

Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee

Monday, 16 September 2024

Minutes of the meeting of the Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee held at Dr Johnson's House, Gough Square, EC4A 3DE on Monday, 16 September 2024 at 11.00 am

Present

Members:

Munsur Ali (Chairman)	Deputy Alpa Raja
John Griffiths (Deputy Chairman)	Anett Rideg
Suzanne Ornsby KC	David Sales
John Foley	Ian Seaton
Jaspreet Hodgson	Deputy Dawn Wright
Wendy Hyde	Aaron Anthony Jose Hasan D'Souza
Wendy Mead OBE	Brendan Barns
Deborah Oliver	

In Attendance

Elizabeth Scott	- Head of Guildhall Art Gallery
Steven Chandler	- City Surveyor's Department
Damian Nussbaum	- Director of Innovation & Growth
Rob Shakespeare	- Keats House, Open Spaces Department
Jayne Moore	- Town Clerk's Department
Rachel Levy	- Community and Children's Services

Omkar Chana	- Innovation and Growth
Andrew Buckingham	- Communications & External Affairs
Jen Beckermann	- Senior Responsible Officer (Destination City)
Gregory Moore	- Deputy Town Clerk
Lady Lucy French OBE	- Fleet Street Quarter Bid (item 7)
George Kekatos	- Fleet Street Quarter Bid (item 7)
Celine Luppo McDaid	- Director, Dr Johnson's House

1. **Apologies**

Apologies were received from these Members: Peter Dunphy, Andrew Mayer, Alethea Silk, Alderwoman Jeanette Newman, Wendy Mead, David Sales, James St John Davis.

The following Members were unable to attend in person but observed the meeting online: Jason Groves, Judith Pleasance, Irem Yerdelem, Caroline Haines, Mark Wheatley.

2. **Members' Declarations under the Code of Conduct in respect of items on the agenda**

There were no declarations.

3. **Minutes**

RESOLVED, That the public minutes of the meeting of 15 July 2024 be approved as an accurate record of the proceedings.

Members noted that a report is being prepared that sets out the resources allocated to the various cultural assets that is expected to be submitted in December 2024.

4. **Culture strategy - development and update**

Members heard an update on the culture strategy that set out the following strategies:

- Baseline mapping of:

- Cultural assets (within CoLC and outside)
- Existing cultural infrastructure organisations
- Existing events calendars;
- Data mapping of existing audience and visitor research and review of existing CoLC strategies (City Plan, City Belonging);
- Review of existing/ neighbouring strategies (BIDs, GLA, other London boroughs);
- Identify stakeholders for series of stakeholder consultation workshops (to include committees, residents, workers, CoLC staff, cultural organisations, BIDs and assets);
- Begin stakeholder consultation process; and
- Create and recruit Culture Director post.

1. Keep going with existing operational commitments

Ensure the Culture team has correct interim structure to continue working on existing projects; engage with Destination City SRO on organisational design proposals; and

2. Develop culture strategy in consultation

Identify the resourcing implications – eg an external agency as facilitator of the proposed consultations and to complete data mapping (probably a combination of in-house v outsourced).

Members commented on the merits of being clear about what is understood by the term ‘culture’ (for the purposes of the Committee) upstream of the production of a cultural strategy, noting also that a definition has been considered previously. The meeting noted that the cultural strategy is expected to be defined imminently now that a Senior Responsible Officer is in place (as of approximately a month ago), who is expected to bring together previous definitions of the term used and referenced by the City of London Corporation ahead of formulating and presenting to the Committee a definition and a strategy.

A Member asked when a draft cultural strategy might be ready. The meeting heard that a cultural strategy is expected to be produced by March 2025, taking into account the above steps that is to be a short, high-level piece. A Member pointed out that referencing the City’s previous cultural strategy would be a worthy exercise, as well as some of the information circulated as part of the workstreams to feed into the strategy’s development. The meeting noted that the SRO Culture’s focus areas

include: the establishment of an Awayday for the Committee before the end of 2024 to accelerate the process (to include strategy and definitions); mapping exercises; and the plethora of cultural plans already in existence on the Square Mile.

In response to a question on details of the proposed Culture Director post, the meeting heard that the post is expected to be a full-time role, and that the Culture SRO 0.2 post acts as an enabler of the cultural strategy to draw together the resources to achieve a coherent cultural strategy to include the appointment of a full-time Cultural Director.

On the question of what is meant by a 'culture team', the meeting heard that the resources and position would be brought to future Committee meetings.

5. **Guildhall Library transformation**

The update on the Guildhall Library transformation was deferred.

6. **Update on Dr Johnson's House**

The meeting received an update on Dr Johnson's House by its Director that included a discussion of Dr Johnson's legacy and the importance of his dictionary to subsequent such works.

The meeting noted the following points:

- Dr Johnson's House is reviewing and analysing its purpose, audience and cultural plan to include greater prominence to its contribution to the Black British story and its connection to the City of London;
- One of the House's intentions is to further expand the learning programme; and
- Focus areas include improved accessibility to the House, and a more extensive events hosting strategy.

7. **Fleet Street Quarter BID**

The meeting viewed a presentation on the Fleet Street Quarter Bid that included the following points that was presented by Futurecity:

- It is important to define the audience ahead of preparing a cultural strategy;
- Fleet Street is still the centre of journalism;
- A strategy is a framework that provides a direction and tools as a guide;
- art is a catalyst to telling the right story; and
- detailed cultural mapping facilitates the programming process.

A Member sought clarification on the source of the anticipated growth of 33K people occupying office space in the area, noting the recently elected Government's apparent position on working from home. The meeting heard that the research was undertaken prior to the July 2024 UK election (and that the research will be updated in early 2025) but that there is still an expectation that people will return to the office – noting that at present London averages 2.7 days a week in the office though some major City employers recently mandated a full or nearly full return to the office.

A Member sought further clarification on how developers were involved in the cultural strategy process. The meeting heard that developers varied in their interest in working within a cultural eco-system though most developers did want to engage in cultural strategies (particularly where a strategy was clearly articulated), and that there is an exploration of creating mechanisms for the creation of cultural groups to facilitate exchanges of ideas.

A Member asked about expectations for young people to engage with different types of cultural offerings. The meeting heard that while previous generations had learned to interact with the cultural realm in a passive way, while future generations were much more responsive to an immersive, interactive experience.

8. **Barbican and Community Libraries update**

The Committee noted the report of the Executive Director, Community & Children's Services, that provided an overview of Barbican and Community Libraries since 2023.

Members noted the wide variety of events, activities and projects offered by the service to support both the learning and development and economic needs of people in the communities who use them, noting also the steady increase in post-pandemic visits and issues as the services continues to support the wider work of the sector through collaboration with other departments, other boroughs and national organisations. Members noted that further resources have been devoted to services for young people.

A Member asked how services were promoted to residents of the Golden Lane estate, and the meeting heard that newsletters are widely distributed among other communication initiatives.

On the Bostock Community Room (section 7) Members sought confirmation that the deadline would not slip any further, and the meeting heard that further delays were not expected.

On the Landsec issue at Shoe Lane (section 15), a Member asked whether any collective pressure could be exerted. The meeting heard that the matter is being discussed, but that the payment is already half of what it could be according to the lease conditions.

9. **CAI updated Terms of Reference**

The meeting considered the report of the Director of Innovation & Growth and of the Head of Profession (Culture).

The meeting noted (sections 13 to 15 of the main report) that CAI are currently responsible for reviewing blue plaque applications but that the process is not currently optimal – and that a proposal will be submitted for a new process to the Head of Profession (Culture). A Member commented on the higher costs and longer timeframes for dealing with blue plaque applications compared to other areas, and Members heard that a review is under way that takes those factors into account and that time-critical applications could be fast-tracked.

A Member commented that any review should take into account criteria around a balance of people being commemorated by blue plaques.

RESOLVED, that the amendments to the updated City Arts Initiative Terms of Reference for 2024- 2025 be approved.

10. **Questions on matters relating to the work of the Committee**

There were no questions.

11. **Any other business the Chair considers urgent**

There was no other business.

12. **Exclusion of the Public**

RESOLVED, that – under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting for the following items on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of the Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act.

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