

Policy and Oversight Board Minutes

Monday 18 September 2023

PRESENT

Committee members: Councillors Lisa Homan (Chair), Jacolyn Daly, Natalia Perez, Nikos Souslous, Nicole Trehy, Rory Vaughan, and Victoria Brocklebank-Fowler

Other Councillors

Councillor Florian Chevoppe-Verdier (Lead Member for European Co-operation and Digital Innovation)

Officers

Matthew Sales (Assistant Director, Programmes, Assurance and Analytics)

Julius Olu (Assistant Director – Commissioning and Partnerships)

Nicola Ellis (Strategic Director Chief Operating Officer)

Tina Akpogheneta (Chief Digital Officer)

Darren Persaud (Assistant Director Resident Experience Transformation)

David Abbott (Head of Governance)

Guests and other attendees

Jazz Browne (Chief Executive of Nubian Life)

Precisa Getsevich and Adam Semar (Youth Council)

Shad Haibatan (SOBUS)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Helen Rowbottom, Rebecca Harvey (Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion and Community Safety), and Rowan Ree (Cabinet Member for Finance and Reform).

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Councillor Nikos Souslous noted a non-pecuniary interest in item 4 as a Trustee of both the Creighton Centre and Hammersmith United Charities. He also noted a non-pecuniary interest in item 5 as the founder and Director of ReadyTechGo.

Councillor Natalia Perez noted a non-pecuniary interest in item 4 as a Trustee of Hammersmith United Charities.

Councillor Jacolyn Daly noted a non-pecuniary interest in item 4 as a Trustee of the Urban Partnership Group.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chair noted the action sheet attached to the minutes and highlighted that all but one of the actions from the previous meeting had been completed. The final action was in progress – the Board had been sent the Electoral Commission’s interim Voter ID report and the final report would be circulated once it was available.

RESOLVED

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2023 were agreed as an accurate record.

4. INTERGENERATIONAL PRACTICE IN HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM

Julius Olu (Assistant Director – Commissioning and Partnerships) introduced the report that set out the current status of intergenerational practices in the borough and opportunities for developing and embedding intergenerational activities to address loneliness and social isolation. He was joined by Jazz Browne (Chief Executive of Nubian Life), Precisa Getsevich (Youth Council), and Adam Semar (Youth Council).

Julius Olu highlighted some of the key examples of existing intergenerational practice in Hammersmith & Fulham and opportunities for the development of activities to combat social isolation and loneliness. He praised the borough’s diverse third sector, supported by the Council’s Third Sector Investment Fund, that met a wide range of resident needs. He noted the inter-generational work that was already happening, but said there were opportunities to expand it further.

Jazz Browne addressed the Board and explained that Nubian Life was a care provider for older Afro-Caribbean and Asian people with complex health and social care needs. Nubian Life believed it was important for older people to remain connected to their community and intergenerational work was an important part of achieving that. Intergenerational activities could provide a creative approach to community development and helped challenge systematic ageism. She then discussed two successful projects – a sewing club and a gardening club that brought together people aged 5 to 87. She noted that intergenerational activities worked best when they were mutually beneficial and suggested developing activities around mutual interests.

Julius Olu highlighted some of the intergeneration work in Children’s Services from the report. International Baccalaureate had an intergenerational component with older people mentoring young people. Family Hubs presented opportunities for intergenerational practice. Community spaces, including Family Hubs, provided spaces for older people to care for grandchildren and meet other grandparents. Children’s Services were reviewing options for intergenerational practice as part of the Family Hub programme including grandparent-friendly Family Hubs,

grandparent-specific sessions, services and information for grandparents/older carers, and identifying the school's offer in intergenerational practice.

The Chair welcomed Precisa Getsevich and Adam Semar from H&F's Youth Council to the meeting. Adam Semar said the Youth Council had discussed intergenerational work and put forward the idea of skill sharing between different generations – for example, younger people could share their digital skills with older people. Another area for the Youth Council was around better understanding democracy. Many younger people didn't understand the inner workings of local councils and other democratic institutions and he suggested this was an area that older people could share their knowledge and experience. Lastly, he noted that a priority for the Youth Council was around expanding volunteering opportunities and to that end, they were looking to implement an online platform to facilitate and reward volunteering in the borough. Precisa Getsevich spoke about the valuable experiences she had taken from her grandparents but noted that many children didn't have grandparents around to pass on their skills and experience. She felt intergenerational schemes could help bridge that gap.

Councillor Victoria Brocklebank-Fowler noted she had heard of a London-based charity that matched young people looking for somewhere to stay with older people who had a spare room. The younger people would pay minimal rent in return for providing some practical help around the home and companionship. She suggested the Council could promote those types of schemes in the borough. Julius Olu said he would investigate.

ACTION: Julius Olu

Councillor Natalia Perez asked if there were specific communities that the Council would like to engage further in this area. Julius Olu said this work was still at an early stage. Officers had identified need, but further work was required. Councillor Perez highlighted the challenges for first generation migrants, particularly older populations who may suffer from increased instances of isolation and loneliness. She felt there were opportunities to bridge gaps.

Councillor Jacolyn Daly asked Jazz Browne what she thought made the gardening and sewing clubs work so well. Jazz Browne said they took a genuine interest in what people wanted to achieve and created the space to let them follow through. She added that the willingness and commitment of their volunteers was also key to their success.

Councillor Daly noted the borough had some great youth services and clubs and felt there was an opportunity for them to deliver some intergenerational activities. She also suggested some of the unspent money from the King's Coronation fund for youth services could be used for this work.

Councillor Rory Vaughan said he was pleased to see such a rich base of projects already in borough. He asked what the Council could do to support them to prosper, and what infrastructure was necessary to enable people who have ideas to take them forward.

Julius Olu agreed the Council needed to be a bridge to support the borough's third sector. He noted the Council had a small grants application process whereby groups could bid for money. The Council was also around the mid-point of its Third Sector Investment Fund strategy. Intergenerational work was already in the service specification, but it could be strengthened further.

Jazz Browne suggested that we could make better use of the Volunteer Centre in the borough. She noted there were a number of forums in place, including Community Connect started by People Arise Now, that could be used to further the conversation. Councillor Vaughan commented that we seemed to have people wanting to do this work, but they needed the room to put it into practice.

The Chair noted that young people had regularly talked about a lack of volunteering opportunities for under 16s and asked if this could be an area for improvement. Jazz Browne agreed. She said Nubian Life had provided work experience placements for secondary schools, but she felt only the schools closest to them knew about it.

Councillor Nicole Trehy suggested going to Youth Centres to see what type of activities people were most interested in. She also noted that there were large numbers of young people from schemes like the Duke of Edinburgh's Award looking for volunteering placements but few places to go. More work needed to be done to align these groups.

Councillor Nikos Souslous said he regularly heard from charities that they didn't know what services were already available and suggested the Council needed a way to highlight them. He also asked if there were any programmes where students went into care homes to spend quality time with older people. The Chair noted that Hammersmith Academy had a scheme, which stopped during the pandemic but was due to restart this year, where students could volunteer at the Elgin Centre next door to the school. Julius Olu said he would take these suggestions to colleagues in Children's Services.

ACTION: Julius Olu

Councillor Nicole Trehy asked if the local voluntary sector was still healthy given the pressures of the cost-of-living crisis. Jazz Browne said it was a mixed picture. Fulham Good Neighbours had retained roughly the same number of volunteers, but they had less time to give. They were planning a recruitment drive shortly.

Precisa Getsevich said they should allow children to volunteer. Younger people were keen to volunteer, had the time, and didn't have the same financial pressures as adults – but they were often restricted from volunteering opportunities.

The Chair noted that many Councillors were on the Boards of voluntary groups and in her experience turnover was high. Given the financial climate, more people needed to be economically active and finding long term volunteers was difficult. She thought there may be opportunities for young people and said she would take it away and develop the idea further.

ACTION: Councillor Homan

Shad Haibatan (SOBUS) welcomed the focus on intergenerational projects. He noted that the number of volunteers was reducing. Regarding allowing children to volunteer, he said there were potential safeguarding issues and organisations would need support and training around that. He also suggested there should be more investment from the health sector towards intergenerational projects as they improved health and wellbeing.

Councillor Vaughan noted there had been a long-standing issue with young people in year 10 looking for work experience opportunities, but many companies weren't able to get insurance so there weren't enough places. He suggested perhaps they could consider voluntary opportunities instead.

Katrina Getsevich addressed the Board and noted that she had benefited greatly from being a part of the Youth Council and H&F Volunteer Centre. When she was younger there were a range of projects where older people shared their skills – including producing radio shows and magazines. The skills she learnt helped her build a career. She felt volunteering was important but there should be more of a focus on the benefits for volunteers such as training and qualifications.

The Chair thanked everyone for participating in the discussion and sharing their ideas. She noted that the Council did not have a lot of additional money to invest but there was work to do to ensure the borough was getting the best of what was out there, working in the most productive way. She highlighted the following areas for further investigation:

- Intergenerational housing arrangements.
- Voluntary sector grant funding and building intergenerational work into future funding commitments.
- Sharing life skills across generations.
- The Council's role as facilitator.
- Identifying less engaged communities.
- Ensuring we are not boxing people into restrictive age categories.
- Intergenerational wealth inequality, as highlighted by the Resolution Foundation.

RESOLVED

1. The Board discussed what further opportunities there were for intergenerational practices in H&F and provided a steer on the way forward.

5. DIGITAL INCLUSION STRATEGY FOR HAMMERSMITH & FULHAM

Nicola Ellis (Strategic Director Chief Operating Officer) introduced the report which outlined the new co-produced Digital Inclusion Strategy for the borough. Tina Akpogheneta (Chief Digital Officer) and Darren Persaud (Assistant Director Resident Experience Transformation) gave a presentation on the strategy that aimed to make Hammersmith & Fulham a more digitally inclusive borough, where residents have access to the digital skills, devices, and support they need to achieve their aspirations.

Darren Persaud discussed the importance of co-production, through the involvement of the Digital Accessibility Group – made up of residents who reflected the diversity of the borough. He noted that input had also been obtained from other Council departments and the voluntary and community sector. Darren Persaud also spoke about the feedback that had been incorporated from the Policy and Oversight Board meetings in September and December 2022, detailed in paragraph 26 of the report.

Darren Persaud said the next steps for the strategy included further feedback from the Board, further conversations with the Cabinet Member, then sign-off from the Digital Accessibility Group, and final approval at Cabinet.

Councillor Florian Chevoppe-Verdier thanked officers for their work on this important area. He noted the pandemic had accelerated digitalisation of many areas of life and hoped the pace of support and regulation would keep up. He said he could attest to the quality of work in the Digital Accessibility Group and that it was inspiring to see. He spoke about the importance of looking at services early to ensure they worked well for all residents from day one.

The Chair asked how outcomes would be measured. Nicola Ellis said they wanted data to validate the approach but there was still a lot more work to do on measuring outcomes.

Councillor Natalia Perez thanked officers for the update. She asked if the Council would support residents to access digital services like Universal Credit. She also asked if the Council's plans for free Wi-Fi access included safeguards for younger users to ensure they weren't exposed to inappropriate material. Nicola Ellis said the Council had welfare support teams to help users access benefits. As part of the cost-of-living Alliance, officers were also looking at a platform to highlight groups that provided additional support. Tina Akpogheneta added that online safety was not just for children. It was important that people felt safe online regardless of their age or level of experience. When the Council worked with third-party providers that needed to be built-in to the offer.

Councillor Daly asked, in reference to the Council's public website and online services, if there was a trade-off between accessibility and security. Tina Akpogheneta said security was a priority for the Council and all services were held to the same high standards and all suppliers were vetted for their security controls. She noted that accessibility as it related to the public website was more a design issue than a security issue.

Councillor Nikos Souslous asked for more information on the Good Things Foundation scheme to supply residents with devices. Darren Persaud said either services like Libraries or Housing would proactively identify people in need of devices, or people could make a direct request. They would be considered, then if successful, they would collect the device from a local library and be given advice about how to use it. The scheme was administered by Council officers, but the devices were supplied by the Good Things Foundation.

Councillor Souslous expressed concerns that some people could fall through the cracks if the criteria were too strict. He also asked if the Council was donating older

devices to the Good Things Foundation. Tina Akpogheneta said the Council was doing a device refresh in the next financial year and was planning to donate all reusable devices to be repurposed.

Councillor Souselous noted internet access in libraries used to be free and asked if it was possible to offer free Wi-Fi again. Darren Persaud clarified that Wi-Fi in libraries was free, and the first hour of desktop internet was free, but the second hour was paid. Officers were looking at the impact on revenue though and expected a decision in the next few weeks. The cost of printing had been raised previously, and that would be made free shortly.

Councillor Souselous noted the term 'elderly' had been used, but the sector preferred the term 'older people' instead. Officers said they would use the new term in future.

Following a question from Councillor Souselous, the Chair confirmed the Council did offer free Wi-Fi in sheltered housing.

The Chair noted that the Board had asked Community Fibre and Hyperoptic to make their social tariffs more widely known at the meeting in September 2022 and asked if progress had been made. Darren Persaud noted officers added text to the Council's website about this issue. He said colleagues were meeting with them soon about Wi-Fi in community centres. The Chair asked officers to circulate a list of sheltered housing schemes and community halls with free Wi-Fi.

ACTION: Tina Akpogheneta / Darren Persaud

Councillor Rory Vaughan said he would like to see clear measures to track progress. He also suggested member involvement would be useful to prioritise this work.

ACTION: Tina Akpogheneta / Darren Persaud

Shad Haibatan (SOBUS) addressed the Board and noted the Council needed to be aware of people and groups who could fall through the gaps of online only services. He believed every home should have basic access to internet given how many aspects of modern life relied on the internet. He also touched on the benefits and dangers of Artificial Intelligence, the threat of online scams, and the mental health consequences for young people spending so much time online.

Councillor Chevoppe-Verdier said the strategy went together with in-person delivery of services. It was not designed to replace in-person services. In response to the other points raised, he noted some exciting work being trialled in the pest control service to respond to questions from residents. He also recognised the concerns around fraud. He said the strategy aimed to give people the skills to use their devices with confidence. He also noted that an upcoming update to the Council's website would allow automatic translation of all content into the most common languages spoken in London.

Jazz Browne (Chief Executive of Nubian Life) asked if there was a drive to use assistive technologies for older people. Darren Persaud said the Council had an expert on technology enabled care and they were looking at provision in some care

homes. They were aware that some older residents were wary of these technologies though.

Jazz Browne noted that day centres weren't connected to the Council and suggested officers explored how to use assistive technology in day centres. The Chair said this sounded like an area for co-production – Adult Social Care could explore how they could develop the service in partnership with users. Councillor Perez suggested it could be discussed at Health PAC as item.

ACTION: David Abbott

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions.

RESOLVED

1. That the Board reviewed and commented on the new Digital Inclusion Strategy and accompanying action plan.

6. POLICY AND ACCOUNTABILITY COMMITTEES' UPDATE REPORT

The Chair introduced the report outlining the areas of work and reports considered by each of the Council's six Policy and Accountability Committees, from April 2023 to September 2023.

RESOLVED

1. The Board noted the report.

7. WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair introduced the draft work programme for 2023/24.

The Chair noted that the Youth Council had been invited to attend in December to discuss their manifesto and policy development work. She also requested an update on the Fuel Poverty Strategy and the Council's response to the cost-of-living crisis.

RESOLVED

1. The Board noted the draft work programme for 2023/24 and suggested additions or amendments.

8. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The following dates of future meetings were noted:

- 11 Dec 2023
- 23 Jan 2024
- 29 Apr 2024

Meeting started: 7.00 pm
Meeting ended: 9.16 pm

Chair

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