CULTURE, HERITAGE AND LIBRARIES COMMITTEE

Monday, 20 July 2026

Minutes of the meeting of the Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee held at Committee Room 2 - 2nd Floor West Wing, Guildhall on Monday, 20 July 2026 at 2.00 pm

Present

Members:

Brendan Barns (Chairman)	Adam Hogg
Suzanne Ornsby KC (Deputy Chair)	Tessa Marchington
Jamel Banda	Vasiliki Manta
Matthew Bell	Wendy Mead OBE
Lesley Cole	Sophia Mooney
Elizabeth Corrin	Gaby Robertshaw
Deputy Caroline Haines	Stephanie Steeden
Stephen Hodgson	Deputy Dawn Wright

In Attendance

Officers:

Rob Shakespeare	-	Keats House, Environment
Jayne Moore	-	Town Clerk's Department
Emma Markiewicz	-	London Archives, Head of Profession (Culture)
Rachel Levy	-	Community and Children's Services
Omkar Chana	-	Interim Culture Director
Andrew Buckingham	-	Town Clerk's, Media Officer
Mark Jarvis	-	Chamberlain's Department
Kevin Colville	-	Comptroller and City Solicitors
Laurie Miller-Zutshi	-	Town Clerk's Department
Jen Beckermann	-	Executive Director, Private Secretary to the Chairman of Policy and Resources
Gregory Moore	-	Deputy Town Clerk
Emily Slatter	-	Town Clerk's Department
Joana Antonio	-	City Surveyor’s

1. **APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from Professor Emma Edhem, Melissa Collet, Simon Duckworth, Deputy Helen Fentimen, Jason Groves, Alethea Silk, Sir William Russell, and Mark Wheatley.

These Members observed the meeting online: Karin Dostolova, Munsur Ali, Irem Yerdelen, and James St John Davis.

John Griffiths observed the meeting.

2. **MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT IN RESPECT OF ITEMS ON THE AGENDA**
There were no declarations.

3. **MINUTES**
RESOLVED, That the minutes of the meeting of 18 May 2026 be approved as an accurate record of the proceedings.

4. **FORWARD PLAN**
The Committee noted the forward plan

5. **DESTINATION CITY PROGRAMME: UPDATE**
The Committee received the report of the Deputy Town Clerk setting out the progress of the Destination City Programme in its first full year, noting its more coordinated, data-led and partnership-driven approach to delivering the City Corporation's growth strategy.

The Committee noted these points:

- The Destination City (DC) dashboard has been launched delivering information on a range of metrics and indices that are automatically updated;
- A consolidated calendar of events is available; and
- The DC team is working closely with the London Museum on the Museum's messaging, communications and service preparedness ahead of its 28 November 2026 launch.

Members commented on an apparently confusing variety of web pages covering similar topics (including "cityofldn" and "onecitylondon"), and asked whether that should be streamlined into a single destination. The meeting noted the former is expected to reduced as a branding element, with content being increasingly directed at the "onecitylondon" brand, while any other websites, including DC-related ones, are subservient to the "onecitylondon" brand.

In response to a question on Museum advertising (including in hotels and on transport networks), Members noted the challenges of directing Museum visitors towards the Square Mile rather than towards Islington. The meeting noted that the Museum is communicating with Transport for London (owned by the Museum's co-sponsor) on Museum promotional strategies, and that DC is working on a toolkit for the hotel and catering industry to promote the Museum alongside a range of information events.

6. **UPDATE ON GUILDHALL ART GALLERY**
The Committee heard this update on the Guildhall Art Gallery (GAG):

- The Head of the Gallery and Amphitheatre left the organisation earlier in the year;

- Once the Cultural Strategy and Ambition 25 have been finalised, a new structure is expected to be introduced; and
- An interim solution has been finalised in which two existing members of staff with a cultural/curatorial background will work on gallery management and forthcoming exhibitions.

Members commented that the GAG appears to have been hollowed out across the past decade notwithstanding its significance as a cultural asset and importance in the Square Mile's history and context, and called for a Director-led clear curatorial direction that champions the GAG's role and importance and maintains conservation functions, following the interim management solution period. The Committee expressed strong support for the recruitment of a Head of Gallery, with some Members commenting on an apparent lack of communication around the departure of the former Head of Gallery.

The meeting noted that no Director post has existed for the GAG though a Head of Gallery post was included in the revised staffing structure agreed by the Committee in March 2021 which provided for changes to the way the GAG is staffed (to include additional support during exhibition set-up and take-down operations that is not always cited in discussions around staffing).

A Member asked whether arrangements have been made to cover the duties of the two staff members providing interim management services. The meeting noted that the changes to the Sculpture in the City structure have freed up capacity, and some capacity has been created at the London Archives.

The Committee noted that news releases and publicity is in place ahead of the GAG's forthcoming tapestry exhibition and the inclusion of the GAG's Charter in the upcoming Bayeux exhibition at the British Museum.

7. **BLUE PLAQUE PANEL - ELECTION OF CHL MEMBER**

Two expressions of interest were received for the position of Member of the Blue Plaques Panel, and a ballot was held.

The outcome was as follows:
Matthew Bell: 10 votes
Caroline Haines: 6 votes

Matthew Bell was elected to the Blue Plaques panel.

The Committee heard the following update:

- A new blue plaque will be launched in September 2026 in partnership with Dr Johnson's House and the Fleet St Quarter BID to commemorate Francis Barber; and
- The Blue Plaque scheme launch will take place during the Open House Festival in September 2026.

Members commented on the small number of women currently commemorated by blue plaques, noting that the commemoration of a more diverse range of people will be strongly encouraged.

The Committee discussed communication strategies for promoting the scheme that includes work with the BID and the City Corporation's media team.

8. **THE MONUMENT UPDATE 2025/26**
The Committee received the report of the Executive Director Environment outlining achievements at The Monument to the Great Fire of London from April 2025 to March 2026 that included information on visitor numbers, income achieved and other initiatives that contribute to Corporate outcomes.

Citing this sentence in the report: *"The Monument's ability to meet its strategic outcomes is contingent on resolving its future governance, operations and resource base"* a Member asked for further information on the resolution of those matters. The Committee noted that the timeline for any resolution would need to take into account resource implications and the working deadline for a transfer is end 2026, working in conjunction with the City Bridge Foundation.

9. **ACHIEVEMENTS AT KEATS HOUSE 2025/26**
The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director, Environment updating
Members on achievements at Keats House in 2025/26, including those which contribute to the achievement of Departmental, Corporate and wider cultural sector outcomes and initiatives.

Members noted that the report was presented to Members of the Keats House Consultative Committee at their meeting of 30 April 2026 and that the narrative will be included in the annual return to the Charity Commission, which will be prepared by Chamberlain's for January 2027.

Members also noted the assurance that risk management procedures in place for Keats House are satisfactory and meet the requirements of the Corporate Risk Management Framework and the Charities Act 2011 noting in particular the risks summary and the detailed risk register, which was last updated in April 2026.

RESOLVED, That Members, acting on behalf of the City Corporation as trustee, confirm that the register appended to the report satisfactorily sets out the key risks to the Keats House charity and that appropriate systems are in place to identify and mitigate risks.

10. **REFURBISHMENT OF BARBICAN LIBRARY**
The Committee considered the report of the Executive Director of Community and Children's Services setting out the principles that will guide service provision at Barbican Library during planned refurbishment works.

Members noted that the project is funded through Community Infrastructure Levy funding and the City Surveyor department's Cyclical Works Programme, with no additional revenue or capital spending requested, noting also that Sykes & Son Ltd have been appointed as contractor with works are expected to begin in October 2026 and be completed by the end of February 2027, with a final deadline of March 2027 to meet funding and Barbican Renewal programme requirements.

Members noted the principles for any temporary closure or limited service provision alongside the request to delegate authority to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chair, to approve detailed decisions on service provision and mitigations.

It was noted that full closure would only be used where necessary for health and safety or budget reasons, and would be kept to the shortest possible period and that a limited lending service, alternative provision at other City libraries, targeted mitigations for some users with protected characteristics, and engagement with library users and stakeholders will help the City of London Corporation continue to meet its statutory library duties during the refurbishment.

A Member asked why the work is being done at this time rather than during the full closure of the Barbican Centre. The meeting heard that the works were proposed and the funding agreed in 2023, with the money needing to be spent by April 2027. The Committee also noted that refurbishment at this stage provided assurances to library users that there is no intention to close the library.

RESOLVED, That the Committee delegate authority to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chair, to approve future decisions on the detail of the library provision during the works, including any requirement for full closure of the library for some portion of the works, in line with the agreed principles.

11. **REVENUE OUTTURN - 2025/26**

The Committee received the report of The Chamberlain, Deputy Town Clerk, Executive Director of Community and Children's Services, City Surveyors and Executive Director of Environment setting out the revenue outturn for the services overseen by the Committee in 2025-26 with the final budget for the year together with the carry forward requests still to be approved.

The Committee noted that overall total net expenditure during the year was £24.942m whereas the budget was £24.434m, representing an overspend of £0.508m on all risks, mainly due to cyclical works. The local risk overspend was £0.068m.

Members noted this additional more detailed information:

Site	Code	Budget £	Outturn £	Variance £
Guildhall Art Gallery	BV400	2,955,000	2,985,745	30,745

Site	Code	Budget £	Outturn £	Variance £
City Information Centre	DC200	487,000	463,909	(23,091)
Roman Bath House	AJ800	65,000	63,379	(1,621)

A Member commented that it would be useful to view 5-year trends, and the Committee noted that a trend analysis will be provided at the September 2026 meeting (see action point).

A Member commented on lack of clarity in the use of the term 'overspend' when it is used to designate a situation that involves a lack of income rather than spending more than the funding that is available, noting in particular that The Monument is in profit contrary to the narrative.

12. **DCSS BUSINESS PLAN**

The Committee received the high-level Business Plan for the Department of Community and Children's Services for 2026/2031, noting the factors taken into consideration in compiling the Department of Community and Children's Services Business Plan.

13. **CULTURAL STRATEGY - FINAL DRAFT**

RESOLVED, That the Committee

- Approve the Cultural Strategy 2026 and its publication, as set out in Appendix 1 (non-public),
    - In doing so, Delegate Authority to the Town Clerk, in consultation with the Chair and Deputy Chair of the Culture, Heritage & Libraries Committee and the Policy & Resources Committee, for any amendments to the Cultural Strategy 2026 ahead of reporting to the Court of Common Council;
- Approve the Delivery Toolkit (Appendix 2 non-public) and Audience Playbook (Appendix 3 non-public) and their publication, as supporting information for delivering the Cultural Strategy 2026,
    - In doing so, note that any minor operational updates to the Delivery Toolkit and Audience Playbook will be made by the Head of Profession for Culture and any major changes will be made in consultation with the Chair and Deputy of the Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee; and
- Approve the updates to the Inspiring London through Culture (ILTC) Fund criteria, as set out in paragraph 17 of the report.

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14. **QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE COMMITTEE**
There were no questions.

15. **ANY OTHER BUSINESS THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT**
The Chair congratulated the team on the success of the recent Beerfest at Guildhall.

16. **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.

The meeting ended at 3.40pm

Chair

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