
London Borough of Hackney
Skills, Economy and Growth Scrutiny Commission
Municipal Year 2022/23
Date of Meeting Monday 9 January 2023

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 Gilbert Smyth, Cllr Anna Lynch, Cllr Jon Narcross, Cllr Fliss Premru and Cllr Jessica Webb
Apologies:	Cllr Steve Race and Cllr Joe Walker
Officers In Attendance	Ceylan Ismail (Hackney Young Futures Representative), Mia Guercini (Management Trainee), Luyanda Muraya (Hackney Young Futures Representative), Silvia Perin (Strategic Delivery Officer), Thierry Shillingford-Brown (Hackney Young Futures Representative), Sudenaz Top (Hackney Young Futures Representative), Polly Cziok (Strategic Director, Engagement, Culture and Organizational Development), Brian Debus (Branch Chair), Matthew Paul (Joint Branch Secretary) and Petra Roberts (Strategic Service Head for Culture, Libraries and Heritage)
Other People in Attendance	Isobel Hunter (Libraries Connected)
Members of the Public	
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Councillor Polly Billington in the Chair

- 1 Apologies for Absence**
 - 1.1 Apologies for absence from Cllr Walker and Cllr Race.
 - 1.2 Apologies for lateness from Cllr Potter.

2 Urgent Items / Order of Business

- 2.1 There were no urgent items, and the order of business is as laid out in the agenda.
- 2.2 The meeting is dedicated to the discussion about library services and Hackney's Library Strategy.

3 Declarations of Interest

- 3.1 The declaration of interest were as follows:
 - 3.1.1 Cllr Smyth declared he is a member of the Musicians union and was a member of an Executive task and finish group for the libraries review.
 - 3.1.2 Cllr Narcross declared he is a member of Unison.
 - 3.1.3 Cllr Lynch declared she is a member of the Royal College of Nursing (RCN) and an accredited trade union steward for RCN.
 - 3.1.4 Cllr Premru declared she is a member of National Unions of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) and Transport Salaried Staff' Association (TSSA).
 - 3.1.5 Cllr Webb declared she is employed by the RMT and a member of GMB.
 - 3.1.6 Cllr Billington declared she is a member of Unite, Unison and GMB.
 - 3.1.7 Cllr Potter declared she is a Member of the Council Joint Committee (CJC) and they have discussed library services at their previous meeting. Cllr Potter was also part of the Members task and finish group and attended the first meeting and a member of Unite.

4 Future of Libraries and Hackney's Library Strategy

- 4.1 The Chair informed the Commission that the discussion would commence with 2 presentations one from Libraries Connected and the second from Hackney Young Futures Commission. This would be followed by a Q&A from Members of the Commission.
- 4.2 The last 2 presentations would be from Hackney Council and the second one from Unison representatives in Hackney. This would be followed by a Q&A from Members of the Commission.
- 4.3 The Chair informed the Commission that written information and the presentations were provided in advance (in the agenda pack) from Hackney Council, Unison and Libraries Connected.
- 4.4 The Chair provided background information about the Libraries Services review which was launched in April 2021 by Hackney Council.

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- 4.5 The review of Hackney's library services entailed extensive conversations about libraries with residents and stakeholders to measure the satisfaction levels of the current service provision and identify the local needs and aspirations for the future of the service.
- 4.6 A new library strategy was developed following engagement with residents, councillors, staff and relevant council departments.
- 4.7 Hackney Council's Library Strategy and associated service objectives, transformation vision, and service model was adopted by the Council in October 2022.
- 4.8 This meeting is to review the implementation plan for the library strategy, consider the future plans for library spaces and the workforce changes.
- 4.9 The Chair explained the purpose of this meeting was not to comment on the strategy itself because the strategy and vision had already been formally agreed by the Council's Executive.

- 4.10 The Chair welcomed to the meeting the following attendees:

Libraries Connected

- Isobel Hunter, Chief Executive

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- Polly Cziok, Strategic Director, Engagement, Culture and Organizational Development and
- Petra Roberts, Strategic Service Head for Culture, Libraries and Heritage.

Unison

- Matthew Paul, Joint Branch Secretary and
- Brian Debus, Branch Chair.

Hackney Young Futures (HYF)

- Thierry,
- Luyanda,
- Sudenaz, (virtual) and
- Ceylan (virtual).

Also in attendance from London Borough of Hackney to support the HYF representatives was:

- Silvia Perin, Strategic Delivery Officer
- Mia Guercini, Management Trainee Policy and Strategic Delivery.

4.11 Presentation by Libraries Connected

- 4.11.1 The Chief Executive from Libraries Connected (LC) commenced her presentation and the main points from the presentation were:

- 4.11.2 Libraries Connected is the membership body for public libraries in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and the crown dependencies.

- 4.11.3 Libraries Connected are funded by the Arts Council as a sector support organization.
- 4.11.4 Their main work is to network libraries and support them in areas of innovation and service development.
- 4.11.5 They are focused on looking at the next steps for the sector and where libraries need to develop.
- 4.11.6 LC advised at the start of the pandemic they outlined a recovery model. However, the fourth stage of the recovery model is not to put services back to how they were pre-pandemic but to stop and reflect on the changed world to review the changing needs of library services.
- 4.11.7 LC pointed out they had hit the point now where they can start to see the patterns of use post pandemic.
- 4.11.8 LC highlighted that upon review of the agenda papers they noticed the patterns of library use in Hackney were mirroring the trends nationwide.
- 4.11.9 LC pointed out from the monitoring of library services that physical footfall stands at about 70% and is still rising. Book lending is back to pre-pandemic levels and digital lending and digital activity are at a higher level than they were previously.
- 4.11.10 The key area they are helping libraries to think about is the changing needs within their communities, the sharpened needs and inequalities that have risen due to the pandemic.
- 4.11.11 LC recognized that Hackney had focused on inequalities, but for some residents in the community they still lacked access to opportunities. Therefore it will be important for libraries to think about how they are reacting to this issue.
- 4.11.12 LC were pleased to see that this was echoed in the ambitions of Hackney's strategy and fits with Libraries Connected research findings e.g., the role of libraries in the recovery post pandemic.
- 4.11.13 LC were interested in how libraries delivery their service not just the services they deliver. They have a concept of the 3-channel library service. Libraries are important in relation to their physical spaces (buildings). This was seen from their role in the warm winter work and as a meeting place for individuals. There are 3 channels aside from the physical building they are:
- Digital
 - Out in the community – community library services, mobile library services etc. This is about getting libraries out into the community rather than expecting people to come through the doors.
 - Partnerships with the third sector – partnerships like food banks, housing associations etc.
- 4.11.14 In addition to the universal offer LC advised they are talking to libraries about the four pillars of delivery for library services. They are:

- Reading and literacy – children’s literacy and closing the literacy gap that the pandemic has exacerbated.
- Health and wellbeing – many health and wellbeing problems have been exacerbated by the pandemic, levels of poverty and destitution.
- Digital and information – not just focused on people being digitally connected but also the big job around misinformation and disinformation. Libraries can play an important role in this.
- Culture and creativity – this category is very important to a creative borough like Hackney. Libraries are a gateway for access to cultural and creative activities.

4.11.15 The operation of libraries through these 3 channels links to how they can continue to deliver the 4 pillars outlined above. LC was of the view every library operation should cover these. LC highlighted key to delivering the new ways of working will be a very skilled, dedicated, dynamic and flexible workforce. Therefore, having a workforce that can work across branches, be deployed to specific projects and a workforce that is multi skilled. At the heart of this is having the real skill to engage with communities.

4.11.16 LC highlighted that they are very aware of the financial pressure councils are facing currently but libraries are a key area of resource. So innovative ways of working will be crucial. The Libraries Consortium provides access to books and resources and innovation in how services are provided to people.

4.11.17 LC pointed out that finding new ways for libraries to generate income will be key too.

4.11.18 These are the headline themes they are supporting library services to focus on over the next 2 years as they emerge from the pandemic.

4.12 Presentation by Hackney Young Futures

4.12.1 The Chair invited Hackney Young Futures representatives to outline their experiences in relation to library services. The main points from their presentation were:

4.12.2 Libraries are incredibly important to young people but having said that the young person advised she had not used library services in seven years. The last time she accessed a service she found it to be a hostile environment. The rules about talking in libraries were not clear.

4.12.3 Using Hackney Central Library the young person found that there were no co-working spaces, which is key issue. Secondary school work requires a lot of group work and if they could not work at school then the library was the next option. However, library space was not providing the opportunity to engage with their peers without being told off straight away.

4.12.4 One young person expressed the desire to revisit libraries again but the reason this is unlikely to happen is because the young person has a laptop and Wi-Fi at home. The young person wants to have a reason to visit a library e.g., engage with their community, learn something new or about an event. This would require more engagement and communication, which is currently lacking. This is an area the young person would like to see improved for libraries in the future.

- 4.12.5 Another young person explained he has been accessing library services since the age of 10. The young person's favorite library was Dalston because it had an archive service. This facility was utilized by the young person when he was doing his history course work. Having access to information about the Second World War was extremely helpful for the young person. The staff and atmosphere in the Dalston Library were commended by the young person.
- 4.12.6 A young person highlighted that libraries are the only safe place for people who are undocumented particularly during the winter period. This space is one of a limited number of places a person can go into without any questions being asked, which allows you to gather your thoughts and soak up the atmosphere. Libraries should not just be considered for young people, young adults and viewed only from the perspective of how to get more people into the premises. But for people who are working and struggling. The question should be how to give people a safe place.
- 4.12.7 Another young person highlighted that she is studying for her A Levels but does not currently access Hackney's libraries because the environment is not as nice as other boroughs. The young person pointed out the Dalston Library is nice, but it closes too early. For a young person studying this did not give her the ability to do a lot of work without feeling rushed from the premises.
- 4.12.8 It was also pointed out that Hackney Central library lacked warmth from staff and there was limited co-working space in the library. In comparison places like the British library operate longer hours and provided a nice working environment to work with friends.
- 4.12.9 For Hackney Library services the young person would like to see more co-working spaces
- 4.12.10 Another young person is currently studying at university and highlighted that she used Hackney libraries for most of her secondary schooling years and during her A Levels. Access to libraries was extremely useful because the young person lived in an overcrowded household and did not have a space to study at home.
- 4.12.11 This space was a valuable service to young people during the pandemic. The young person wanted to highlight that libraries may be the only place to study for young people living in an overcrowded household. Whilst this young person had positive experiences she highlighted there have been a lot of negative experiences, with staff expressed by other young people.
- 4.12.12 The young people highlighted that Hackney libraries matter a lot to young people especially for a young person with siblings living in an overcrowded household. Echoing the same points as the previous young people.
- 4.12.13 Another young person explained that she has been using Hackney libraries since she could read and participated in activities like the summer reading challenges.
- 4.12.14 The young person was also part of the young readers book club at Hackney Central Library. The young person explained that this was a great way to

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make connections with other young people. The young person highlighted that she had attended writers' workshops with Michael Roszen and Benjamin Zeph giving a poetry reading. It was these types of events that the young people would like to see more. Pointing out that events like these had slowed down especially after covid.

- 4.12.15 The young people were of the view workshops like these would really help to engage young people with libraries more.
- 4.12.16 Libraries were not only a place to study but also a meeting place to socialize and access information.
- 4.12.17 The young person pointed out that Tower Hamlets library delivers several free courses and spaces can be hired for free. The young person was of the view this is not done enough by Hackney libraries. Pointing out that there is a room in the CLR James library but seems to be rented out by professionals although not very often.
- 4.12.18 The young person also recommended that libraries could have private study booths like a university library. This would be very useful.
- 4.12.19 The Strategic Delivery Officer from the Policy and Strategic Delivery Team in LB Hackney added the views of young people have highlighted that libraries are one of the most important places for young people to hang out and have intergenerational activity opportunities.
- 4.12.20 In essence Hackney Young futures are in support of the Hackney Libraries Strategy aimed at making libraries more accessible.
- 4.12.21 Hackney Young Futures said that they would like to ensure that young people are part of the decision making, planning and designing of those spaces.

4.13 Presentation by Hackney Council

- 4.13.1 The Chair invited the Strategic Service Head for Culture, Libraries and Heritage to commence her presentation. The main points from the presentation are outlined below.
- 4.13.2 The presentation provided an overview of Hackney's Library Strategy and the vision for library services in Hackney in response to the feedback from residents during their consultation period.
- 4.13.3 The officer informed that in April 2021 the Council undertook a comprehensive review of the service to co-design a new vision. This was the first review for several years.
- 4.13.4 Over an 18-month period they engaged residents, library staff and many stakeholders.
- 4.13.5 The engagement campaign was called 'Our libraries' engaged 8,500 residents. The consultation was in partnership with the Council's Consultation Team and used a variety of channels and tools to reach residents of all ages and backgrounds. These covered surveys, focus

groups, interviews, telephone conversations. The presentation provided a breakdown of library users and non-users spoken to.

- 4.13.6 Over 1200 pupils participated in the school's competition to create a poem, poster or piece of art to share their ideas on what Hackney's library services could look like in the future.
- 4.13.7 The feedback provided insight into the full impact library services could have on residents beyond a lending book service.
- 4.13.8 As a community hub it would enable residents to socialize, take part in creative activities and meet their friends in a friendly and welcoming space. Helping to reduce loneliness, reduced health and social isolation.
- 4.13.9 Fundamentally libraries provide access to high quality information and lifelong learning, and they aim to celebrate the culture and heritage of all Hackney's local population.
- 4.13.10 Libraries are one of the most trusted and safe spaces for communities and provide a sense of belonging and an opportunity to network with others.
- 4.13.11 Libraries provide spaces with big rooms and desks for study that are nicely lit, pleasant and warm for academic enquiry to help fulfil their potential.
- 4.13.12 The co-designed vision with residents involved an extensive engagement process with all the library staff as well as council officers from across the organization and a task and finish group with councillors. These engagements provided advice and suggestions for the strategy.
- 4.13.13 The Council recognizes the role libraries can play in supporting the post covid recovery. They are focusing on addressing inequalities, economic recovery, enabling social mobility and collaboration. This is a key theme for the new vision.
- 4.13.14 This will mean more partnership working with residents and local organizations to influence the future approach.
- 4.13.15 Implementation of this strategy will require a redesign of the service within available resources. To ensure the service can remain sustainable the council is investing in service development to make the service fit for the future workforce.
- 4.13.16 The council has made a commitment to residents to keep library sites open and the hours of operation unchanged. It was highlighted that the Library Service also has a corporate savings target for the year to meet. Therefore, the savings can only be achieved through the reorganization of the workforce.
- 4.13.17 Shared Intelligence is an organization that has produced a Hackney user report which provided statistics and data about how the service is being used. This report also provided a comparison with neighbouring boroughs of finance and service users. This report has highlighted that Hackney's total

revenue expenditure is above the national average and its statistical neighbours.

- 4.13.18 Although this translates into good visits and active borrowing numbers the report also highlights it would be useful for the borough to compare itself with other local authorities who are outperforming Hackney but spending less than Hackney.
- 4.13.19 To make the library service outstanding it will need a strong set of outcomes that enable the council to meet the demands of residents now and in the future. The 8 outcomes the council is working towards are:
- Improve digital access and literacy
 - Encourage healthier and happier lives
 - Support stronger and more resilient communities
 - Enable greater prosperity and thriving communities
 - Help everyone achieve their full potential
 - Increase reading and literacy
 - Enable cultural and creative enrichment
 - Support the Council's corporate priorities.
- 4.13.20 The Council used the Government's National Universal Library offer as a strategic tool to ensure the service outcomes lead to a comprehensive and efficient service.
- 4.13.21 The key objective for the service is to put libraries at the heart of cultural life in the borough and support the full potential of every person in Hackney.
- 4.13.22 In relation to implementation of the strategy and what success might look like the Council outlined:
- 4.13.23 Everyone needs access to digital resources. Digital inclusion is important for residents and staff the library service is addressing this through a digital transformation pilot and are working with ICT to improve the core infrastructure. It was highlighted that the majority of the library sites are now hard wired to give access to faster Wi-Fi, public printers are working, and the staff phone system is working more effectively.
- 4.13.24 The Council has received funding to purchase assistive technology, this will enable the libraries to be inclusive for the hearing and visual impaired residents. There will also be digital skills training for staff and an offer of free training for community members in collaboration with the adult learning service and the digital buddy scheme.
- 4.13.25 Libraries are working in partnership with adult learning on a pilot to promote lifelong learning hubs. The Council has increased the educational session's provision to 350 classes over the last 10 months. Some of the classes address increasing employability skills i.e., writing CVs, English and numeracy skills etc.
- 4.13.26 Libraries are also part of the arts and culture events program in the Hackney calendar. They are planning to co-locate and create a new partnership for their community library service. This service will work closely with the adult

social care team to maximize reach and support independence for older residents with care needs.

- 4.13.27 The library service has also recently partnered with the Fair Money advice charity to provide free money and debt advice.
- 4.13.28 All the libraries have signed up to be part of the warm spaces campaign in the winter. It was highlighted that the free coat scheme and coffee mornings have been popular with residents. The library service kept Hackney Central library open between Christmas and New Year with the support of their amazing library service staff.
- 4.13.29 The library service will also do more of what is working well for example having more activities for children and families as well as piloting keeping libraries open for longer hours in the evening to extend the study and co-working space provision for young people.
- 4.13.30 Library services were successful in securing funding for a range of library improvements. One improvement will be the creation of a new outdoor community garden for families. Turning the derelict car park at Stamford Hill library into a vibrant community outdoor space as part of the library.
- 4.13.31 The funding will also be used to create digital and creative maker spaces in libraries in addition to building a new meeting room that will be available for hire at Hackney Central library.
- 4.13.32 The aim is to provide a core library offer across all the sites but retain a high level of quality and accessibility.
- 4.13.33 They want to co-design their capita and redesign the spaces in the future with young people and other users.
- 4.13.34 When the library service consulted non library users, they asked for better promotion of the offer across all their sites. This request will be taken forward by the new Engagement and Development Team in the new libraries structure. They will develop a brand, communications strategy and newsletters to build their social media presence.
- 4.13.35 Library services plan to install digital display boards so residents can view the offer in libraries and connect with other council services.
- 4.13.36 The key aim is to inspire, innovate and encourage more local people to participate in the service offer to give a more inclusive approach. Library services want to provide inclusive, innovating and flexible spaces for all residents of all ages to come together and grow in their cultural experience.
- 4.13.37 Long term the new vision can only be achieved if the right conditions are in place. This means looking at ideas for new types of services.

4.14 Presentation from Unison

- 4.14.1 The Chair invited the Unison Branch Secretary for Hackney to commence his presentation. The main points from the presentation are outlined below.

- 4.14.2 Unison will present information outlining their concerns in relation to staff engagement for the strategy.
- 4.14.3 Unison informed staff have had limited involvement with the wider review which included public consultation. There was a staff survey, but this was heavily focused on operational issues and day-to-day challenges. The survey did not engage their views on future staffing structure. Hackney Council management did share themes from the review before publishing the strategy.
- 4.14.4 Staff and the union are broadly supportive of the measures to increase usage of the libraries in relation to improving connectivity and the focus on events.
- 4.14.5 The staff had an away day in the summer that explored service improvements with workshops to review how they could do things differently and achieve the culture shift mentioned by the young people in the meeting.
- 4.14.6 However, the details about job descriptions, changes to roles and responsibilities and cuts to staff numbers were not shared with the staff or the Union until the formal consultation in September 2022.
- 4.14.7 The restructuring proposals remove approximately £0.5 million from the staffing budget. This is a big proportion. This is £145,000 more savings than is required by the service area to achieve. There has been an additional £50,000 increase in senior management pay what impacts on the wider staffing cuts year on year.
- 4.14.8 The proposal will delete 99 library staff jobs, removing the equivalent of 19 full-time posts. This is approximately a third of the full-time posts in the service. However, taking into consideration the number of part-time posts, this could result in 44 staff job losses.
- 4.14.9 From the formal staff consultation, it is anticipated that a higher number of staff have requested voluntary redundancy; despite the volume of these requests compulsory redundancies can still take place. This is an area the Unions are against.
- 4.14.10 Unison acknowledges there will be an uplift in relation to the pay and grades and there will be new library officer posts. But in the new posts all staff will be expected to do supervisory level tasks e.g., opening and closing, cashing up etc. Although this presents an opportunity for some staff there are other staff who do not want this level of responsibility. This has staff feeling forced into doing it or be forced out.
- 4.14.11 Unison pointed out there will be the removal of set break times and library managers will manage 3 sites instead of one site. This means a manager will no longer always be present on site. The responsibility will be on staff at a scale 6 grade.
- 4.14.12 Staff will be expected to work at different sites instead of being assigned to a particular library.
- 4.14.13 The new rota being introduced will include mandatory regular Sunday working. For a number of staff with care responsibilities the unsociable hours

of work will be challenging, and they do not wish to do this, even if it will be one in a 7-week period.

- 4.14.14 There will be increased use of relief staff in the service. This was designed as a stop gap to help cover the occasional staff absence but over the years has proliferated.
- 4.14.15 Hackney has included security guards in the minimum staffing numbers although they will not be present for the duration of opening hours. This will be a breach of the minimum staffing level.
- 4.14.16 The library service workforce is an older workforce with over 69% being aged 45 years and over; 66% female; 60% being black and global majority and 55% are Hackney residents. Unison highlighted that these statistics show it will have a disproportionate effect and impact on the local population.
- 4.14.17 In relation to relief workers Unison pointed out that staff on a zero hour contract would have access to more rights than the library relief workers and less in comparison to permanent staff who have contractual benefits. The union was of the view that this is not a working contract that should be used as widely as it is.
- 4.14.18 It was pointed out that this cohort of workers cover 1000 hours per month, equivalent to eight full time jobs. This highlights how the service is already under staffed before the proposed cuts.
- 4.14.19 Hackney management have highlighted that the relief staff are there to cover staff absences in particular sickness cases. But there are high sickness levels in the service. Introducing the reductions to the workforce will have a disproportionate impact on the service. Achieving the opposite to the vision.
- 4.14.20 Unison collated staff views via an anonymous survey to staff in library services. This survey showed that staff were concerned about job losses, working below the minimum staffing numbers and the health and safety implications. Also, the lack of direct assimilation into the new job roles and the inability to continue to provide services at the current level.
- 4.14.21 Staff were of the view the cuts were too excessive. They would like to see all staffing cuts avoided coupled with keeping the scale 4 posts (this is the role of library assistants). Instead of the single grade introducing a career grade system for staff to progress if desired.
- 4.14.22 Unison informed the Commission they had submitted a number of alternative options including career linked grades to allow staff to develop whilst protecting staff in their current roles. Their proposals included recruiting the new Development Team posts as a first phase of the restructuring and then looking at the wider restructuring later. This would give the service more time to rebuild usage to recover from covid and the cyber-attack. Both events had hit library services hard and impacted on the number of service users.
- 4.14.23 Unison suggested a pilot on the reduced staffing levels was trialed first to see if it was sustainable and the model is correct.

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- 4.14.24 Unison suggested the council uses its general reserves (estimated to be £168 million as at March 2021 - an increase of £7 million from the previous year) to buffer some of the corporate saving requirements. Unison were of the view Hackney has alternative choices.
- 4.14.25 Unison highlighted that all these suggestions have been overlooked or dismissed without full exploration or discussion.
- 4.14.26 Unison highlighted the final report was almost identical to the draft proposals except for a couple of small changes.
- 4.14.27 Unison pointed out the commission had not had an opportunity to scrutinize the strategy.
- 4.14.28 The workforce strand is being fast tracked to implementation.
- 4.14.29 Unison pointed out that it has been stated that the savings were needed to make improvements to Stoke Newington. But a press release in 2020 before the library service review stated the funding for the improvement works was already ear marked.
- 4.14.30 Unison highlighted there has been a public campaign and they have a public petition with almost 2800 signatures. The community is recognizing this will have an impact on the service. Their public campaign was also supported by Diane Abbott MP.
- 4.14.31 Staff have been voting in a strike ballot and the conclusion is to take strike action. This will be the first strike in over a decade.
- 4.14.32 Unison would also like to see the innovation and vital improvements to this public service to best protect its future and deliver a professional service for the community. But in their view the proposals are unsustainable and will present a safety risk to staff and users as well as being financially unsound. This could lead to temporary or permanent site closures in the future.
- 4.14.33 There is concern library services will lose the knowledge, experience and community trust as mentioned by the Chair of the Commission.
- 4.14.34 Unison wanted to see Hackney's management show respect for their collective bargaining rights and be prepared to negotiate to protect jobs, staff safety and wellbeing.

4.15 Questions, Answers and Discussion

Libraries Connected and Hackney Young Futures Q&A

- (i) Members referred to the co-working spaces and asked for more details about what this? Members queried if this related to different workers from different backgrounds coming to share their expertise and explore new ideas?**

In response Hackney Young Futures explained the co-working spaces related to co-working booths like they have in WeWorks or smaller rooms that groups of pupils can work in.

- (ii) **Members referred their question to the young people who used library service in the past and those who no longer used the service and asked what would make them use library services again? Members also asked what was missing and what they would like to see in libraries that would encourage more young people through the doors.**

In response Hackney Young Futures replied, the design and aesthetic to have a comfortable warm environment to study in. This is important. Also, co-working space that is not deadly quiet and where you can study with your friends.

The young people would also like to see more individual study spaces. From experience when visiting Hackney Central Library after school it would get very crowded and there was no individual study space. Particularly during the exam periods.

The young person also suggested improving staff culture. The young person reiterated the bad experience they had with some members of staff in Hackney Central Library, which had caused the young person to drift away from using the service. The young person pointed out the rules for the library were not very specific which led to confusion.

The young person added the behaviour of security guards also added to the staffing culture issue. Highlighting the way they behaved was not inviting to groups of young people in school uniform.

The young person referred to the Library app and highlighted you do not always have to visit the library in person to benefit from its services.

It was also pointed out that previously libraries were seen as cultural hubs it would be nice to see more activities for people and young people between the ages of 18-25 yrs. For example, creative workshops or having a movie night. There is more that can be done because they are versatile environments.

The young people also pointed out that creative arts students cannot use the library if they are doing topics like music tech or a big art piece. There was not enough space to do it in a library. This limits their spaces to either at home or after school. Having a space for the creative arts and music would be beneficial too.

- (iii) **Members referred to Libraries Connected commented about the changing needs of libraries and where people are not just coming to borrow books but to get advice. Commenting on this could include advice that they may have accessed from formal advice centers and now wished to use comparison websites etc. Members asked how this has changed the service offer and what libraries should be in these circumstances.**

In response the Chief Executive from Libraries Connected explained a Mori poll of trust in different professions revealed that top were nurses at 98% and second were librarians at 96%. This demonstrated that people trust libraries and trusted the advice and sign post they were given.

It was important that library staff are supported to give advice and signpost to advice too. This would require changing of spaces and a lot of libraries have now invested in little booths or small rooms inside a bigger space to have space for more confidential discussions.

The Chief Executive from LC commented the discussion about workspaces is really interesting and some recent library designs have identified how to make the space more flexible e.g., to have shelving that can be moved to create space for a performance or partitions that can be moved around to create meeting rooms, little booths to do zoom meetings, quiet work etc.

Pointing out that in Islington library they have embraced the traditional library reference room changed it to a space with desks; a lamp and power socket attracting people of all ages now. This is thinking creatively about the space that libraries have. Library designers are leading with this and coming up with some interesting solutions to use the space and flexible furniture.

(iv) Members asked what implications this would have for the changing nature of the workforce and the support a different kind of library service would be needed to deliver this type of library service.

In response LC referred to the young people at the meeting and highlighted they are giving a clear message about what they want from library services which is meaningful engagement with people.

There has been a gradual change from thinking about skills-based recruitment to the attitudes and aptitudes people have.

The Chief Executive from LC pointed out in Manchester they are doing some work on modelling a different way of recruiting in communities.

This involves having an open evening and inviting people along who might be interested in libraries. This is not centered on experience or skills but how good these people are when engaging with others. Looking at if they like helping people; if they are problem solvers and interested in having a flexible job working across a range of areas.

This highlighted that the specification for a library assistant / staff was changing however it was also pointed out that qualified professionals in the industry would still be needed in the workforce mix (qualified librarian informational professional).

In essence the workforce will need a wider mix of people as frontline library staff. This can lead to a really dynamic and interesting career for people who love engaging with other people and being part of a community.

(v) Members referred to the comments from the young people about the value they get out of using library services and what they want from the service. Members asked Libraries Connected for their views on other community groups e.g., older people in relation to flexible working; the workforce and any additional resources that could benefit other cohorts of people?

In response the Chief Executive from Libraries Connected replied we recognize that we have an aging population and that its key to support people to have active and healthy lives as they age. The Chief Executive highlighted that the home library service and community library service is very important and there is strong evidence that the library service provided a lifeline during the pandemic. This was not just related to the books and resources but that service users expressed it was also about the human contact and the bespoke level of support from the library. Library staff were able to pick up when people were starting to struggle with things at home. There were stories of how library services were an alternative service putting people in touch with other services. It was highlighted that the home library service remains a really important way of connecting people.

It was pointed out that libraries also arrange a range of events for older people like knit and natter groups which are popular but very often for older ladies. So libraries have begun thinking about what can appeal to older gentlemen too e.g. one library has a weekly newspaper discussion session for discussions, debates and making friends and Men's Shed with craft based activities for men to help support making social connections. Manchester libraries are doing work around active aging sessions for older people. Offering a range of activities aimed at having fun and doing things like having more comfortable seating (so older people feel welcome stay longer) and film screenings etc.

The challenge for libraries as a universal service is it is there to support every cohort in the community so this can present challenges to programming and they have to structure the resources to suit the needs of different community groups.

It was pointed out that whilst young people are one important segment that need careful consideration there is a growing older population that is equally as important, needing bespoke or specialist programming too.

The other important area is volunteering. The volunteer age group is often older providing all the benefits of being active physically, psychologically and better health.

- (vi) **Members commented this discussion was highlighting a need for active conversation, co-working, sharing (not necessarily being quiet) and being able to come together to talk whilst the same time having a quiet place to study if a student cannot study at home.**
- (vii) **Members referred to people who may have got behind following the pandemic with jobs applications etc. Members asked what library services can do and queried if people used libraries for CVs and access into work?**

In response Hackney Young Futures suggested it would be good to partners with organizations like 'Into University' who have satellite locations in Haggerston and Hackney Downs. Highlighting that they may be able to provide support with the CV and give one to one support because librarians are busy, and it is not really their role to help.

The Chief Executive from LC agreed there was a role for libraries and working in partnership was the way forward to bring that expertise into the library. LC was aware of examples across the country of libraries supporting people back into employment and the British Library has a unit that helped to support people with setting up a business and thriving businesses. This included mentoring and one to one support. Other libraries were providing support with getting back into work, jobs clubs, CV sessions and access to other resources.

It was agreed that this is a place that many people naturally look to for this type of help. Libraries should explore how they can be a gateway to those services through partnership working. This would be powerful.

London Borough of Hackney and Unison Q&A

(i) Members asked, considering the evidence from the Hackney Young Futures representatives what were the plans for the strategy and workforce to reflect residents' needs so that it becomes more inclusive?

In response the Strategic Director, Engagement, Culture and Organizational Development from Hackney Council informed that it was important that the council develops its workforce and values and maintains the diversity of the workforce.

The council has worked hard with staff throughout the process to ensure they feel confident to apply for jobs in the service. This is because the staff that remain in the service will be on higher graded jobs. Pointing out this was a good opportunity for staff. The council had worked with an EDI consultant who worked closely with a group of staff to co-produce the recruitment process for the roles. This was to enable staff to trust and feel confidence in the process.

The service is currently rules based and rigid. If the Council is to meet the needs of the community and reflect on the voice of the young people in the meeting. This means they need to change the culture in the service.

A key aim of the restructure is to distribute leadership across the service. This was the rationale for having the minimum grade as a scale 6. This would give every member of staff a minimum level of responsibility and a leadership role within the library. The new structure will not be hierarchical giving staff more professional autonomy. This will help to achieve the culture change too.

One of the key points the Council picked up from the staff survey was the view that there was not enough space for staff development and training. E.g., they wanted staff away days for libraries reinstated. This has been implemented. The Council had committed to 4 staff development days a year. The means libraries will be shut to the public 4 days a year. This will be devoted to getting the staff together, developing their skills, working on the culture change and allowing them to share skills and ideas with each other. This change will enable the workforce to have the skills they need going forward. To enable them to provide the services that residents desire.

- (ii) **Members referred to diversity in the workforce and how libraries attract and retain young people in the workforce. Members referenced the apprenticeship scheme and asked if this led to a permanent job when the apprenticeship ended. Members also queried given that it is less attractive for young people to work unsociable hours and on Sundays. How will the Council attract and retain young people in the library workforce?**

In response the Strategic Director, Engagement, Culture and Organizational Development from Hackney Council pointed out the library service is a 7 day a week service. As expressed by the Hackney Young Futures representatives having libraries open on a Sunday gives students a place to study. This is important. For the staff working in this service the Council has informed them it would be a maximum of 1 Sunday in 7. This could be less because some staff have indicated they would prefer to work more weekends to reduce their childcare costs in the week.

In response to the question about young people the library service has 4 apprenticeships built into the new structure. These will be the first apprenticeships in library services for a long time. The apprentices will be the responsibility of the Development Team supporting them to increase their skills as a group.

It cannot be predetermined if this will lead to a longer-term role because some may choose to work in a different borough; stay in Hackney's library service; go into archive and heritage or some other part of the council. The aim is to give them a broad range of skills to give them choices. The hope is the council will retain some of the apprentices trained in the workforce to tackle the issue of an aging workforce. It was pointed out that 40% of library services staff are currently over 55 and many staff have opted to take early retirement through the restructure.

The council is keen to retain some of the experience and knowledge to be able to replace experienced staff. Over the years the service has not been acquiring more staff like the current service manager who started as a school leaver. This is one of the key objectives to having an apprenticeship programme.

- (iii) **Members commented that the new strategy presents a lot of new ideas about how they can adapt to the new ways of working and be more flexible. Members referred to staff concerns raised about health and safety and making sure there is appropriate cover. Members asked about the Council's plans to address these concerns.**

In response the Strategic Director, Engagement, Culture and Organizational Development from Hackney Council explained the minimum staffing numbers had not changed. The difference is security guards are explicitly included in the health and safety guidance as a minimum staffing number. The Director pointed out that often the security guard is included in the numbers in practice.

The Director acknowledged that security guards did not start until after 3pm but during the day they will not be below the minimum number.

The Director acknowledged there will be fewer personnel in the service than there are now. However, one of the key issues currently is that the service is carrying a high level of unsustainable sick leave. Currently this stands at 26.1 days per head per annum. This is higher than the average across the Council or for manual services like waste collection, social care and other high stressed professions.

Although a lot of issues feature in this figure one of them is chronic sickness which has not been managed. Also, staff have previously put in for voluntary redundancy but have not been successful. Currently the service is unstable because there are so many staff off on sick leave.

In addition, the staff on a scale 4 cannot work unless there is a manager present because they cannot open or close a library and cash up. Due to this staff are always being moved around to ensure there is a scale 5 or a manager on site. However, if all staff will be a scale 6 grade and can therefore take that responsibility. This will give a greater degree of stability to the workforce.

The Director acknowledged the Unions had raised concerns about their use of relief staff but from their benchmarking with other boroughs this showed that several library services make use of relief staff. Notwithstanding it was noted a number of staff that are requesting for voluntary redundancy have asked to join the relief pool of staff. This means will allow some staff to take their early retirement but still work. This means that the staff available to cover will be experienced people. These staff members are also pleased because they can supplement their pension income with extra work and keep that link to the service. Having this option has helped staff with their decision to take early retirement.

In response to health and safety concerns the Director confirmed they will not go below the minimum staffing level as advised by corporate health and safety. It was explained that the minimum staffing levels are linked to fire evacuation based on the layout of the building, number of floors and the number of people needed to get people out safely from the building.

The Director explained they want to train their staff better to handle the few incidents that do happen. It was pointed out they have several staff that are already skilled at dealing with incidents. The Director highlighted in Shoreditch Library a staff member dealt with an individual with severe mental health problems. The Director explained this individual was known to the staff and they knew how to cope with the situation. The Council wants to ensure staff members feel really well trained to manage incidents like these if they occur.

It was also pointed out that by bringing more council services into the library and having more staff working from that location; this meant more council staff would be always coming in and out of the building. This should enable the library staff to be more supported and not isolated.

The Director advised that all staff working from that building will take joint responsibility for it and what happens in the building.

- (iv) **Members referred to the importance of libraries for young people to do their studies and schoolwork due to overcrowding and the request from young students to extend the library opening hours. Members highlighted given the constraints being discussed how likely was it that the council would be able to meet these needs and extend the opening hours of libraries?**

In response the Strategic Director, Engagement, Culture and Organizational Development from Hackney Council advised she would like to introduce the open libraries model. This model enables people to have swipe card access to unstaffed libraries (currently Hackney's libraries are staffed until 8pm). The Director would like to implement the technology that has an enhanced level of membership. This would give access to use the service up to 10pm or midnight. This would give access to all the libraries on a Sunday - currently only 3 are open on a Sunday. This type of access has been successfully implemented in other places e.g., Brighton. The Director pointed out that Brighton has similar social issues to Hackney such as homelessness, drug abuse and all the issues you might be concerned about in unstaffed spaces. This model has been successful there and they have managed to keep all their libraries accessible until midnight. This type of operating model is being reviewed by Hackney Council's head of service for the library service.

It was pointed out that older people also like to use libraries early in the morning. This would facilitate that.

Currently the Council is piloting technology at Stamford Hill library to get the technology working before exploring further operational roll out. In a time of constrained resources if the technology is successful, it will also allow them to give community groups access to use meeting rooms in the evening after staff have left for the day. This would help libraries to generate more income.

The Hackney Young Futures representative commented she was pleased to hear about the open library model and that it was being explored. Commenting that not having a library open whilst she was doing her A levels was very frustrating. The young person pointed out that libraries need to be opened later for students and although Hackney Central is open until 8pm this was still not late enough for students like herself who did not have the space. At university her library was open 24/7. The young person expressed an interest in understanding the timescale for this new model and technology and how this would be advertised to Hackney residents who have English as a second language or ethnic minorities?

The Chair advised the Commission to note the enthusiasm with which the idea of the open libraries model was received by the Hackney Young Futures representative. The Chair commented that this showed the need for this type of service offer by library services. In keeping with the formalities of the meeting the Chair asked for the young person's question to be picked up by the Director outside of the meeting.

- (v) **Members asked how the strategy could make library services more inclusive for people who have learning differences and neurodiversity. Members pointed out that they may find the environment stressful in**

terms of the design. Therefore, the use of more visual tools to assist people with dyslexia would be helpful.

In response the Strategic Head of Culture, Libraries and Heritage from Hackney Council informed Members they have created a working group from the library service and ICT. They are looking specifically at accessibility and assistive technology. This review will also look at desk spaces and how to make them more accommodating for people with different needs. When redesigning their spaces, the plan is to co-produce the redesign and this redesign will include accessibility. The officer advised she would welcome the voice of residents with various needs to understand how they can make the space more accessible.

- (vi) The Member commented as a councillor on the task and finish group in his view the strategy was ambitious and innovative and will improve the service overall.**
- (vii) The Members asked for clarification on the difference between job security for a scale 4 as opposed to a scale 6?**

In response the Strategic Director, Engagement, Culture and Organizational Development from Hackney Council explained the concerns about job security related to the Council's organizational change process. Currently in the workforce they have Library Assistants on scale 4 and Library Supervisors on scale 5. In the restructure they have deleted all the scale 4 and scale 5 jobs and replaced them with scale 6 jobs.

The Council's organizational change process stipulates that staff cannot be directly assimilated to a job that is a higher grade than they are already occupying. If the job is a higher grade then they have to apply for the job. They can only be ring fenced if it is one grade higher, but the person still needs to be interviewed for the role. Therefore, the staff within the service have to go through a recruitment process to secure employment. Due to the process management cannot guarantee that there would not be any compulsory redundancies. In essence there is always a chance that a staff member may not be successful when going through this process.

- (viii) Members asked if there has been some form of help given to staff with interviews techniques etc. to support staff through this process?**

In response the Strategic Director, Engagement, Culture and Organizational Development from Hackney Council confirmed interview training was given to staff; one to one interview practices and one to one interview coaching. The Director reiterated that the recruitment process had been co-designed. The application and interview process had been simplified and all staff were being given the interview questions in advance with 7 days' notice to help with their preparation. They have done all they can possibly do to give the message to staff that they want them to have the jobs. The aim is not to lose staff but to give staff better jobs with increased pay. It was noted that the organization's change process does not allow management to give staff a higher-grade job outside of the process.

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The Branch Secretary from Unison also replied that they understood the constraints of the organizations change process but would have preferred the proposals were designed in a way that mitigated and removed the risk of compulsory redundancies; whilst still allowing development opportunities. For this reason they suggested alternative options. But these options were not included in the draft or final report. It has only been as a result of the strike action that there has been some discussion and the union was hoping to still negotiate an outcome.

The Branch Secretary from Unison highlighted that Hackney management comment they do not want staff to lose their job and that they will make it through the process. But inevitably this does happen. They need to make sure they put in place all the protections possible. This is not just for the recruitment process, but the strategy plans too.

(ix) Members asked in relation to the appetite for voluntary redundancy and asked if the Council had any concerns about the loss of skills with so many people wanting to take voluntary redundancy or concerns about the voluntary redundancy costs to the service area.

In response the Strategic Director, Engagement, Culture and Organizational Development from Hackney Council informed in terms of the cost they do not have a final calculation but with the volume of redundancies this will be a big cost to the Council. From a finance perspective this structure is expected to breakeven within 2-3 years.

There has been pent up demand within the service for voluntary redundancy among the staff for a while now. In the last 3 or 4 rounds of corporate voluntary redundancy there has been a high volume of requests from the library services. But these requests were declined because there was no service redesign to accompany it. It was pointed out that most staff choosing to go were weekend assistants who work one day a week.

The Director acknowledged the concern about the loss of skills and experience and advised they would be releasing people gradually. At the start of the process, they gave a clear message to staff that they would give redundancy to the people who wanted it. For the new library service, they need staff who really want to work there. From discussions with staff who have long service history they are keen to go into the relief pool and keep a connection to the service and many are happy to stay on for as long as they need them during the transition. The redundancy of staff will be phased, and the staff have offered to be flexible.

The desire from this process is to end up with a workforce that is mixed with experienced staff and the opportunity to go out into the community to recruit some new people into the service. Not just apprentices but to fill other vacancies too.

In response the Branch Chair from Unison added early in the process they asked Hackney Council what would happen if 99 staff members requested for redundancy because they were deleting 99 jobs. The response from Hackney Council indicated this would result in a large volume of new recruitment. Unison highlighted in the first 2 months of the consultation period only 14

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people requested redundancy but in the last 4 weeks - which was extended by 1 week at the request of the unions – this increased to 44. Unison pointed out this increase happened because more staff members recognized that this opportunity was not achievable. Unison sees this as a clear vote from staff about the strategy.

The Unison advised they are in favor of the general principles behind the strategy, but this can only be achieved if they have enough staff and retain the knowledge and skills built up within library services over several decades. The network within local communities would be destroyed because of these proposals. Unison pointed out although the Director referenced there would be a gradual release of staff. As soon as the redundancy notice has been issued, they have 90 days. It was Unison's understanding that once the DPR was signed off the proposal would become operational.

The Chair reminded Members of the Commission that although there were comments about the strategy consultation process. This meeting was not scrutinizing the consultation process but reviewing the delivery plans for the strategy. This included looking at workforce changes which is why the Commission was keen to hear the trade unions views.

- (x) **Members referred to the discussion about residents' requests from library services and how they are used. Members queried if the spaces in libraries could be developed in a way that the space can be used beyond the library service offer. Like for example using the space to assist with the recent vaccination program.**
- (xi) **Members referred to the changing demands for library services and library staff and asked Unison if the strategy would support staff in having the skills required for the changing library service.**

In response the Strategic Director, Engagement, Culture and Organizational Development from Hackney Council explained in terms of flexible spaces it will be important that they try to ensure the spaces within their libraries can be used in many ways. In some locations this could mean having shelves on wheels rather than fix infrastructure to clear a space. The information from Hackney Young Futures highlighted how packed libraries get during exam time with study spaces full and children sitting on floors. The Director highlighted that for the rest of the year when it was not exam time these spaces were relatively under used.

In addition, all the buildings were different with their own unique problems coupled with some buildings being new and some old. Spaces would need to be designed in a way that allow them to bring in more of one thing and take out another. Particularly to achieve a flexible community space.

The Director referred to the information the Head of service stated earlier in relation to building a meeting room in Hackney Central Library. This would be from Section 106 funds. In Stamford Hill library they were using Section 106 funds to open access to the building. This will give access to the top floor of the building which is currently under used due to not being DDA compliant. Highlighting investments like this can open up spaces and make them more accessible.

The Director explained Stoke Newington Library is a new and exciting project. It is an infrastructure project of £4.7 million that enable them to stop a grade II listed building from deterioration. In reference to the points made by Hackney Young Futures about having music space, the Stoke Newington Library could become a specialist music library because it has a fairly extensive music sheet collection which the council would like to expand (highlighting the Orchestra of schools' collection is currently locked away and not used) and could encompass practice space, performance space and teaching space. The Director pointed out these are the types of future aspirations they have for libraries to meet the needs mentioned by the young people and to provide flexible spaces open for innovative work.

As part of the development in Woodberry Downs the council is doing a feasibility study for the new library in that location.

The Strategic Head of Culture, Libraries and Heritage from Hackney Council added a caution in terms of opening spaces. Pointing out there must be careful zoning for each space to design in quiet and busy spaces.

The Council wants to co-design the spaces with residents who will be using the spaces in that locality. Over the next six months they will be carefully reviewing the footfall across libraries by re-introducing counters to capture how people are using the spaces. Then they can redesign the spaces to meet people's needs.

The Branch Secretary from Unison advised that in a Hackney Council statement in response to their campaign the council advised that reducing the roles will deliver savings but also contribute towards service development including the repairs and renovation plans for Stoke Newington Library.

In response to Members question about staff skills and support the Branch Chair from Unison explained because of the high staff numbers and diversity of the workforce (from the communities and different parts of the borough and pan London) if one person cannot answer a question often there is another person who can. This demonstrated there is a diversity of knowledge contained within each library.

Unison expressed concern about the council's ability to tap into the skills and the decline of skills due to the following challenges:

- There will be 34 permanent staff on duty over a 7 day period.
- Libraries will be open up to 65 hours a week but staff only work 36 hours a week
- The number of staff that will be on duty at any one time.
- The cover for holidays, training, and sickness.

Unison welcomed more training and development for staff, and they accept that there is an element of standstill within the service that needs to improve. But were not convinced this could be achieved by reducing the staff numbers.

- (xii) **Members referred to the welcoming aspect of the libraries and referenced page 186 of the report where it mentions a respondent's comments about the environment of the library being hostile. Noting**

the expressions that it used to be a friendly place to browse for books, read magazines and feel welcomed. The respondent described how they are interrogated at the door and need to show their library card to enter and that they get chastised for some minor breach etc. Members asked how the council ensure that libraries remain welcoming spaces for young people and that they do not experience the hostile environment described in the case study.

- (xiii) **Members asked about tactile transmissions, ventilation and addressing safety issues for people coming into the library – visitors, service users etc.**

In response the Strategic Director, Engagement, Culture and Organizational Development from Hackney Council explained that Covid 19 was a challenging time. During the first lockdown they were shut. However, when they reopened, operating them safely was a real challenge. The head of service at the time was given a gold star by the Director of Public Health for how well they managed the safety of the environment within the libraries. Notwithstanding this did come with a lot of constraints like people needing to account for themselves when they walked in. This was a feature of the pandemic operation but it is not anymore. The only aspect still in place from Covid is the screens. They have been able to re-open more spaces again and put back their soft furnishings. The libraries will feel a lot more welcoming now than they did during the pandemic. At the time it was a real challenge to run infection proof libraries and still get the environment to feel welcoming.

The Strategic Head of Culture, Libraries and Heritage from Hackney Council added this is part of the culture change, workforce review of the roles and restructure. It will also be about developing a workforce plan over the next 6 - 12 months with staff. This will include talking to them about the vision, developing standards and ensuring library staff have the skills to meet all the future challenges post covid. They will also be looking at encouraging leadership at every level of the workforce and sharing responsibilities. This is one of the reasons why they brought the culture and engagement team together. Library staff will be working more closely with their heritage, achieve and museum staff and be able to have more development overall alongside regular staff away days. These will enable them to really develop the new culture, fully engage the workforce so they have high levels of morale and equipped to meet some of the upcoming challenges.

The Director added they will also be working with Young Hackney to ensure their staff are well skilled in working with young people. Some of the ways young people behave is not ill intentioned but needs to be managed in a way that does not disturb other library users. There are examples of situations in libraries where they are handled well and not handled well. Making sure staff in libraries have all the skills will be important.

The Branch Chair from Unison added there were 3 to 4 different incidents at libraries last year which has heightened their concern about health and safety with reduced staffing. They accept the point that libraries should be a welcoming space and contributing to this will be the design and layout. Unison pointed out that Clapton and Shoreditch libraries have a much better layout than other sites. They recommended that this should be modelled

across the other 5 sites and taken into consideration for the redevelopment work at Stoke Newington.

In relation to the bad experiences mentioned the Union stated that from the libraries reported statistics in 2019/20 they had approximately 1.5 million visits that year. To have everybody satisfied with that volume of people going through any workplace would be an achievement.

- (xiv) Members asked a follow up question in relation to ventilation referring to the Government's confirmation that Covid is an airborne disease. Members asked how the ventilation will be resilient in new, old and refurbished buildings to ensure its a healthy place for the staff and to help people feel safe using the service.**

The Strategic Director, Engagement, Culture and Organizational Development from Hackney Council informed this was a real challenge for the historic building portfolio. In relation to the refurbishment of Stoke Newington library this is something they will be talking to the design team about to ensure it is designed in. If they do build a new library at Woodberry Down this will be considered too.

In relation to the older buildings this is more challenging particularly for those on main roads. Although they have windows that can be opened there is likely to be a lot of traffic which will bring noise and pollution from cars. In essence where they are building new buildings this can be designed in. The council recognizes that it will be important to ensure it is considered across the library's estate. This is something they can add to their capital programme requirements for libraries.

The Strategic Head of Culture, Libraries and Heritage from Hackney Council added that they are also considering outdoor spaces. This will take into consideration how they could use outdoor spaces to keep libraries open if there was another pandemic. For example, for Woodberry Downs they are considering if it's possible to have some form of roof top space and how to make the indoor and outdoor spaces more open for better ventilation.

- (xv) Members referred to health and safety and changing staff numbers and the Council's reference that they will ensure that there is sufficient cover and will follow guidance. Members asked if the Council could reassure staff that this will be kept under review and evaluated to keep staff safe.**

In response the Strategic Director, Engagement, Culture and Organizational Development from Hackney Council confirmed this would be kept under review. The Director informed he Commission in a recent meeting with the trade unions they asked if the Council would commit to having an independent externally commissioned review approximately 1 year post implementation to give an independent assessment of how it is working. The Director advised she was happy to make this commitment. The Director was confident that organizations like Libraries Connected could carry out the review. The director welcomed having external scrutiny and viewed it as a healthy challenge. The Director also highlighted that they will continue to work with their colleagues in Corporate Health and Safety Team.

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The Director pointed out that when Stoke Newington Library will be shut for 12-18 months during the refurbishment. This will give them extra staff capacity across the other sites. Although they wish to also use this extra capacity to do more community outreach for libraries.

The Branch Chair from Unison explained the problem they have is incidents are reoccurring (serious incidents) year on year in each library - different times, different stages and different scenarios. Their concern was that management look retrospectively and put in temporary measures. These are removed approximately 2 months later. So fundamentally nothing changes. Therefore, they remain concerned because of the significant reduction in staffing levels.

If you have a library with a large floor area like Hackney Central library but only have 2 staff members and 1 security person (this could happen under the new proposals) on duty this means that people get lost, and things can happen quickly or escalate. To quell such situations, they need to be identified early. There have been incidents between members of the public, between public and staff and other scenarios. Unison was not convinced this has been fully accounted for in the health and safety approach being taken.

The Branch Secretary from Unison added the question asked correlates to the reasons they asked for an independent assessment to be carried out. They want independent evidence that the new structure is working, health and safety incidents reduced, and that relief staff usage had reduced too. Unison advised if there is evidence this is not working, they do not want to see this brushed under the carpet.

Unison are fearful if people are let go now they might not get them back in 12 months' time if needed.

- (xvi) Members referred to digital inclusion, digital provision, and skills. Members queried if a staff member opted for voluntary redundancy could they return to working for the council. Members thought there was a restricted period of 2 years after voluntary redundancy.**
- (xvii) Members commended the work set out in the report in relation to digital provision but recognized this was an area of work that needs improving.**
- (xviii) Members referred to digital inclusion and queried if service users had adequate skills or if service users needed training. Members asked if there were adequate staff to be able to make sure everybody is included in terms of IT to reduce the digital divide. For example, having access to Wi-Fi where they cannot use it at home.**

In response the Strategic Director, Engagement, Culture and Organizational Development from Hackney Council explained in relation to staff taking redundancy and working in the relief pool this is permitted. This is because it is a different type of contract of employment. The service has staff that are on permanent contracts but that also do relief work and have a relief contract. When staff asked about being able to take VR and still do relief contract work. The HR advice was this is permitted. In addition other people have asked if they take VR can they join the relief pool and HR confirmed they can.

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The Director explained this became very attractive to several people. The Director highlighted this situation is unique to the library service. It was also pointed out that they have other council service staff who work in the library's relief pool too.

In response to the digital question the Strategic Head of Culture, Libraries and Heritage from Hackney Council confirmed this was part of the digital transformation work they started 10 months ago with the ICT Team. Initially they have focused on the core infrastructure because they need fast Wi-Fi to access resources. The officer pointed out it is important that library staff are fully trained too. Initially they will ensure everyone has the basic digital skills and they are working on a training programme with the ICT Team. This is likely to be backed by a survey to staff to assess their skills currently with the view of progressing to a higher skill set level over time.

The anticipation is that one of the future needs will be cloud printing straight from your mobile phone to the library printer. Staff are currently working with a small group for digital inclusion. This is being tested using different models. The current model being tested is with Hackney Pensioners Convention Group. This is a group of older residents who have requested to design posters. Staff can teach them how to use available software. The training for staff and residents will need to go hand in hand.

The Chair thanked all attendees for their contribution at the meeting and closed with the comments below.

The discussion had been extremely helpful for the Commission to understand the delivery plans of the strategy and service.

This discussion highlighted some of the challenges facing the Executive in terms of managing reducing budgets, increasing demand and the changing needs.

It was also helpful to hear from trade union colleagues about the concerns they have for the staffing of the service and what it means for their members.

The Commission was pleased to note there will be continued conversations between the trade unions and the council about how to resolve some of the ongoing concerns around health and safety and the commitment by the council to a review after 1 year.

This will be taken into consideration when the Commission is making its recommendations about the risks around delivery for this strategy.

5 Minutes of Previous Meeting

- 5.1 Members noted the minutes from the previous meeting will be on the next agenda.

6 Skills, Economy and Growth Scrutiny Commission Work Programme 2022/23

6.1 The Chair referred to the work programme for the scrutiny commission on pages 361-371 in the agenda.

6.2 The Chair updated on the upcoming agenda discussion items for the future meetings. The Chair confirmed the discussion items on Economic Development was being moved to the March meeting date from February 2023.

6.3 Cllr Premru raised the Skills and Circular Economy report by the GLA with ReLondon and published in June 22 and suggested inviting in a speaker to scrutinize the report.

In response the Chair advised this might be useful to include in the agenda pack for a future meeting. The Chair also explained that the focus would be on the Council to review their plans for this area of work.

Cllr Potter commented the report is quite wide and the focus of the next meeting was green skills. Cllr Potter suggested this might be better with the skills CQT in April 23.

7 Any Other Business

7.1 None.

Duration of the meeting: 7.00 - 9.10 pm