

<b>Committee(s)</b>	<b>Dated:</b>
Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee	23 November 2020
<b>Subject:</b> Black History Month and Google Arts & Culture	<b>Public</b>
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	3, 7 and 10
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
If so, how much?	£0
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?	N/A
<b>Report of:</b> Director of Major Projects	<b>For Information</b>
<b>Report author:</b> Nick Bodger, Cultural and Visitor Development Director	

### Summary

Over recent months, your Cultural and Visitor Development Team (CVDT) has been working with various departments, teams and external partners to realise a series of projects that positively promote the role of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities in City life, unearthing hidden histories and exploring contemporary influences. Some of these projects have been developed for launch within Black History Month (October), others for roll out in the future, ensuring representation is integrated, embedded and more evenly spread within the activities that the CVDT delivers year-on-year.

This report describes the initiatives that make up this work including City involvement in the multi-partner Google Arts & Culture *Black British History* project which – amongst other themes – seeks to tell the story of the City's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade alongside contributions from other London and UK organisations. In addition, the launch of the research report *Black and Asian Women in the City of London: 1600-1860* by Chihyin Hsiao which forms part of the CVDT's *Recognition of Women* project, is also featured.

So too are a series of *Creative Challenges* launched as part of *Our City Together* which celebrate inspirational black creatives and activists, and contributions to Culture Mile Learning's *Our Stories: Reflecting on Black British History in Four Objects* – a programme of activity and digital content to support secondary school teachers incorporate Black British history, arts and culture into the curriculum. Other initiatives detailed include virtual guided tours and read, watch and listen lists, with future plans covering a podcast mini-series with Open House which will look at the links between City buildings and the transatlantic slave trade and a series of events under the Outdoor Arts Programme including a Mela in Aldgate Square.

## Recommendation(s)

Members are asked to:

- Note the report

## Main Report

### Background

1. The tragic death of George Floyd in May of this year brought about a step change in the global *Black Lives Matter* movement. International brands, businesses and institutions and some UK local authorities now acknowledge the issue of racism with many publishing a commitment to tackling it, while fifteen of Amazon's top twenty bestselling books in 2020 explore race, racism and white privilege.
2. At a local level, the City Corporation formed its Tackling Racism Taskforce to consider how racism (in all its forms) is currently tackled by the organisation and to assess whether any further action could be undertaken by departments to promote economic, educational, and social inclusion. In addition, on 1 September 2020, the taskforce launched a public consultation to examine the historic items, symbols and addresses located or used within the Square Mile or as part of the City Corporation's wider holdings that relate to racism and slavery. The consultation concludes on 24 November this year and your City Arts Initiative (CAI) will play a role in interpreting findings.
3. Against this backdrop, your Cultural and Visitor Development Team (CVDT) has undertaken a series of projects to explore the City's links with the transatlantic slave trade and to celebrate the lives of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities and individuals with a link to the City.

### Current Position

4. A major strand of this work has been the City Corporation's contribution to Google Arts & Culture's [Black British History](#) pages which tell the story of the City's involvement in the transatlantic slave trade alongside contributions from other London and UK organisations. Access is via link provided or using the short URL [g.co/blackhistoryuk](https://g.co/blackhistoryuk).
5. Launched on Friday 30 October, City content invites viewers to explore stories of [notable and lesser known places](#) in the Square Mile (see link), including the trial of the Zong Massacre held at Guildhall in 1783 and the first meeting of the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade at 2 George Yard in 1787.
6. In addition, your CVDT has facilitated an [audio and street-view tour](#) by Blue Badge Guide Dominic Burris-North which provides an in-depth examination of the creation, abolition and legacy in modern society of the transatlantic slave trade in the City. Developed from a popular virtual event open to City Corporation staff and Members in August, Dominic is set to return to the City – by popular demand – on Tuesday 10 November to deliver the same to a wider and public audience of City stakeholders.

7. To enable the work described, your CVDT – with Google and the City’s BAME network – has sought to identify black historians, writers and commentators to tell the City’s story with an authentic voice, as well as sourced high resolution photography of original artefacts, paintings, drawings and illustrations from the City’s heritage partners (including Guildhall Library, London Metropolitan Archives, Museum of London, the Bank of England and Historic England) to illustrate content.
8. That the City Corporation has engaged with such a major platform in such a significant way has enabled it to support the delivery of an unbiased educational resource to tell the City story to a global audience and to provoke discussion and debate. In turn, this has provided a valuable PR opportunity to communicate our commitment to tackling racism and will help inform the public consultation run out of taskforce (see item 2) by way of the research and identification of sites and subjects that may be commemorated and/or celebrated. The project was presented to the Tackling Racism Taskforce on 2 October 2020.
9. City Corporation content for the site will continue to be developed and uploaded over the coming months, expanding further on the work already published.
10. Further exploring the City’s Black history, a new research paper was finalised in October 2020. Part of our *Recognition of Women* programme, [Black and Asian Women in the City of London: 1600-1860](#) by Chihyin Hsiao (access via link provided) was commissioned following the publication of initial research into the representation of women in the City’s public realm and collections which identified a paucity of subjects from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds. The report highlights the scarcity of records (making this area of research difficult to navigate) and provides a narrative on central trades and the systemic racism that shaped the experience of minorities during these times. It is available on the [Celebrating City Women](#) website.
11. Carrying a foreword by the Tackling Racism Taskforce’s Co-Chair Caroline Addy, the report received significant media attention. Not least in the *Independent*, under the title [Unearthed historical records lay bare prejudices faced by the City of London’s black and ethnic women residents](#) (available via link) which noted that “all too often, women were reduced to a mere footnote in history, and Black and Asian women are even less likely to feature in conventional histories”.
12. The report also features in the [Londonist](#) (available via link) which explains that it “is littered with brutality, cruelty and tragic outcomes. Many BAME women living in London at the time were servants, 'owned' by masters, and given Anglicised first names, often with surnames like 'Moor' or 'Blackmore'”
13. Both the Google Arts and Culture project and *Recognition of Women* research were showcased in regular communications from the CVDT in October (Black History Month) most notably through its *Our City Together* newsletter as part of a wider programme of work which included a *Read, Watch, Listen* recommendation list celebrating the work of Black creatives and highlighting work written by, directed by, composed by and starring the best of Black creative talent. The list was created by the CVDT with City partners including the London Symphony Orchestra, Barbican and Keats House. It is available [here](#).

14. Accompanying this, the CVDT also developed a number of *Creative Challenges* for the month. Available [here](#), they are:
- i. **Week 1:** *Portraits* in which illustrator and workshop facilitator Jess Nash invites audiences to create a portrait, celebrating inspirational black creatives and activists.
  - ii. **Week 2:** *Creativity, Ingenuity and Community* in which Jess Nash (see above) explores how these themes are key elements of Black culture and suggests ways in which participants may demonstrate them through making.
  - iii. **Week 3:** *The Life of Pablo Fanque* in which historian Rob Power (who works regularly with the Black Curriculum) delivers an historical profile of black circus owner Pablo Fanque who was born in Norwich; the activity invites visitors to create a poster advertising that Pablo's circus is coming to town.
  - iv. **Week 4:** *Music for Everyone* in which composer Blasio Kavuma looks at the origins of African Call & Response and how it has shaped our musical landscape; the activity invites audiences to use household objects to create their own Call & Response.
15. In addition, the CVDT promoted *Our Stories: Reflecting on Black British History in Four Objects* in support of Culture Mile Learning – a programme of activity and digital content to support secondary school teachers incorporate Black British history, arts, and culture into the curriculum, beginning in October 2020. All videos are accompanied by additional downloadable resources that can be used in or outside of the classroom and include:
- i. **Guildhall Art Gallery** with a newly commissioned film of Liz Johnson Artur discussing her artwork *Top Shelf*.
  - ii. **London Metropolitan Archives** (LMA) with a short film of LMA archivist Rebecca Adams discussing the Mollie Hunte Collection.
16. Looking to the future (and subject to Covid restrictions being lifted and social distancing mitigations being realisable), your Outdoor Arts Programme will deliver events and activities in 2021 around the agreed theme of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of John Keats. Focussing on the recurring motif of beauty, which appears throughout Keats' work, *A Thing of Beauty* (from "A thing of beauty is a joy for ever", the opening line to *Endymion*) has been re-thought to consider two topics that are uppermost in contemporary thinking right now – racism and climate action. As such, the programme will celebrate the beauty of diversity within our communities and the beauty of our planet (examining the mitigations we must take to protect it).
17. On the diversity theme, the *Mela* that was set to take place in Aldgate Square in 2020 is now scheduled for April 2021, with other events and activities around the diversity theme in the planning stages.
18. A grant from your *Inspiring London Through Culture* theme of the City Corporation's Central Grants programme has also enabled a new on-street exhibition by the Games London (which your CVDT will support). *Ensemble* is a portrait and video exhibition showcasing eight talented people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds working in video games, providing visible role

models for young people who are interested in working in the industry, particularly those who do not have clear pathways into this line of work.

19. Finally, work is also underway with Open House to deliver a podcast mini-series looking at the links between City buildings and the transatlantic slave trade.

### **Corporate & Strategic Implications**

20. **Strategic implications** include alignment with the [Corporate Plan](#) at outcomes 3, 7, and 10 in that this work helps people have equal opportunities to enrich their lives and reach their full potential; that it seeks to preserve and promote the City as a world-leading global centre for culture; and that it promotes City heritage and cultural experiences.
21. **Financial implications** there are no financial implications noting all work is undertaken using local risk budget funding and/or is delivered by partners.

### **Conclusion**

22. Sir Godfrey Henry Oliver Palmer OBE, Professor Emeritus in the School of Life Sciences at Heriot-Watt University in Edinburgh, and a human rights activist said:

“The future is about understanding that we can’t change the past, but we can better understand it and change the consequences of it.”

23. The work described in this paper seeks to do that; to recognise our history publicly and honestly, to celebrate our present, and to seek ways in which we may better engage with the widest spectrum of the communities we serve, soliciting participation and championing diversity.

### **Nick Bodger**

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