would enable them to recreate the experience of accessing the event in person. To have a legacy that could be used in the future. It could also be used as a networking tool for the groups in the future.
- 5.5.21 The council wishes to maintain the online presence of the carnival groups. The groups have feedback that although they enjoyed learning about creating a film and sharing their work, they would love to get back to making costumes for the carnival event. It will be key to refocus the carnival groups on their art form; allowing them to do that again and for the council to document and facilitate this rather than expecting them to do this from home with mobile phones.
- 5.5.22 It will be important to do a wide-ranging community engagement plan this year. The council is in a better position this year to think about how this will work. For example, this could be to build on the carnival dance challenge that enabled public participation in a collective endeavour.
- 5.5.23 The council plans to build on the Hackney carnival archive they started on Love Hackney. They wish to find ways to make that more accessible and interactive.
- 5.5.24 The Council would like to involve another young person on the digital content production again in association with Hackney Young Futures.
- 5.5.25 The council wishes to explore partnerships with local businesses to encourage them to support the online program. They are committed to supporting the carnival groups and continuing with the annual commissioning programme to sustain their practices throughout the next year.
- 5.5.26 The Cabinet Member for Planning, Culture & Inclusive Economy thanked the Cultural Development Manager and her team for a successful first attempt at producing a digital carnival. The Cabinet Member pointed out similar to libraries, this had opened up opportunities even though it was sad not to physically participate in a live event.
- 5.5.27 The Cabinet Member pointed out the Mayor of Hackney is keen to see a larger programme delivered this year. Therefore, if they are to go virtual again, they will look at how to expand this further. This expansion will primarily be led by more participation, making and creating things and doing performances and capture more views.
- 5.5.28 Fundamentally it is about building a larger programme and a larger portfolio of activities. Even though it will take a lot of work to do this.

- 5.5.29 The Cabinet Member advised the Council's view is it would not be safe to run a live event on this scale in September. The Cabinet Member pointed out Glastonbury were of the same view and had cancelled their event too.
- 5.5.30 The Strategic Director, Engagement, Culture and Organisational Development advised the decision to cancel the live event was driven by the uncertainty around the infection situation. Highlighting it was important to note that even if they were to consider holding a safe event in September this year. The organisations capacity to do the work and deliver the event is not available. For example, the council's current event manager is redeployed on the covid effort working on PPE distribution. In addition, the Police also have to put in a large number of resources to help keep the public safe. Also, health partners are involved in the carnival planning too. So, it is not just about making the plans for the event for September but also about the organisational capacity to sit around the table with partners to plan the event. The Hackney Carnival is a partnership effort to make it a safe event.
- 5.6 Part 2 was a discussion about the impact of covid on cultural services, arts & cultural sector, digital divide and the plans to support the recovery of the arts and culture sector in the borough.
- 5.7 The Strategic Director, Engagement, Culture and Organisational Development commenced the update by paying tribute to the support work of the Cultural Development Manager (Lucy) and Cultural Programme Officer (Petra) to the arts and culture sector in the borough. Recognising it has been a challenging year for the sector and still is. The Council is aware how important the arts and culture sector is to the local economy, jobs etc.
- 5.7.1 The Strategic Director highlighted the work of this team would normally centre around organising events. Their usual work has been impacted and the team have shifted their focus onto providing support to their partners in the sector.
- 5.8 The Cultural Development Manager made the following main points from the reports in the agenda.
- 5.8.1 Covid has had a significant impact on the arts and cultural sector and they remain affected.
- 5.8.2 Initially in the first lockdown the culture team did a survey and held several meetings with the sector to understand the impact of the first lockdown.
- 5.8.3 All cultural programmes came to a stand stop.
- 5.8.4 Organisations reported a serious loss of income through the withdrawal of grants, freezing of grants and the loss of all of their earned income streams – tickets, space hire, hospitality etc.
- 5.8.5 Organisations based in council premises were able to discuss rent deferrals but others with private landlords did not all have the support and understanding from their landlords.
- 5.8.6 The Arts Council set up emergency funding in the first instance which helped to keep several arts organisations afloat. But some reported falling outside the

- criteria for the government funding because they did not pay business rates, had a higher rateable value for their premises, being a micro business in a shared workspace or having charity rate relief.
- 5.8.7 The job retention scheme has protected many jobs in the sector however the freelancers have been hugely affected with many losing all their paid work.
- 5.8.8 Several organisations also reported concern about losing contact with their participants and audiences and the effect this would have on their wellbeing. Particularly young people and older people alongside the impact of digital exclusion.
- 5.8.9 The Culture team contributed to the Council's lobbying efforts to the Government. They lobbied through the parliamentary inquiry into the impact of covid on the DCMS sector. This included lobby for a forward-looking sector support fund to develop organisations to enable them to survival the initial impact of the pandemic.
- 5.8.10 Following the lobbying the Government announced the cultural recovery fund of 1.57 billion to invest into the arts and cultural sector. The first round was funding to help businesses stay afloat covering 6 months of funding from October 2020 to March 2021. In LBH they were allocated approximately £12 million. This went to 68 arts and cultural organisations in Hackney.
- 5.8.11 There is a second round of recovery funding – launched in December 2020 – of which the application window has closed. They are currently awaiting the outcome of that funding allocation decision. This will be additional funding covering April - June 2021. This will be to help businesses transition into a more sustainable operating business model with the aim of being able to reopen in July 2021.
- 5.8.12 Regarding the re-opening and reclosing of venues. When organisations tried to reopen in between the lockdowns they reported opening with 30% capacity for cinemas and less in music venues. Some venues tried to mitigate that by holding 2 performance per night and bringing in additional audiences in phases.
- 5.8.13 The 10pm curfew mainly affected bar sales but for places like theatres they started performances earlier to mitigate this.
- 5.8.14 The feedback from organisations that did reopen advised it was easier financially when they were closed because they had no overhead costs. Therefore, many were of the view it was not viable for them to reopen.
- 5.8.15 For those that reopened they found that audiences were keen to return to venues, screenings and performances. They were sold out. However, they did flag concern about the lack of new films and cultural performances being put forward by the relevant industries, citing there was not enough new work available to draw in audiences. When venues reclosed, it was difficult because business had started to pick up again.
- 5.8.16 Organisations were able to keep their spaces open for tenants and for hires e.g., daytime TV and film screenings, rehearsals and recording. This has been an important source of income. Many organisations moved their programmes

- online this enabled them to stay in touch with audiences and to try new things, although it has not necessarily been a lucrative source of income.
- 5.8.17 Online equipment requires substantial investment. This is a long-term investment and remains to be seen if it will be a good source of income.
- 5.8.18 Many organisations have been innovative e.g., music venues have tried out live streaming events, one theatre is developing an outdoor theatre, this will allow them to reopen sooner than they would do for their indoor theatre.
- 5.8.19 There is a radio programme for older residents. There is a project called Hackney Social Radio by Immediate Theatre. Programmes are broadcast weekly on Resonance 104.4FM. If older residents do not have access to digital devices or WiFi they can tune in. The programmes feature music requests, audience phone-ins, stories from the community, features from local artists, interviews and advice from experts, with regular up-to-date information about where to access help and support.
- 5.8.20 In relation to the recovery plan, there have been a few council services that have directly supported organisations to survive the challenges – Regeneration, Property, Environmental Health, Licensing, Employment and Skills and Cultural Development. They have all worked together to share information with organisations through various meetings, regular newsletters and emails, access to funding through supporting the many rounds of government for businesses, organising advice sessions on various grants that are available to organisations, writing letters of support and launching commissioning funds - the Wick together fund for freelancers in Hackney Wick area and the second round of the Shoreditch and Hoxton art fund.
- 5.8.21 The Council's property team has supported venues with rent deferrals and the culture team has supported organisations with private landlords to access support from the GLA's Culture At Risk office. They have also engaged with private landlords directly.
- 5.8.22 The council has supported the reopening process by inviting guest speakers to share best practice. For example, with reopening workspaces and helped organisation to interpret government and local guidelines on the restrictions for licensed venues. In addition to practical advice on how to reopen. They have also promoted venues and shops through the Love Hackney Shop Local campaign.
- 5.8.23 The council has supported the creation of training opportunities by facilitating organisations to apply for the governments kickstart apprenticeship scheme. They have supported the development of online programmes by putting on training sessions by the Arts Council's digital culture network.
- 5.8.24 The Council has been working with the visual arts and heritage organisation to reconnect with Hackney's schools. These organisations felt that this was the key issue for them. They have not been able to deliver their workshops in schools, so they have had online sessions with teacher to explain and explore the best way to keep that engagement with schools.

5.8.25 In terms of future support for the sector, this is evolving all the time. Currently they envisage supporting the sector to access funding through a new Neighbourhood CiL fund. This will be launched in the next few months. This will enable arts and cultural organisations to apply for project funding. There will also be further rounds of government funding.

The Chair clarified if the CiL funding was Hackney Council funding. The officer confirmed it was.

The Cabinet Member for Planning, Culture & Inclusive Economy added this is being explored by the planning authority. They are keen to bring it forward as a culture fund that can be deployed across the sector. They will draw down the Neighbourhood Community infrastructure Levy (CiL) which is a section of planning gain that comes forward specifically to deploy around communities and investing in communities. This is to help mitigate the social impact of new development in the borough.

The Chair clarified if this was Section 106 money.

The Cabinet Member confirmed Section 106 is focused on specific planning gain related to affordable housing and school places from the immediate impact of a development. This funding also has more restrictions. The CiL takes a more general planning gain.

5.8.26 The officer continued the presentation by advising the licensing team will launch Hackney Nights which is a new online portal for licensed venues and will help them to find the information they need.

5.8.27 There will be a specific love Hackney shop local guide for the night-time economy to help promote the cultural offer when venues start to reopen.

5.8.28 The culture team will launch a new arts and health network to help the cultural sector to connect better with health professionals around social prescribing, older residents and the negative effects of isolation and mental in children and young people.

5.8.29 The culture team will be talking to property services and Hackney Business Network (previously known as Invest in Hackney) about the possibilities for the arts and cultural sector to access any space that becomes available.

5.8.30 The culture team will continue to deliver their cultural initiatives which enables them to commission organisations to deliver work e.g., the Hackney carnival, Windrush festival, black history season and discover young hackney and hackney circle.

5.9 The Cultural Programme Officer added in addition to maintaining some of the cultural programme activities they have led on initiatives responding to the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020 linked to the racial inequalities work. Using arts and culture as a powerful tool.

5.9.1 In relation to the Mayor's review of the naming of landmarks, streets and public spaces. The review is called 'review, rename and completely reclaim', established in June to listen to the views of residents about how to tackle

- landmarks, streets, buildings and public spaces named after plantation owners and people who traded in enslaved Africans.
- 5.9.2 They had reached a turning point in history where covid and the Black Lives Matter movement placed racism in the spotlight and this complimented the Council's Black Lives Matter motion and built on the local history of fighting racism in the borough, dating back to the 1980s. This has also been well document through the work of Hackney Museum.
  - 5.9.3 The project gives the council an opportunity to rethink the names of spaces, where communities live, learn, work and play. To ensure that they are appropriately reflecting their diverse communities.
  - 5.9.4 In June 2020, the council set up task groups across culture heritage working with planning, parks and green spaces. Central to the review in Hackney is the community steering group. Made up of local cultural historians, community leaders, young people and residents. All having local expertise, experience, investment and passion for the subject. They have played an advisory role to the council. The community steering group identified the names and symbols of people who profited from slavery and colonialism and those that remain memorialised in the public spaces.
  - 5.9.5 The group met weekly and identified 4 contentious symbols through the review which are linked to Sir John Cass, Cecil John Rhodes and Sir Robert Geffery and Francis Tissen
  - 5.9.6 They have developed a framework for the council which includes a traffic light system and a process on how the council can make decisions about contentious sites.
  - 5.9.7 One of the first actions is to change the name of Cassland Road Gardens which the council has committed to. That was named after Sir John Cass Director of the Royal African Company. This will be complex as they need to consider the impact on residents, legislation and the process of engagement. The council wants to hear resident views and give residents as much information as possible before consultation more widely.
  - 5.9.8 The other aspect of the review is to consider how in the future the borough's public realm could better reflect the people they champion across the board. The Hackney renaming hub was launched in November 2020. This is an online hub to crowd sources new names from residents. They have also launched the web page which gives information about how the two groups are working together on the review.
  - 5.9.9 The equalities work links with the announcement of the 2 new permanent public art works to pay tribute to the Windrush generation. In partnership with Create London the Council will commission 2 sculptors – Thomas J Price and Veronica Ryan – to produce 2 permanent pieces of artwork to honour Hackney's Windrush generation and in recognition of the significant contribution they have made to life in Hackney and the UK. This will also symbolise the ongoing commitment from the borough to provide refuge and welcome to worldwide migrants.



- 5.9.10 The Council is currently fund raising for this work. The artwork will be installed in 2 different locations across the borough – outside Hackney Town Hall and the Narrow Way.
- 5.9.11 The Council's partners London Creates have been awarded a sizeable grant from the freelance foundation to deliver a public digital engagement programme; to include an interactive website, exhibitions and educational resources. This ties in closely with their Windrush engagement programme working with approximately 3000 Windrush elders and their descendants on a whole range of intergenerational activities across arts heritage, sports, health and education. This work will link with the black curriculum work across the council and link to the unveiling of the artwork with the celebrations of the Windrush day and year-round ambitions to promote black history - telling the story and the educational history about the art works.
- 5.10 A local business owner from Village Underground, Auro Foxcroft attended the meeting to give his experience as a venue operator in the arts and culture sector. Outlining the impact of the pandemic on the business.
- 5.10.1 The venue operator from the Village Underground thanked the culture team for all the work they have done. He explained this has genuinely been very good and helped to sign post to funding opportunities which has been excellent.
- 5.10.2 Most important was bringing everyone together. The venue operator explained he takes part in a regular music venue meeting with participants from across the borough. The solidarity and coming together and Hackney Council facilitating this has helped to share ideas, support and help. The venue operator hopes that this will be a long-term change.
- 5.10.3 The venue operator commended Hackney Property Services for their support too. Particularly in their case and having forbearance on their rent. Also, to Hackney Council supporting the cultural sector with deferments. This has managed to keep businesses going. Village Underground highlighted they have benefited from forbearance from a range of organisations, but rent was really key.
- 5.10.4 Hackney's cultural infrastructure is stressed, and some businesses are doing better than others. In his view Hackney is doing fairly well considering the current climate. In his view this is partly to do with the support and partly to with the great cultural infrastructure that Hackney has. Emphasising they are all working together.
- 5.10.5 In terms of what might happen next, he would like to encourage the council to focus on bringing everybody together for reopening. There are a number of great organisations both building based, and non-building based. Taking the opportunity to come back stronger and getting Hackney's cultural infrastructure going well is probably the safest way forward. Not just for the infrastructure but also for the audience to feel safe to comeback out again.
- 5.10.6 They should also look to welcome everyone back to cultural events and try to reduce the natural and understandable apprehension. In his view the council can play a fundamental role in terms of messaging and the communication to residents. Continuing the facilitator role, the council has been undertaking to bring organisations together.

- 5.10.7 In relation to spaces it would be sad if Hackney ended up with empty commercial space. Not only because of the impact on the economy but for the people who previously occupied those spaces. The venue operator pointed out If this does happen it would be good if the Council could devise a process for using the space for cultural purposes, offering it out to cultural organisations and particularly to those that interact the most with residents and society. Offering to arts and culture that have the most social role.
- 5.10.8 The venue operator pointed out space is such a premium in arts and a lot of great projects and ideas could flourish with the use of empty spaces. Pointing out from his experience in the industry when they get a commercial lull this can leave loads of empty space and suddenly you get an explosion of creativity and great new ideas. In terms of property services and what the cultural team can do to get empty space in temporary use, (until it becomes income generating again) this can be put into the hands of artists and arts organisations which would be good for the community at large.
- 5.10.9 The Cabinet Member for Planning, Culture & Inclusive Economy thanked the Village Underground for his contribution and the officers in LBH for leading the support work to the sector. The Cabinet Member pointed out this work has positioned the sector within the council across the different service areas that engage with the Cultural Team. This has reaped dividends for many in the sector in Hackney. This is the first time over the last 10 months that the cultural sector is in higher consideration by Property Services as they are for cultural development, business support and business advice services that the council are delivering. This work has helped the council to understand its relationship with the arts and cultural sector in the borough.
- 5.10.10 Bringing about a far greater level of engagement, as described by the guest in the meeting, has been important because the other set of relationships that are critical is the relationship between the Arts Council and Arts Council England. It will be key going forward for the council to advocate on behalf of local organisations across the sector with creditability and bring that advocacy into Arts Council England and into Central Government and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport.
- 5.10.11 Ensuing the council is listened to because it's important to champion all of those great creative practitioners that have made Hackney their home.

## 5.11 Questions, answers and Discussion (part 1)

- (i) **Members referred to the table in the report highlighting the work started after officer attendance at LiH in January 2020. Members commended the council for taking on board the comments and recommendations made during their meeting and the plans to expand. Members referred to schools and youth clubs not being open except for vulnerable young people. Members asked how they would get schools involved - in addition to youth cubs and tenant associations - recognising it is just after they start their academic year following a long summer holiday.**
- (ii) **Members commented if they are making films these can be made at any time and during the summer term before they break up. Although**

**Member recognise schools will have a lot of academic work to catch up on. Members think it's important that young people are given the opportunity to make films and costumes because of cultural heritage being an important part of people's wider education.**

In response the Cultural Development Manager confirmed they do want to involve schools and agreed they can ask them before they break up for the summer holidays. This format will give them a lot more flexibility for involving groups that have those kinds of restrictions.

One of the first steps is to meet with their carnival groups and contact the curator team for the carnival to help produce a robust community engagement programme. There will be via consultation and co-production with key carnival stakeholders and artists. The process will involve talking to various partners and working out what will work for them.

They intend to involve youth groups, schools and the other partners they started to contact in February 2020.

- (iii) Members commended the work and activities by the service to involve schools and agreed it would be a great activity. Members also welcomed the creation of an online space for the carnival as this would serve well for the future. Referring to the previous report to the Commission from officers last year about their relationship with other carnivals around the world. This will add as a rich resource for other carnivals.**
- (iv) Members commented events like this do not have much institutional memory. Therefore, the work to create institutional memory through videos as a resource about the carnival was welcomed.**
- (v) Members commended the report on the carnival and asked if the same funding was available during the pandemic and enquired how groups can get help with funding.**

In response the Cultural Development Manager advised the funding application they were scheduled to submit to the Arts Council was still available. There is also project grant pots of funding. The officer pointed out the funding stream is currently oversubscribed because they have removed the requirement for match funding. This funding is available to large organisations, local authorities, individual artists and carnival groups. They do provide support to groups during their application process. They support them with advice on how to make a successful application.

The other fund is 'developing your creative practice', this is also Arts Council funding. This is aimed at individual artists to be able to develop their practice in a new way, to seek advice and mentoring to support what they would like to do. The Council is writing letters of support for carnival artists and others who are applying for that funding.

In summary there is funding available, but it is extremely competitive.

The officer advised the council will not be applying to the Arts Council for funding for the carnival this year because they are submitting a bid for another project. They can only apply for one in at a time.

- (vi) Members asked the officer to describe a tangible benefit from this work that people can do together e.g., NHS claps. The Member suggested doing something that embodied the spirit of carnival bringing the community together. Is this possible?**

The Cabinet Member for Planning, Culture & Inclusive Economy welcomed the idea and asked Members for suggestions.

The Chair suggested the creation of small neighbourhood groups with activities to celebrate carnival - subject to small groupings being permitted. The Commission agreed to feedback any further ideas.

- (vii) Members asked if the carnival would be shown on YouTube. Members suggested being on YouTube may encourage more people to view it and once they are allowed to mix, they could sit together.**

In response the Cultural Development Manager confirmed last year they used the Hackney Carnival Facebook page because they already had a following on that page with a view of building on that audience. The officer advised on reflection it would be good to put it on YouTube because it may be more accessible.

- (viii) Members pointed out Hackney has very talented young people and older people and asked if the dance challenge would be opened to and linked in with groups like the Windrush generation to encourage all age ranges to get involved.**

- (ix) Members commended the engagement list of groups in the report. Members asked if all these groups would be encouraged to participate in the online event again.**

In response the Cultural Development Manager advised they would get back in touch with the groups to explore the potential of their involvement this year and work out the best way to do that for them. This will be worked out with each group.

This will require coming up with a form of community engagement that everyone can do.

## **5.12 Questions, answers and Discussion (part 2)**

- (i) Members commended the work of the council to support the cultural organisations and tenants of council properties. Members asked if the Council has been lobbying the government to put pressure on all landlords to help the organisations that were not fortunate enough to be commercial tenants with the Council.**

In response the Cabinet Member for Planning, Culture & Inclusive Economy advised as a Council they have been championing the case for commercial

tenants across many sectors when it comes to their relationship with commercial landlords. The Cabinet Member confirmed this has been happening and continues currently.

The Cabinet Member highlighted that both Mayor of Hackney and he, as Cabinet Member, will be attending a meeting with landlords to advocate for a group of commercial tenants. Pointing out this is ongoing work. The Cabinet Member informed there are more calls on the Council to support in whatever way it can. The fundamental issue is the council has no authority to intervene in the relationship between a commercial landlord and its tenant. Notwithstanding the council can help, advocate and bring people together.

In relation to lobbying government to lever out as much support as possible. The Council has contributed to the formal channels such as the Select Committee inquiries and direct representation through to the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

- (ii) **Members asked Village Underground to outline his experience of being a venue operator during these times and the plans for reopening. Members also asked if he was aware of any venues that have not survived during the pandemic.**

In response Village Underground explained it has been tough because their business operation revolves around bringing people together and this has evaporated. They have lost approximately 95% of their income.

During the open period they put on a couple of events and found the audience was keen to buy tickets and come out again. The current challenge is whether Hackney's infrastructure will be as successful as it was previously in the first and second culture recovery fund round. If they have the same level of success with funding Hackney should see most of the cultural infrastructure survive. In his view the big issues to watch for the winddown of furlough – this has been a protection for many jobs. This is not just in reference to the cultural sector jobs but jobs of the audience members too.

There is also the end of eviction protections soon so this could be a potential watershed moment for commercial landlords and commercial tenants.

Lastly there is the large debt mountain that is building up from taking out a coronavirus business interruption loan (CBILS) scheme. His business had £1million of CBILS loans to keep them going through the pandemic. In addition to the forbearances given to them by the council and other stakeholders/funders. He pointed out they have a payment plan in place, but this is subject to the business bouncing back reasonably well.

The venue operator was of the view there will be organisations in the borough that are going to struggle with the huge mountain of debt. Pointing out even if they did not take out CBILS loans they would have forbearance that will need to be paid back.

In his view the sector has a lot of optimism that they will get through this period. But there are still hurdles to overcome for the cultural and hospitality sector. He pointed out it comes back to everyone working together and the Council

taking the leading role. Orchestrating a mass opening when it is safe to do so to encourage a lot of activity. They are hoping this will commence in the summer.

- (iii) **Members referred to the night-time economy being closed and that residents may have found it has been quieter and become accustomed to this. Members asked if the Council is expecting residents to provide opposition to venues reopening? Members commented it is great that parts of Hackney have become a destination but queried if the culture offer after the pandemic could be widened.**
- (iv) **Members referred to the great work in relation to Black Lives Matter and the Windrush generation. Members asked if it would be possible to make culture even more encompassing. To enable people who do not currently enjoy those destinations, clubs and venues to enjoy a wider culture, so they could build back better and stronger.**

In response the Cabinet Member for Planning, Culture & Inclusive Economy acknowledged the thoughts and comments from the venue operator from Village Underground. The Cabinet Member added they can consider a portfolio of activities across a wider community to draw people in. Hoping then the residents would not look at the sector with animosity. But perhaps with a new sense of ownership of what the cultural, leisure and hospitality sector can offer in the borough. Point out the arts and culture interface are the perfect platform to do as described by the venue operator. Like the work he has been doing with his two venues demonstrating the capacity and ability of the arts and cultural sector to build those bridges and create that relationship.

- (v) **Members referred to one of the most famous venues in Hackney (theatres) and asked if they have engaged with theatres like the Arcola to find out the impact on them.**

In response the Cultural Development Manager confirmed theatres have been hugely affected just like music venues and cinemas.

Officers advised these are the 3 groups of organisations they meet with monthly to help them navigate this very difficult time.

In relation to the theatres a lot of them were interested in doing outdoor theatre in the first lockdown. But this was something the council was unable to support them with because of the concerns about organising events during the pandemic.

Some like the Village Underground were able to reopen for a short period in the late summer and were able to re-engage with audiences.

There have been some innovate approaches like access all areas. This is not a venue but a theatre organisation that works with people with a learning disability. This group normally takes part in the carnival each year but this year they worked with their members to create an online event. This also had a route through Hackney's streets with QR codes for people to scan as they went along the route to hear about the lockdown experiences of their members.

The Shoreditch Town Hall have progressed with some projects. They have started working with a group of young people to help develop their programme for young people. They have recently put out a call for 6 new artists to work with them to develop new work. They had approximately 160 applications for this. This demonstrates a huge demand for these opportunities in the sector. They have moved all their work online.

The Cultural Programme Officer added the council has worked closely with the Hackney Empire on the Discover Young Hackney Festival. The is an all-year-round programme for young people aged 13-19.

They put on activities to help young people remain part of society and to take care of their wellbeing and mental health. The council commissioned 15 projects. A lot of the projects were held online but focused on the softer elements of wellbeing and mental health and gave young people an opportunity to communicate with each other. This was in addition to developing skills and training opportunities to provide pathways for young people into the arts and culture sector. Theatre organisations have worked hard across the borough to maintain that creative activation.

The Hackney Empire is planning to hold their annual Alter Ego talent contest in the next couple of months. This is likely to be held in March or April 2021. The Hackney Empire is continuing to engage with audiences online as well as through other communication channels.

Members acknowledged it has been a terrible time for many businesses but especially the arts and culture sector. It was pleasing to hear that in the short window of opening that some businesses had reopened. The Commission is hoping the vaccine programme will be successful and enable the sector to take events back offline and put them back into the community.

The Chair and Members of the Commission thanked LBH staff and Village Underground for attending the meeting.

## 6 Minutes of the Previous Meeting

- 6.1 The draft minutes of the previous meeting held on 18<sup>th</sup> January 2021 have been delayed and will be provided at the next LiH meeting on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2021.

<b>RESOLVED:</b>	Minutes were approved
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<b>ACTION:</b>	
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## 7 Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission- 2020/2021 Work Programme

- 7.1 The Chair referred to the work programme and updated the Commission on the discussion items for the next meeting.
- 7.2 The March meeting is scheduled to focus on housing and the digital divide.

7.3 There will also be an update from Thames Water on the flooding in N4. This is the six-month progress update agreed by the Commission earlier in the municipal year.

7.4 Police to be called back for first meeting of the new municipal year in June. The Overview and Scrutiny officer to send out the invite requests for the June date in the draft calendar.

<b>ACTION:</b>	Overview and Scrutiny officer to send out the invite requests to MPS Borough Command Unit Police, IOPC, MET HQ and MOPAC for the June 2021 meeting.
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## 8 Any Other Business

8.1 None.

Duration of the meeting: 7.00 - 9.10 pm