

Economic Regeneration, Housing and the Arts Policy and Accountability Committee Minutes

Wednesday 5 July 2017

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Daryl Brown, Adam Connell, Alan De'Ath (Chair), Lucy Ivimy and Harry Phibbs

Other Councillors: Andrew Jones, Sue Fennimore and Lisa Homan

Officers: James Fitzgerald - Head of Culture, Thomas Dodd - Arts Development Officer, Brendan Morrow - Reviews & Complex Cases Manager, Fawad Bhatti – Policy and Strategy Officer

8. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Connell. Councillor Ivimy had sent her apologies for lateness.

9. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

10. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 June were agreed to be accurate.

11. ARTS STRATEGY UPDATE AND 2017-18 ACTION PLAN

James Fitzgerald explained that the Council's Arts Strategy had been launched in Mid 2016 and an Arts Development Officer had been appointed 6 months ago. The report detailed what progress had been made and what was planned for the next year.

Thomas Dodd explained that the highlights so far were the Hammersmith Poem by Robert Montgomery, which had been displayed under the Town Hall Extension and drawn significant attention; and the successful shop front studio in Kings Mall. The shop front studio was the first pilot scheme using an empty shop as a studio which had worked; it was intended to repeat the project.

Councillor Jones said that he was very pleased with how the Arts Officer had been taking forward the Arts Strategy and with the projects which were being developed. He noted that the Council had also organised the Shepherds Bush Comedy Festival, which had supported arts venues. Councillor Jones said that the Council was looking at a range of new ideas and was keen to ensure that the borough had sufficient gallery space.

A resident asked what the Council thought Arts Fest should be. Councillor Jones said that he felt Arts Fest should continue to be run by the community but that the Council should offer more practical support where this was possible. Councillor Fennimore noted that the Arts Fest received Council funding and said that it was hoped that business in the borough could be encouraged to give more. Councillor Jones added that the Arts Strategy was focussed on how the Council could work with partners to deliver exciting arts projects and facilities; he noted that the Council continued to have its budget cut by central government and that the Council did not have enough money to directly fund all of the projects it might want to.

Councillor Phibbs asked who had owned the unit in Kings Mall which the shopfront studio had used. Thomas Dodd said that the unit was owned by Schroeders, who had allowed Arts students from across London to use the unit for 6 months. Councillor Phibbs noted that buildings in private ownership might become unavailable very quickly; he asked whether there were any Council buildings which could be used, suggesting that exhibitions could be held at schools over the weekend. A resident said that performance and rehearsal space was also needed. James Fitzgerald said that officers were working with Property Services to look at options, especially for artists residencies. Councillor Brown noted that any arrangements in schools would need to have appropriate safeguards for children.

Councillor Ivimy arrived at this point in the meeting.

Councillor Phibbs noted that it was difficult to display the Cecil French collection because of the high value of some of the pieces of art but said that it was important that the collection be shown. He was pleased that some of the works had been loaned to galleries and asked whether fees had been charged. Thomas Dodd explained that, as was customary when loaning art, no fees had been charged. Mr Dodd added that when works were loaned out their value increased.

Councillor Phibbs said that the Council spent money on paying debt interest and suggested that the collection should be sold to reduce the Council's overall debt. This would, he said, leave more revenue to be spent on other

things including arts projects. He felt that the Council could not justify owning the collection whilst not displaying it.

Councillor Jones said that the administration did not want to sell off its assets. The Council's capital debt was held at low interest rates and so it was not necessary to sell the collection to reduce interest payments. He pointed out that the administration had renegotiated a number of agreements with developers to secure £56 million of additional capital. Councillor Jones explained that the majority of the value of the collection was made up of a few high value pieces, and that these were more regularly displayed than the rest of the collection. Discussions with developers were ongoing to try to fund a permanent display of the collection in the borough, whilst it was hoped that an exhibition of most of the collection could be put on somewhere in the medium term. He said that the collection needed to be catalogued and curated and that the Council was looking at how this could best be done.

A resident said that the Cecil French collection formed part of the borough's heritage and should not be sold.

Councillor Phibbs asked whether a listings section for arts and cultural events could be added to the Council's webpage. Whilst residents noted that a number of newsletters did exist Thomas Dodd agreed to look at the suggestion and see if it could be done.

A resident noted that a cultural trust had been discussed with a recent Arts network meeting and asked what more had happened on the scheme. James Fitzgerald said that the Arts Network had agreed the terms of reference for the trust and that more information would be presented to the network soon.

Councillor Phibbs asked whether the Council could set up a scheme to match artists with businesses, such as cafes, which would be prepared to display their work. James Fitzgerald said that this idea would be looked into.

Councillor Phibbs asked whether Pub Theatres could be offered business rate relief to encourage more performance space to be provided. Councillor Jones said that it was difficult to provide business rate relief; however, pubs had been encouraged to take part in the Shepherds Bush Comedy Festival which the Council had organised and planning policy was being looked at to encourage the provision of more performance space. A resident said that some pub theatres charged very high rates for the hire of their spaces which meant that groups often lost money by performing there; Councillor Phibbs thought that increased competition between venues would ensure that rates were reasonable. Councillor Jones agreed to look into the business rates implications for a business if it were to convert spare space into a theatre.

Councillor Phibbs noted that the Council's archives housed at the Lila Huset contained many paintings of local scenes which could be displayed across the Council's property portfolio. He had previously suggested this and asked whether any action had been taken. James Fitzgerald said that he would look into this, although it was noted that much of the archive's contents needed to be catalogued before it could be displayed.

Councillor Phibbs suggested that school arts competitions could be sponsored by businesses. James Fitzgerald said that officers could look at this, however, there were a great many ideas for arts projects requiring business support and so these had to be prioritised; those which were easy to arrange and would have the biggest impact would be the first schemes which officers would try to facilitate.

Councillor Phibbs asked that he be updated on progress made on schemes he had raised at the meeting by email, rather than waiting for the PAC to discuss the Arts again.

The Chair asked whether the Council's Statement of Licensing Policy supported the Arts. Councillor Jones said that the policy provided a good balance between protecting residents and encouraging a vibrant cultural and night time economy. The Council's planning policies had been amended to encourage culture and the arts.

12. HOUSING FOR REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

Brendan Morrow explained that the report set out the support the Council provided for Refugees, Asylum Seekers and those with no recourse to public funds.

Those who had been granted refugee status were entitled to work, and claim benefits and access social housing in the same way as British citizens.

Those who were claiming Asylum were provided with accommodation and subsistence payments by the National Asylum Support Service; this support continued until their application had been determined and the Council were not usually involved in this support.

The Home Office sometimes granted leave for people to remain but with no recourse to public funds. This meant that they could not claim benefits or receive help with housing in the normal way. Children and vulnerable adults did however have rights to some assistance through Social Services legislation such as the Care Act 2014 and the Children Act 1989; this was because of the Council's safeguarding duties. Where Adults or Children's Services accepted that the Council had a duty to provide assistance they would ask the Housing Solutions service to provide suitable accommodation and provide subsistence payments. Housing Solutions would place those entitled to this type of assistance in private rented accommodation which would be funded from through budgets delegated by Adults and Children's Services.

Mr Morrow explained that the team which provided the No Recourse to Public Funds Service was currently undergoing a review, with a view to closer working with Adults and Children's Services. The Council had also got access to a system called Connect which allowed officers to see immigration information and liaise with a dedicated home office team.

Councillor Fennimore said that this was a very complex area involving lots of technical legislation which many people struggled to understand. She said that she felt it was important that where the Council had a duty to support people it did this well and praised the work of officers who ensured that Hammersmith and Fulham did this. Councillor Homan added that Councillor Fennimore had taken a personal interest in this area and her work had led to improvements in the service. She noted the good work of Housing Options staff in sourcing accommodation and helping residents.

The Chair asked what the impact of the removal of the provision enabling asylum seeking families with children to remain supported until they left the UK would be. Brendan Morrow explained that the change would mean that more families who had not left the UK but whose applications for asylum had been rejected would need to be supported by the Council owing to its safeguarding duty to the family's children.

Councillor Phibbs said that the system seemed very confusing and would benefit from being clearer and easier for the public to understand. He said that he felt it was wrong that Asylum Seekers were not allowed to work whilst their claims were being processed.

Councillor Phibbs asked whether there was any incentive to the Council to reduce the costs of providing services to those with no recourse to public funds. Brendan Morrow said that the Council had a statutory duty to support those with No Recourse to Public Funds who qualify for the provision of accommodation & subsistence and that this service had to be met from existing budgets. Funding for accommodation and subsistence costs was set by Adults and Children's Services. These budgets were managed by Housing solutions which sought best value for money in sourcing competitively priced accommodation.

Councillor Phibbs asked why accommodation which was not self-contained could not be offered to refugees being resettled by the council via the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Relocation Scheme. Councillor Fennimore explained that the Home Office required self-contained properties to be offered, noting that this policy was controlled by the Conservative UK Government. Fawad Bhatti explained that the Home Office's explanation for this policy was that refugees needed to have sustainable long term accommodation leading to independence and self-sufficiency, which lodging did not provide. He also said that there was a higher risk of the 'live in' landlord and refugee tenant relationship breaking down compared to self-contained accommodation. Fawad Bhatti added that the Home Office had also specifically asked if we can accommodate larger family units with children. He noted that to his knowledge all of the 7,000 Syrian refugees who had been helped so far had been offered self-contained accommodation. Councillor Phibbs asked that the Council write to the Home Office to request a change in their guidance to allow people the choice of shared accommodation which he felt would allow more people to be helped and might allow some people to integrate more easily. Councillor Homan said that she did not share Councillor Phibbs confidence that there would be residents willing to share their homes with refugee families in the long term.

Councillor Phibbs asked how many Syrian refugees the Council had housed, noting that Camden had managed to accommodate many more families. Councillor Fennimore explained that we would have around 19 / 20 people in the near future via the Syrian and the Vulnerable Children's schemes with more in the pipeline. She said that earlier on Camden had benefitted from very philanthropic landlords enabling them to take a number of families quickly. She noted that Refugees Welcome had been working hard to encourage Hammersmith and Fulham's landlords to do the same as well as encouraging local residents to support refugees.

13. GRENFELL FIRE RESPONSE

A resident asked that an update be given on what the Council had done to help with the Grenfell Fire. Councillor Fennimore explained that on the morning of the fire Kim Dero, the Chief Executive, had called Nicholas Holgate, the Chief Executive of Kensington and Chelsea to offer support. Hammersmith and Fulham had provided staff in a number of roles with staff helping in rest centres, with housing needs assessments and many other things. Regular meetings were held to identify what further support could be offered. 41 victims of the fire were staying in hotels in Hammersmith and Fulham and these people were visited every day to provide support and advice. Councillor Homan noted that the community response to the fire had also been fantastic giving the examples of food vouchers being offered by restaurants and collections for the victims being run by TRAs.

14. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING AND WORK PROGRAMME

It was agreed that the next meeting would be about Fire Safety and that all other items would be postponed to another meeting.

Councillor Phibbs noted that an issue had been referred to the PAC by the Audit Committee but had not been scheduled. The Clerk explained that the item had continued to be considered by the Audit Committee, and that most of the issues they had initially raised had been resolved, and so an item had not been brought; he apologised for not having highlighted the referral to the PAC.

A resident asked that a meeting of the PAC be held in the South of the borough. The Chair agreed to look at whether this would be possible.

Meeting started: 7.00 pm
Meeting ended: 8.35 pm

Chair

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