
London Borough of Hackney
Skills, Economy and Growth Scrutiny Commission
Municipal Year 2021/22
Date of Meeting Wednesday 9 March 2022

Minutes of the proceedings of
the Skills, Economy and
Growth Scrutiny Commission
held at Hackney Town Hall,
Mare Street, London E8 1EA

Chair Councillor Polly Billington

Councillors in Attendance Cllr Clare Potter (Vice-Chair), Cllr Richard Lufkin and Cllr Steve Race

Apologies:

Officers In Attendance Suzanne Johnson (Head of Area Regeneration), Aled Richards (Director of Public Realm), Stephen Haynes (Director – Strategy, Policy and Economic Development), Sonia Khan (Head of Policy and Strategic Delivery), Daniel O'Sullivan (Service Area Manager) and Michael Toyer (Economic Development Manager)

Other People in Attendance Tony Wong (HCVS and Programme Director Connect Hackney), Euphemia Chukwu (Woodberry Aid), Councillor Susan Fajana-Thomas and Lauren Tobias (Volunteer Centre Hackney)

Members of the Public

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Councillor Polly Billington in the Chair

1 Apologies for Absence

1.1 No apologies for absence.

1.2 Officer apologies from the Head of Community Safety, Enforcement and Business Regulation and Strategic Lead Policy and Strategic Delivery from London Borough of Hackney.

1.3 Councillors virtually in attendance were:

- Cllr Nick Sharman,
- Cllr Gilbert Smyth
- Cllr Sam Pallis.

2 Urgent Items / Order of Business

- 2.1 There were no urgent items, and the order of business is as set out in the agenda.

3 Declarations of Interest

- 3.1 None.

4 Voluntary Sector

4.1 The Chair introduced the item and explained the voluntary and community sector (VCS) had been through a transformation following the pandemic. The Commission asked for an update about the sector; the boroughs volunteering service and the future of the sector. The Commission was particularly interested in hearing from a mutual aid group because this was an area of development since the pandemic.

4.2 The Chair informed the meeting the presentations would commence with Sonia Khan, Head of Policy and Strategic Delivery from London borough of Hackney (LBH) followed by the following officers from the following VCS organisations; Tony Wong, Chief Executive Officer and Jessica Lubin, High Transformation Director from HCVS; Lauren Tobias, CEO from Volunteering Centre Hackney (VCH) and Euphemia Chukwu, Founder / Director from Woodberry Aid.

4.3 The Head of Policy and Strategic Delivery from LBH commenced the presentation and made the following main points:

4.3.1 The voluntary sector was critical to the emergency response during the pandemic. The grassroot activity and volunteering had been in collaboration and through the community partnership network. The network was initiated by the Council. This made use of existing resources and gaps were plugged with additional resources from the council.

4.3.2 This was in response to transitioning from direct delivery support (that was not sustainable) to tapping into existing activities.

4.3.3 This acknowledges the voluntary sector standing within the communities. Therefore, any preventative approach from the outset responding to the pandemic needed to make sure the Council was valuing the VCS from the start.

4.3.4 The Council worked with the London Community Response Fund. This was a group of funders that came together (this group consisted of some local authorities and some philanthropic funders). This made way to focus its resources on the emergency response. In essence this meant that if one project was not picked up by one funder it might be picked up by another funder. This also enable organisations to support the most vulnerable and meet the needs of residents.

4.3.5 Although there was a big response to need during the pandemic it became clear that funders who were not on this initial journey, but involved in the immediate pandemic response, did not understand they were still in a crisis, in terms of poverty, inequalities and complex needs. These have now exacerbated and present a potential threat to VCS organisations.

4.4 The Chief Executive from HCVS commenced his presentation and made the following main points:

4.4.1 During pandemic the voluntary sector was recognised for its role and the importance of the sector.

4.4.2 Following the role of the VCS in the pandemic they have seen improved partnership and relationships with the statutory sector and amongst the VCS sector itself. More collaboration in the sector.

4.4.3 They aim to solidify this work with the VCS enabler work which HCVS is leading on.

4.4.4 There is still concern around funding. They do not feel that the funding arena for the sector is thinking about the future. They acknowledge they are still in the pandemic, but some organisations are starting to consider how they mobilise their services beyond the initial pandemic response. But as they emerge from the crisis there seems to be a lack of funding opportunity for the sector in terms.

4.4.5 In a recent survey HCVS identified concern from the sector about their future and financial stability.

4.4.6 Although there is recognition that partnership working has been positive, the sector is still experiencing increased demand. HCVS have noted that several organisations are supporting clients with additional challenges. Particularly now with the onset of the fuel price increases and the events in Ukraine. It was highlighted that mental health is still a massive challenge not only for the communities they are serving but also for the workforce. It was highlighted that the VCS are some of the lowest paid staff doing complex work. Also facing a combination of being squeezed at all angles.

4.4.7 The demand for services has increased because of levels of poverty, health inequalities, food prices, fuel and uncertainty about what covid will bring next year. The VCS want to support people, so they do not need to choose between food or fuel this winter.

4.4.8 HCVS facilitated a VCS assembly on emotional wellbeing. Mental health and emotional wellbeing were highlighted as the top priorities by the community. They have seen an increase in mental health demand with people presenting at a higher level of need.

4.4.9 The VCS are part of the community and always want to support the people around them. HCVS pointed out if an individual presented with NRPF they would be supported because they often do not want to go to statutory services. In essence the VCS is acting as a third emergency service.

4.4.10 HCVS pointed out the increased demand is putting a lot of pressure on the sector. Although it is recognised the Council is facing the same challenges itself. The future of the sector is very uncertain and facing financial challenges. This has a knock-on effect on the VCS.

4.4.11 It was reiterated the VCS needs financial stability and long-term investment. It was highlighted the VCS workforce is among the lowest paid staff in the health system. These staff need financial stability too to deliver services to manage their own personal food, fuel and poverty challenges.

4.4.12 The VCS needs financial stability to be able to plan the delivery of services beyond a few months or a year in advance. Having financial stability will help them to have the biggest impact in their communities to help reduce health inequalities to make sure the VCS is an active and equal and proactive part of the health system.

4.5 The Chief Executive from Volunteering Centre Hackney (VCH) commenced her presentation and made the following main points:

4.5.1 Thousands of residents signed up to volunteer within weeks during the pandemic. This response was astounding and not experienced before. However, this response presented a massive challenge.

4.5.2 It was explained volunteers signed-up through existing community groups and through VCH. Volunteers worked in all weathers to deliver food, prescriptions, medical supplies and also to prepare food (including culturally appropriate food).

4.5.3 Demand was rising all the time and they worked in partnership with a range of statutory services – public health, community partnerships NHS – to deliver the community champions program, vaccine stewards and logistics support.

4.5.4 The VCH increased their befriending service within weeks from 20 matches to 150. Many of these matches continue. But the number of referrals is increasing. It was pointed out there are very few befriending services in the borough with an open criterion.

4.5.5 VCH work very closely with the voluntary sector groups to provide them with the volunteers. They recruited very quickly to help with the logistic support (driving and good preparation) as required.

4.5.6 VCH also identified that residents created their own projects to help (social action). Their own food pantry or digital sharing projects to bridge gaps. There were online exercises and entertainment. These were set up independently and in their areas with mutual aid groups or with exiting community groups.

4.5.7 VCH set up the system very quickly to respond to the emerging needs as the existing systems were not appropriate. They implemented a new recruitment matching mechanism to be able to respond to the continuing emerging needs.

4.5.8 The VCH worked in partnership with the council and other programs. The VCH also provided guidance and support to a lot of mutual aid groups because so many varied in their knowledge, skills and expertise.

4.5.9 VCH found there were resident and existing groups starting up all over the borough and this poised a risk to volunteer management and best practice. In addition, for existing group many had to redeploy their own staff. Work very quickly whilst delivering services.

4.5.10 It was pointed out very few organisations have volunteering coordinators. At one stage they were trying to recruit volunteer organisers for charities. But this is a skills gap in the sector and one that remains. It was explained that volunteer coordinators were not viewed as essential roles. However, they are required to help support, manage, look after and recruit volunteers.

Wednesday 9 March 2022

4.5.11 Overall, there was a lot of positives. Overwhelming numbers and half of the people who volunteered had never volunteered before. Huge numbers came out to volunteer their skills to help their neighbours and people.

4.5.12 Although it was diverse many people were young 25-44 years old and white. This was a demographic that had not volunteered before, and they were a demographic that did not to engage. Over 50% said they would volunteer again.

4.5.13 The reason they volunteered is to engage with their community and a lot of the relationship continue. This was very local volunteering and they worked hard to try to match people to deliver food and prescription close to their postcode. They have tried to keep these connections going.

4.5.14 VCH pointed out they have been trying to do this for years to use the skills that people have to support each other and work together across communities in a local area to provide services. This social action established new projects.

4.5.15 Volunteering is more than just matching people to a charity role and it was more than this in the pandemic and continues to be. It is about delivering a service that is needed across communities.

4.5.16 This has given a greater appreciation among the statutory sector of the VCS role and the huge resources and assets residents, and volunteers can bring.

4.5.17 The speed of the response was good, but this posed an inequity in reach because to really volunteer you need to establish and build relationships. This process requires resources and takes a long time to build. This requires working with community groups on the ground to build trust. This not only applies to one-to-one support but working with groups too.

4.5.18 There was a lot of focus on vulnerability. The self-isolation requirements created a challenge in that it was a one-sided approach and took away the ability for people to collaborate and share their skills together.

4.5.19 There was a lack of engagement from Government. All the national government volunteer recruitment campaigns were not helpful locally because they did not work with local infrastructure. The ask from Members was to influence Government in the future about this area.

4.5.20 In relation to the resource and the time it takes people to work with people on the ground. If this type of emergency support needs to be repeated, this should be in partnership with groups and other charities on the ground. Redeploying existing staff. Previously this has been done without any funding and volunteer centres are often not given the recognition for their role. It was highlighted that volunteer centres provide an essential infrastructure and resource.

4.6 The Founder / Director from Woodberry Aid commenced her presentation and made the following main points:

4.6.1 Woodberry Aid was set up at the start of the pandemic. They identified that there were some residents in Woodberry Downs that were not able to access support.

4.6.2 The gap identified was the vulnerable elderly and disabled members of the community. Woodberry Aid was set up to close that gap. In addition, they provided cultural offers to the community.

4.6.3 Covid really hit the residents of Woodberry Downs severely. Local residents experienced the following:

- A high number are living in social housing, in cramped conditions with complex needs.
- Many residents are living on universal credit and were experiencing food poverty prior to the pandemic.
- There were families with SEND needs and a number of single parent families who are struggling to meet additional costs with children at home.
- Black and ethnic minority residents in the community were particularly impacted due to higher infection and death rates.
- Mental health needs were very high across all communities as residents were experiencing exacerbated poverty and the trauma from local deaths. The impact of trauma in the community was significant.

4.6.4 The demand at these early stages was huge. They learned quite quickly that partnership working was crucial.

4.6.5 In relation to the current situation, there has been no change and the living standards for people are not getting any easier. Although covid is reducing, the poverty and needs of people are still extremely high.

4.6.6 At the peak of the pandemic Woodberry Aid distributed 3000 meals a week. Through funding this increased to 4000 meals.

4.6.7 Despite the return to everyday lives the need has not reduced. The view is moving forward people will still need their support in the community. People are stretched and stressed which is causing anxiety and affecting their mental health.

4.6.8 For Woodberry Aid to continue to provide and meet the need they require funding. They are a grassroot organisation that reaches out to the people that well-established services cannot reach. They have the trust and understand the need. To continue this work will require funding. They are hoping there will be a solution and that the Government recognises grassroot organisations are essential. This will allow them to continue and support the local community.

4.6.9 In relation to skills, economy and growth. Woodberry Aid pointed out most of their beneficiaries from the early stages of the service have transitioned to become volunteers too. This has provided good opportunities for them to gain new skills. The volunteers included young people too.

4.6.10 The volunteers at Woodberry Aid have remained consistent over the last 2 years. They are still volunteering, and some have moved on. The experience and skills they have acquired has helped them secure employment.

4.6.11 In the 2 years three have moved into employment grown in confidence and gained new skills. It was pointed out one person was unemployed for over 5 year and lacked confidence. But after volunteering for 2 years with Woodberry Aid they have grown in confidence and learnt new skills. This person secured employment last

December (2021). In addition, young people have secured employment too through volunteering.

4.6.12 Woodberry Aid highlighted their work was crucial, but they could not continue without support from government. At the peak of the pandemic partnership working, and collaboration helped them to sustain; but they are uncertain about how they can continue with the return to normal.

4.7 The Head of Policy and Strategic Delivery from LBH closed the presentation by making the closing remarks below.

4.7.1 There is no going back to normal for the council and their partnership working with the voluntary sector.

4.7.2 The challenges HCVS outlined are the same challenges the Council faces. The joint working was co-created with the sector taking on board their insight and impact. The challenge will be using this insight.

4.7.3 The Council wants to continue to work with other funders to share their understanding. The aim being to improve the knowledge of funders who do not work at a local granular level. There is a lack of share the awareness and understanding that we are in a growing crisis.

4.7.4 The collaboration and partnership working with the sector has changed their relationship with the Council. The Council anticipated this direction of travel which is referenced in the Council's voluntary and community sector strategy. They had identified the need to work more on the ground with local organisation and understand the local ecosystem. In addition to needing to change their funding relationships.

4.7.5 The council was able to flex when the pandemic started and had already reduced the bureaucracy following the co-production work they had started with the sector.

4.7.6 The Council has introduced a new funding stream that is about community infrastructure. This is about locally based organisations and cultural organisations that have reach into different and diverse communities.

4.7.7 The rationale is to fund based on community reach not on a project. Funding organisations that are good at reach as opposed to organisations that are good at filling out funding bids and doing a good project proposal.

4.7.8 This approach will not work if they do not change how the whole council and health system views and works with the VCS. Valuing their role which was revealed during the pandemic. They are continuing to embed the approach across the council to drive that culture change. However, this partnership working can only be sustained through culture change across the whole organisation.

4.7.9 The Council is currently embedding priorities for volunteering, voluntary sector partnership working and grant making because of the pandemic. E.g., working with VCH on the voluntary sector brokerage and the future impact. How to value the place-based work and how they might work together to look at external funding. This could include looking at the dynamics such as who volunteers and how they can move to good health

4.7.10 In relation to the community partnerships network, currently there is work to look at the different food networks to consider how they can be sustained. This is challenging for the reason outlined in the previous contributors above (funding and level of input) but if they can get a network working together, they can be prepared to be able to draw in external funding and direct this to the organisations that have reach within the communities.

4.7.11 The Head of Policy and Strategic Delivery also pointed out there is the need for preparation to respond to future emergencies. The officer pointed out Hackney was able to respond quickly to the refugee crisis because the Council was preparing for the Afghan refugee crisis. They are currently working on getting access to advice and advice services for Ukraine residents.

4.7.12 Wider preventive work will be picked through the council's poverty reduction framework. This will ensure the Council has the focus on the immediate impacts whilst looking at the role of the voluntary sector for long term prevention and early intervention.

4.7.13 In relation to influencing Central Government. The officer pointed out the Council recently acquired some funding from the Department for Levelling Up Communities and Housing to show how they can work better in a hyper local place-based way with people. Explaining that this is to show central government how they might work with councils differently and how some of their policies and ways of funding could be developed. The Council had submitted a second stage business plan.

4.7.14 The objective is to consider how central government policy could be developed to be more supportive to a place-base and community-based approach valuing the reach.

4.8 Questions, Answers and Discussion

(i) The Chair commented the very nature of mutual aid organisations helped people to get jobs, acquire skills and dignity through their work helping their own community.

(ii) Members commented the information presented reflected the same information ward councillors heard from Hackney Wick Ward residents. Similar work with the council was carried out to deliver services to a whole range of people they had not previously been in contact with. In addition to mobilizing a new set of people it was encouraging to see that the experience in Hackney Wick was part of a bigger movement in the borough.

(iii) Members acknowledged that out of the pandemic new models were emerging of how the council works and how the VCS works. This is a very different VCS model. This presented a key change to the council's way of working and model of doing for people. Highlighting this was a major culture change. Members were impressed with the Council's flexible way of working. Members noted this would be a new way of doing things and not just in an emergency. Members pointed out making a culture change of this magnitude was enormously difficult and needs sustained leadership, new skills, and continual support for the operational model. Members commented they have not seen evidence of this turning into long term culture change.

Wednesday 9 March 2022

(iv) In relation to the VCS model Members commented they found that place-based people and organisations are right at the hyperlocal level. The information presented was highlighted that people needed to be joined together at a very local level. However, it was not clear how any single funding stream could do this. Members commented they were not well organised across the VCS, as a council and in Government to supporting the necessary networking. Members asked how they would build on this and acquire a network of community workers that can sustain this work across a range of services and throughout the borough.

(v) Members commended the work done by the sectors during the pandemic. Members commented the work by VCH and the Council was quite organic at a hyper local level. Members asked if this was patchy or had a good coverage across all the communities that need it and enquired about the vision?

(vi) Members pointed out it is anticipated that over the next year families will be forced to make the choice between heating and food. Members asked if the council and VCS was prepared or working in partnership to consider the provision of support to families in the coming year?

(vii) Members noted a larger proportion of the volunteer demographic was white. Members asked if this was related to a lack of engagement by other communities or if the white community was less engaged in hyper local organisations? Members asked if there was any further insight to explain this?

In response to ways of working the Head of Policy and Strategic Delivery from LBH explained the council had dedicated capacity across her service and there was a change support team in digital that was proactively developing the change program that is linked to partnership working. This involved working with a group of people and scaling up. There is also an element about resources, the type of resources frontline workers, management, and leadership. E.g., making sure everyone has the same information about emergency support. Some of this needed better digital tools, conversations and getting people to learn together. Training had a role but learning together and sharing was more impactful. This was being evaluated by University College London.

In addition, it is also about recognising that working this way takes its toll and is difficult to do. Even if you work more with external agencies you need to take into consideration that this was different organisational cultures coming together. Sometimes you would need to repeat pitches and this can be quite exhausting. ~This is looking at the role of managers and testing the support available for frontline staff. This way of working was being tested through peer support.

Lastly changing the ways of working is also about building the partnerships needed. For example, the food network. There was also the need to ensure all council departments are working in a more collaborative way and the right framework was in place to support working in partnership with the VCS. This way of working would be a change from pre pandemic. This responsibility was held by one team. They would be the team to talk to about funding issues or the survival of an organisation.

The officer added how this will be embedded into the workforce strategy and all council plans is in development. An example of this is the poverty reduction framework. This values the partnership and collaborative working with the VCS.

Wednesday 9 March 2022

There is an evaluative framework and the three aspects to it outlined above are being developed in tandem.

In response to the point about hyper local the officer explained that the place-based approach currently focuses on food because of the impact during the pandemic. This would help to build on previous what and learning. The community champion leads by public health have been a hyper local way of reaching residents. The officer informed that the Pembrey community work was pre pandemic but proved itself as a way of working with the community during the pandemic. This is now going into another phase. There is also Kings Park Moving Together programme. The concept of place shaping is gaining traction.

In relation to the vision, they are getting to the tail end of the current administration and there will a newly appointed leadership. So it will be important to be clear about the reasons for placed based working because although it's about place shaping it is also a way of reaching residents who are unlikely to trust and seek support from the council. It will be important to have this as a clear policy point.

There are methods that can be used to look at where there is more capacity and preparedness within communities and where there are and how the council might be able to make sure that where communities who do not have anchor organisations do not get left behind. This is not like having a set vision in a community development plan.

The officer pointed out it is worth revisiting the policy reasons for doing place based work. Highlighting the risk of having a grand plan is that you try to implement the same model of a local hub in every area. But from the evidence emerging it is becoming clear it will be important to think about a community development approach to the way they develop and deliver public services and the way they deliver partnerships. Then consider where there is a need to have a hyper local approach.

In response to the point about the demographic this was a risk anticipated when they entered the pandemic. But they wanted to reach people who had not thought about volunteering. It was highlighted there are people in communities who volunteer do not consider themselves to be volunteers. It was also noted that there was a difference between the demographic of those who are part of a formal volunteering program and those who were volunteers.

The VCH added there is no insight to explain the demographic. VCH pointed out the majority of new volunteers did not have a family to support, and some were Hackney residents on furlough and not working. It was highlighted that Hackney has a lot of residents who are in the creative industry (musician, hospitality etc.) and who were not being paid. Volunteers also included people who were new to the borough.

Many of the new volunteers came through community groups or mutual aid groups. There was also a lot of people who were not on their books in existing community groups or mutual groups. VCH pointed out the demographic was not necessarily a bad thing; they had wanted to reach that population and it is recalibrating now.

In relation to place based working there is a huge diversity of groups across the borough (TRAs and people who deliver provision in community centres) who are not necessarily recorded or known as a voluntary sector organisation. Therefore, the work they and VCH do on placed based projects is to reach and help people who are

Wednesday 9 March 2022

not necessarily engaged with the community sector and the statutory sector. However, this is not funded. The VCH has lottery funding for 2 resident led skills share work and more recently were funded by the CCG to do this model through GP surgeries. This encourages patients to share their skills with each other. This has been successful because it is reaching people with hugely complex health conditions to volunteer in surgeries and share their skills. This has developed since Covid. This work can only happen where there is funding, and it will need continual funding if you want to deliver this in every borough. The officer highlighted it takes a lot of time to work with residents and not all residents (who have trust issues and lack confidence or have other barriers) want to engage. It takes time to build trust.

HCVS added last year through Happy CVS they launched their VCS enabler model. This brings together all their networks. There are several networks that operate to serve specific groups. A top tier created last year has incorporated the VCS assembly model. This brings together all the VCS alongside statutory partners and residents (where appropriate) to look at broad issues that impact communities to co-produce solutions to these big issues.

In reference to the point about changes to council working it is in essence co-producing with all residents and the VCS organisations that are closest to residents to make sure they are working that way.

HCVS are looking to develop this and secured funding for another year and want to turn this into longer term investment.

In relation to the neighbourhoods conversation HCVS deliver the neighbourhood programme this follows a similar footprint to the primary care network. This brings together in a similar guise residents, VCS and statutory partners to make sure there is a person centre approach to delivering health and social care to residents. Ensuring services are joined up and coordinated. In answer to the question about if they are coordinating and have networks, the response is yes.

(viii) Members asked the Mutual aid group to explain if groups needed to mirror their way of working to respond to a crisis?

The Woodberry Mutual Aid explained every community is unique. What is important is knowing your community and being embedded within the community. This gives the insight to local need, and you can identify how to respond. The officer explained they identified the gap within their community and responded. The staff and volunteers they had were previously beneficiaries. To empower them they became volunteers for the organisation until they secured employment and moved on.

In reference to the demographic of their volunteers it was a mixture. They had older people (this helped them to get out), young people and people from ethnic minority backgrounds.

(ix) Members commented the power of connectors like Woodberry Aid should not be underestimated and an emerging recommendation from this discussion is to value people and the volunteering coordinators role.

The Cabinet Member for Health, Adults Social Care and leisure from LBH added the points made by Woodberry Aid is precisely the reason why a big community development strategy was not required. The Cabinet Member pointed out every

community is special and unique and highlighted that the King Park Moving Together project found their area had its own unique set of problems and to turn into a functioning community they must first address them in a unique and specific way to Kings Park Ward.

The Cabinet Member informed the Commission the work outlined by VCH at the meeting was the reason why they had been awarded the freedom of the borough.

(x) Members commented the groundswell witnessed was unprecedented. Members were of the view the development of mutual aid organisations was often where pre-existing anchor organisations formed a pivotal role in ensuring mutual aids evolved and were functioning.

(xi) Members highlighted work with resident participation groups revealed they wanted to be that ignition point for engagement. Without the support from anchor organisations Members were of the view it would be difficult. Members referred to the Council's resident participation team and asked about the relationship between them and the voluntary sector.

(xii) Members also asked in the absence of social capital how they could generate it through resident participation when you do not have institutions to do it.

(xiii) Members referred to the points about embedding and the role of HCVS in neighbourhood conversation and pointed out a local mutual aid in her ward found these conversations useful. Members asked if this model still exists and if any learning was extracted. Pointing out the role of various organisations coming together in an area to understand what each other is doing, the needs and how they can work together was very useful. Members asked for an update on those conversations.

(xiv) Members commented it would be useful to evaluate all mutual aid groups particularly on the variability of sustainability and the drivers behind the disparities.

In response HCVS confirmed the conversations had continued. This started with Well Street Common as the pilot area and over the last 12 months this has evolved to seven areas. HCVS advised the detail from each conversation was unique but in essence the view was shared experience is useful in terms of key stakeholders being around the table and learning the specific characteristics of each neighbourhood and their needs. This was in addition to valuing being able to speak openly and freely with key providers. This is a model that everyone supports and would like to evolve and develop. This is work HCVS will be doing.

ACTION	HCVS to provide Cllr Potter with an update on the results for each conversation.
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In response the Head of Policy and Strategic Delivery informed there was support to mutual aid groups. The Council has a lead officer within her team that works with mutual aid groups, so there is a relationship with these groups.

In reference to social capital and the role of the council and co-institutions. The officer pointed out social capital is not evenly distributed in communities so they need to recognise there is an equality issue.

Wednesday 9 March 2022

In relation to the role of the Council the officer was of the view there needed to be a coherent approach to working with the voluntary and community sector that recognises the VCS influences on the ground. The officer highlighted groups like Woodberry Aid that know the people and understanding the local eco system have the insight. Therefore, having a strategy that recognises the organic activity of local people is useless unless if you do not know what is happen in areas and if you do not build and add value to this. This is the direction they are taking with grant funding but there is more to do in relation to policy from this work as they learn from the pandemic.

Part of the council's role is about making sure the focus on the VCS is not seen as one team's work but that different parts of the council - working with residents - also see the value in working with the VCS, as a way of being able to build social capital. Notwithstanding the officer pointed this is not a substitute for talking to communities directly but recognising this as a way of being able to develop activity on the ground.

The officer highlighted the council is interested in understanding how the model described by the VCH (in GP practices) works to build social capital equitably and develop partnerships for people in places.

The Chair closed the item with the following comments:

- commented the discussion was extremely valuable because they have heard about the analysis and experiences of the frontline organisations.
- This demonstrated how a crisis became an opportunity for strengthening the relationship between the local authority and the dynamism we have within our communities to help identify where the gaps are and how we might be able to support residents.
- In respect of mutual aid organisations the Chair commented harnessing the energy is one aspect but resisting the temptation to be statist was another aspect. These are inevitable tension.
- From The Chairs observations the council had managed this well and ended up in quite a good place in terms of the areas outlined at the meeting.
- Members noted with interest how food had become a key issue, and this was not just related to food poverty but because food was a connector and linked to areas beyond the subtenancies of the body such as the soul.
- The Chair suggested the council should work on developing this area of work further.
- The Commission would review this discussion and consider if there are recommendations to be made about what the work that can be done to fill gaps physically and geographically in relation to the shortage of social capital and where the biggest strength is.

5 Economic Stock take and the Night Time Economy

5.1 The Chair welcomed to the meeting Aled Richards, Strategic Director of Sustainability & Public Realm; Stephen Haynes, Strategic Director Inclusive Economy, Corporate Policy & New Homes; Suzanne Johnson, Head of Area Regeneration and Michael Toyer, Economic Development Manager. Also in attendance for this item was the Cllr Susan Fajana-Thomas, Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Daniel O'Sullivan Service Area Manager, Parking, Markets and Street Trading from London Borough of Hackney.

5.2 The Chair explained the first half of this item would be about the economic stocktake in Hackney. The second half would focus on the night-time economy.

5.3 The Chair commenced the item by saying following the unprecedented shock to the economy from the pandemic the Commission wanted an update on the health of the economy pre pandemic and post pandemic. To assess the work by the Council throughout the pandemic to support the economy and the council's analysis about the impact of those efforts.

5.3.1 The Strategic Director Inclusive Economy, Corporate Policy & New Homes from LBH explained the questions asked by the Commission were applicable to both service areas and would be covered in the one presentation.

5.4 The Head of Area Regeneration commenced the presentation and made the following main points:

5.4.1 The business statistics in Hackney inform us there are a total of 24,295 business units (Source: ONS Inter-Departmental Business Register 2021) and 98% of businesses in Hackney are small and micro businesses.

- Micro employee numbers are between 0 - 9 and the business count in the borough is 21,970
- Small employee numbers are between 10 - 49 and the business count in the borough is 2,005
- Medium employee numbers are between 50 - 249 and the business count in the borough is 285
- Large employee numbers are between 250+ and the business count in the borough is 30.

For high street businesses based on the business rates data it was estimated that in Hackney there were up to 3,000 retail, leisure, and hospitality units in the borough (based on Hackney Council Business Rates records for 2020).

5.4.2 The biggest sectors in the borough are:

- Professional, scientific and technical
- Information and communication
- Business administration and support services
- Retail
- Arts, entertainment, recreation and other services
- Property
- Construction
- Accommodation and food services.

5.4.3 The officer explained as set out in the presentation there are various sources of business and economic data, they access to assess the economy. More recently the Council has been collating data on Hackney businesses from the business grants programme.

5.4.4 As a result of the business grants program, they built a new IT system for businesses to engage with to obtain a grant. This has given the council precise information about name, location, size of the business (number of employees), type of business (if registered as a company, sole trader or freelance or partnership model) and business sector.

5.4.5 The officer explained the business set code is the category assigned by government for the business type and sector and their business rate status. Although

some of the information held is like the data provided by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the data collated by the Council is specific to Hackney businesses.

5.4.6 Now the council has data held in one place and does not need to draw the information from various sources as previously. This will provide a valuable and rich data source for future use. But currently this data is being used to pay out business grants.

5.4.7 The ONS provide detailed data about business sectors and employment per sector.

5.4.8 The GLA provides a London data set is about local economies, high streets and includes some information about the night-time economy.

5.4.9 The ONS and GLA data is used to identify wider trends and for strategy development.

5.4.10 The council has carried out 3 business survey's during the pandemic which focused of the immediate priorities of businesses at different points in the pandemic. The support needed by businesses and the type of business support that would benefit businesses in the future post pandemic from the council. The latest survey was recently completed, and the council is currently analysing the results.

5.4.11 The council has an employment land study, this was prepared for the local plan. This data set is quite dated now. This data was used to help guide landlord requirements for commercial space, existing retail space and used to predict the future retail and commercial space needed in the borough.

5.4.12 The council also has different type of subscriber lists; business network (4000 businesses signed up), night portal (100 businesses) and zero emissions network (700 businesses).

5.4.13 In relation to how the data collated is used. The officer explained regulatory services data is used for fees and inspections part of the service and income functions. There are limitations with this data because it is used to make applications. But this data would not be updated if a regulatory application is not required again.

5.4.14 The business grants data is currently being used for the emergency grants program.

5.4.15 The Council has provided economic support to businesses through the pandemic via the distribution of Government Covid-19 business grants. As at January 2022, the Council had distributed around £126m of grants to local businesses via the Discretionary Grant fund (£3.4m paid), Retail Hospitality and Leisure Grant (£38m), Small Business Grant (£30m), Local Restrictions Support Grants (£18m), Christmas Support Payment (£163k), Closed Business Lockdown Payment (£10.3m), Restart Grant (£17.5m), and the Additional Restrictions Grant (£8.8m to approximately 2060 business).

5.4.16 The grants paid to those businesses who pay business rates have primarily focused on businesses in the hospitality, leisure, retail and accommodation sectors. The discretionary grant funds have also focused on the same business sectors (but included those businesses in these sectors who don't pay business rates) as well as

businesses which supply the retail, accommodation, hospitality and leisure sectors, market traders, nurseries, and childminders. In addition, the discretionary grant funds has also considered businesses in any sector provided they could adequately demonstrate that the pandemic had a negative financial impact on their business and they were experiencing financial hardship as a result.

5.4.17 The Government announced two new business grants to support businesses most impacted by the rise of the Omicron variant. The Omicron Hospitality and Leisure Grant is a one-off grant for businesses in the hospitality, leisure and accommodation sectors who pay business rates. The Government has also provided a top up to the discretionary Additional Restrictions Grant fund to allow Local Authorities to support other businesses in their area who they consider to be impacted by the Omicron variant. The two grant funds opened for applications in January 2022 and will be paid by 31st March 2022.

5.4.18 The officer highlighted there had been other support such as the furlough scheme, business loans, self-employment income support stream.

5.4.19 The Council has also taken a more bespoke approach and used its discretion to allocate funding from the Government Covid-19 Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG) to provide longer term support to local micro and small businesses by establishing 5 x business support programmes. The programmes listed on slide 9 were either still operational or had recently closed. Therefore, they have either paid out or will be delivered up until December 2022.

5.4.20 as a commercial landlord the Council has provided other support during the pandemic. The Council has worked with businesses on a one-to-one basis to provide a rent deferral or rent reduction and in some cases right off the payments. For business tenants the council has provided support to business tenants via the business forums, the Hackney business network, social media channels etc.

5.4.21 The Council has carried out a high street promotion 'Hello Again Hackney' campaign, 'My Virtual Neighbourhoods' and lots of different initiatives.

5.4.22 The officer informed the high streets data is from GLA high streets data service, town centre health checks and a retail study from 2017.

5.4.23 In terms of the support to businesses in the local high street, this was mainly the forms of support outlined earlier: grants, business rates relief and the bespoke grant programs created by the council (specifically focused on the high street and town centre businesses).

5.4.24 The key feedback received from businesses during the pandemic is the need for financial support to pay the rent and bills to effectively keep the business operational.

5.4.25 The focus over the last 2 years has been to get the financial support out to businesses.

5.5 Questions, Answers and Discussions

(i) Members asked if the council was collating data on diversity and protected characteristics for businesses?

(ii) Members asked if the grant programme had resulted in any under claiming from specific businesses and if any particular grants were not taken up? Members also enquired if the uptake was low did the Council know why these businesses were not claiming?

(iii) Members referred to the vast amount of data collected and asked about the impact on the local economy over the last 2 years (pre-covid up to now) and if there was any economic scarring or if all businesses had rebounded?

(iv) Members asked what business sectors were still suffering the economic affects and what can we do about that?

(v) Members referred to the absence of figures in relation the support provided. Members asked how the Council has assessed the effectiveness of its work and how the council is evaluating?

(vi) Members asked what criteria was being used to make decision on allocations; what the Council expected to see and how the council will judge if they are successful?

(vii) Members acknowledged the Council's primary focus has been on getting the money out to businesses to protect existing business but pointed out there also needed to be an evaluation of where the economy is in comparison to where it was. This would give an indication of progress or regression, economic scarring and resilience as a result of the support the council provided. Members also suggested this information should show how much was attributed to the council passporting money and how much to the bespoke support developed.

(viii) Members asked to see in the first meeting of the new municipal year an economic evaluation outlining pre and post pandemic. Not just information about the economy and the businesses themselves but also where and how the Council understands the impact of the government actions taken and Hackney Council action to support businesses. Members commented if the Council could demonstrate the number of businesses it managed to sustain this would be an extraordinary result. Members added they were not sure if this had been achieved and how the council managed to do this. That would be good to understand.

(ix) Members commented that this council budget was quite small in terms of council spend. Therefore, it would be good to understand the value or success from this spend.

(x) Members suggested this was presented in a format that demonstrated that over several years 2018,2019,2020 etc. by sectors to show the changes.

In response the Head of Area Regeneration explained in response to the number of businesses this has increased slightly / roughly remained the same. There was not a significant reduction in businesses in borough.

The officer pointed out the Council has not had an economic function for several years. An economic development function was being created to understand the economy. This function is not fully operational. The officer highlighted they have not

had a dedicated economic development team, and this was currently in the process of being formed.

In response to Members questions about diversity the officer explained for all business grant applications they ask businesses to complete an equalities and diversity form, but this is not a statutory requirement, so completion is optional, but they do have some data. For the bespoke grants created they have not evaluated this data set because this is still live. The service areas current focus is on the distribution of grants by the government deadline of 31st March 2022. The officer informed if the funds are not distributed by that deadline they will be reclaimed by the government.

In response to the question about under claiming for main business grants the issue has been false claims. The Council is working through a large volume of applications from businesses. There have been a number who were not businesses. The council needs to ensure they are not giving out money to businesses who should not be claiming the grant. This required a lot of analysis. It was pointed out this issue is not specific to Hackney, other councils have experienced the same high levels of fraudulent claims and paid out money incorrectly. The council has needed to ensure their checks are robust, but they are confident in their distributions of funds to businesses.

For each bespoke grant the officer informed in the previous SEG meeting in February figures were provided on the amounts given. In terms of the number of businesses awarded a grant they are in the process of evaluating the data. After the 31st March they will compile a report following analysis of the information.

In response to the questions about pre covid, now and the economic scarring the Economic Development Manager from LBH added the government data provides information up to March 2021. The March 2022 data which will help to understand how many businesses have remained afloat will not be available until October 2022. The council has very good data about spend on the borough high streets. This is a live data dashboard. This has showed with each restriction spend plummeted but then increased again when relaxed. Dalston recovered and in Hackney Central spend levels increased to beyond pre pandemic levels. But this information needs further analysis and investigation to understand the reason for the new trend.

An area they want to investigate further is the government statistical information showing 24,000 registered businesses. It was noted that across the UK there are reports that approximately 40-60% are not registered. This data does not include sole traders who are not registered for VAT and who do not have PAYE. There are gaps with this area of data and a data set they will look to improve in the future. This is a really important area for Hackney because many people in this business area are normally in the arts and cultural sector.

The Strategic Director Inclusive Economy, Corporate Policy & New Homes from LBH commented the Council has not had the analytical capability in place to analyse the data. The Head of Area Regeneration and her team have been working to improve this over the last 18 months / 2 years. An Economic Development Manager had been appointed and was building a team.

The Director accepted the points made about having comparisons data and graphs. The Director explained they would build on this work and bring an update to the Commission in relation to the strategy and metrics.

The Director pointed out if you look at PAYE there has been an increase of approximately 2.5% from November 2021 to pre pandemic levels in Hackney. In reference to the 24,000 business units reported this number has remained stable over the last 3 years. The Director acknowledged the request for information the Commission wanted presented to be able to assess and understand the performance of the local economy.

- (xi) The Chair closed the item with the following comments:
- It was reassuring to hear and see the statistics development and see the analysis.
 - It was important for the Commission to see this analysis so they can start to interrogate the information and understand the economy.
 - The public sector not only has a role to shape the economy but how it interacts with it.
 - The Council needs know the current situation and have data to benchmark in order to make predictions about the future.
 - Taking into consideration the previous discussion about continual economic uncertainty the Council needs to accept that economic instability will continue to be the new normal. Members urged the council to understand what this will mean for its residents and business survival.
- 5.6 The Strategic Director, Sustainability and Public Realm introduced this night-time economy section of this item and made the following main points.
- 5.6.1 At the onset of the pandemic the pubs and clubs all closed down and the night-time economy stopped overnight.

5.6.2 Hackney is one of the main boroughs across London lobbying to get the Home Office to amend the legislation to ensure the requirement to pay the late-night levy for pubs and clubs is removed. Explaining the late-night levy is paid by these establishments to support the enforcement costs related to the night-time economy.

5.6.3 But the Home Office has not amended the legislation so Hackney Council decided to trigger the provision that exists within the legislation to provide a reduction for premises which adhere to the best practice scheme. The Council implemented the Hackney Night Accreditation scheme which is the Hackney Nights Portal (a one stop shop for all the pubs and clubs) to provide training and support in order to deal with the pandemic. This portal provided information related to training, covid protection and all other information. The licensing team worked with environmental health and public health to deliver monthly advice sessions for licensees to help navigate the covid restrictions and officers attended local pub watch meetings.

5.6.4 The work by Hackney has been seen as exemplar in London and Hackney Council has been working with Westminster Council to develop their scheme.

5.6.5 In terms of outdoor trading and dining under the Business Planning Act 2020 the Government ensured licensees could get alfresco dining and the onus was on local authorities to expedite the process with a small fee. This was a challenge, but the Council successfully completed this by the deadline set. The Council had been proactive in allowing a lot of tables and chairs outside.

5.6.6 For market traders the council did not charge traders for storage, provided free business support, application support and other online activities. The Director pointed out many local authorities closed their markets but Hackney they kept Ridley Road Market open. This market is recognised as one of the most important markets in the borough for essential goods.

5.6.7 The Council created a simple covid risk assessment interview and 6-point plan document for all returning licence holders and businesses to ensure they were operating in a covid secure manner and were set up to navigate the restrictions during the pandemic.

5.6.8 The Council also created a service specific roadmap for a phased reopening to ensure each site across the borough was set up to succeed and maximise opportunities for a positive economic recovery. A multidisciplinary office was set up to support to businesses with a covid response. The team visit these premises to provide all the support they needed to open safely.

5.6.9 There is a lot of data coming in now about the health of the night-time economy. The economy is extremely resilient and because it has been a young population destination area it has bounced back well after the pandemic.

5.6.10 The information received will be entered into the Council's statement of licensing policy with a revised cumulative impact assessment and study of the night-time economy. The revised policy will be published in 2023.

5.6.11 A requirement in the Licensing Act is to keep a public register of licenses. In March 2020 the Hackney register recorded 1149 premise licenses. This is slightly down from 1165 the previous year.

5.6.12 One of the challenges they have experienced is that the licensing regulatory services and planning were impacted severely by cyber-attack which wiped out a large proportion of their data. The teams have been working to restore the data. There will be a further report at the end of the month to review the number of licenses across the borough.

5.6.13 The information being collated currently represents new applications coming in for 2020 and in 2021. Business activity continues at a relatively high pace, with a total of 234 applications. Approximately 10% above the 3-year average pre-pandemic. The night-time economy appears to be rebounding well.

5.6.14 The level of new applications received has been consistent. Although in the summer of 2020 when sales were permitted off-site the council witnessed a huge increase in the number of applications received alongside an increase in antisocial behaviour.

5.6.15 Temporary Event Notices (TENs) can be seen as a barometer of activity as the number of these received generally reflects the level of activity and health of the NTE. Following the onset of the pandemic, the number of TENs decreased. The council is now seeing a good return to TENs applications and a gradual increase in activity during 2021. The Council is expecting the number of TENs to increase in 2022 in line with the Platinum Jubilee Celebration and other celebrations like the World Cup.

5.6.16 One of the areas of proficiency in the night time economy is the rapid increase in grocery delivery services. There were no businesses of this type in Hackney at the end of 2020. However, by the end of 2021 there were 9 delivery services operating, with a further two that had been granted then surrendered in the same year. The sector has become increasingly competitive now the self-isolation rules have become rendered.

5.6.17 The Council will be observing these businesses over the next 2/3 years. But as household incomes become more squeezed this could affect these businesses.

5.6.18 In reference to an inclusive economy at the start of reopening (after the pandemic restrictions and Brexit) there was an influx of inexperienced hospitality staff. This presented challenges with the reopening of the economy. However, the Hackney Nights Accreditation scheme provided online training for those staff. The Hackney Nights Portal provides training certificate, accreditation and a 30% reduction in the levy if businesses sign-up.

5.6.19 The courses look at inclusivity of the night-time economy. For example, how to identify hate crime, substance abuse, limit violence against women and links into the sustainability criteria. The license premises signing up to the portal are taking steps to actively reduce environmental impact too.

5.6.20 The wellbeing of staff is extremely important and there are training events for this in the portal too.

5.6.21 The certificate can be put on display in the premises. This helps to support the council's inclusive economy objectives because it ensures the night-time economy is much safer.

Further details can be found in the presentation are in the agenda on pages 23-42.

5.7 Questions, Answers and Discussions

(i) Members commended officers for their work on markets and commented markets are growing and valued.

(ii) Members referred to the information about the increase of TENs being a positive indicator of economic activity. Members commented that TENs were originally implemented for jubilee weekends, church halls etc. Whereas now TENs are used for other types of events (particularly in Hoxton East and Shoreditch Ward). Members commented there are residents who would object to that characterisation for TENs.

(iii) Members highlighted TENs seemed to be used by pre-existing licensees to extend their license activities e.g., in big car park outside (particularly last summer). The observation was TENs seemed to be used to circumvent the usual licensing system. Members asked for the Council's views especially given the positive view about TENs.

(iv) In reference to licensing during covid Members commented in their view the council reached the right place in the end in relation to outdoor space. But Members queried if the Council was slow to react. Members were of the view there was some missed months for elements of the economy. Members referred to Westminster Council's response and commented Hackney seemed slower and unsure about what to do.

(v) In reference to the night time economy rebounding quickly in Hackney. Members asked if one area was doing better than another e.g., Shoreditch compared to Dalston or was it the same across the borough?

(vi) Members referred the Council's work to encourage the night-time economy, closing streets having more street foods etc. Members asked if the Council would consider continuing this to strengthen the local economy offer?

(vii) Members referred to the points made about sustainability and asked how Hackney can further the green agenda through licensing levers such as reducing plastic. Members also asked in relation to the 21st Century streets, if there were opportunities associated to outside dining that aligned with the Council's aspirations in relation to net zero.

(viii) In response the Strategic Director, Sustainability and Public Realm explained officers do hold a conservative view of TENs like Cllrs because the officers will be responsible for managing any fall out within the community. However, TENs are an indicative indicator of the health of the night-time economy. Notwithstanding the Council does work very closely with the Police. If there are concerns a TEN could lead to antisocial behaviour it would not be approved for license. Although it was acknowledged TENs had increased due to the restrictions on having a drink inside a premises. This resulted in alfresco drinking which caused its own issues particularly for people living in and around the London Fields area.

(ix) Members asked how many TENs the Council or the Police objected to?

The Strategic Director, Sustainability and Public Realm replied he did not have the exact figure at the meeting but at the last review approximately 15% were objected to, by the Police, Council or the Licensing Team.

In response to alfresco dining the Strategic Director, Sustainability and Public Realm acknowledged they were a bit slower to act and not as quick as Westminster Council. But the Council did not want to replicate some of the scenes witnessed in Soho but learnt from this.

The Council was proactive in approving the applications but the main challenge they were experiencing in approving applications related to the quality of the information submitted and objections from blue light services because of concerns about blocking access for fire services. The key issue was obtaining quick responses back from emergency services in relation to access for some streets. This was an issue for areas like Shoreditch with the width of pathways not being suitable for pedestrians and tables and chairs. But there were some areas they closed off like Broadway to allow more room for tables and chairs.

In response to the questions about the sector rebounding and any area doing better than the other. The Strategic Director, Sustainability and Public Realm explained the statistics for the number of applicants received show the sector is rebounding strongly. The more prominent rebound is Shoreditch and Dalston.

In relation to Shoreditch, it has its own unique problems, but they are working with the Police to manage the rise in antisocial behaviour. The MPS have modified their team and there is a better working relationship.

In response to the questions about sustainability and using the licensing levers in the process. The Strategic Director, Sustainability and Public Realm explained the accreditation scheme has been configured in a way whereby they sign up to get recyclable glasses and recyclable plastics. They are also working with commercial waste and environmental services to work with businesses to increase recycling and look at their containers. It was acknowledged that there is still more work to do on sustainability and the products the night-time economy uses.

(x) Beyond recycling and commercial waste Members asked how businesses were being supported particularly hospitality to reduce the carbon footprint with food and air quality in relation to delivery services (Deliveroo, Just Eat etc.) big and small. Members asked how the Council used its licensing regulatory powers to support cleaner and ideally zero emissions vehicles for delivery services?

In response the Strategic Director, Sustainability and Public Realm explained under the licensing regulations Hackney Council was the first in the UK to introduce the ultra-low emission zone for Shoreditch night-time economy. The Council is also working with big businesses to reduce the volume of deliveries they do in vehicles and looking at the use of cargo bikes. Licensing is working with transport colleagues to push for sustainable modes of transport, and they are looking at other interventions to improve the air quality and increase the amount of air quality monitors.

(xi) Members expressed concern about safety in relation to e-scooters road safety and the threat to pedestrians.

(xii) Members referred to the previous question about the current use of TENs not fitting with their initial design for use. Members asked if there were any policy recommendations that the Council can use to address resident concerns or lobbying for national policy change?

(xiii) Members referred to the increase in outdoor dining during the pandemic and asked how the council actively sought to protect footpaths to ensure pedestrian access particularly for the disabled population. Members asked if this was a conflict with the Council's policies to keep pathways clear?

(xiv) Members referred to the delivery services and commented it was good to see that electric bikes could go through the road closures and that the council is giving a competitive advantage to people in sustainable modes of transport.

In response the Strategic Director Sustainability and Public Realm of LBH explained that when covid hit there was a bonfire of the current regulations. The new regulation implemented removed a lot of the bureaucracy. This had a negative impact in terms of increasing the time allowed to obtain a TEN. The license authority had very little powers to curtail this. The Council is writing to the Government about some of the legislation changes.

The Service Area Manager from LBH added there is a group engaging with government ministers about the potential permanency of repayment licenses. A parliamentary debate was scheduled to take place in March 2022 to make them permanent. The officer pointed out the current legislation expires 30th September 2022. However, this has been paused while they engage with local authorities. Prior to implementation of this new process the Government had only engaged with

Westminster and City of London. Both local authorities do not use pavement licences and all other local authorities do. Therefore, the Government was void of a view of how this would impact the population.

In regards to the licensing process under the Business Plan Act. Hackney is one of 3 out of 33 boroughs that did not have any automatic licenses issued under consent. The officer explained if the council did not adhere to the strict 10 working day deadline the license was granted automatically and had full validity up to 30th September 2022. Officers have been working to complete the process to these very tight timescales. In addition, the officer highlighted having the licence set at £100 and for a longer period of time would bring a degree of disruption to residents through anti-social behaviour, increased littering and street drinking.

Hackney Council has been quite Stringent on pavement licenses becoming implemented and the first to implement a regular review after 3 months as opposed to 12 months. Hackney is utilizing the legislation to obtain feedback from residents and other local businesses about any negative activity. Where needed the Council has taken action to revoke a license or place additional conditions to manage negative behaviours.

In response to the other questions the Strategic Director Sustainability and Public Realm of LBH highlighted Westminster Council has learnt some harsh lessons from their roll out in Soho and Charlotte Street in relation to anti-social behaviour and the complaints received from local residents. The approach taken in Hackney has been to grant alfresco dining (table and chairs) unless there is a serious risk of obstruction of the pavement for disabled people, parents with prams, anti-social behaviour or impedes emergency vehicles. Therefore, there is a presumption in favour. But they have taken a pragmatic approach and if there are any of the above issues the Council will not support the license. Business complaints about not having a license approved have usually been rejected on strong grounds.

The Service Area Manager from LBH added that for the process of license applications they issue documentation which includes hyperlinks in the report so they can see the Council's alfresco guidance. Hackney has a guidance tool that takes businesses through a journey of the different options such as a shop front license and the different approaches i.e. whether to have a pavement license. In comparison to some of the documents produced by other local authorities. For example, Westminster Council documentation is viewed to be very technical and not supportive to businesses. Accelerating them into trading in an environment that was negative to residents and not a sustainable business.

In relation to the current licenses held in the borough Hackney has the second lowest level of complaints related to alfresco dining. Based on the feedback from businesses Hackney has incorporated updates to ensure then information was relevant during the pandemic. This has been a useful tool to help business navigate the challenges of the pandemic.

(xv) Members referred to the anaerobic digestion in relation to food waste for venues and licensing. Members asked if the council can consider investing in anaerobic digestion and make it part of Hackney Light and Power company so the council can supply lower carbon gas and reduce dependencies on supplies from places like Russia.

(xvi) As a point of clarification Members referred to the Hackney nights sustainability factor and asked if 30% of businesses were engaged with this. Members acknowledged the Portal deals with sustainable issues but asked if it would be possible to include an advisory note with all license applications that are approved to draw attention to sustainable working practices and avoid single use plastics.

In response the Strategic Director Sustainability and Public Realm confirmed it was a 30% reduction in the levy.

In response to the question about single use plastic the Strategic Director Sustainability and Public Realm advised the Council can consider the suggestions in relation to Hackney Light and Power, but they need to explore cost implications.

In reference to the advisory note, the Council could look to add an advisory note to license applications that are approved. The Director explained they are trying to take this a step further by making it a requirement by adding it to the other sustainability initiatives for net zero.

(xvii) The Chair closed the item and made the following closing comment.

- It was good to ban single use plastic but also a technical and policy challenge to find a viable alternative particularly for small and medium sized businesses. Members wanted the Council to ensure they are enabling rather than dictating things that could have unintended consequences for residents and businesses.

6 Skills, Economy and Growth Scrutiny Commission 2021/22 Work Programme

6.1 This was the end of the municipal year and the work programme had concluded.

7 Minutes of Previous Meeting

7.1 There were no minutes of the previous meeting to approve.

8 Any Other Business

8.1 None.

Duration of the meeting: 7.00 - 9.15 pm