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### Written Responses to Questions from Councillors

#### 7.7 From Cllr Garbett to the Mayor

To consolidate its first-in-the-country scheme for community parklets, can the Council confirm how many parklets have been constructed to date, and whether there are plans to make the process less onerous on applicants - to allow more diverse communities to participate?

#### Response from the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Transport

Thank you for your question regarding Hackney's parklet programme. I'm sorry I didn't have the chance to respond to this at Full Council.

It is important to acknowledge at the outset that this is the first-in-the country scheme, as you identified. I'm very proud to acknowledge this and the work done to uphold our parklets program. It is a part of a broader portfolio of work to ensure that we are providing our residents with greater access to greener spaces. I know you understand the importance of these spaces.

To date, a total of 21 parklets have been installed across the borough. 12 of these parklets were installed directly by the Council and 9 have been introduced by residents through the Community Parklet programme.

We are currently assessing applications made through the most recent application window through community parklet programme, and expect to soon be taking several additional parklet proposals out to consultation, to build upon the success of the programme and increase the coverage of parklets in new areas in the borough.

The Council has a responsibility to ensure any infrastructure placed on the public highway is safe, appropriate and benefits the wider community. The application process for parklets balances this need against the objective to widen participation in the process and to be as easy for residents as possible.

That is why the Council has assigned dedicated officer time to support residents making applications. The process is not a simple pass or fail process and the Council actively assists supporting applications through a two stage process.

This helps to ensure that community parklet proposals meet the safety and design requirements before they are installed on the highway, but also that residents do not have to invest too much time at the start, before they have had support from our officers.

The community parklet programme is open to all in the borough and I can provide assurance that Council officers are continually working on ways to improve the parklet application process and support applicants throughout

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their applications which includes encouraging diversity among participating communities.

In Hackney, our diversity is our strength. It is important that all programs across the Council, including our environmental schemes, reflect and celebrate the diversity across the borough. I assure you that I am working closely with officers to enable this, particularly within the parklets scheme.

Thank you again for your question and your continued advocacy in support of a greener and diverse Hackney.

### 7.8 From Cllr Turbet-Delof to the Cabinet Member for Health, Adult Social Care, Voluntary Sector and Culture

This year is Hackney Carnival, one of the most anticipated, inclusive, culturally diverse and vibrant events in the country. Can we hear updates on how communities, businesses and residents will be able to participate, apply for available funds and make this another amazing year for our borough's Carnival?

#### Response from the Cabinet Member for Health, Adult Social Care, Voluntary Sector and Culture

Thank you for this question, I'm sorry we weren't able to get to it at Full Council so I am following up in writing.

I share your excitement for what promises to be a fantastic Hackney Carnival in 2024.

While a public announcement about the precise date is on its way, Hackney Carnival is indeed looking forward to parading the streets of Hackney for what will be our first Carnival in four years.

Community involvement serves as the cornerstone for Hackney Carnival. It not only enriches the Carnival but also strengthens the bonds within the Hackney community. Working with the newly appointed Artistic Director, Pax Nindi, who comes with excellent existing relationships with Hackney's Carnival community, the goal will be to make Hackney more vibrant, connected, and inclusive, ensuring that the Carnival remains a true reflection of a collective spirit.

Plans are already being drafted for how to advertise, filter and communicate opportunities for how residents, artists and traders can get involved.

Given the monetary constraints we now face, and taking on board the ambitions of the Carnival Groups who we are in constant dialogue with, the focus for this year's Carnival will be on making the street parade the best it can be and to deliver an event that is safe, inclusive, intergenerational and welcoming to families.

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We are aware of the excitement this year's Carnival will bring and are mindful that the interest will likely outweigh the vacancies available to participate. With that in mind we are discussing an efficient registration process to ensure those who want to join in as traders or artistic practitioners have the appropriate credentials.

This is crucial for things like food trading enquiries where health and safety standards must be met, and for those working with children where safeguarding processes are paramount. These are all necessary and responsible procedures that will help us deliver a safe and spectacular event.

The Culture team and their dedicated Carnival Directors are now working on our first communications announcements. It includes an internal announcement followed by public-facing communications. The Carnival will be overseen by the Carnival Board made up of senior officers across the Council and key partners such as for the Police. Registration forms for the variety of ways people can get involved will be released either at the first date announcement, or shortly after.

Announcements will be published on the Council website, via a press release to local press, the Love Hackney social channels and website and on the Hackney Carnival social media channels which have a significant following.

I hope this answers your question and members will be kept updated as these plans are progressed.

### 7.9 From Cllr Rathbone to the Deputy Mayor for Delivery, Inclusive Economy & Regeneration

Could the Deputy Mayor please let us know what is happening about The Tram Depot in Upper Clapton Road which has recently been put up for auction, and what the Council intends to do to ensure it is preserved, along with 25 businesses and 50 jobs?

### Response from the Deputy Mayor for Delivery, Inclusive Economy & Regeneration

Cllr Rathbone thank you for your question and if I may highlight Cllr Rathbone's long running championing of the numbers of small businesses resident in the Tram Depot buildings and his continued advocacy for the future of the Tram Depot as a place to live and work. It is also worth noting the valuable contribution the buildings make to ensuring Lea Bridge ward has a thriving local economy.

For the benefit of all Members, the Tram Depot is a privately owned set of commercial buildings, it is not owned by the Council. Clearly the Council can only influence any redevelopment through either advocacy with the owners and through the Planning system. In Hackney's Local Plan, LP33, the Tram Depot is within a designated Priority Industrial Area. As the name suggests, industrial employment uses are therefore seen as the priority uses for any

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development planned for this site and will need to be incorporated in any new development proposal and therefore be prioritised in the assessment of any future Planning application for the site.

There is no extant Planning permission for the redevelopment of the site. There have been historic pre-application discussions with the Council that have discussed mixed use residential and commercial development which included proposals for some student residential accommodation. These discussions were all some time ago and did not result in any Planning applications. In the meantime the Council's Regeneration service will be attempting to make contact with the new owners of the site in an attempt to establish their plans and ensure that you are kept up to date on any such discussions.

### 7.10 From Cllr Joseph to the Cabinet Member for Finance, Insourcing and Customer Service

Following pressure from Hackney Council and London Councils, the Government uplifted Local Housing Allowance in the Autumn Statement. What is the Council doing to ensure the Government funds social housing and provides local authorities with the resources to ensure that local families can afford to stay in Hackney?

### Response from the Cabinet Member for Finance, Insourcing and Customer Services

Thank you for submitting a question to me for Full Council on 24 January 2024. Unfortunately there was not time to answer it at the meeting. so I set out my answer below.

Hackney did indeed place a lot of pressure on the Government to increase LHA rates. This is great news for our residents and renters, who will benefit from greater housing affordability, even within Hackney's broken housing market. However, we must acknowledge that the Government failed to also increase the benefit cap. This cruel policy continues to cause poverty in the borough.

It is very difficult, often impossible, for a local authority to ensure that this Government listens, let alone does something about our asks and the challenges that we face. In fact it generally works the other way around, with the Government setting the environment in which we local authorities have to work. We have no power to ensure or force the Government to do anything.

What we do have though is the ability to lobby, persuade and influence.

And this is where we have been very active. Most recently, we, along with many other councils, persuaded the Government to provide extra money for social care in the provisional local government finance settlement. The Mayor and I wrote to the Government [here](#) and you can see the subsequent announcement [here](#).

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In addition, you'll be aware of how Hackney has been at the forefront of the country with our Better Renting Campaign. And how our colleague, Councillor Sem Moema, has led the debate in demanding an abolition of Section 21, otherwise known as no fault evictions, for private renters. While it is fair to say that the Government, despite promises going back to Prime Minister May five years ago, hasn't exactly moved with speed on this item. Hackney Council and Hackney Councillors have landed some significant political blows. The recent announcement from Michael Gove on this is welcome, and in part a recognition of our efforts, we await the detail with interest.

Addressing the question at hand, let me also provide some further examples of our lobbying work in this area. Again Hackney Council has led from the front and achieved success in the matter of how we can use our own right to buy receipts. We've certainly not achieved all our aims yet but the Secretary of State has at least listened such that we can now use 100% of our receipts for the next two years.

Officers also spent a lot of time last year speaking with and lobbying Government officials to help us with our housing new build and regeneration programmes. We have spoken with the Department of Levelling Up, Housing And Communities on a number of occasions, held various meetings with them and taken officials on site visits and field tours around Hackney, all in the last few months.

At these meetings we have taken every opportunity to energetically lobby for an increase in grant rates so that we can build more council housing in Hackney.

We have also listened to our communities in Hackney where working people and families have told us of the desperate situation they face. People have told us how they are facing having to move out and leave Hackney and how desperate they are to stay here, to own their own homes and send their children to our good schools.

We are therefore taking every opportunity we have to tell these stories to the Government and to lobby for more funds so that we can build more low cost homes for working people.

Despite this, the situation is challenging and sometimes the Government does not listen. I can assure you that Mayor Woodley, myself, my colleagues and our officers are relentless in pressuring the government for the funding and the tools we need to tackle this problem.

But you'll be as aware as me that the only likely step change in approach will come with the election of a Labour government,

### 7.11 From Cllr Adejare to the Cabinet Member for Health, Adult Social Care, Voluntary Sector and Culture

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As we continue to work to ensure the voices of our communities are amplified, can the Cabinet Member please advise how our grants funding ensures all communities, especially minoritised groups are supported in terms of accessing these funding streams to ensure their needs are reflected in Council activities?

### Response from the Cabinet Member for Health, Adult Social Care, Voluntary Sector and Culture

Thank you for this very important question, I'm sorry we weren't able to get to it at Full Council so am following up in writing.

At a time when inequalities are growing it is especially important that we ensure we direct our scarce resources to those communities that have the greatest need.

During the pandemic we started to work in new ways with community organisations that had the best reach, knowledge and expertise with minoritised communities. By adopting new, more collaborative, ways of working we were able to respond effectively in an environment where much was unpredictable and needs were changing quickly. Building trust and full collaboration was key.

We took this approach when investing in our grants programme, but also in how we fundraised together and made better use of assets and resources, such as food surplus.

This experience has informed our approach to grant making as we came out of the pandemic and had to work collaboratively to respond to greater levels of poverty and inequality.

An example of this is the introduction in 2022 of Community Infrastructure Grants which invest in helping organisations build community support and social networks. We have changed how we assess applications from focussing on measuring project delivery and impact to assessing the values, culture, attitudes and behaviours of organisations. Just over half a million is invested annually in this programme and over 50% of the organisations funded are led by minoritised communities.

We continue to provide small project-based grants as these are also an important means of providing funding to the smaller groups serving the diversity of communities in Hackney.

As well as designing new types of investment that really value the work of diverse and minoritised communities, we have made changes to our application and assessment processes to make them more accessible:

#### **Applications**

We have simplified our application forms to make it easier for groups to apply, to help us gather information about organisational leadership so we

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understand the extent to which we are investing in organisations led by minoritised communities, and to ask how organisations are involving beneficiaries. We collect equalities data and take this into consideration when making funding decisions.

### **Assessment**

We have started monitoring key equalities data for our assessors. In 2023/24 the majority of assessors were from Black or Black British backgrounds. We have included information about key inequalities and structural and institutional racism, and intersectionality in our assessor briefings.

### **Feedback**

We ensure that organisations are able to give feedback after the application and assessment process.

In addition to the above we have been open in acknowledging that some of the language and terminology that was in use (e.g. BAME) is no longer reflective of what is used by groups. We have been open in acknowledging that some application processes may advantage/disadvantage certain groups and we continue to ensure that applications are not assessed on the quality of their English language. We have also asked groups for suggestions on future application processes and have collected this information through our application feedback form but also through specific focus groups with key communities such as black-led and Orthodox Jewish-led organisations.

In 2023/24 the majority of Children and Young People's grants went to organisations that identified as being led by (defined as 51% of their board and senior leadership) people from Black and Global majority communities. The vast majority of the project based grants are not targeting beneficiaries of a particular religious background. However, around 25% of grants awarded in 2023/24 are targeted at beneficiaries from Charedi and/or Jewish communities.

We are currently planning a full review of the Council's investment in the VCS across all services. Our new Equalities Plan and the Council's Anti-Racism Action Plan will sit at the heart of this work guiding our exploration of where, why and how we invest so that we can work across the Council and with our partners in the VCS to design out inequalities.

I hope this clarifies our work currently and happy to discuss this further.

### 7.12 From Cllr Premru to the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Transport

Following the disruption and damage done to canal dwellers, homes, businesses and arts institutions following the heavy rain and flooding in Hackney Wick, can you confirm what support the Council provided for residents and what further measures we need to put in place to deal with future extreme weather conditions?

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### Response from the Cabinet Member for Climate Change, Environment and Transport

Thank you for this important question and I apologise that we didn't have time to address this at Full Council.

I understand there is concern about the recent canal breach at Hackney Wick on the 5th of January 2024. The subsequent breaching occurred at Old Ford Lock in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, flooding parts of Fish Island (Dace Road).

Fortunately, the London Borough of Hackney has not been directly affected by the flooding, as the incident occurred approximately 600 metres away from our jurisdiction. However, we have been closely monitoring the situation in Tower Hamlets.

If any Councillors have obtained information from individuals affected by the incident within Hackney's boundaries, we kindly request that they share this information with Hackney's Lead Local Flood Authorities (LLFA). Currently, we have not received any reports from the Emergency Response team indicating that our constituents were affected.

This incident serves as a significant reminder for Hackney's Lead Local Flood Authorities (LLFAs) regarding the vulnerability of Hackney Wick to various sources of flooding. It is imperative for us to remain vigilant and take proactive measures to prevent similar incidents impacting our constituents in the future.

Currently, we have several Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) proposals in progress, primarily addressing excess surface water flooding in Hackney Wick. However, we acknowledge that tackling the potential impact of a canal breach from the River Lea may necessitate a different approach. The sheer quantity of Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS) required to attenuate such fluvial flooding is presently considered unrealistic.

Collaboration with Tower Hamlets, the Environment Agency, and the Canal & Rivers Trust remains a key priority, and we are committed to sharing insights and lessons learned to fortify our collective response to future flooding in Hackney Wick. The safety and well-being of our residents are paramount, and we will be actively reviewing measures to implement that will reduce future risk to our constituents.