MINUTES OF THE Culture, Community Safety & Environment Scrutiny Panel HELD ON Tuesday, 16th December, 2025, 6.30pm – 9.30pm

PRESENT:

Councillors: Makbule Gunes (Chair), Luke Cawley-Harrison, George Dunstall and Sue Jameson

ALSO ATTENDING: Cllr Rossetti, Cllr Arkell, Barry Francis, Kenneth Tharp, Maurice Richards, Ayshe Simsek and Jessica Russell (Online)

1. FILMING AT MEETINGS

The Chair referred Members present to agenda Item 1 as shown on the agenda in respect of filming at this meeting, and Members noted the information contained.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were apologies for absence from Cllr Grosskopf.

3. ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

There were no new items of business, but the chair accepted late items in relation to item 6 and item 7.

4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest put forward.

The Chair proposed to vary the agenda to take item 8 before item 7 and to take forward the second deputation on libraries before item 7. This was because there were directors and officers in attendance for the budget quarter 2 update and the Panel were only considering the overspend and delivery of savings rag rated red or amber. It was noted that these only related to the Resident Experience, and Environment Directorate. Varying the agenda would make better use of the officer time and provide a clearer consideration of the library strategy item given there was deputation and non-panel member attendance for this item.

The Panel agreed this proposal and the agenda was varied.

5. DEPUTATIONS/PETITIONS/PRESENTATIONS/QUESTIONS

Nazarella Scianguetta addressed the Panel and spoke for wheelchair users, families and who were facing daily barriers with accessibility to parks and pavements. Nazarella, emphasised that the wheelchair user community deserved better and was putting forward the deputation to urge the panel and the Council to take urgent action. She referred to the social model for disability and urged the Council to implement the changes needed to implement this social model. She spoke about the barriers for disabled people caused by society and when there were parks created with uneven steps and without ramps and required accessories to support wheelchair users in accessing parks and pavements.

She referred to the need to provide more tactile guidance and toilet facilities in parks. She explained that these were not minor inconveniences but obstacles for disabled people to live a full life.

She outlined the following issues:

- Uneven and narrow pathways which were unsafe for wheelchair users and those with mobility aids,
- Parents with prams that unable to access play areas.
- Parents in wheelchairs were unable to play and interact with children.
- No step free entrances in parks
- Cramped spaces in cafes and shops without accessible doors
- Insufficient accessible toilets
- Toilets that do not meet the legal requirement for wheelchair users.
- No tactile sensory guidance for visitors with visual impairments to parks

The lack of accessibility of pavements to disabled residents, in the deputation's view, sent a message that disabled people were not the priority. The deputation highlighted that the consequences of this were profound, with limited independence, poorer health outcomes, and exclusion from simple joy of being outdoors. This further impacted on dignity and equality and the right to belong.

Nazarella, continued to outline that disabled residents' experiences were overlooked in decisions made about parks, and there was not enough engagement with disabled users when making changes, She highlighted the engagement process for the park behind station road where there had been no changes made to support the impaired community.

Nazarella asked the Council to take forward the following actions:

- Investment in the upgrade of ramps, tactile surfaces, accessible toilets in parks, inclusive play equipment.

- Collaborate with disabled residents and organisations representing disabled residents to co create positive solutions, ensuring information on the provision of support for disabled access is available in an accessible format, enforcing any contraventions.

- Providing ongoing disability awareness training for all staff by using the social model for disability template. It was noted that doing this enabled the borough to include the impaired community and to be ahead of any other Council.

The Chair thanked Nazarella Scianguetta for her powerful speech.

There were questions from the Panel to the deputation, and the following information was provided by the deputation.

- With regards to the some of the barriers still in place following the redevelopment of Wood Green Common, it was noted that there was no playground provision for neuro- diverse children or wheel chair users and the pavement leading to access the park was not wide enough for a wheelchair user . The equipment in the park is more able bodied people to use. Nazarella felt disheartened that following the budget allocation to parks there was no consultation with disabled users to help make those parks accessible. In addition, there was a need to make the parks accessible to children with special needs and make them accessible for wheelchair users to be able to go into the park or where disabled residents can play sport.

- The non accessibility of toilets also made wanting to go to a park distressful and Nazarella felt it was a legal right to have access to these facilities.

- Regarding accessibility audits of parks, these could take place every 3 to 6 months to check that added provisions were working but it would be ideal to have a system in place where disabled residents could call in with a request to mend a pavement or provision so that this information is known more quickly by the Council.

- The deputation advised that she was unable to use any park as she could not enter with her wheelchair as the pavements were uneven and there was a risk to her wheelchair which she would have to fund if it became damaged. This meant that her son was not able to spend quality time in green spaces with her.

The Head of Parks and Climate Action responded to the deputation as follows:

- In 2023 the Council had approved its People Needs Parks strategy following two years of co-production work with a wide selection of the community. The Council heard from many people they did not feel included in their local parks and wanted the Council to begin to tackle this in a variety of ways. However, it was recognised by all involved that there wasn't an instant fix as many of the issues were complex and involve how people feel about parks and greenspaces as much as the physical infrastructure that's in place. It would also take time to bring about positive change and this was recognised in the 15-year lifespan of the strategy.

- Through the dedicated Parks Inclusion Officer and the work of many other teams.The Council have been working with a wide range of groups to improve the accessibility and inclusivity of parks and greenspaces. With so many spaces the Council could not work on them all at once. However, the Council were working to ensure the learning from this work was transferred into business-as-usual activities.

It was noted that the Council's approach had been informed by accessibility audits and dementia friendly audits carried out in a number of parks. In addition there was a Healthy Parks Framework Workshop carried out at Chestnuts Park and Boundary review of Finsbury Park. The Council had established an internal Accessibility Working Group, to work on the following 5 key areas:

1. Signage - larger, more frequent, welcoming, with clear contrast and consistent branding
2. Seating – more social and accessible to all
3. Surfaces – addressing uneven surfaces where possible
4. Socialising - mix of organised and informal activity, to support people in accessing and familiarising themselves with the park, and with local parks staff.
5. Sense of Place – exploring options such as interpretation boards, tree IDs and audio trails to strengthen people's connection with their local park.

The Council had started to look at seating, collating a list of design requirements raised in audits and consultations across age-groups. These were being shared with the Council's manufacturer who has agreed to produce some design alternatives to our current standard bench, for consideration.

It was noted that the Council were creating events and activities with community groups. This included an annual Age Well Festival at Bruce Castle Park which was focused on celebrating the Borough's older residents. Accessibility was a constant focus with a walking bus to the space, a buggy on site and VIP area to support residents with access needs being some of the components incorporated to improve residents access and experience of the event.

It was noted that the Council managed a People Need Parks small grants programme, which supported individuals and groups to run their own events and activities in the borough parks. One of the key aims of the fund was inclusivity and this year the Council had supported a number of diverse events and activities that supported new communities to access and enjoy the park. These included Women's football sessions, a Polish picnic, Italian carnival and a Dementia-friendly walks programme.

The Head of Parks and Climate further outlined the Council support and drive to make the borough parks safer and more welcoming for women and girls. The Council have established a Safer Parks for Women and Girls Network. This included representation from services across the Council as well as a number of different community groups.

It was noted that the Council had also created a Haringey Parks Young Women's Network for 16 – 30-year-olds that met monthly and had recently submitted a funding application to the National Lottery to run a monthly walks programme, Women Step Forward, as well as Community events on International Women's Day and International Day of the Girl Child. The group was currently setting up a research project to look into lighting options within the parks.

The Head of Parks and Climate Action explained that with an estate of over 244,000m2 of pathway across parks and greenspaces there would always be some uneven pathways, and there would be areas such woodlands and nature reserves where surfacing was less accessible. Despite limited funds, the Council were able to upgrade some paths each year such as the New River Path in Finsbury Park and create new paths such as those in Wood Green Common and Down Lane Park.

The Council was committed, as part of the People Needs Parks Strategy, to making 50% of all playgrounds accessible over the next ten years. Playground accessibility and inclusivity was at the heart of all the Council's play renovation projects engaging many groups to ensure the Council meets its goals on inclusivity, this can be seen with the work in Down Lane, Russell Park, Priory Park and Wood Green Common and will be further enhanced as the Council aim to deliver 7 play areas as part of the Tottenham Parks Programme.

The meeting noted that the vast majority of cafes, community spaces, sports facilities and all toilets in parks were leased to individual companies and groups and therefore the Council was not directly responsible for their upkeep. However, where there were opportunities, the Council would try to influence change. For instance, the Council had built the first changing places facility in Finsbury Park a couple of years ago. The Council were in the process of delivering a changing places facility at Lordship Rec and in the new build pavilion in Down Lane Park. The Council recognised that there was a way to go to equal up access and would continue to put time and effort in to doing so.

Unlike highways, it was noted that tactile paving had not been used in parks in Haringey other than in a few limited locations where the park merged with the public highway such as Ducketts Common. However, the Council were working on a project with the RNIB with the first tactile maps of Finsbury Park which should go into the park in the next few months.

The deputation had further follow up questions but given the constitutional time allocation had been exceeded, there was not facility for further discussion. The Chair asked the deputation to put forward further follow up queries to the Democratic Services and Scrutiny Manager who would also send through the written response to the deputation.

The Chair further thanked the deputation for the important information shared.

6. MINUTES

RESOLVED

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on the 13th of November 2025.

7. DRAFT LIBRARY STRATEGY - 2026-2030

The Chair invited the second deputation from Sarah McGuire who was speaking in relation to the draft Library strategy at item 7.

The deputation was speaking about the draft library strategy in the agenda pack and focused on the principles being considered equality primarily in socioeconomic terms. The deputation advised that while this was important, they were concerned that other groups may not be adequately considered. They highlighted whether the draft library policy sufficiently addressed the needs of:

- Older residents, who required accessible spaces within a reasonable distance, particularly those with limited mobility. They felt that libraries should provide regular opportunities for social interaction to reduce isolation.
- Individuals with physical disabilities, who needed local access without the burden of traveling long distances.
- People with mental health challenges, who would benefit from calm, non-judgmental environments where they could feel comfortable and safe. Currently, there were few alternative quiet spaces in the community.
- Children with special educational needs and neurodiverse individuals, who required quieter times and sensory-friendly spaces. Families educating at home also needed access during off-peak hours.
- Residents with sensory needs, who appreciated facilities such as pianos with headphones but need predictable access during quieter periods.
- Those requiring digital and practical resources, including computers, printing, and photocopying for employment, education, and community activities. Limited opening hours could create barriers for these essential services.

In summary, the strategy should ensure libraries remained inclusive, accessible, and responsive to these diverse needs, not just socioeconomic factors.

The deputation further contended that in order to take the above issues into account, the Council would likely need longer opening hours for libraries. The deputation asserted the Council consider making better use of the spaces that exist in libraries and the new draft local plan that proposed demolishing and eventually rebuilding three libraries.

There were no questions from the Panel to the deputation group, and the Chair asked the Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure services to respond.

The Cabinet Member appreciated the deputation highlighting the vital role libraries played in the borough. She concurred that libraries were more than a place for the collections of books and that they are community hubs for learning, creativity, and connection.

She explained that this was why the Council had undertaken one of its most comprehensive consultation exercises to shape the new library strategy. It was noted that over the past year, the Council had worked closely with residents to ensure the strategy reflected the diverse needs of the community. The approach was rooted in the principles of the Haringey Deal: consultation, listening, and co-design. Engagement had included in-person sessions across eight libraries, targeted outreach to seldom-heard groups, and partnerships with schools, community centres, and voluntary organisations. Materials were provided in multiple formats and languages to ensure accessibility.

The Equality Impact Assessment had informed the process, considering all protected characteristics: age, disability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation and locally recognised socioeconomic status. She noted that every resident's perspective carried equal weight, whether they were parents, students, or older residents seeking companionship.

The Cabinet Member continued to outline that the draft strategy addressed accessibility through audits and partnerships with health and wellbeing organisations. It committed to tailored provision for children with special educational needs, including quiet spaces, sensory-friendly programming, and staff training. Support for home-educating families and expanded creative spaces, such as pianos with headphones, were also included.

It was noted that libraries would continue to provide essential digital and practical services for employment, education, and community activities, with investment in IT upgrades to ensure reliability and affordability.

Inclusivity was central to the administration's values, and it was noted that libraries would play a key role in Haringey's Borough of Culture 2027, serving as venues for cultural programming and creative engagement by embedding libraries within the Council's cultural vision, the aim was to transform them into vibrant spaces for imagination and participation.

Finally, the Council were committed to inspiring the next generation of library users through early years programmes, coding clubs, and creative workshops.

In summary, the Council had listened, consulted widely, and acted inclusively. The draft library strategy was built on equality, culture, and community, ensuring libraries remained at the heart of Haringey for generations to come.

The Chair invited the Cabinet Member and the Director for Culture and Communities and the Policy, Equalities & Participation Manager to deliver the presentation on the library strategy.

Context of the Library Strategy

The Cabinet Member for Culture and Leisure provided context on the current position of libraries in Haringey: revised opening hours have now been fully implemented. These changes brought the Council in line with the London average; previously, Haringey offered some of the longest opening hours in the capital. However, importantly, all libraries remained open, unlike in some neighbouring boroughs where there were a number being closed.

The strategy was also coming forward in the context of a decade-long decline in visitor numbers, from approximately 2 million in 2011–12 to around 840,000 in 2024–25. However, last year did see an increase of visits, which the Libraries team were analysing to understand the drivers behind this growth.

Demographically, the most frequent users were children aged up to 12, followed by those aged 12–16, while usage among residents over 75 was the lowest. This highlighted the need to sustain engagement from early years through to adulthood.

It was noted that library usage patterns had also shifted. During the pandemic, physical closures led to a surge in digital borrowing, with e-book and audiobook loans rising from around 600 per month in April 2019 to 6,200 by March 2025. The new strategy was designed to respond to these trends, focusing on growth and sustainability to ensure libraries continued to deliver core services such as book lending, alongside wider community benefits and their role in Haringey's cultural and heritage landscape.

Consultation

The Policy, Participation and Equalities Manager provided an overview of the engagement and consultation undertaken this year, building on the Cabinet Member's comments.

In relation to the consultation, the Council had adopted a multi-faceted approach, culminating in a public consultation on the draft strategy from 24 September to early November. Engagement had begun in March with discussions with Friends of Libraries groups to gauge interest in a co-design approach. Following this, the Council had issued a public invitation and promoted participation during in-library engagement sessions held across all eight libraries in May and June. Additional sessions had taken place in Hornsey and Coombes Croft Library in October to inform individual library plans.

It was noted that seventeen residents expressed interest in joining the co-design group, which met throughout the summer to shape priorities and inform survey design. Four formative surveys were conducted: one for library users, one for non-users, one on technology in libraries, and one on proposed principles for the strategy. The co-design group reviewed feedback and influenced the draft strategy before its formal consultation.

The Council had also engaged with six school, both primary and secondary, through librarians and pastoral staff, including an after-school book club. Further outreach

included discussions with the Youth Panel and ongoing engagement with Friends of Libraries and reading groups.

The Policy, Participation and Equalities Manager, continued to outline the responses to the consultation:

- Survey response trends - Initial surveys received strong engagement; responses declined for the final draft strategy consultation, likely due to ongoing involvement and no major surprises in the draft.
- Communications approach - Comprehensive outreach included digital surveys (with print options in libraries) and notifications via Commonplace, reaching over 6,000 subscribers in July.
- Community feedback - Libraries were viewed as essential for education, digital access, social connection, and community wellbeing. They were valued as free, safe, and inclusive spaces, especially for children, older residents, and those without home internet.
- Service delivery models - Strong opposition to replacing staff with self-service or volunteer-led models. Some support for volunteers in complementary roles.
- Concerns over closures - Early fears about closures or service reductions diminished as engagement progressed.
- Demographic representation - People with disabilities represented 16% of respondents (borough benchmark: 13%).
- Final draft strategy survey aligned with borough averages - 42% of respondents identified as neurodiverse, indicating significant inclusion of this group.

The Director for Culture and Libraries continued to set out some further context, with the Panel noting that figures from the Department for Culture, Media and Sport showed that since 2010, 276 library buildings in England had closed without replacement, including 22 in London. This reflected the significant financial pressures on local authorities. While Haringey had reduced opening hours last year (previously among the longest in London) the Council had retained all nine libraries, unlike some boroughs such as Enfield, which recently closed seven of its sixteen libraries.

Libraries in Haringey played a vital role in delivering the borough's vision of being a place where everyone could belong and thrive. They supported greener choices through recycling facilities for textiles, batteries, light bulbs, and printer cartridges. Initiatives such as the new growing terrace at Wood Green Library further demonstrated commitment to sustainability.

Libraries also served as multifunctional spaces: quiet areas, social hubs, warm spaces in winter, cool spaces in summer, and providers of free Wi-Fi and computer access. As members of the London Library Consortium, Haringey residents benefitted from shared resources across 23 libraries, including book stock and digital services.

The Council would continue to expand the library offer with creative spaces for podcasting and music production and had recently introduced Logic Pro software in three libraries, with plans to extend further. Out-of-hours events, such as the successful "Library Lates" series curated with young people, highlighted libraries' role as cultural hubs.

The Panel noted that the strategy did not propose replacing professional staff with volunteers. However, the Council welcomed co-designed initiatives with Friends groups to enhance services. Unlike some boroughs, the Council did not charge for computer use, ensuring libraries remained accessible and inclusive.

The setup, ongoing operational, and maintenance costs for the proposed initiative were currently beyond the Council's financial capacity. However, as a parallel measure, the recently established Repair Hub offered refurbished household items to residents, contributing to a more equitable service offer.

It was noted that considering best practice elsewhere, Newham engaged residents through participatory budgeting and community outreach via its libraries. Merton was an Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation, receiving multi-year funding a model that the Council aspired to replicate, though recent changes to the Arts Council's funding cycle delayed the ability to apply.

It was noted that other examples included Newcastle City Library, a six-storey facility with a 185-seat performance space, and Chester's Storehouse, which combined a library, theatre, cinema, and community arts centre. While Haringey did not currently have the infrastructure to deliver such integrated facilities, future relocations or redevelopments presented opportunities to think boldly and creatively about what libraries of the future could be, subject to funding availability.

The Panel noted that the arts and culture strategy had strongly influenced the development of the library strategy, ensuring alignment of themes across both. The guiding principles were access, collaboration, equity, growth, lifelong learning, visibility, and representations shaped the survey design and informed residents' feedback.

Alongside the overarching strategy, individual plans were being developed for each of Haringey's nine libraries in collaboration with Friends groups. These plans were essential to reflect the unique character and needs of each local community.

The Council's vision for Haringey's libraries was outlined. They were aimed to be welcoming, inclusive, and trusted spaces at the heart of the borough. They would be free to access and open to all. Libraries would serve as cultural and community hubs, supporting traditional book borrowing while also offering opportunities for learning, creativity, and wellbeing. They would host services, events, and activities that inform, enrich, and inspire residents.

The draft library strategy now included clear success measures under each priority. These indicators would allow the Council to track progress and ensure accountability. If the Council achieved these objectives, Haringey's libraries would become vibrant cultural hubs, offering diverse opportunities for learning, creativity, and community engagement. The Council's goal was for every resident to feel proud of their libraries and fully benefit from the services they provided.

The Chair thanked the Cabinet Member and Officers for the presentation and invited questions from Panel members.

Cllr Dunstall noted that during that consultation period the Council had heard a lot from people about concerns about the increasing use of volunteers and automation potential and in this context, what was the expected role of volunteers can play and do play currently. In addition, the Panel member queried the risk of an over reliance on volunteers. Also, it was noted that it may be easier to find volunteers to take on certain roles in certain more affluent areas and had the impact that this might have on equity of access been considered?

In response, it was noted that during the 2023 budget consultation, a proposal to increase the use of community libraries and volunteers was strongly opposed by residents. However, through subsequent engagement on library opening hours and the strategy, there was now a growing understanding of financial challenges, and a greater acceptance of the role volunteers can play. While some boroughs relied heavily on volunteers, the Council's approach remained cautious. The service already had volunteers supporting activities such as shelving and events but were not considering handing over library operations or introducing swipe access systems. Any future expansion of volunteer involvement would require careful planning, learning from other boroughs, and addressing equity concerns, particularly around more affluent areas. The focus was on ensuring volunteers complement services to help keep libraries open, not replace core functions.

Cllr Dunstall further queried if the Council were exploring whether data can provide indication on why certain age groups were not using libraries? For example, the over-75s usage was low and was this because there were alternative activities available locally, or did libraries fail to meet their needs? For 17–21-year-olds was this reduced usage linked to university attendance and access to more relevant resources there? In summary, were there detailed insights into what each age group used libraries for and why they do or do not engage?

In response the Policy Manager communicated that the engagement approach was guided by understanding both current library users and non-users. While quantitative data provided usage patterns, qualitative conversations offered deeper insights into community needs:

It was noted that for young people, libraries served as essential study spaces, especially for those without adequate room at home. Usage often peaked during revision periods and was influenced by social factors (friends visiting together). Schools-based outreach highlighted the importance of facilities like quiet spaces and printing.

In relation to older residents, many relied on libraries for digital access and printing but often needed support with technology.

Patterns varied by location. For example, in Alexandra Park, younger children visited after school, often accompanied by carers. At Coombes Croft library there was seen to be high PC usage, particularly by men. This information was gathered through targeted engagement based on quantitative data.

The Panel noted that key understanding was that ongoing qualitative engagement was critical to shaping library plans, as needs differed across communities. Future

strategies should be locally informed and adequately resourced to capture these insights.

Cllr Jameson spoke about Communication cards which were an invaluable resource for children with SEND and autistic individuals, as they provided visual symbols to support understanding and expression. Systems like Communication in Print allowed the creation of picture-based materials, including adapted children's books and personalised cards. However, families often needed a dedicated space where they could easily print these resources. Providing such facilities within libraries would significantly enhance accessibility and offer a practical, supportive service for SEND families. In response, the Director for Culture and Libraries agreed to investigate the availability of this provision in libraries.

In response to a question about mental health support from library staff, it was noted that survey responses consistently highlighted the importance of staff training to ensure libraries were welcoming and inclusive. This was a recurring theme across all engagement activities. While only a small percentage of respondents explicitly identified as having mental health issue, it was interpreted that this may reflect underreporting rather than lack of need. Assurance was provided that strengthening staff awareness and skills around inclusivity, mental health, and SEND support would be key to improving user experience and accessibility.

There was a question about providing some examples of the current thinking around how volunteers could be utilised. In response it was noted that volunteers were viewed as having a key role in library activities, but their involvement was not currently prescribed but under consideration. It was noted that many events at libraries were already run by Friends of the Library groups. Reference was made to a recent event which was a public talk by Baroness Young of Hornsey at Hornsey Library and an art exhibition that ran for over two weeks, attracting new visitors at this library. It was further outlined that these initiatives, were largely volunteer-led, and showed the potential for growth, especially with the London Borough of Culture programme approaching. Officers advised that they expected the number and quality of events to increase as part of the pathway for the strategy. Therefore, the Council recognised that volunteers could contribute in diverse ways beyond traditional tasks like shelving, including supporting cultural events and exhibitions.

There was a further question on the data being collated and analysed by a data analyst to identify how the borough libraries were being used and by whom together with the trends in use being seen.

In response, it was noted that the recent consultation exercise had highlighted that young people wanted libraries to feel more welcoming, with relaxed layouts, beanbags, and curated collections rather than standard alphabetical shelving. A youth council member had highlighted that around 500 young people pass Muswell Hill Library daily, but very few go inside and he highlighted a clear opportunity for engagement. It was suggested that a targeted communications campaign aimed at young people could significantly boost usage. The Panel noted that ideas like this would form part of ongoing work to improve library spaces and their economic model.

Referring back to an earlier point made on the re-emergence of book reading by young people, it was noted that Gen Z was being seen as key demographic starting to use libraries, and the Council wanted to sustain this trend. The reasons behind their engagement were not fully clear, but it likely related to a desire for community and real-world social connection which was especially important following the pandemic. The Cabinet Member commented that this presented an opportunity to build on their interest and strengthen libraries as social and cultural hubs.

There was a question about the commercialisation proposals for the borough libraries. As given the current economic difficulties, they were likely to need to be part subsidised by commercial activities. The Panel noted that the current draft strategy approach to libraries was as cultural hubs and it would be important to understand the difference between the library offer between now and in 5 years' time.

In response it was noted that there was not yet a fully formed roadmap for libraries, but recent library refurbishments had focused on creating rentable spaces. With the new Civic Centre, the Council aimed to implement a unified booking system across all council venues, including libraries, making the offer clearer and more attractive, including better visuals and pricing. This would support both community use and commercial opportunities.

It was further noted that there was also potential for improving existing initiatives, such as a cinema at Hornsey Library, which remained under consideration. A key development highlighted was the introduction of Community Librarians in every library. Libraries were seen as being as much about relationships as books, and these dedicated roles would help users and Friends groups co-create ideas and strengthen engagement. Over time, this collaborative approach would amplify the offer and make libraries central to community life.

In addition to a wider point on listening to users, it was noted that the Council had listened to users of Hornsey library and users would now be able to reserve their study/work places at the library when popping out to get coffee or lunch.

There was a further question on utilising the use of libraries for events and having an officer post that concentrated on this activity as a way forward. In response, the Cabinet Member outlined that the Council had already invested £4.9 million in refurbishing branch libraries to protect them for the future. The Council had agreed to keep all nine libraries open and made a difficult decision to reduce opening hours to ensure accessibility and sustainability. The Council would be monitoring with global trends of growing library popularity and would need to carefully balance the Council's own curated programme especially in preparations for the London Borough of Culture but while still offering space for Friends groups and community-led ideas. It was felt that collaboration was key to maintaining vibrant, inclusive libraries.

Continuing the discussion on the long-term tangible outcomes of the strategy, there was reference made to the 6 priorities of the Library strategy, and it was noted lifelong learning emerged as the top priority in the consultation, with 91% public support. This could help initiate collaboration with services like Public Health to promote library benefits such as informing expectant parents about resources for their child. Research showed that 92% of parents valued reading, yet only around 40% of children receive a

bedtime story, highlighting a gap that could be addressed. It was noted that the Council would be working more holistically across health, early years, and cultural initiatives to integrate libraries into wider community support. These partnerships could lead to innovative opportunities.

The Chair asked a question about the lower number of consultation responses to the draft strategy between September 2025 and November 2025. In response, it was noted that libraries remained a highly valued service in Haringey. Previous consultations showed strong engagement in the future of libraries with over 700 responses to the budget consultation in 2024/25 and more than 1,000 on changes to opening hours. Although, there had been 52 responses to the draft strategy, taking account this year's total strategy-related surveys had generated 841 contributions from 428 this number likely suggested residents felt more confident that libraries were protected. Following difficult decisions on opening hours and investment, it was concluded that the tone had shifted toward positivity and collaboration on issues concerning libraries.

The Chair allowed Cllr Rossetti, a non-panel member, to ask a question on the strategy. Cllr Rossetti asked if the responses to the consultation on the draft strategy would be an appendix to the strategy document that would go to Cabinet in January 2026 given that the responses had informed the draft strategy. In response it was noted that the consultation report on the draft library strategy would be included as an appendix to the strategy, detailing engagement and consultation activities. Surveys and formative consultations from the summer would also be uploaded to Common Place for public access. Officers had avoided adding these to the Cabinet report to prevent excessive documentation, as the strategy was already a substantial set of papers.

Cllr Rossetti asked a further follow up question on the draft strategy which committed to ongoing data collection on library usage, to inform future planning. She asked if the data showed significant changes in demand or usage patterns, would the Council remain open to reviewing operational decisions, including reviewing opening hours, as part of its commitment to a responsive and evidence-based approach. In response it was noted that some of that data, including footfall data, was shared with the Friends group that the Council meet with every two months. So, the Libraries team were getting into a regular pattern of sharing that data with them directly. The Chair added that, given the Panel's remit, this data would also be key information to consider. It was subsequently agreed for the Panel to review this data on an annual basis.**(Action Fola to add to the Work programme),**

The Chair thanked officers, the Cabinet Member and colleagues for an informative discussion.

8. FINANCE UPDATE - Q2 2025/26

The Chair of the Panel did not require an introduction to the financial update for quarter 2 as this had been considered at Cabinet and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the past week, and the Panel's responsibility was to consider the information relating to the terms of reference and the areas marked as red or amber.

The Chair would continue to go through the report and Panel members were also invited to ask questions.

The Chair referred to page 5 paragraph 1.13 – (iii) which advised a budget duplicate deletion in relation to budget double counting within the walking and cycling action plan. The Chair continued to seek assurance that this would not impact on the delivery of the plan.

The Head of Transport and Travel outlined that the double counting had been identified and the walking and cycling action plan had been updated in terms of streets for people delivery plan, which was considered at Cabinet and set out the finance plan for the next 5 years which included : strategic CIL allocations one and two and funding from TfL and the LIP(Local Implementation Plan) and assumed a minimum allocation per year. These combined funding sources would deliver the walking plan for the next 5 years.

The Chair had a follow up question on the process leading to the double counting and sought assurance that this has been rectified and would not impact other savings. In response it was noted that this was essentially an oversight based on the previous projection which looked at combination of borrowing and strategic CIL. However, when the Council looked at reducing its borrowing and looked at funding via CIL the team did not reduce the projection in terms of the borrowing. Assurance was provided that the finance behind the plan was sound.

In response to a question from the Chair on the focus for income levels from leisure, the Director for Resident Engagement and Environment provided assurance that the leisure centres were generating income. At the point of transfer the leisure services had a commercialisation plan which had been audited on two separate occasions. This had identified ways for the Council to generate additional income through alternative methods. The Director explained that the delays were twofold. The first related to staffing and the time taken to harmonise the workforce which had meant the Council could not recruit to vacancies and some income generating roles. The context of TUPE transfer of 100 staff over three sites was outlined which was complex, but negotiations and structure had taken longer than anticipated but the service were now in a good place. The directorate had adjusted dedicated support to completing this exercise and to ensuring colleagues that were joining from Fusion integrated to Council. Secondly, it was important to note that the new offer was going through a budget process, and the directorate was establishing and designing what this looked like and anticipating some income in the last quarter of this year and seeing the full year’s benefit in the next financial year.

There was a question on commercialisation, and it seemed that the Council were still subsidising the service and there seemed no clear in path to profit and plan. It was further questioned whether the leisure service would become a commercial service that was profit making and the time frame for this. In response it was noted that the directorate do have a commercialisation plan and this was not net zero but aimed at making a profit. This was included in the MTFS, and the directorate was actively considering what will happen over the next four years and the aspiration for this. The directorate recognised that it was a competitive part of the organisation and had had the commercial plan verified by two different organisations and had positive feedback

and the reality was in the delivery of this. It was noted that part of the offer was not on membership but service offer and varied provision but improving and enhancing on all offers to the membership.

It was noted that there was a follow up discussion on commercialisation listed as a future item for the work plan for the Panel**.(Action Fola)**

There was a follow up question on the staffing negotiations as it seemed a significant lead in time was being followed when the agreement had been in place with Fusion before the transfer so an opportunity for negotiations to happen earlier.

In response it was noted that staffing engagement was complex and the Council could not engage before the transfer as this was not lawful. Workshops were offered but could not start until the TUPE was completed. It was noted that the directorate had responded and worked with HR colleagues and changed the dedicated level of staffing and there was a dedicated HR colleague working on this. The Director was optimistic on getting to a resolution, but the amount of work was time consuming and labour extensive. However, the director expected to see some stability for staffing in service

There was a question on membership levels and the service offer and change to the current membership banding levels to a gold, level silver. It was further asked whether the new banding would be applied to new members of leisure centres or also to existing members too as these were higher than existing fees. It was queried whether there could be a drop off in membership and therefore was income predicated on this?

In response it was noted that the service commenced the change in pricing of membership from the 1st of Jan 2026 and this would apply to any new sign ups from this date for gold, silver. In addition, in the coming two months, it was confirmed that there would be a transition of all of the existing members to one of these two levels. Concessionary options would still stay in place, and these had been re- aligned to the original 30% and 50% discounts. It was noted that the Council had inherited over 84 different membership types from Fusion and there was a lot of confusion between residents and staff and officers on what memberships were on offer and the Council were in the process of regularising this. Assurance was provided that, following a benchmarking exercise, the Council was still offering a cheaper membership than surrounding boroughs. This should also be considered in the context of the Council making a lot of investment across the service.

In relation to the question on whether any staff had left leisure service because of the experience of the transfer, the Director was not aware of any staff leaving due to this and the transfer had been good in context of taking forward difficult and challenging sites. There had been significant initial work completed to get to a steady state for the services. There had been recent contact and walkabouts to the transferred leisure sites with positive feedback from staff and the services were focusing on the delivering a single workforce.

There was discussion on the lack of savings through digital transformation, and the Panel had asked for an officer to attend a future finance related meeting of the Panel to respond on the consistent issues seen in relation to this savings area. The Director

was asked to in the meantime respond to the continued regular rag rated savings related to digital transformation which instead of saving money were causing overspend due to non-delivery. However, this was then often mitigated by a different action which was not clearly defined, and this seemed to need much greater scrutiny.

In response, a digital saving related to Planning was explained as an example of project that was rag rated red. This related to a historic saving, and it was noted that overall legacy digital transformation savings dated back a number of years and the progress had been impacted by Covid period and some of the legacy savings had since been apportioned across different parts of the organisation based on size. In terms of high level oversight, there was a modernisation board which directors were part of, including the Director for Finance and Resources which was to help identify and prioritise where IT efforts should be placed as there were finite resources and there may be some projects that may not provide the best financial results but could be taken forward based on a really high level criteria. The selection of projects also included the priority for resident benefits and the projects that were for investment. Given this situation, when considering the saving a green rag rating could not be provided until a clear pathway was apparent. This did not mean that the digital transformation was not taking place but there needed to be a cashable saving to allow a change to the rag rating. An example of digital transformation was the in parking and the use of technology. In conclusion, it was recognised that digital transformation delays were showing as the bulk of the overspend in Resident Experience and Environment, but the director was confident that in the next financial year some of the projects would come forward and some would be concluded delivering improvements in the planning system and reducing the demand in this service area.

The Director agreed to ask the Corporate Director responsible for digital to attend the future meeting and talk through the savings**(Action Fola)**

Cllr Cawley – Harrison added that there was a need for more information in the reports about the IT projects. Also, there was member understanding that there had been a shift over the last couple of years for the Council to do more inhouse digital working including procurement specifications and projects that would have previously been outsourced to partners, and it would be useful to understand if this policy decision was working to implement and enable service savings. In addition, from a governance perspective, there was a need to have a wider view of the IT enabled savings across the MTFS and this would mean deciding whether these were IT projects to be scrutinised by the Panels according to service area or as a whole by the the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. **(Action Fola)**

In response, to a question on the PCN challenge and the reduction of 50% of the discount given, this was related to the Taranto system and the parking IT provider and the resetting of the time period to pay a fine once an objection was responded to. At the moment there was no provision within the legislation for the fine to be reset. The system did not allow for this but to mitigate impact on this budget saving the parking team had changed the way that they managed the process of letters being sent out so that engagement was quicker.

In response to a question on the events in parks, there was a new officer in place to focus on income generation in parks by working with providers and ensuring local needs were met. It was noted that this officer was working on bringing a range of events across several parks and creating an audience. There were activities at Ducketts Common, Priory Park and Finsbury Park outlined with new winter events leading to expansion through the borough of culture activities together with events at Lordship Rec and Downhills Park planned.

In relation to the activities outlined on page 37 and the reduced estimation of fines expected, this was due to the change in positioning of cameras and the Council looking at hotspots and relocation of equipment to target areas of non-compliance with traffic requirements.

In relation to a question on the parking write-off and the reasons for this, it was noted that this was accumulative and where the Council was trying to recover debt after a number of years since the PCN's were issued. The Council would go through debt collection exercises and in some cases this could take a number of years. However, at the end of this process there would always be a decision to make on whether the debt was collectable. Assurance was provided that the Council undertake regular debt collection and data cleansing exercises to recover unpaid charges, sometimes pursuing debts for up to five years. However, there did come a point where historic debts were deemed irrecoverable after multiple collection attempts, and these were written off.

It was further noted that despite these challenges, collection rates have improved year-on-year, with up to 10–12% additional recovery over a three-year period. Legal processes could be lengthy, often requiring multiple court actions and taking several years to conclude. Some debts, such as those linked to foreign-registered or cloned vehicles, were particularly difficult to recover. The Council were working with contractors to identify persistent offenders, impound vehicles where possible, and address issues such as cloned plates. Progress has been made through revised enforcement approaches, and the Panel were assured that the Council were engaging with national initiatives led by the British Parking Association to tackle these problems.

It was further explained to the Panel that while write-offs would continue, likely increasing as penalty charges rise, this did not indicate a failure to collect what was recoverable. The Council monitored collection rates closely and adjusted strategies where needed. Current efforts included improving enforcement agent performance, introducing competitive market options, and enhancing payment processes to encourage early settlement.

In response to a question on outsourcing the debt recovery, this could reduce administrative costs but under current legislation, the Traffic Management Act, did not permit this. Therefore, the Council remained committed to maximising recovery within legal frameworks and ensuring compliance with Council policies.

The Chair had a question on the proposed GF capital Virements for quarter 2 page 52 to 53 (Waste Management slippage - capital slippage deferred to 2026/27) and what were the potential costs associated with this slippage. It was noted that this delay related to obtaining quotes for kitchen waste collection, which the Council were now

required to provide following changes in government policy on recycling and waste management. The procurement, managed through the existing Veolia contract, covered not only service delivery but also vehicles and containers for collection. Extended procurement timelines for these assets had resulted in deferring the associated expenditure to future years. This was not considered a significant concern, as the delay avoids immediate borrowing costs and the team remained on track to meet operational deadlines for service implementation.

9. WORK PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Head of Transport and Travel advised the Panel that he understood that the scope for the review of the Walking and Cycling Action Plan was quite wide and the most recent request was to provide some data on dockless and cycle usage in Haringey which had been provided.

The Head of Transport and Travel sought further understanding of the next steps for the review and the data and support needed.

The Panel members advised that following a further discussion on the 8th of December 2025, the scope of the review had been reduced and was now on safety concerns that extended beyond cyclists and powered two-wheelers to include impacts on other residents and pedestrians. The key focus was on ensuring safe, shared spaces for all road users. The Panel reiterated that this was not a scrutiny review of the walking and cycling action plan.

The Panel wanted to start looking at how safe it was to cycle in Haringey, and this would include people using bikes and hire bikes and the impact of cycling on road users at the same time. The Panel highlighted exploring the duality on roads for cycling and looking at the safety world around two wheeled vehicles and suggested they could look at information on collisions and accidents to understand current issues.

The Chair further explained that they would start the review with a brief consultation with residents via a survey followed by an in-person meeting and engagement with stakeholders' groups in the borough.

In response to the above, Head of Transport and Travel advised that it was not possible to obtain comprehensive datasets on cycling and powered two-wheeler safety, but current data showed a rise in collisions involving powered two-wheelers, largely driven by the growth of the delivery industry and inexperienced riders. It was noted that many of these riders lacked formal cycle training and faced pressure to work quickly as self-employed couriers, increasing risk. The Travel Team recognised this, and the issue was being addressed as part of the Council's Vision Zero commitment. He explained that there were initiatives like the "Pavements Are for Pedestrians" campaign run by the Active Travel team, engaging delivery drivers in multiple languages, promoting road safety awareness, and offering incentives such as cycle training and high-visibility gear. These efforts would continue to reduce risks and improve safety for all road users.

The Head of Transport and Travel advised that his team could provide statistics in terms of cycle and pedestrian casualties, but they would not have statistics in relation to interaction between pedestrians and cyclists or cyclists on delivering an interaction with the general public.

The Head of Transport and Travel further explained that his team could do a perception survey to gauge public opinion, but it would reflect residents' views rather than factual data. For accurate insights he recommended focus on collision statistics involving cyclists, pedestrians, and other vulnerable road users to specifically determine whether incidents have increased or decreased. The Head of Transport and Travel agreed to provide the Panel with this collision data outlined above that was obtained from the police and this would be filtered to include incidents involving bicycles or powered two-wheelers, along with location details. This information could identify potential hotspots, which can be considered for site visits by the Panel **(Action Maurice Richards)**

The Panel also asked for the Travel Team to provide any draft proposals for upcoming cycle infrastructure projects, including their locations and how they accommodate other road users. Additionally, any resident feedback the Team had would be helpful.

The Panel suggested taking forward online engagement that could be focused on gathering residents' experience, whether cycling themselves or interacting with cyclists in Haringey. This feedback could help inform potential recommendations for improving the Walking and Cycling Action Plan in response to changing conditions, or support preparations for next year's contract tendering.

In response The Head of Transport and Travel outlined that the team already held extensive perception data from previous consultations, including the Walking and Cycling Action Plan, Curbside Strategy, EV Strategy, and Transport Strategy. These covered public views on road space reallocation, attitudes toward cycling, and perceived barriers. As a way forward, his Team could extract relevant insights from these reports rather than re-surveying residents. However, this data reflected opinions and could not be independently verified. For factual evidence, the Council should rely on collision statistics. The Travel team had access to TfL software that allowed them to filter cyclist collision data specifically for cyclists and identify hotspots across the borough. The Travel team could turn this around quickly and provide those insights to the Panel as a way forward. **(Action Maurice Richards)**

In response to a request for additional data on enforcement of line bikes and issues around hotspots with bikes provided by Lime and Forrest, the Travel Team could provide the Panel with data on high-usage areas and locations with significant non-compliance, along with locations and details on how the Council were addressing these issues through the rollout of dockless bike parking. **(Action Maurice Richards)**

The Chair advised that the Principal Scrutiny Officer compile and send out a survey and the information that Head of Transport and Travel had indicated providing above. There could then be an initial Panel meeting to focus on reviewing data provided and

survey results and planning next steps for the review in mid-January. It was further agreed to hold a full-day stakeholder session with groups such as Living Streets and Disability Action at the end of January/ early February to gather evidence and compile recommendations. It was previously agreed that this would take place on a Friday and agreed the Scrutiny Officer provide a selection of potential dates for Panel members.

10. NEW ITEMS OF URGENT BUSINESS

None

11. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

23rd of February 2026.

CHAIR: Councillor Makbule Gunes

Signed by Chair ……..

Date ……