

Policy and Oversight Board Minutes



Tuesday 20 June 2023

PRESENT

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

Other Councillors

Councillor Rowan Ree (Cabinet Member for Finance and Reform)
Councillor Sharon Holder (Cabinet Member for Public Realm)

Officers

Matthew Sales (Assistant Director, Programmes, Assurance and Analytics)
Julian Eccles (Strategic Lead for Communications and Communities)
Tara Flood (Strategic Lead, Co-production)
Kevin Caulfield (Strategic Lead, Co-production)
Philippa Cartwright (Project Director, Civic Campus)
Zoe Wilkins (Electoral Services Manager)
Kayode Adewumi (Assistant Director – Democratic, Registration and Coroner's Services)
David Abbott (Head of Governance)

Guests

Jane Wilmot OBE (Resident Co-Chair, Civic Campus Disabled Residents Team)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Rebecca Harvey (Cabinet Member for Social Inclusion and Community Safety).

Apologies for lateness were received from Councillors Rowan Ree, Nikos Souslous, and Helen Rowbottom.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Councillor Nikos Souslous declared a non-pecuniary interest in Item 5, Introduction of Voter ID Requirements, in his capacity as an election agent for H&F Labour.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

Councillor Victoria Brocklebank-Fowler noted that under Item 7, she had requested a report on exam performance for a future Board meeting. Councillor Homan said she would discuss it with Councillor Rowbottom.

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 April 2023 were approved as an accurate record.

4. UPDATE ON CO-PRODUCTION FOLLOWING THE DISABLED PEOPLE'S COMMISSION REPORT

Julian Eccles (Strategic Lead for Communications and Communities) introduced the report that provided an update on the Council's co-production activity and actions taken following the recommendations of the Disabled People's Commission.

Also in attendance for the item were Tara Flood (Strategic Lead for Co-production), Kevin Caulfield (Strategic Lead for Co-production), Jane Wilmot (Resident Co-Chair, Civic Campus Disabled Residents Team), Philippa Cartwright (Project Director, Civic Campus), and Councillor Sharon Holder (Cabinet Member for Public Realm and Co-production Lead for the Council).

Julian Eccles explained the importance of embedding co-production in the Council's services. He noted the report's recommendations for the Policy and Accountability Committees (PACs) and the Board to review co-production across the Council on a regular basis.

Kevin Caulfield discussed the significant progress made since the Strategic Lead for Co-production posts were created in 2019. He noted that officers had been working to build the capacity of residents to take part in co-production work. He also discussed the recently refreshed H&F co-production implementation group, comprising Councillors, officers, residents, and community organisations.

Tara Flood noted that moving the co-production team under Communications function should help to embed the messaging across the Council. A corporate training programme was due to be rolled out. Tara Flood also noted that the team had been approached by other local authorities and Government departments who were keen to learn from H&Fs best practice about implementing their own co-production programmes.

Phillipa Cartwright discussed the award-winning approach to co-production taken with the Civic Campus project. Jane Wilmot spoke about her experiences of the co-production working groups on the Civic Campus, and highlighted the importance of involving a wide range of Disabled people who could bring their lived experience to the project and ensure it was 'ruthlessly inclusive'. She felt it was important for the PACs to receive regular updates about the barriers Disabled people faced and the progress made. She suggested inviting the co-chairs of the Civic Campus Disabled Residents Team to attend those meetings to supplement the information provided by officers.

The Chair thanked Julian, Tara, Kevin, and Jane for their presentation and said she welcomed the message of embedding co-production and ensuring it was consistent throughout the Council's services.

Councillor Natalia Perez asked what the Council could do better in this area and how residents could be brought closer to decision-making. Julian Eccles said there was always scope for improvement. He noted that it was important for officers to understand that co-production led to better policy making, better delivery, and better financial efficiencies.

The Chair asked if there were lessons from the Civic Campus project around changing the culture amongst contractors that provide goods and services to the Council. Philippa Cartwright said it was important to stipulate the Council's requirements at the contract level. The fact that the Civic Campus Disabled Residents Team had sign-off gave them authority and meant they were listened to. Officers also needed to make contractors understand why it was so important – and win hearts and minds.

Jane Wilmot added that the Council wrote a statement for every contractor that set out its expectations around thinking inclusively. That set the tone for the project. The Chair suggested these elements could be written into a range of contracts and activities undertaken by the Council. She asked officers to investigate areas that this could be done.

ACTION: Julian Eccles

Councillor Jacolyn Daly thanked the contributors for their presentation and said the progress made was inspiring. She asked how the work could be brought to the PACs in a way that's useful. Julian Eccles felt the Committees should focus on major service delivery areas. The report recommended quarterly updates to the Committees to assess how well the Council was doing across each area.

Councillor Nikos Souslous asked if there were lessons from working with organisations like the police. The Chair suggested inviting the police and the co-production team to a future meeting.

ACTION: Councillor Souslous / David Abbott

Councillor Nicole Trehu thanked officers for the report and highlighted the importance of ensuring public spaces were developed with a diverse population in mind and bringing co-production into every decision. She also noted that the Metropolitan Police said they wouldn't be responding to mental health calls beyond September 2023 and raised concerns about the impact on neurodiverse people. The Chair suggested this could be considered at a future meeting.

ACTION: David Abbott

Councillor Rory Vaughan asked how projects were identified and chosen for co-production support. Julian Eccles said officers were guided by advisory groups – they looked at the main commitments from the Council's business plan and

discussed where they could have the most impact. They also considered routine service delivery items like waste collection and highways.

The Chair noted the Council was pioneering in this area and asked what was being done to promote its co-production work. Julian Eccles said now the team had moved under Communications they were keen to communicate more these activities to residents. The Civic Campus project had been well promoted through housing and architecture media. He said officers were keen to highlight the practical outputs and show the difference this work makes to people.

The Chair thanked everyone who had contributed to the discussion. She reiterated the need for regular updates on co-production to the PACs and the Board, the role that contractors would play delivering co-produced services to residents, and the importance of bringing partners like the police and health on board.

RESOLVED

1. That the Board requested each Policy and Accountability Committee consider a quarterly update on previous and planned co-production activity.
2. That the Board considered a summary of such reports biannually.

5. INTRODUCTION OF VOTER ID REQUIREMENTS

Zoe Wilkins (Electoral Services Manager) and Kayode Adewumi (Assistant Director – Democratic, Registration and Coroner’s Services) presented the report which outlined the Council’s operational response to requirements in the Elections Act 2022 for voters to provide photo identification in polling stations.

Zoe Wilkins noted that the first elections to apply the new rules were the local government elections in parts of England in May 2023. She said officers were awaiting the Electoral Commission’s report on why voters were turned away so the Council could mitigate any issues when the rules were applied in the borough. She explained that there was already a robust communication and engagement plan in place, and there would be flyers with voter registration information, a social media campaign, targeted adverts based on the results of the Commission’s report, and further information in the Council Tax and winter booklets. She noted there was some grant funding from the Government for this work, but not all of it had been confirmed.

Kayode Adewumi added that the Elections team were working closely with the Co-production team to look at the accessibility of venues and the communications plan. They were also thinking about other areas to improve to ensure residents could access their right to vote. He said the new burdens on the Council were partly funded by Central Government but there were funding gaps, which meant additional costs for the Council.

Councillor Rowan Ree (Cabinet Member for Finance and Reform) addressed the Board and said the Council would do everything in its power to ensure that everyone who wanted to vote was able to, despite the additional costs to the Council.

Councillor Victoria Brocklebank-Fowler asked how officers verified someone's identity if they requested a Voter ID certificate. Zoe Wilkins said if they had a National Insurance number, they could check their details on a government portal. If they didn't have a National Insurance number, then they could accept other forms of ID.

Councillor Brocklebank-Fowler noted that any publicity would be supplemented by pan-London and national coverage, and she felt that very few people would not know about the new requirements. She felt the separate household notification letter was surplus to requirements and overly costly, given that information was already being included with Council Tax letters. She asked the Cabinet Member and officers to reconsider. Zoe Wilkins explained that the items listed in the report was the Election team's wish-list, and not all of them would be taken forward.

The Chair said the borough had a relatively high turnover of residents and it was important to ensure they didn't miss out on their right to vote because of a lack of information. Councillor Ree agreed. He said the new rules introduced new barriers to voting which could stop people applying and the Council needed to ensure people were informed.

Councillor Natalia Perez noted that some communities were not officially recognised by the Office of National Statistics, citing the Latin American community as an example. She noted that a recent Greater London Authority (GLA) and YouGov poll showed that 95% of white Londoners were aware of the changes, 82% of Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Londoners were aware, and 76% of European Union (EU) citizens in London were aware. The poll showed that 32% of all Londoners were not aware of the new rules. She was concerned that some communities would be adversely affected and asked what steps had been taken to address the issue.

Zoe Wilkins said the GLA produced elections materials in a wide range of different languages which the team could adapt. They also linked to the Electoral Commission's website which was available in many languages. Kayode Adewumi said if Councillors were aware of community organisations the team could work with, they could send him the details.

ACTION: Members

Councillor Jacolyn Daly reiterated the importance of democracy and ensuring people weren't disenfranchised. She noted that there was only a small amount of money earmarked for adverts and questioned how impactful it would be. She felt the challenges were bigger than one team and the problem needed a Council-wide approach. She suggested the PAC Chairs think about how different departments could respond.

ACTION: PAC Chairs

Councillor Daly noted one of the issues at the recent local elections was people who didn't look like their ID and Elections staff reportedly had little support on the day.

She asked officers to consider the learning from that and what support could be put in place.

Zoe Wilkins said she would be doing an all staff briefing in September to ensure officers across the Council were aware of the rule changes. Training was also open to anyone interested in working in polling station or in other capacities. Regarding support for staff in stations, H&F had polling station inspection teams – managers who were trained to support the stations.

Councillor Rory Vaughan asked how the Council could collect statistics from upcoming elections to track performance. He also suggested sampling people across the borough to see if they were aware of the new rules. That could give insights to enable the Council to better target further information. Zoe Wilkins said statistics were collected based on a prescribed form required in polling stations. She hoped the Electoral Commission report would contain actionable lessons, but she said she could discuss sampling with the community engagement team.

The Chair said she thought language would be a bigger problem given the diverse population and asked officers to look at any lessons learned from other larger metropolitan areas like Manchester. She also asked how many people requested a private area for identification checks. Zoe Wilkins said she didn't think that information had been recorded.

Councillor Nikos Souslous asked how postal voting had changed by the Act. Zoe Wilkins said people would be able to apply for a postal vote online and the Council was due to start testing that soon. Regarding postal vote handling, the Act limited the number of postal votes that could be dropped into stations. Councillor Souslous also raised the issue of station staff not recognising valid forms of identification like Commonwealth Passports. Zoe Wilkins said that was a training issue and said she would try to get samples for training.

Councillor Souslous asked how many people had fraudulently voted in H&F. Zoe Wilkins said the only case she was aware of was from 2005 or 2006, where a man tried to vote twice. He was cautioned by the police.

Councillor Rowan Ree added that the measures put in place by the Act wouldn't have prevented that issue. He called it a 'solution in search of a problem' and believed it was designed to discourage people from voting. He noted that of the 58 million votes cast in 2019, 33 were proved to be fraudulent.

The Chair asked officers to consider the suggestions made at the meeting and work with the co-production team to ensure all of the materials being sent out were accessible.

ACTION: Zoe Wilkins

The Chair asked officers to circulate the Electoral Commission's report to members once it was published.

ACTION: Zoe Wilkins

RESOLVED

1. That the Board noted and commented on the report.

6. FORWARD PLAN

Matthew Sales (Assistant Director, Programmes, Assurance and Analytics) gave a short overview of the report that reviewed the forward plan of the Board in 2023/24 and sought the Board's views on any further key strategic issues within its remit to programme for consideration in 2023/24.

Councillor Brocklebank-Fowler requested a report on exam performance, unless a similar report was considered at the Children and Education PAC.

The Chair highlighted the following potential items for September:

- Intergenerational practices
- Fuel poverty strategy
- Budget update

Councillor Brocklebank-Fowler suggested financial reports on housing, including an update on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). Councillor Daly noted those items were on the Housing and Homelessness PAC agenda in the Autumn. The Chair added that an HRA update could also be included in the Board's budget update in September.

Councillor Daly suggested bringing the work on digital inclusion and the Council's broader digital transformation programme together into one item for a future meeting.

The Chair also suggested an item about how the Council worked with partners and gave the example of mental health services, provided in partnership with the NHS and community groups.

RESOLVED

1. That the Board noted the forward plan for 2023/24 and commented on additional key strategic issues within its remit to programme for consideration.

7. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The following dates of future meetings were noted:

- 11 Sep 2023 (later moved to 18 September 2023)
- 11 Dec 2023
- 23 Jan 2024
- 29 Apr 2024

Meeting started: 7.00 pm
Meeting ended: 9.16 pm

Chair

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