

# Community Services, Business and Planning Policy and Scrutiny Committee

**Date:** 14 September 2020

**Title:** Update from Councillor Paul Swaddle OBE, Cabinet Member for Community Services and Digital

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This report seeks to update the committee on matters pertaining to the Community Services and Digital portfolio focusing on:

1. COVID-19 Response
2. COVID-19 Re-Opening and Recovery
3. Operational Updates

For the attention of the committee, Cabinet responsibility for Libraries, Archives and Registrars has transferred to the Children's Services portfolio; therefore, all updates on this service will be covered by Councillor Barnes as the Cabinet Member responsible.

Appendix:

- Cabinet Member response to recommendations of the Access to Culture Task Group

## 1. COVID-19 RESPONSE

### 1.1 PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, LEISURE AND SPORT (PALS)

In line with guidance issued by national government in response to COVID-19, the Council's leisure provider, Everyone Active, closed all seven of our leisure centres on Friday 20 March 2020. The nation-wide lockdown and the closure of our leisure centres and community sports facilities presented a real challenge in encouraging our residents to be active; however, the Council was able to progress and adapt our ActiveWestminster digital transformation programme, OpenActive, to provide support to our residents to be active at home, which aligned with the national campaign by Sport England, #StayInWorkOut.

Our ActiveWestminster digital programme, OpenActive, came out of our ActiveWestminster Strategy 2018-2022 and our commitment to maximising the potential of digital technology to promote timely and relevant opportunities for physical activity, leisure and sport. There are two main ways for residents to utilise digital technology to be more active; this includes self-directed activity, such as walking, cycling or watching a pre-recorded exercise class, or 'live' and directed, such as live streaming an exercise class. There are lots of solutions for residents to find pre-recorded exercise classes, such as online via

YouTube, which works well for a proportion of our residents; however, we consider live-streaming exercise classes is the best way to:

- create motivation and sustained activity because there is a variety of offerings every day and happening at a specific time;
- foster community spirit and collaboration to reduce feelings of isolation as you are virtually in a class with other people; and
- support local fitness business to continue delivering to the population when they otherwise would not be able to.

There have been two critical aspects to our adapted OpenActive project; this included delivering guidance to fitness providers in Westminster who deliver high quality, openly published live exercise classes online, and upgrading the front-end user experience (UX) for both our ActiveWestminster website and app to support virtual exercise classes.

Getting and staying active is vital to everyone's physical and mental wellbeing and we wanted to ensure we were able to continue to support our residents to be able to find and access opportunities to get and stay active but from the comfort of their own homes, in local parks and open spaces throughout national lockdown whilst our leisure centres and community sports facilities were closed.

Our partners, imin and Playwaze, worked with us to produce a simple guide to help fitness providers to start live-streaming exercise classes. All live-streaming exercise classes hosted by our ActiveWestminster partners are available through both our ActiveWestminster website and ActiveWestminster app with a wide offering for our residents suited to their needs, such as activities for children, adults, people with disabilities, and over-50s.

The Council also collaborated with our partner Sport England on their national campaign #StayInWorkOut launched to inspire and inform the public about the many fun, innovative and creative ways the nation can get and stay active. This campaign was supported through our social media channels as a way to share information with our residents on hints, tips and home-based physical activity inspiration whilst in lockdown.

Throughout lockdown, Paddington Recreation Ground remained open to ensure this highly valued community asset could be used by residents to get outdoors and maintain active lives. Between 1 April 2020 to 31 July 2020, 738,955 visitors accessed Paddington Recreation Ground, an increase of 15% from the same period in 2019. Whilst open, there have been officers on the ground to ensure that users were following national guidelines, such as maintaining 2-metre social distancing.

At Sayers Croft whilst the facilities were closed to visitors, the resident team continued to work throughout lockdown supporting schools with booked activity visits and continuing with the refurbishment plan of buildings and the climbing tower, as well as updating educational resources. All work which would have been carried out by external companies has been carried out in-house. The Education team at Sayers Croft have provided online resources for children and families to participate in at home throughout the pandemic.

Our School Games Officer (SGO) has also kept in touch with Headteachers during lockdown and through to the end of term in July, informing them of School Games national and regional plans. In the absence of young people attending school our SGO has shared information to Headteachers from a range of agencies providing virtual online offers including London Youth Games virtual competition, as well as sharing details of local opportunities as lockdown was eased.

In addition to this, in response to national government guidance, the PALS team led the deployment of signage that informed residents and visitors on facility closures and reminding them to maintain social distancing. Signage was deployed across our seven leisure centres, over 170 playgrounds, multi-use

games areas, outdoor gyms, sports courts and pitches, table tennis tables and other communal recreation areas across the borough.

## **1.2 VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR (VCS)**

### **1.2.1 WESTMINSTER CONNECTS**

The pandemic placed an unexpected pressure on the voluntary and community sector as residents were shielding, self-isolating, or were vulnerable due to the lack of wider support networks. Westminster Connects was established rapidly as part of the Council's response to COVID-19.

The Government required that councils to check in with residents that were shielding once a month to assess their ongoing needs and ensure that they are safe. Around 10,000 residents were identified by the NHS as shielding in the borough and a group of re-deployed council staff and volunteers were tasked with providing this service. We provided support to these residents via food urgent food requests, shopping services, social contact or medication collection and delivery. We contacted the residents by letter, text and phone call to make sure everyone knew what support was available and set up the Westminster Connects helpline to make it easy for residents to get help.

The key aim of Westminster Connects was to connect residents with the right support, predominantly provided by volunteers who were registered and managed by the Council. We had a fantastic response from residents wishing to give up their time and volunteer to support our most vulnerable residents, with over 3,300 residents registering to volunteer for Westminster Connects.

Westminster Connects also helped direct donations and offers of support from local businesses and residents to other voluntary and community organisations, such as North Paddington Foodbank and Westminster Foodbank. The service also helped set up a wide range of other projects, such as the Unity Kitchen food project to provide food for the homeless and young people. The Council set up a Food Network Group to coordinate the work to support residents with food and meal delivery, a shopping service, and the Community Intelligence Forum to support voluntary community sector (VCS) organisations.

During lockdown from March until the end of June, Westminster Connects met over 40,900 needs of our residents through the support and generosity of our volunteers and local businesses.

In June the Westminster Connects service transitioned to a longer-term operation model, which enabled the Council to maintain its support network for both shielded and non-shielded residents for the remainder of lockdown. As part of this transition, the helpline moved from being run by council staff to becoming part of the Agilisys telephony service. The helpline move was seamless, and no issues occurred. We maintained a team of redeployed staff until the end of July, which was the end of the self-isolating period for residents who were shielding.

From August we have developed threshold plans for Westminster Connects and shielding, which would enable us to scale up the service in the event of a local increase in the cases of coronavirus. In addition, we have been developing the volunteer service with a wider range of opportunities as part of the rebranding of Westminster Connects into an ongoing volunteer force to support the needs of the community.

## **1.3 CULTURE**

Cultural and creative organisations found themselves within one of the worst hit sectors impacted by COVID-19, having experienced a catastrophic loss of income due to venue closures and a severe drop in production during lockdown. The Council has sought to provide reassurance to the sector that it has support at this unprecedented time.

In mid-May, the Council contacted over 500 local arts, education, community organisations and policy stakeholders to signpost organisations to emergency resources available from different bodies and expressing the council's commitment to supporting the recovery. We also regularly communicated with the Culture Network on funding and information updates, such as the latest national government rescue funding details.

From June, the Leader hosted a series of video conference calls with key cultural stakeholders to provide a forum to hear from the sector about the pressing issues they are facing, and to ascertain how the Council might offer support, for instance, through its Movement Strategy and changes to the public realm to encourage visitors to return to cultural districts.

The Council also communicated the difficulties faced by Westminster's arts sector to counterparts at the Greater London Authority and London Councils in monthly zoom meetings to help them develop their response and lobby national government for support.

In addition to this work, a virtual West End LIVE took place on the weekend of 18 June through collaborative working between the Council's Events team and the Society of London Theatre. This was free to access and was promoted across internal and external platforms to engage over 200,000 people, ensuring that London theatre remains on the radar despite theatres not yet being ready to open.

### **1.3.1 CITY LIONS**

City Lions were quick to respond to the changing needs that COVID-19 brought upon us. By 20 March, the team had redesigned the programme to be delivered online.

Since the start of lockdown, we have delivered eighteen live weekly sessions, four three-day holiday programmes (each running for five-hours a day), and a City Lions Digital Festival with over 24 events and activities engaging almost 300 young people. This has meant that we have continued to offer high quality relevant services for our young people despite being in lockdown.

We have also delivered eighteen weekly creative challenges for our young people, with a prize of £25 for each challenge, which was kindly donated by one of our local entrepreneurs.

## **1.4 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOODS**

### **1.4.1 OPEN FORUM**

As concerns surrounding COVID-19 were high, the Council made the decision to cancel the Open Forum event scheduled for 16 March 2020, due to health and safety concerns related to COVID-19. Whilst the event was cancelled, all pre-submitted questions were responded to and residents appeared satisfied with this.

As an alternative to our Open Forums, we did host two Leader Live sessions on Facebook during lockdown. The first Leader Live took place on 17 April and attracted 585 live views, and a total of 48 questions asked during the live event. This was the first Facebook Live event for the Council and

garnered thirteen times the average view time than an average video on the Council's Facebook page. The first event also received 75 times more shares, and 657 times more comments compared to usual. After the event, the stream was uploaded to the Council website and YouTube. The second Leader Live took place on 29 May and attracted 353 live views, and a total of 49 questions asked during the event. These events proved very popular with our residents as we saw more engagement on this platform compared to other forums carried out previously.

During lockdown and following the success of the Leader Live events, scoping work took place to host a future Open Forum virtually. We endeavour host this online Open Forum in late September or early October.

#### **1.4.2 WARD BUDGETS**

The pandemic did not significantly affect the ward budget programme as we did not see an increase or decrease in applications throughout lockdown. There were a number of COVID-19 specific projects funded by ward members during lockdown; an example of the COVID-19 specific projects supported by ward budgets included:

- Ebury Food Surplus and Thamesbank Centre
- North Paddington Foodbank
- All Sing! Community Choir to enable them to continue online;
- Hot food provision at Maida Hill Place;
- Paddington Waterways and Maida Vale Society to provide relief to local residents; and
- Covent Garden Food Bank.

### **1.5 CUSTOMER SERVICES AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION**

#### **1.5.1 CUSTOMER SERVICES**

In response to the pandemic the Council entered a fast-paced, agile, multi-phase approach to surface important information quickly on all key platforms.

As part of the wider communications mix, it was vital that the Westminster City Council website formed a central bank of up-to-the-minute, reliable information.

The first phase of the website response focused on a single information hub, sign-posted from the homepage and banners across the site. As the amount of information grew, and more data became available showing how users were navigating the site and what they were searching for, we moved into new structures to host COVID-19 updates. This centered around hubs for businesses and residents, and over time these became increasingly streamlined to ease navigation, with most service-specific updates moving out to service pages.

Traffic to the Council website rose by 18% in the first three months of the pandemic from mid-March to mid-June, compared to the previous three months. In total, between March and the start of June, the website had over 1,260,000 unique visitors.

We also developed two new map pages at speed for Westminster Connects and Shop Local. The Westminster Connects map page was created for visitors to identify volunteers and those needing help. The Shop Local map page was created to support the local business community by drawing visitors to their premises by highlighting their opening times and services.

For the first time ever, we held two Facebook Live events with the Leader, giving people the chance to ask Councillor Robathan questions and have them answered either in the moment or through swift

follow-up from officers. These events were popular and saw record levels of engagement on the corporate Facebook account as mentioned earlier in the report.

We also ensured updates were posted on social media multiple times a day, and the team managed a long-term significant influx of questions and comments from the public via our corporate platforms, particularly on Twitter.

Throughout lockdown, tailored, daily email updates via the MyWestminster e-newsletter were sent directly to people's inboxes every day including weekends. These received praise from multiple recipients, even Money Saving Expert, Martin Lewis.

### **1.5.2 DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF COUNCIL SERVICES IN COLLABORATION WITH OTHER CABINET MEMBERS**

As part of the Council's response to the pandemic, the IT team worked on delivering priority digital projects with services and other Cabinet Members, with support from the Community Services and Digital portfolio. These priority projects included:

- The delivery of a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system to store details of vulnerable residents who may require additional support services;
- The creation of a sign-up process to allow prospective social housing tenants to view available properties and maintain social distancing;
- The provision of a solution to allow residents to request our shopping support service; and  
The delivery of web and mobile applications to support a service managing the logistics processes for moving the deceased from hospitals within London to temporary excess storage facilities around the capital was completed in April.

In addition, the following priority projects to support our response continue to progress:

- The creation of a virtual library website to enhance our library service offering;
- The provision of an online resident parking permit application and renewal form; and
- The introduction of Interactive Voice Recognition (IVR) support for vulnerable residents.

### **1.5.3 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (IT)**

At the start of lockdown, the majority of Council staff had IT equipment, such as a Microsoft Surface Pro, allowing them to access all IT services from home. This facilitated a relatively easy switch to home working. The IT team also carried out rapid upgrades on the virtual private network (VPN) and central internet capacity to support the surge in remote working. Alongside this, IT support processes were redesigned to operate in a mainly remote-only mode, such as delivery and set-up of new and replacement IT equipment to staff in their homes.

We have seen a significant increase in the use of Microsoft Teams for conferencing and collaboration by Council staff with members also making use of this facility to carry out Council business. For example, by June 2020 we saw an increase of around 25 times the use we saw in February earlier this year.

As part of the Council's response to the pandemic, Council Committee Meetings were moved online using the Microsoft Teams Live platform. The move to allow Council Committee meetings to take place virtually has meant that the Council has been able to continue to move forward with licensing and planning applications, appoint a new Lord Mayor, and allow for the democratic functions of the Council to continue with live streaming Cabinet and Policy and Scrutiny Committees. For example, in May, we hosted our first Full Council meeting virtually and appointed our new Lord Mayor, Councillor Glanz. We had over 150 viewers tuned in to this meeting, which is significantly more than usual for our Council meetings.

In addition, the team has upgraded our audio-visual equipment in meeting rooms at City Hall to better support virtual meeting on Microsoft Teams, as well as hybrid meetings whereby there will be some attendees in the meeting room, with others joining remotely on Microsoft Teams.

#### **1.5.4 TELECOMMUNICATIONS**

During March 2020, our Agilisys contact centre experienced no significant change in call volume as users sought information and support in response to the pandemic. However, in April and May, we saw call volumes reduce significantly as some services were temporarily closed as officers were redeployed in response to the pandemic. From June onwards, the volume of calls answered increased to near normal levels. We consider this increase in volume to be due in part to the transition of the phonenumber for Westminster Connects to our in-hour contact centre service with Agilisys, as well as the re-opening of some of the Council's services in line with national government guidance.

#### **1.6 BROADBAND AND CONNECTIVITY**

The critical nature of broadband infrastructure was demonstrated by the increase in data usage during lockdown. Some providers have observed an 80% increase in data traffic during lockdown which demonstrates the importance of fast reliable broadband to cope with this increase demand.

Street works in Westminster continued with a business as usual approach during lockdown with operatives on worksites adhering to social distancing guidelines and wearing additional safety equipment, such as face masks. Broadband and fibre installation works have continued to agreed programmes across Westminster, with GNetwork accounting for the majority of the planned works in this area. To help mitigate the impact to residents working from home, there was a city-wide rollout of acoustic noise barriers across all of their sites, which has allowed works to continue while keeping noise disturbance to a minimum. The opportunity was also taken to complete installations in more complex locations, while traffic volumes were at lower levels, with Regent Street and Piccadilly being of particular note.

In addition, Children's Services identified a number of families that lacked a broadband connection, which was an essential requirement for their continued participation in education during lockdown. In response to this, the Economy team worked with a mobile operator and broadband providers to source Mi-Fi, wireless mobile broadband routers and fibre connections for these families. As a result of this project, an additional five families in Westminster had access to broadband connections to help them maintain contact with their social worker and participate in education.

## **2. COVID-19 RE-OPENING AND RECOVERY**

### **2.1 PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, LEISURE AND SPORTS (PALS)**

#### **2.1.1 LEISURE CENTRES**

Following the revision in national government guidance to allow leisure centres to reopen from 25 July, Everyone Active and the Council worked together to ensure we were able to reopen our leisure centres safely and to the high standards our community expect.

On 1 August 2020, all seven of our leisure centres re-opened with a phased re-introduction of our service provision over August. For example, on 1 August, our gym facilities were open and from 5 August we offered bookable lane swimming sessions over hourly slots.

Protocols and safety measures were in place to provide a COVID-secure environment for re-opening for staff, residents and customers. During lockdown, ahead of reopening, each facility was deep cleaned. The protocols and safety measures introduced by Everyone Active ahead of re-opening were made available online and on signage throughout our leisure centres. For reference, the safety measures introduced by Everyone Active are:

- We ask that anyone feeling ill or showing signs of any symptoms does not attend the centre and follow NHS guidance;
- Ensuring our cleaning measures adhere to Public Health England guidance;
- All activities will have maximum numbers allocated;
- We will look to implement a one-way system (where possible) so we can maintain social distancing guidelines in all areas of our centres;
- Hand sanitiser and cleaning materials will be located at various locations around the building for customers to use;
- All customer communication can be done through this website to avoid interaction, but where this may be unavoidable, we have installed protective 'sneeze screens';
- We will provide training for all team members on our new way of operating, ensuring both member and team safety is always a priority;
- Most activities will be booked online or via the Everyone Active app prior to visiting the building;
- We will increase our cleaning of the centre and have reviewed our procedures to ensure they meet the COVID 19 'Public Health England COVID 19: Cleaning of non-healthcare settings guidance'. You will see additional focused cleaning of any shared surfaces and regular antivirus fogging machines throughout the day; and
- Remind both colleagues and customers of Government advice through clear notices around our centres.

These safety measures remain in place at all seven of our leisure centres and Everyone Active continues to encourage users to book ahead of their visit either online or through the app to ensure the restricted capacity is safely managed.

As part of the re-opening process the team have worked towards the Right Directions 'Fit for Business' independent certification. This is a new accreditation produced by nationwide Quest auditors, Right Directions, as a mark of confidence that leisure facilities with the certification have taken measures to ensure they are compliant with government COVID-19 guidance.

Since re-opening, leisure centres have seen a positive return of users, with extremely positive feedback concerning the new measures and safety procedures that have been introduced.

## **2.1.2 ACTIVESTREETS PROGRAMME**

The Council has accelerated our ActiveStreets programme to safely support the easing of lockdown and to provide a new additional space for children and families to get out and be active. As part of this programme, we have introduced several semi-permanent 'Play Streets' temporary road closures for 'Street Play' sessions, and temporary 'School Streets'. This aspect of our accelerated roll-out of our ActiveStreets programme is a temporary measure that will be continually monitored in order to reflect the safety and needs of our local communities.

The semi-permanent 'Play Streets' are operational on weekdays from 3pm to sunset, and on weekends from 10am to sunset until the 30 September 2020 at the following locations:

- Chepstow Place – between Dawson Place and Pembridge Place;
- Fernhead Road – between Kennet Road and Maid Hill market;
- Northumberland Place – between Talbot Road and Artesian Road;

- Ranelagh Road – between Lupus Street and Johnson’s Place (cul-de-sac);
- Oliphant Street – between Fifth Avenue and Sixth Avenue;
- Peach Road – between Oliphant Street and Ilbert Street;
- Marne Street – between Fifth Avenue and Third Avenue; and
- Kilravock Street – between Fifth Avenue and Sixth Avenue.

The temporary ‘Street Play’ sessions were arranged to take place at the following locations:

- Droop Street – between Third Avenue and Fourth Avenue – on weekdays from 1pm – 4pm until 30 August 2020 with support from ‘Street Makers’ from the Avenues Youth Project; and
- Old Pye Street – between Abbey Orchard/Perkins Rents and St Annes Street – on Wednesday 29 July, Wednesday 5 August, Wednesday 12 August, and Friday 14 August from 1pm until 5:30pm with support from ‘Street Makers’ from St Andrew’s Youth Club.

The temporary ‘School Streets’ have been assessed and selected to be in place from 1 June until the end of term in December 2020 on Mondays and Fridays during term time. During days and times of operation, the following streets will be closed to vehicles, except for access for residents, deliveries and emergency services:

- Bridgeman Street from 8:30am to 9:15am and from 3pm to 3:45pm to support pupils attending Barrow Hill Juniors;
- Droop Street from 8:30am to 10am and from 12:45pm to 2:15pm to support pupils attending Queen’s Park Primary School;
- Shrewsbury Road from 8:30am to 10am and from 2:15pm to 3:45pm to support pupils attending St Mary’s of the Angel Catholic Primary School;
- Marlborough Hill from 8:30am to 9:30am and from 1:15pm to 2:15pm to support pupils attending George Elliot Primary School;
- Lower Belgrave Street from 8:30am to 10am and from 3pm to 4:30pm to support pupils attending St Peter’s Eaton Square Church of England Primary School;
- Crompton Street from 8:30am to 10am and from 1:30pm to 3pm to support pupils attending the younger year site at King Solomon Academy;
- Drury Lane from 8:30am to 9:45am and from 2:15pm to 3:45pm to support pupils attending St Clement Danes Church of England Primary School;
- Essendine Road from 8:30am to 9:45am and from 11:15am to 12:45pm to support pupils attending Essendine Primary School;
- Forset Street and Nutford Place from 9am to 10am and from 2:45pm to 3:45pm to support pupils attending Hampden Gurney Church of England Primary School;
- Craven Terrace from 8:30am to 10am, from 12:30pm to 1:10pm, and from 2:15pm to 3:45pm to support pupils attending St James and St John’s Church of England Primary School; and
- Bulstrode Street from 9:30am to 9:50am and from 3:30pm to 3:45pm to support pupils attending Wetherby Senior School.

The temporary ‘School Streets’ support social distancing guidelines by creating space for pupils, parents and carers the space to safely get to and from the school gates.

The team are meaningfully implementing the ActiveStreets programme to encourage, facilitate and enable our schools, residents and communities to open up our streets for play and physical activity on the doorstep, increase in the number of people who know their neighbours, improve air quality and increase active travel in a variety of different ways; whether that be a ‘Play Street’, a ‘Street Play’ session or a ‘School Street’.

### **2.1.3 ACTIVEWESTMINSTER TABLE TENNIS PROGRAMME**

Table Tennis, as an activity, is regarded as one of the best by leading researchers to boost mental wellbeing and even minimise the impact of dementia. The PALS team have implemented an accelerated programme working in partnership with Table Tennis England to improve access to facilities to encourage residents to play table tennis and be active.

The PALS team have been successful in acquiring 400 table tennis home equipment sets which have been distributed amongst our Looked After Children and Care Leavers. In addition, the PALS team have launched the ActiveWestminster Table Tennis Programme across a number of locations across Westminster.

From early August the following locations were equipped with a new semi-permanent table and equipment, as well as a £360 activation fund per table, to allow two-hour sessions to be delivered each week for 18 weeks until October 2020 as part of the first phase of the programme:

- Lisson Grove (two tables were provided);
- Edbrooke Road Gardens;
- Lillington and Longmoore Garden Estate; and
- Ebury Bridge Estate.

In addition, as part of the first phase of the programme, we provided the following clubs with an indoor table and equipment to use:

- Crompton Street Shelter;
- Marylebone Project; and
- Caxton Youth Club.

There are two more phases planned as part of the programme so far, with the next planned for October 2020 at the following sites:

- Brunel Estate;
- Churchill Gardens Estate;
- Peabody Avenue;
- Tachbrook Estate;
- Bessborough Gardens; and
- Pimlico Gardens.

As part of the second phase of the programme, we will be providing the following clubs with an indoor table and equipment to use:

- The Avenues Youth Club;
- Marylebone Bangladesh Society Youth Club; and
- North Paddington Youth Club.

### **2.1.4 SAYERS CROFT**

Since being closed to the public in late March, refurbishment works to the site have been brought forward. These works included the demolition of the old water tower to make way for a new £250,000 Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funded climbing tower to be constructed, and the renovation of our camping facilities.

During the summer holidays and once national government guidelines were revised, the Sayers Croft team offered a new camping and activity programme to Westminster families who could act as one household. The activities offered were limited to those that the team could safely manage and maintain social distancing guidelines. With only one month of the summer holidays to attract bookings

we have taken 32 enquiries, with 11 confirmed bookings to date. This has proven successful in its delivery and will be taken forward as new business during the summer holidays when we have fewer bookings.

In June, we re-opened bookings for the Forest School at Paddington Recreation Ground for dates in the Autumn term and so far, we have seen schools in Westminster booking their sessions as per usual.

However, as national government guidance is advising schools against residential, it is unlikely that the residential centre will see business as usual for the rest of the year. We have researched how best to meet the needs of those who should have been visiting the residential centre in Autumn to offer day visits as an alternative, which will help offset staffing costs. We recognise that whilst some schools are hopeful for a visit in October or November, some will want to cancel their visits altogether. Since March, we have offered postponements for visits until 2021.

## **2.2 VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY SECTOR (VCS)**

### **2.2.1 WESTMINSTER CONNECTS**

Following the revision to national government guidelines on shielding, after 31 July shielding was paused unless the transmission of coronavirus started to rise significantly.

However, to support the recovery post-lockdown, Westminster Connects has established an effective network with local suppliers, developers and other businesses that want to make a difference in the community. Our aim through the network, which was established in August is to connect businesses with their communities, including voluntary and community sector organisations. We will use this network to promote the work of VCS organisations and to highlight need in our community which we identify through our Community Intelligence Forum.

Wherever possible, Council officers involved with the recovery work are developing projects with VCS organisations. For example, a new initiative being developed to help young people to train a cycle mechanics and to repair disused bikes is being developed with Groundwork London. Through the Council's Economy Team, we also provide a regular digest of external funding opportunities to VCS organisations to help them to access funds to deliver their programmes and meet local need.

In addition to this, the Westminster Connects team has been working on the following to support the Council's recovery work:

- Begun a rebranding process to establish the volunteer force as a key way for residents to continue to support their community;
- Continued to maintain the helpline, with referrals to the food banks for people in hardship;
- Begun work on a hardship fund, supported by government funds;
- Started a Business Network, to coordinate support from businesses;
- Maintained the Food Network Group, and developed a food transition plan in case of future lockdowns;
- Gathered lessons learned from the first phase of the pandemic; and
- Developed volunteer ideas with different council departments to increase the reach of services.

There is more detail on the work and plans for Westminster Connects in the separate report presented to this Committee on Monday 14 September 2020.

## **2.3 CULTURE**

We are working to hold a virtual Culture Network forum in the coming weeks to focus on recovery planning and sharing good practice amongst the sector in terms of responses to the pandemic situation.

The Council's Economy team have been providing advice and distributing a range of government grants (£10,000 - £25,000 for companies of rateable value under £51,000), and expanded rate reliefs (100% discount in rates for 20/21) to live arts, music and comedy venues. We have also recently allocated Section 106 funding to the Donmar Theatre to support a tour of a contemporary Shakespeare production 'Teenage Dick' which will play to five Westminster schools, reaching 750 schoolchildren, as soon as it is safe to deliver this.

In addition, the Council also won the Royal Society of Art's prestigious Cities of Learning competition recently and this programme will provide a framework for bringing together our local cultural institutions and learning providers to support young people's access to creative experiences and skills as part of our civic renewal planning.

## **2.4 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOODS**

Our Member Services team and Communications team have worked to promote the ward budgets as a way for communities to tackle local problems during recovery. We have not seen an increase in applications yet but will continue to promote this source of funding.

## **2.5 CUSTOMER SERVICES AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION**

As we move into recovery, we are running multiple, targeted campaigns and online activity which are highly relevant to recovery. This includes online, cross-platform delivery for hospitality strategy and an ongoing re-opening response, NHS Test and Trace (with an emphasis on hard to reach communities), Sightsee Crowd Free (which has seen us partner with social media influencers for the first time), Back to School, rough sleeping and much more. Each Council-led campaign has been directed by the relevant Cabinet Member, with support from the Community Services and Digital portfolio.

### **2.5.1 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

As lockdown has eased, our Committee Services team has worked closely with the IT team to assess the feasibility of hosting hybrid Council meetings in accordance with national government guidelines. We hope to offer the option of a hybrid Council meeting in the future, which would see attendees and participants joining in person, and also virtually for the same meeting. This offering would help support the Council's plans to re-open the City, as well as national government's messaging to see employees return to work.

## **2.6 BROADBAND AND CONNECTIVITY**

The Council has maintained, and continues to maintain, as close to business as usual as possible in relation to facilitating fibre deployments both in our streets and on our housing estates. By maintaining fibre deployment, it will support residents and businesses to access fast and reliable broadband connectivity which will help aid recovery.

## 3. Operational Updates

### 3.1 PHYSICAL ACTIVITY, LEISURE AND SPORT (PALS)

#### 3.1.1 LEISURE CENTRES

Our maintenance and improvement work programmes were largely unaffected by the pandemic. We have worked alongside our construction and supplier partners to follow national government guidance to continue with the majority of works where safe to do so. While progress has been slower than usual due to the strict COVID-19 working protocols, the team have achieved many positive results. A number of these interventions are listed as follows:

##### ***Marshall Street Leisure Centre***

- Installation of a new chemical dosing system in the swimming pool;
- Extensive repairs carried out to the swimming pool roof;
- Refurbishment of the lift;
- Redecoration works carried out across the centre; and
- Ensuring all air handling units have a supply of fresh air (rather than re-circulating air).

##### ***Porchester Centre***

- Installation of three new fully compliant lifts and one lift refurbished;
- Cleaning and upgrade of pool air handling units;
- Full refurbishment of main swimming pool and gym roof lanterns both internally and externally;
- Works to fully refurbish the main swimming pool continued;
- Ensuring all air handling units have a supply of fresh air (rather than re-circulating air);
- Reinforcement of the main swimming pool tank alongside the replacement of all rusted and dilapidated circulation pipework;
- Improvement works completed in the spa on the doors, walls and floors; and
- Restorative repaint and redecoration work across the centre.

##### ***Paddington Recreation Ground***

- Construction of a new 'Lazy Brook' in the environmental area, complimenting the existing ponds and an extensive replanting scheme has taken place;
- Installation of a green roof built on top of the trackside containers, with the containers themselves soon to be planted with a variety of plants, to provide more biodiversity and habitat;
- Works are continuing to the new AstroTurf pitch in the 'D' of the athletics track.
- Construction of a new 60 metre sprint track;
- Installation of all new energy efficient LED lighting throughout the athletics track;
- A new purpose-built Calisthenics area;
- A new purpose-built Parkour Park;
- Installation of new air handling units that have a supply of fresh air and cleaning of duct work has taken place in the gym and studio; and
- Full rejuvenation of the AstroTurf tennis courts.

##### ***Queen Mother Sports Centre***

- Follow a full remodelling of the major swimming pool circulation pipework, to allow each of the separate swimming pools to have a wholly independent filtration system, the main swimming pool will reopen for lane swimming from Thursday 3 September 2020, alongside the teaching and diving swimming pools;

- Full replacement or refurbishment of all air handling units and cleaning of internal ducts, ensuring all air handling units have a supply of fresh air (rather than re-circulating air);
- Refurbishment of the shower areas in the wet-side changing rooms and the poolside group change areas;
- Repairs to the main pool hall Barrisol ceiling panels;
- Upgrade to energy efficient LED lighting;
- Redecoration works;
- Exterior works to the roof, cladding and curtain walling; and
- Installation of a new fence and additional CCTV cameras to enhance security across the site.

#### ***Seymour Leisure Centre***

- Installation of new flooring in the dance studio;
- Parts of the centre are being redecorated; and
- Ensuring all air handling units have a supply of fresh air (rather than re-circulating air).

### **3.1.2 MAJOR PROJECTS**

As with our maintenance and improvement work programmes for our leisure centres, the following major projects were largely unaffected by the pandemic:

#### ***Jubilee Leisure Centre***

Throughout lockdown, the detailed design work continued, and demolition works were completed on-site in preparation for the main works to commence on 24 August. The developer, EcoWorld, has worked closely with colleagues at the Council to ensure the work programme causes as little disruption to residents as possible. There is now a monthly community newsletter circulated amongst residents to update them on the programme. A virtual 'meet the contractor' event also took place on 25 August to give residents and ward members the opportunity to hear from the developers about the work programme and meet the newly appointed contractor, Boshers.

#### ***Seymour Leisure Centre***

The project has potential for a wide scale enhancement of both leisure and library services for Westminster residents within a fully co-located facility and could become a hub for both physical and mental wellbeing, whilst protecting the aging Grade II listed building. Council officers are working to draft a Strategic Outline Business Case for discussion between Cabinet Members.

#### ***Lisson Green pitch***

This project was made possible by working in partnership with Westminster Housing and having attracted external funding via the London Marathon Charitable Trust. The original pitch surface has been removed, new fencing and gates installed, and floodlights have been upgraded to date. The work to lay the new pitch surface has been delayed until national government guidance is revised to allow football to be played.

#### ***Luton Street Leisure Centre***

Main site works re-commenced on 27 April following changes to national government guidelines and is progressing well.

### **3.1.3 ACTIVEWESTMINSTER STRATEGY**

As part of our ActiveWestminster Strategy, we are planning to trial our proposed policy to remove restrictive signage, such as 'No Ball Games' and 'No Cycling' in the street or in communal areas across Westminster in due course. After the trial, we will review the impact the removal of this restrictive signage had on strengthening a culture of physical activity, leisure and sport, including play, in our neighbourhoods.

### **3.1.4 BUILT FACILITIES STRATEGY, PLAYING PITCH STRATEGY, AND LOCAL FOOTBALL FACILITY PLAN**

The Built Facilities Strategy (BFS), the Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS), and the Local Football Facility Plan (LFFP) have been commissioned in response to Sport England's feedback on the City Plan 2040. The existence of a robust PPS, BFS and LFFP will enable informed and evidence-based decisions and actions to be made across a range of agendas including sports and play development, planning policy and planning applications, educational provision, funding, facility and asset management, public health and the management of provision and maintenance for these facilities. Early scoping work is currently underway to draft these strategies and plans.

## **3.2 CULTURE**

The Cultural Strategy for the next five years demonstrates our commitment to engaging more hard-to-reach residents in culture and we will work with our community and cultural partners to achieve this. The publication of our finalised Cultural Strategy was postponed in light of pandemic, but we hope to launch our finalised strategy in the coming weeks, taking into account the recovery situation for cultural institutions.

### **3.2.1 CITY LIONS**

The City Lions team continues to work closely with education establishments and youth organisations to expand our online offer by brokering opportunities for our young people.

## **3.3 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND NEIGHBOURHOODS**

### **3.3.1 OPEN FORUM**

After undertaking scoping exercises, the Council is planning to host our next Open Forum event in late September or early October, but this time it will be taking place virtually as national government guidelines do not permit large gatherings yet. Officers are currently working to pull together plans and once ready, we will be promoting this more widely.

### **3.3.2 WARD BUDGETS**

At the end of August 2020, since May 2018, we have allocated £1,570,229.93 towards 330 ward budget projects. This means there is £1,189,770.07 remaining to be allocated towards ward budget projects until March 2022. A ward-by-ward breakdown of expenditure is available for reference in Figure 1 below.

**FIGURE 1: WARD BUDGET ALLOCATION SINCE MAY 2018 TO END OF AUGUST 2020 BY WARD**

<b>WARD</b>	<b>SPENT</b>	<b>REMAINING</b>
Abbey Road	£80,014.77	£57,985.23
Bayswater	£80,238.20	£57,761.80
Bryanston and Dorset Square	£26,312.66	£111,687.34
Churchill	£95,602.43	£42,397.57
Church Street	£102,100.00	£35,900.00
Harrow Road	£114,811.54	£23,188.46
Hyde Park	£11,882.82	£126,117.18
Knightsbridge and Belgravia	£58,137.00	£79,863.00
Lancaster Gate	£42,291.24	£95,708.76
Little Venice	£74,684.24	£63,315.76
Maida Vale	£83,915.70	£54,084.30
Marylebone High Street	£111,667.87	£26,332.13
Queen's Park	£104,719.67	£33,280.33
Regent's Park	£56,873.16	£81,126.84
St James's	£82,741.89	£55,258.11
Tachbrook	£70,641.77	£67,358.23
Vincent Square	£81,296.96	£56,703.04
Warwick	£115,631.42	£22,368.58
Westbourne	£97,494.67	£40,505.33
West End	£79,171.92	£58,828.08

### **3.4 CUSTOMER SERVICES AND DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION**

#### **3.4.1 WEBSITE**

Our Digital team continues to work with the IT team on delivering our upcoming new corporate website. The new website is due to go live in November 2020 and will provide a vastly improved, seamless online experience, which puts the user first. The new site will deliver multiple efficiencies by way of enabling users to find what they need, fast, as well as giving the council the tools to personalise content and promote campaigns and events through colourful, contemporary new pages.

As a minimum, the new website meets AA requirements, and where possible AAA, under the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), which is a single, shared, international standard for web content accessibility. All templates and the site's information structure has been rigorously tested with real users to help inform decision making.

#### **3.4.2 CORPORATE COMPLAINTS**

Since the start of the pandemic there have been some minor changes to working arrangements for complaints. Most services had capacity to answer complaints although it was recognised that they would take longer to deal with them as other priorities would take preference. In view of this services were asked to answer complaints as soon as it was practicably possible and to keep residents informed of delays, and to send holding replies when target response times could not be met. This message was also added to the Council's Complaints web page online.

Complaints about Business Rates were put on hold from the commencement of lockdown until 1 August 2020 because the service was engaged in allocating the funds received from national government under the special discretionary business rate grants scheme. All Stage 1 complaints about business rates that were put on hold are now up to date.

Between the start of March to 20 August 2020, we received 670 Stage 1 corporate complaints. This figure was down by 60 from the same period the previous year. For the same period, we received 71 Stage 2 corporate complaints, which was down 4 from the same period the previous year.

The complaints system is not configured to identify COVID-19 as a reason for making a complaint and therefore we cannot determine if the pandemic is a complaint trend. In addition, most of the initial concerns relating to the pandemic were answered by the relevant service areas as general queries and would have only entered the complaints procedure if the customer was unsatisfied with the reply to their concern.

Between the start of March to 20 August 2020, 56% of all Stage 1 complaints were completed within our target response times. Stage 2 response times have also slowed down and 52% of the cases answered as at 20 August 2020 were completed within 20 days. We anticipated that our response times would take longer than usual during lockdown due to staff sickness and urgent secondments for staff to provide priority assistance in response to the pandemic.

**3.4.3 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION (FOI) REQUESTS**

In March 2020 the Information Commissioner (ICO) announced it would not penalise public authorities for failing to meet Freedom of Information (FOI) deadlines during the pandemic and that this would remain the case until the additional pressure on public authorities had been reduced significantly. However, the Council has endeavoured to maintain business as usual with our FOI service where possible.

We saw a significant decrease in FOI requests from March to the end of May 2020, when compared to the same period the previous year. For example, in 2020 we received 412 FOI requests, and in the same period in 2019 we received 510 FOI requests. Throughout this period, the nature of FOI requests remained varied but there has been a greater emphasis on the Council's response to the pandemic since March, particularly around the financial impact on the Council.

Since May, we have seen a steady increase in FOI requests as shown in Figure 2 below.

**FIGURE 2: FOI REQUESTS BETWEEN MARCH 2020 AND 21 AUGUST**

MONTH	FOI REQUESTS RECEIVED
March	234
April	104
May	74
June	114
July	122
August (up to 21 of the month)	57

In March 2020 the compliance rate (FOI's responded to in 20 working days) was 87%. This figure dropped to 77% in May but has since risen back to 91% in July. This dip in performance was partly

due to staff sickness and urgent secondments for staff to provide priority assistance in response to the pandemic.

As well as responding to requests for information, the Council must publish information proactively. We are currently in the early stages of a project seeking to work with all departments to publish more information online. This project is being driven by the type of information that is frequently requested under FOI. This work was placed on hold due to the pandemic, but we hope to progress this project as lockdown has eased.

#### **3.4.4 DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION OF COUNCIL SERVICES IN COLLABORATION WITH OTHER CABINET MEMBERS**

The pandemic has slowed down our digital transformation programme as IT staff were tasked with priority projects to support the Council's response to the pandemic. However, the IT team is continuing to work on active digital transformation projects, such as:

- The Mobile Working Project will be delivering the ability for street-based council officers to issue Fixed Penalty Notices through a full end-to-end mobile platform. It is anticipated that this will be completed at the end of September;
- The Registrars Service Improvement project will be delivering a mobile payment system, self-checking kiosks, mobile printing, and a comprehensive service and room booking system. It is anticipated that this will be completed at the end of September;
- The Online Housing Register Applications Project will replace paper-based housing application forms with an improved online solution. It is anticipated that this will be completed at the end of September;
- The CRM for Housing project is progressing into the defining and planning phases, and is aiming to include the management of online service requests from residents; and
- The Housing Contact Centre Telephony project is progressing and will deliver new omni-channel capabilities, including text and social media. It is anticipated that the initial phase of delivery for this project will be the end of October.

#### **3.4.5 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

Once the majority of priority IT projects in response to the pandemic were complete, the majority of IT staff returned to work on ongoing IT projects. During lockdown, the following projects were completed:

- The Capita Azure Migration project was completed in mid-July and included the migration of Capita's IT services to the Azure cloud; and
- The IT refit of the Lisson Grove offices.

The IT team continues to work on outstanding IT projects, such as:

- The migration of physical servers at Lisson Grove to the new cloud-based Azure environment;
- Large scale migration of applications and data from the Council's servers to the Azure cloud;
- The analysis of the Council's microsites with the intention to move and incorporate them into our new corporate website platform, with a similar look-and-feel where possible. This piece of work is ongoing and ties into the larger piece of work underway to overhaul and improve the Council's corporate website; and
- The 'technical debt' project, which looks to replace tactical solutions with those aligned with the IT architectural strategy set out for the Council, including a single-sign-on framework, a standard forms engine selection, a CRM and data warehouse datalink, a data retention policy, and a secure file transfer protocol. The first elements of this project are anticipated to be complete at the end of September.

**3.4.6 TELECOMMUNICATIONS**

As part of the Customer Experience and Digital programme, the Contact Centre Review project was established to ensure customers receive a consistent experience when contacting the Council. Since June 2020, work has been underway to progress the design of an assisted services hub operating model.

**3.5 BROADBAND AND CONNECTIVITY**

**3.5.1 CITY-WIDE WAYLEAVE AGREEMENT**

The Council continues to deploy full-fibre connection to our housing stock by the end of 2021 as part of the City-wide Wayleave agreement. However, due to the pandemic, the Council and Operators have introduced the following measures to mitigate risks associated with continuing business as usual activity in light of COVID-19:

<p><b>Maintenance of social distancing for residents</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No work required inside resident’s flats</li> <li>• Majority of work is external, work in proximity to any individual resident’s home is of short duration</li> <li>• Operators toolbox talks include guidance for operatives on maintaining social distancing with residents</li> <li>• Operator comms makes clear residents can call Operator’s head office and do not have to speak to operatives on site</li> <li>• Operator comms makes clear residents can defer external work which requires access to their private balconies and gardens</li> </ul>
<p><b>Site safety measures</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operators have in place COVID-19 risk assessments and method statements for their work. They are using gloves, hand sanitiser, masks, maintaining social distancing where work tasks permit</li> <li>• Operators are managing welfare facilities to maintain social distancing</li> <li>• Operatives briefed on maintaining social distancing with residents</li> </ul>
<p><b>Westminster staff safety</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Project Manager has been provided with a parking permit and where necessary is driving to site on set days to avoid use of public transport</li> <li>• PPE provided</li> <li>• Site visits are being limited to WCC Project Manager and one Operator representative with full use of MS Teams being made to engage with other WCC stakeholders and operators</li> </ul>

Delivery to date has been strong and we currently have 63% of our housing stock connected with full fibre. For context the London average for full fibre availability is 18.32%. We anticipate that we will reach 80% full-fibre connection by April 2021 with universal coverage by the end of 2021.

**3.5.2 DIGITAL STREET MARKETS**

This project seeks to provide free Wi-Fi for market traders and ensure they have a reliable contactless solution for taking payments. The Council is currently out to procurement for a Wi-Fi operator to help deliver our Digital Street Markets Project, which is due to close on 18 September 2020.

As part of the project, the Council also intends to roll-out free digital training for small businesses across Westminster. We intend to go out to market for a digital training provider in the coming weeks. The focus of this training will be improving a business’ online presence and developing e-stores so

that should another lockdown happen businesses will have online sales channels they can use to help improve business resilience.

### 3.5.3 CONNECTED BRITAIN AWARDS 2020

The Council has been shortlisted for 'The Barrier Removal Award', which is a category in the Connected Britain Awards. The Council's application highlighted the work the Council has undertaken to achieve some of the fastest fibre deployment in the country, including its work on the Connect Westminster Project, Parking Bay Suspension discount for fibre providers, and our City-Wide Wayleave Agreement. We expect to find out the results of the awards at the conference scheduled to take place later in September.

#### Appendix

**To:** Chairman of Communities and Customer Services Policy and Scrutiny Committee  
Chairman of the Access to Culture Task Group

**From:** Cabinet Member for Customer Services and Digital

**Date:** 15 April 2020

**Subject:** Response to recommendations of the Access to Culture Task Group

#### Recommendation 1

Introduce an integrated smartcard which unifies a number of council services (Libraries, Leisure, Westminster City Save, Free School Meals, Adult Social Care) and enables residents to have one multi-purpose council account.

#### Cabinet Member comments:

Cllr Swaddle is scoping out the opportunity for a council-wide smart card.

Recommendation is **PARTIALLY AGREED**

#### Recommendation 2

Review and improve the Westminster City Save scheme and website.

#### Cabinet Member comments:

A new Citysave website is being developed that will be more functional, secure and compatible with mobile devices.

Recommendation is **PARTIALLY AGREED**

### Recommendation 3

Encourage, support and facilitate opportunities in schools to increase/improve access to culture for young residents. This could include the roll out of the Westminster Children's University beyond the current nine participating schools. This could also include improving awareness of the offer and encouraging increased collaboration between schools and other institutions, such as the Rolls-Royce STE-A-M Evolution Project or The Wallace Collection Young Curators.

**Cabinet Member comments:**

Westminster has been successful in its recent Cities of Learning to RSA. This will lead to the creation of a borough-wide cultural learning model for Westminster to increase cultural capital and skills opportunities for young people and improve access to lifelong learning for all. This framework will increase digital connections and joined up working between education providers, cultural institutions and creative employers across the borough. It will create new creative career ways for those participating in existing Westminster initiatives such as City Lions and creative industry weeks.

Recommendation is **PARTIALLY AGREED**

### Recommendation 4

Champion cultural opportunities by instigating and supporting a Culture Ambassadors scheme within Westminster schools.

**Cabinet Member comments:**

As part of the Cities of Learning programme, young ambassadors would be involved to play a role in co-designing the local offer, although they will not only be linked to schools but also other youth forums across the borough.

Recommendation is **PARTIALLY AGREED**

### Recommendation 5

Embed Westminster City Lions as the primary conduit by which to increase cultural experiences and enrichment for younger residents aged between 13 and 16.

**Cabinet Member comments:**

The City Lions cultural enrichment programme for 13-16 year olds is set to develop further in 2019/20 to enable more in-depth engagement with greater qualitative targets. The City Lions brand will be amplified through increased comms activity and new partnerships with cultural organisations and creative employers. Innovative ways of working are being tested out in response to the COVID-19 crisis such as the pilot online model that was successful this Easter.

Recommendation is **AGREED**

### Recommendation 6

Work more closely with cultural partners and stakeholders in Westminster to create opportunities and experiences for Westminster families, school children, Westminster City Lions and older residents as part of a more holistic cultural offer.

**Cabinet Member comments:**

Cultural Strategy engagement and delivery will enable dialogue with local venues and organisations to increase the number of accessible cultural offers for Westminster residents and extend programmes such as Out and About. The Council will seek to promote the rich and diverse local cultural offer through council communication channels and cross-promotional platforms.

Recommendation is **AGREED**

### Recommendation 7

Every child born in Westminster to have a Library card, through automatic enrolment, via the birth registration process. Every Westminster child starting school to have a Library card as part of the schools admissions/induction process.

#### **Cabinet Member comments:**

Trials in Hammersmith & Fulham have demonstrated libraries cards issued as part of birth registration were not used and most babies born in Westminster were not residents. Opt-out schemes for school joiners were more successful but GDPR changes have since created barriers. A more viable option to be explored with libraries would be to encourage parental sign-up during reception and year 7 school entry admissions.

Recommendation is **PARTIALLY AGREED**

### Recommendation 8

Encourage, support and facilitate culture in the local community by continuing to support and facilitate cultural events at neighbourhood/ ward level, especially in areas of the city that do not have dedicated cultural venues. This should include enabling and supporting local communities to use community spaces (e.g. libraries, community halls/school halls/academy spaces, sports centres) for cultural purposes.

#### **Cabinet Member comments:**

The Cultural Strategy will provide a framework for leveraging the potential of ward budgets, Community Contribution, #MyWestminster and Community Infrastructure Levy neighbourhood funds to support co-created community activities in both libraries and other neighbourhood settings to increase grass-roots engagement opportunities building on the success of Dance Westminster, Fun Palaces and #MyWestminster Day.

Recommendation is **AGREED**

### Recommendation 9

Establish a dedicated council budget for culture, including scope for commissioning, to increase cultural capital for Westminster residents. This would also allow the council to include public art as part of any regeneration scheme and public realm project. Public art should be a key part of the council's approach to place shaping.

#### **Cabinet Member comments:**

The Cultural Strategy 'Creative Placemaking' section and the City Plan public realm chapters demonstrates the council's approach to ensuring culture and public art are at the heart of the placemaking and regeneration schemes.

The quality and impact of the council's temporary rolling City of Sculpture programme is set to improve through collaboration with community and arts partners following the appointment of an independent panel of advisors. Additional funding would enable public engagement activities, and this will be sought from sponsorship rather than ward budgets, in the first instance.

Recommendation is **PARTIALLY AGREED**