

London Borough of Hackney
Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission
Municipal Year 2020/21
Thursday 16 February 2023

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

Chair:	Councillor Soraya Adejare
Councillors in Attendance:	Cllr M Can Ozsen, Cllr Joseph Ogundemuren, Cll Ali Sadek and Cllr Zoe Garbett
Councillors in Virtual Attendance:	Cllr Clare Joseph and Cllr Ian Rathbone
Apologies:	Cllr Penny Wrout, Cllr Sam Pallis and Cllr Sarah Young
Officers In Attendance:	Lucy McMenemy (Cultural Development Manager)
Officers in Virtual Attendance:	Polly Cziok (Strategic Director of Engagement, Culture and Organisational Development)
Other People in Attendance:	Cllr Chris Kennedy (Cabinet Member for Health, Adult Social Care, Voluntary Sector and Culture), Yamin Choudury (Hackney Empire) and Sindy Man & Khanh Luong (Jun Mo Generation)
Other People in Virtual Attendance:	Katherine Mengardon (Play Space) and Vicky Hambley (Hackney Shed)
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Councillor Soraya Adejare in the Chair

1 Apologies for Absence

1.1 The Chair updated those in attendance on the meeting etiquette and that the meeting was being recorded and livestreamed.

1.2 Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Wrout, Pallis and Young.

1.3 Councillors Joseph and Rathbone were in virtual attendance.

2 Urgent Items / Order of Business

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

3 Declarations of Interest

3.1 The Chair declared that her daughter regularly attended Hackney Shed.

3.2 The Cultural Development Manager declared that her son had formerly attended Hackney Shed.

3.4 There were no further declarations of interest.

4 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the Arts & Culture Sector

4.1 The Chair opened the discussion by explaining that the item had been requested as the Commission was keen to hear about the barriers faced by under-represented groups in accessing arts and culture opportunities in Hackney, and the work of the Council and its partners to improve access and increase participation.

4.2 Inequality of access to arts and cultural services appeared consistently as a challenge for the sector, and the Commission saw the discussion as timely given the inequalities and barriers that had been brought into the spotlight as a result of the pandemic and cost of living crisis.

4.3 Representing London Borough of Hackney

- Councillor Chris Kennedy, Cabinet Member for Health, Adult Social Care, Voluntary Sector and Culture
- Polly Cziok, Strategic Director of Engagement, Culture and Organisational Development
- Lucy McMenemy, Cultural Development Manager

4.4 Representing Hackney Empire

- Yamin Choudury

4.5 Representing Jun Mo Generation

- Sindy Man
- Khanh Luong

4.6 Representing Play Space

- Katherine Mengardon

4.7 Representing Hackney Shed

- Vicky Hambley

4.8 The Chair invited the Cultural Development Manager to give a short verbal presentation to supplement the written evidence included within the agenda papers. The main points are highlighted below.

4.9 The Cultural Development Team was tasked with delivering the Council's Arts and Cultural Strategy, which was due a rewrite for 2022-26. This comprised five key themes including community cohesion, employment, health and wellbeing, education and the economy.

4.6 Hackney was a particularly diverse borough. 40% of the borough was from Black and minority ethnic groups, 6% of residents were born in Turkey and Hackney was home to the largest group of Charedi Jewish people in Europe.

4.7 The average age of Hackney's residents was considerably younger than in England and Wales overall, with nearly 50% of the population aged from 22 to 45.

4.8 In 2019, the Council commissioned a report into the social and economic impact of Hackney Carnival. Hackney Carnival is regarded as the borough's biggest and most inclusive cultural event and the majority of the Culture team's annual budget is invested in the event.

4.9 The report suggested that while Hackney Carnival attracts people of all ages, abilities, ethnicities, sexualities and backgrounds, there were lower participation rates among certain communities such as Charedi Jewish, Muslim, Turkish, Kurdish and Asian communities and disabled residents.

4.10 The 'PANIC! Social class, taste and inequalities in the creative industries' report showed that the cultural and creative sector workforce was marked by significant exclusions of those from working class origins. It also concluded that women and those from global majority communities faced barriers in addition to those associated with social class origin.

4.11 Entrance fees to events and activities create a barrier to participation for those on lower incomes. This was in addition to the barriers to those organisations that are hosting events and activities in finding ongoing revenues and project costs at affordable prices.

4.12 There were a wide range of physical barriers experienced by disabled people and those with limited mobility, such as older people. Digitally excluded residents were also impacted by not accessing listings and booking information online, plus online content itself.

4.13 If residents cannot find people from their own communities represented in a cultural activity, artform, venue or workforce they may perceive that cultural activity as not being for them, and some cultural activities may not be accessible due to differences in culture.

4.14 A lack of arts and cultural provision in schools further exacerbated barriers as early opportunities often form lifelong habits. Many cultural organisations would like to work with schools, which were often inundated with requests to deliver activities.

4.15 A brokering role was needed, as identified as part of the Arts and Cultural Strategy. Work to date in this area included occasional engagement with schools for key projects such as Windrush and Hackney Carnival, and Hackney Music Services and Hackney Museum maintained strong partnerships with schools.

4.16 The Chair then invited the Hackney Empire representative to give an overview of its work in the borough.

4.17 Hackney Empire sought to involve all audiences and participants at the heart of its creative process, with a view to making arts and culture accessible to all.

Particularly, it worked with young people from all backgrounds and involved them in decision making as far as possible.

4.18 The aim was to include young people at all levels of the decision making process, and it was currently looking at the ways in which it could involve young people at the most senior level. For example, it was looking to create a Youth Board.

4.19 It also sought to provide employment opportunities for young people, such as for those that were interested in becoming creative arts practitioners and facilitators. This included free workshops and signposting to schools, external organisations and employers.

4.20 The relationship between Hackney Empire and the Council was productive, especially in terms of ensuring its reach was as wide as possible and working with other organisations in the borough. It was recognised that it was in a privileged position due to this relationship, and that other smaller organisations may benefit from this level of engagement and support.

4.21 Those that were engaging with arts and culture had not changed much over the last few decades. The key to progress was to make people understand that arts and culture was all around them, for example when you turn on the radio or TV, and not just when you go to the opera or ballet. Increased participation did not necessarily mean increased attendance at specific events.

4.22 There was difficulty in increasing young people's engagement in arts and culture employment opportunities, partly because creative careers were still not perceived as being on par with other professional careers. Ensuring children were able to understand the careers available and the skills needed for success in cultural industries were therefore crucial.

4.23 The Council's Hackney Community Fund has recently awarded funding to the 'Entry for All' programme, run by Hackney Empire. This had brought together over 6,000 young people from across Hackney and East London to have their first experiences of theatre, with tickets being free of charge.

4.24 The Chair then the Jun Mo Generation representative to give an overview of its work in the borough.

4.25 East Asian communities had settled in Hackney for many years, including a large proportion of Chinese people. Chinese cultural offerings in the borough were particularly strong in the 1980s, although many communities began to disengage in the early 2000s for various reasons.

4.26 Jun Mo Generation was set up to promote the exploration of East Asian culture, arts and education and to support cultural exchange events for community unity and understanding. It regularly attended Hackney Carnival, and was most recently involved in bringing communities together to create and showcase the Carnival Earth Dragon.

4.27 Its work in promoting East Asian culture, arts and education was not just about reaching Hackney's East Asian communities, but also about engaging young people and other diverse communities to get involved in arts and cultural activities and learn about different cultures.

4.28 The Chair then the Play Space representative to give an overview of its work in the borough.

4.29 Play Space was a project based arts and cultural organisation that delivered playful learning opportunities. It had most recently worked on Hackney Young Voices, which ran creative after school workshops for children and young people to develop and showcase their artwork, and was also involved in running projects at Shakespeare Walk Adventure Playground and supporting Tower Theatre to better engage with children and young people.

4.30 These types of projects aimed to introduce arts and culture to children and young people, help them develop relationships with organisations and nurture talents with a view to them considering a career in the sector in the future.

4.31 The Chair then invited the Hackney Shed representative to give an overview of its work in the borough.

4.32 Hackney Shed was a performing arts group for young people that worked with people between the ages of 7 and 25. Its work focused on advancing participation in the performing arts for all groups, from the financially disadvantaged to those with disabilities.

4.33 Making the programme more accessible included a range of measures including donation only projects to they were affordable to those on lower incomes, dedicated staff to support those with additional support needs, projects to cater for all levels of commitment and needs, and working with partners and venues across the borough to reach a range of communities.

Questions, Answers and Discussion

4.34 *A Commission Member asked whether the Council collected core data on cultural services and organisations and whether this allowed the Council and its partners to evaluate the impact of cultural activity on communities.*

3.35 The Cabinet Member for Health, Adult Social Care, Voluntary Sector and Culture explained that those that organised arts and culture events in Hackney were increasingly seeing audiences and participants that were more representative of the local community, and strides were also being made in developing a more representative cultural workforce.

3.36 The Cultural Development Manager added that an evaluation framework was created for larger arts and cultural projects such as Hackney Carnival, which involved the Council working with stakeholders to set out the aims, outcomes and measures for the various projects undertaken as part of it, as well as a plan for data collection, analysis and reporting.

3.37 Benchmarking was undertaken less frequently. It was recognised that more could be done in terms of analysing and comparing the performance of arts and cultural projects with other London Boroughs and arts and culture organisations.

3.38 *A Commission Member followed up by asking whether there was scope to create evaluation frameworks for smaller arts and cultural projects, and whether arts and cultural organisations would find monitoring and evaluation of outcomes useful.*

3.39 The Cultural Development Manager clarified that evaluation frameworks were used whenever funding was granted for arts and culture projects, not only for large scale projects. The way in which they were created depended on the circumstances, for example if funding had to be granted in a short timescale the Council may create a framework once the project had been undertaken rather than beforehand.

3.40 The Hackney Shed representative explained that the monitoring and evaluating of outcomes was important to arts and culture organisations, especially in terms of accessing funding. However, some smaller organisations and/or freelancers may not have the knowledge or capacity to evaluate its work, or access relevant support and guidance.

3.41 The Play Space representative added that funding criteria was often a barrier for smaller organisations and freelancers, and whilst advice and guidance was available, it was often difficult to access.

3.42 *A Commission Member asked how Hackney's diverse communities were supported to be actively involved in shaping the development of the Council's arts and culture projects.*

3.43 The Cultural Development Manager explained that co-production played an important role in the development of arts and culture projects. For example, the Council met regularly with Hackney Carnival stakeholders throughout the planning stages to ensure activities reflected their interests and ambitions. The Windrush Programme was also led and shaped by the Windrush Generation, their descendants and community representation groups.

4.44 The Cabinet Member for Health, Adult Social Care, Voluntary Sector and Culture added that the cancellation of Hackney Carnival in 2022 showcased how important co-production was in creating arts and culture opportunities in Hackney, with community, arts and cultural groups coming together to look at the ways in which projects could be showcased in spite of the cancellation of the live event.

4.45 The Carnival Earth Dragon, which was showcased as a live parade at Hackney Bridge as part of Lunar New Year 2023, was given as an example of the outcomes of co-production coming out of the cancellation of Hackney Carnival 2022.

4.46 The Strategic Director of Engagement, Culture and Organisational Development went on to explain that the Council saw arts and cultural development as a key way to engage with its communities. For example, it used arts and culture as a means to engage with harder to reach groups - building trust with these communities in turn supported the Council to engage with them on wider issues.

4.47 The Windrush Programme was provided as an example of this. The Council had traditionally found it difficult to engage and build trust with older African Caribbean residents, yet the programme had allowed it to open a dialogue with this community which had led to wider engagement on issues such as vaccine hesitancy and Covid testing.

4.48 Another example was in engaging community groups and organisations involved in Hackney Carnival on the proposals for the future regeneration of Dalston, and in supporting Charedi Jewish-led cultural activity which created the foundation for more regular support and resources from the Council.

4.49 A Commission Member asked what the Council was doing to engage with harder to reach groups that may not see themselves represented in arts and cultural opportunities in Hackney, for example Black African community.

4.50 The Strategic Director of Engagement, Culture and Organisational Development explained that the Council had done a lot of work to engage with the Black African community on arts and culture, although recognised that there was work to do in ensuring this was communicated more widely. For example, a number of exhibitions had been held at Hackney Museum to celebrate Black African heritage and culture in recent years.

4.51 There was a wider piece of work that needed to be undertaken to ensure that arts and culture projects and opportunities were more widely communicated and reached the groups that would benefit most from them. Bringing libraries, culture and heritage together under one department was one way in which better joined-up working could be achieved, and the team had also recently created roles which focused on marketing and outreach across the portfolio.

4.52 The Council managed eight libraries in Hackney, and all residents in the borough lived no less than a mile from a library. Libraries therefore had the capacity to be community hubs which run range of services out of them, and work was underway to make them more focused on cultural engagement and facilitating arts and culture events and projects.

4.52 A Commission Member asked what more the Council could do to ensure arts and cultural opportunities in Hackney were equitable and accessible to all residents.

4.53 The Hackney Shed representative explained that making arts and culture more accessible had financial implications for groups and organisations involved in the delivery of events and activities. For example, Hackney Shed organised events and projects for children and young people with a range of disabilities and access needs, for which significant extra resources were needed.

4.54 It was therefore important for these groups and organisations to consider the costs of providing accessible events and activities during the planning process, and for arts and culture organisations to work more closely with the communities their events and activities were aimed at to ensure that all access needs were catered for.

4.55 For those organisations inviting funding proposals from the community, it was important to recognise the financial implications of making projects more accessible, and to reflect this in the grant funding made available.

4.56 A Commission Member followed up by asking whether the Council considered accessibility requirements when allocating grant funding for arts and culture events and activities.

4.57 The Cultural Development Manager explained that the Council asks that all grant funding applications included any details of accessibility requirements and any expected cost implications to address these requirements.

4.58 In terms of the Council's own arts and culture events and activities, it was felt that there was always room to learn more about how to address accessibility requirements. Each event or project would have different requirements, and the Council sought to work with stakeholders to identify the solutions needed to address any related barriers.

4.59 A Commission Member asked for an overall picture of the arts and cultural sector in Hackney and some of the challenges it may face, particularly in light of the pandemic and cost of living crisis.

4.60 The Cultural Development Manager explained that one issue facing many arts and culture organisations in Hackney was the need for affordable workspace. The Council was working to provide solutions by working in partnership with local businesses and organisations to provide workspaces, and ensuring redevelopment projects include affordable workspaces.

4.61 The Cabinet Member for Health, Adult Social Care, Voluntary Sector and Culture added that the Council was in regular dialogue with the sector to understand the impact of the cost of living crisis and inflationary pressures. Overall, the arts and cultural sector in Hackney was going through a challenging period, although some organisations are doing better than others.

4.62 An example was given of one organisation that was unsuccessful in securing grant funding from the Arts Council and had made the difficult decision to open the voluntary redundancy process, with the possibility of compulsory redundancies.

4.63 The Cultural Development Manager went on to add that theatres and cinemas had been hit by a loss of income due to family audiences attending events less often, and even when they do so, spending less whilst there on food and beverages.

4.64 Other concerns included a decrease in the use of hired venues, the impact of high energy costs, ticketed audiences being less keen to try out new experiences, the impact of transport strikes on audience volume and recruitment to the workforce.

4.65 A Commission Member followed up by asking whether demand for arts and culture activities in particular had increased over the last few years, and whether arts and culture organisations were in a position to accommodate this demand.

4.66 The Play Space representative explained that schools and other education settings would always have a need for arts and culture, but were increasingly taking their children and young people out of the borough to undertake these activities. It was felt that this was perhaps due to arts and culture opportunities in Hackney not being communicated widely enough.

4.67 The Strategic Director of Engagement, Culture and Organisational Development followed up by explaining that many schools and education settings take children and young people out of the borough to experience arts and culture as many of them would not have the opportunity to do so otherwise.

4.68 The Hackney Shed representative added that demand for its services had been relatively steady since the pandemic. The challenge it was facing was matching demand with the workforce needed to run services, especially as many volunteers were young people that often leave the sector to go onto other careers such as teaching.

4.69 The Play Space representative added that whilst volunteers were valued, some smaller organisations may be reluctant to look to volunteering for support because of the associated financial implications in training them up.

4.70 The Jun Mo Generation representative added that whilst demand for arts and culture activities in Hackney's schools was high, it was often difficult for smaller organisations to find the resources and staff needed to deliver these activities. This was made more challenging by short delivery timescales, the increasingly complex needs of children and young people, a lack of funding and a lack of volunteers.

4.71 The importance of the Council brokering with schools and organisations to deliver activities was highlighted, and an example was given of when the Council intervened to provide extra grant funding within a short time frame for Jun Mo Generation to deliver more workshops in schools for the Lunar New Year.

4.72 A Commission Member asked what work was being undertaken by the Council to develop closer working relationships with schools and education settings in Hackney, and a more embedded approach to engagement.

4.73 The Cabinet Member for Health, Adult Social Care, Voluntary Sector and Culture explained that schools and other education settings had long standing relationships with Hackney Museum and Hackney Music Service, and that schools and other education settings were increasingly showing more willingness to engage on arts and culture opportunities.

4.74 The Cultural Development Manager added that a new post had been created as part of the emerging restructure of the libraries service, which would work across libraries, heritage and culture to broker the relationships between schools, arts and culture organisations and council-led activity. This would involve signposting to different schools and organisations to ensure the best fit for any arts and cultural proposals.

4.75 Work was also ongoing to introduce arts and culture to young people, with a view to them considering a career in the sector, and to help young people to develop their own relationships with arts and culture organisations in Hackney.

4.76 A Commission Member asked whether the Council was giving due consideration to the rising costs associated with hosting arts and culture activities and events in Hackney, for example in hiring venues or covering enforcement costs.

4.77 The Cultural Development Manager explained that holding arts and cultural events, especially outside, was often expensive. When hosting an event outdoors there were a number of associated costs in terms of safety and enforcement.

4.78 These costs were often difficult to overcome, although the Council did encourage organisations to work in partnership when hosting events to share any costs and negotiate better deals, for example, cheaper venue hire costs.

4.79 The Jun Mo Generation representative added that the costs associated with hiring council managed community halls were a barrier for many smaller organisations in delivering events and activities. It was felt that these organisations would benefit from subsidised hire costs, with consideration given to their financial circumstances and the services they provide for local communities.

4.80 The Cabinet Member for Health, Adult Social Care, Voluntary Sector and Culture responded by explaining that work was underway to look at how the Council used its assets more strategically, and this included looking at the types of services that may benefit from their use and how to make them more affordable.

4.81 A Commission Member asked whether allocating the majority of the Culture team's annual budget to Hackney Carnival was an appropriate use of resources, and whether there was scope to reallocate some of its budget to other priority areas.

4.82 The Cultural Development Manager explained that the budget for Hackney Carnival was set each year with consideration given to what would be achieved through the carnival that year and that, ultimately, budget allocation was agreed at Member level.

4.83 The Jun Mo Generation representative added that Hackney Carnival should not be looked at as a standalone event, but rather a collective of diverse groups that come together to engage their respective communities through a variety of activities and events.

4.84 That may involve young people, community groups, arts and cultural organisations and schools, and may require the expertise of a range of local businesses, from photographers through to designers. A range of groups were encouraged to take part, including those not heavily represented such as Turkish, Charedi Jewish and Asian communities, those with disabilities and those whose first language was not English.

4.85 The Cabinet Member for Health, Adult Social Care, Voluntary Sector and Culture added that although the previous few live Hackney Carnival events had not gone ahead due to the pandemic and the Death of the Monarch, a range of activities and events were still funded to promote inclusion and celebrate Hackney's diversity.

4.86 A Commission Member asked about the challenges that arts and culture organisations faced in accessing funding opportunities, and what support was provided by the Council to help them in navigating the funding landscape.

4.87 The Hackney Shed representative explained that funding was frequently project-based and short-term, which did not allow for long-term planning and financial stability. This meant that organisations were unable to predict with certainty what they would be able to deliver year on year, and may lead to difficult decisions around what needed to be prioritised.

4.88 Whilst Hackney Shed was unsuccessful in securing grant funding this year, the Council did provide to hire a funding consultant to do put together a strategic fundraising plan covering the next few years, and funding applications.

4.89 A Commission Member asked how the Council ensured the voice of Hackney's diverse communities was at the heart of its arts and culture offer, and how it ensured all residents were involved in shaping proposals for events and activities in Hackney.

4.90 The Cultural Development Manager explained that the team received correspondence from a range of residents throughout the year with ideas for arts and culture events and activities. It did its best to encourage all suggestions and consider how they could be incorporated into the Council's programme of activities, and to signpost them to funding opportunities and relevant support and guidance.

4.91 Residents were often heavily involved in planning arts and culture events and activities to ensure they have meaning for the communities there were aimed at. For example, Hackney Museum created a steering group of representative local residents for every project it undertook which was aimed at a specific community.

Chair's Summary

In summing up, the Chair explained that the Commission would reflect on the evidence heard and follow up with any additional information requests after the meeting.

If appropriate, the Commission may also make suggestions or recommendations for improvement for consideration.

5 Minutes of the Meeting

5.1 The draft minutes of the previous meeting held on 23rd January 2023 were presented.

5.2 A Commission Member asked for clarifying amendments to be made to paragraphs 4.85, 4.118 and 4.123 in the minutes document.

5.3 Members then agreed the draft minutes, subject to the changes amendments suggested, as an accurate record.

6 Living in Hackney Work Programme 2022/23

6.1 The Chair referred to the Commission's work programme and highlighted the discussion items planned for the remainder of the municipal year.

6.2 Members noted the inclusion of a Cabinet Question Time session on the meeting scheduled for 22nd March 2023, which would look at the accountability of the private rented sector and housing associations.

6.3 A Commission Member asked whether there was scope to look at how the Council handles its void properties at the Commission's next meeting. The Chair agreed to progress the request outside of the meeting, either as a written update or informal meeting with the relevant officers.

6.4 Members were reminded of the joint meeting with the Children and Young People Scrutiny Commission on 28th March 2023 to review progress against the outcomes of the Child Q Safeguarding Practice Review.

7 Any Other Business

7.1 None.

Duration of the meeting: 7:00pm – 9:10pm