

London CLOA meeting – Culture and Sport Theme

Tuesday 5 July, 10.30 – 12:00

Apologies: Ishbel Murray (LB Richmond & Wandsworth), Thorsten Dreyer (LB Tower Hamlets), Carol Boswarthack (CoL), David Stockdale (LB Hounslow), Lisa Pottinger (LB Tower Hamlets), Amy Jones (WCC), Ian Mitchell (Enable Leisure & Culture), Susan Hayter (LB Hounslow), Tim Clee (LB Hounslow), Alison Burford (VRCL), Dan Buck (Lee Valley Regional Park), Stephen Tate (LB Croydon).

1. Welcome and introductions – Iain Varah, CEO, Vision Redbridge Culture and Leisure

The chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, and noted that he was chairing in the absence of Ishbel and Thorsten, who sent their apologies due to unavoidable commitments.

2. London Area Council – Tonya Nelson, Director, London Area Council

Tonya Nelson presented on ACE's Let's Create strategy and answered the following questions from attendees:

- A question was asked about whether the date of the NPO funding round announcements would remain 14 October. Tonya replied that they were still aiming for 14 October, but this could move to the end of October at the latest due to the high number of applications received.
- A three-part question was asked about what support exists for cultural venues that can't relocate outside London, what the funding pot was for individual artists relocating outside of London, and what is the role of local authorities throughout this process?
- Tonya replied that there is a specific programme named the Transfer Programme that organisations must register for if they wish to be eligible for support. Organisations must move their premises outside London by 2024, and they will be considered for the £8m budget set aside. ACE only wants organisations to relocate who will survive outside London rather than struggle. The organisations will be able to make a light-touch application for the NPO region they move to. Regarding transition funding, organisations can apply for up to £300,000 if they are an existing NPO organisation that was unsuccessful in the latest round of funding. Councils should continue engagement with organisations that relocate outside of London.
- A further question was asked regarding whether the government has levelled up culture in London and how local government can work with ACE to make the case for levelling up the capital given the presence of significant inequalities. Tonya replied that ACE has undertaken levelling up long before it became government policy. London has a strong presence of major culture organisations, and it would be helpful to explore how best to utilise this strength to benefit the capital more broadly. ACE is keen to work on the evidence base for fairness and funding distribution with London Councils, and London Councils has offered to work with ACE regarding their local authority training to develop that further.

3. Unicorn Theatre – Helen Tovey, Co-Executive Director, The Unicorn Theatre

Helen Tovey presented on the work of the Unicorn Theatre and their experiences working with boroughs as an ACE funded organisation. The Unicorn Theatre is based in Southwark, it is the largest

children's focused theatre in the UK, their new strategy focuses on serving 0-13-year olds, and they create specific shows for each age segment. They are a minority led organisation, which is important with respect to ACE's focus on increasing the diversity of cultural leadership, and they have a new chair. They work with three boroughs - Southwark, Tower Hamlets, and Lambeth -, they have one partner school per borough that is highly diverse with high deprivation levels, and partner with GOSH to bring their shows into hospitals. They have a new engagement programme that focuses on co-creation, and Southwark really want to collaborate with young people in this regard. Unicorn focuses on representing young people and giving them a voice to shape the work on their stages through schools and community groups to explore different aspects of theatre

ACE's Let's Create strategy, and they like it. They are an NPO organisation – they received £1.3m in the most recent funding round - and their turnover is £3m. This funding is very high compared to their turnover, which is due to the fact that most of their audience are schools, they subsidise their tickets heavily for schools, and the limits on their venues is a factor in terms of ticket sales. ACE really values their work, and Let's Create places a big emphasis on children. During the pandemic, they launched Unicorn Online, which let them create digital specific productions in short-form. Making 10-20-minute-long productions that are accessible online has helped them reach kids across the country, and it's a more realistic and accessible experience for kids. If they tour, they share the costs with the touring company and the touring company will perform the same performance as they would in London.

Unicorn has predominantly worked with Southwark, and it has been helpful that they have had a clear cultural strategy, which has helped understand funding sources. For Southwark, health and wellbeing, representation, and serving diverse communities is important to them. They have a strong relationship with Southwark's culture department, and being able to check in with them regularly is helpful, which goes both ways for Southwark to learn about Unicorn's work ahead of time. Unicorn receives £23,000 of funding from Southwark for their schools projects, but it is inconsistent, and more regular funding spread out over many years would be helpful. Council timelines and priorities around capital funding can be difficult, and ACE can be rigid with its expectations around project start and end dates and how funding can be spent, which can be problematic. Different council departments do not always understand ACE's requirements for a cultural organisation, and Southwark's cultural team is great at advocating and championing for cultural organisations internally to address that. It would be good to increase understanding of how ACE's processes work. Councils have to work to stringent reporting processes, which can be harder for arts organisations because it affects cultural accessibility.

In summary, aligning with ACE as much as possible, receiving funding over a longer period as it would build resilience and consistency, and working on cross-borough initiatives would be helpful.

The chair thanked Helen for her presentation and noted that both ACE and local government can sometimes be bureaucratic, which hampers organisations that are more fluid. A question was asked about whether coproduction as a concept could be disseminated throughout Southwark council beyond the culture team. Helen replied that while it is positive that both Unicorn and Southwark are both focusing on coproduction at the same time, it is difficult to see whether it would spread further as Southwark have to be fair and fund a wide range of organisations. Unicorn are keen to link up with a university as a research partner in the future.

4. Updates from attendees on latest cultural developments

- London Councils held its AGM in June following the local elections, and Cllr Elizabeth Campbell remains the lead member for business, economy, and culture. The org is developing a set of shared ambitions, which will go to our Leaders Committee for agreement at the end of July, and this will set our strategic direction for the next couple of years. UKSPF will replace EU funding, and LC have been working with the GLA to focus on allocations, and communities and place will be 100% allocated. We have worked with boroughs to identify culture, town centres, and green spaces as three priority areas. We are aiming to set the funding amounts by the end of the month, so colleagues can consult their counterparts internally to find out information particular to their borough
- Barnet has a new Labour administration, and they have ambitious commitments to deliver regarding arts and culture, such as applying for Barnet to be a future London Borough of Culture. A community participation strategy is being developed and workshops are ongoing. A new parks strategy is being considered as the current one ends in 2026.
- WCC also has a new Labour administration with a comprehensive manifesto. Children, culture, and libraries have multiple synergies, and work is ongoing to help WCC work smarter, particularly how they engage with children and young people. A cultural mile is in development alongside a cultural run to create a big community event for communities.
- Redbridge has a new director of strategy who started 18 months ago, and he is keen for their politicians to think long term, particularly with arts and culture.
- The Lee Valley Park Authority, has a range of events ongoing, such as a school music festival tomorrow, performances, and music events
- GLA have quarterly meetings with boroughs at City Hall, the next of which is on 20th September, and there are several funding opportunities available.
- Wandsworth have a new Labour administration too, and they have reiterated their commitment to culture by unanimously adopted their ten-year cultural strategy. At the start of the financial year, they unlocked £221k of funding for social prescribing across the borough
- London Parks anticipate that increased demand for parks will continue post-Covid. Parks are important venues for activities and cultural events. They are developing an asset management policy which is important because few boroughs have asset management plans regarding their investment in green spaces. They intend to develop their own policy first, then strategy, and finally a programme before sharing their experience with boroughs. Litter and waste are high on the agenda, and they've been running a campaign to encourage people to take their litter home. They will be launching their Good Parks for London report on 29 September. They will also be launching their research findings of the impact of green spaces on the mental health and wellbeing of 16-25 year olds in October.

5. AOB

London Youth Games are keen to hear from colleagues regarding how they can extend their service offer to include both dance and music in the coming years – contact Andy Dalby-Welsh, CEO of LYG, at andy@londonyouthgames.org.