

London CLOA meeting – Green Theme

Thursday 20 October, 10.30 – 12:00

Apologies: Dan Buck (Lee Valley Regional Park), Andy Couves (Sport England), Carol Boswarthack (City of London), Layla Richards, Tim Clee, Lisa Pottinger (Tower Hamlets), Stephen Tate (Croydon), Sue Harris (RBKC), Clícia Soares deLima (Lambeth), Susan Hayter (Hounslow), Tony Leach (Parks for London), Coreen Brown (WCC), and Ian Mitchell (Enable LC)

1. Welcome and introductions – Thorsten Dreyer, Interim chair of London CLOA

The chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and announced that he was now interim chair of London CLOA as Ishbel Murray has stepped down from the role.

2. Libraries Connected – Isobel Hunter, Chief Executive of Libraries Connected

Isobel Hunter spoke about the work that Libraries Connected does representing libraries nationwide, with a particular focus on its efforts to play its part in addressing the climate crisis. Key points from her presentation include:

- Libraries Connected is a membership organisation for libraries across the UK and Channel Islands
- In London, there are 325 public libraries, more than any other city in the world
- Librarians are the second most trusted profession in the UK
- Local authorities hold library core funding and legal obligations regarding the climate crisis, and libraries must account for this strategic context
- The Green Libraries Partnership (GLP) was established earlier this year, a multiyear research and development programme to enable public libraries to address their environmental responsibilities. The GLP works in collaboration with ACE, the British Library, Julie's Bicycle, and Libraries Connected
- GLP published a survey report in September to establish the current position of libraries nationwide on environmental matters and how they can do more
- 85% of libraries are working within wider council policy to advance this work, but some have their own plans
- Areas of action where libraries can contribute are physical impacts - energy management, physical space - and engaging communities - what books and collections they can provide
- Libraries are usually managed by a council's estates department, but there is a shift happening towards green design
- There are several examples of libraries that have undertaken activities towards contributing to addressing the climate crisis in places such as Cambridge, Bircotes, Kirklees, Eltham, Newcastle, Calderdale, Barnsley, Wakefield, Greenwich, Hampshire, and Lambeth
- A way that libraries can influence their environmental impact is through the use of their outdoor spaces. A library garden movement is starting to use these spaces as ways to engage their communities and build relationships.
- Regarding plastics, libraries use them frequently for multiple purposes, but many have replaced their plastic membership cards in favour of wooden alternatives. Book jackets are harder to address, and there is little scientific research on adequate replacements for book protection. Libraries Connected is intending to launch a piece of research to investigate this further

- Libraries use multiple forms of transportation to undertake their functions, including vans to transport books, and mobiles for mobile libraries. In London, smaller vans and cars are used, and there are viable alternatives through the use of electric cars, but for mobile libraries in rural areas, it is harder to shift to green alternatives because of the high costs and potential lack of effectiveness
- A particularly interesting area for library work is engaging local communities to help residents take up activities and behaviours that the council is encouraging
- Trust is important, and libraries have an important role in helping people to access truthful and accurate information.
- Finally, libraries are at the forefront of activities to help address the cost of living crisis
- Libraries have multiple strands of support that can be used to help their communities, such as providing winter coat rails where people can leave second-hand clothes for others to reuse, or through providing warm spaces for people to relax and work in
- Libraries Connected have been encouraging libraries to join the Warm Welcome network and help people who are struggling to heat their homes

The chair thanked Isobel for her presentation to the group. A question was asked whether Libraries Connected have links with LEDNET as it might be useful for LEDNET to engage with Isobel. Isobel expressed an interest in engaging with LEDNET. The chair noted that there is a national organisation called ADEPT similar to LEDNET that could also be worth engaging with.

The chair asked a question regarding the status of Libraries Connected's main programme of work. Isobel replied that while the programme is rolling, the first phase concluded with the publication of their survey report in September. They have run a small grants programme, and are engaging with ACE to identify whether they can offer additional financial support.

The chair asked an additional question about the status of the research into plastic bookjackets that Libraries Connected intends to launch. Isobel replied that the study is in the early planning stages, but it would be a world first study. It will take a couple of years to complete the research, but they intend to examine the whole lifecycle of a book from printing to pulping, and similarly for the plastic jacket. There is a need to model alternatives to plastic book jackets to test their practicalities alongside costs involved, but if they secure UK funding, the research could be helpful for libraries worldwide.

A question was asked about whether any work has been done to quantify the economic impact of digitising ebooks versus holding physical books. Isobel replied that digitising is harder than it initially appears because of preservation challenges. Regarding environmental impact, there are three main channels for library services - physical with buildings and books, digital with ebooks and services, and working with communities such as working with food banks. This question needs to be thought about in terms of an ebook's lifecycle, but Libraries Connected would never suggest that libraries should move away from paper books

A question was asked about the clothing exchanges that some libraries are doing and whether there are any learnings that could be shared regarding sports clothing. Isobel replied that these initiatives work best in partnership with particular charities that understand what items are needed and how they can market it to people to get their interest. Sports equipment is something that is needed, but there is a lack of mechanism to facilitate their availability within libraries at present. Isobel offered to link colleagues with the London Libraries Network to engage further.

The chair thanked Isobel for her presentation and answers to questions.

3. London CLOA – do we still need it? – Thorsten Dreyer, Interim CLOA Chair

The chair presented the results of the recent London CLOA survey to attendees. Key points from the presentation include:

- London CLOA emerged from the London Culture and Sport Improvement Network in its current format since 2011
- It is supported by London Councils, including venue and meeting hosting, agenda management, minutes, and securing speakers
- It is one of two regional groups, the other being Wales who operate in a different legislative environment, but the organisation is not formally constituted
- Both CLOA and non-CLOA members attend meetings
- Attendance at meetings has varied over time, but it has been very low recently
- Different approaches towards meeting programming have been tried, such as single sector, cross-sector, and thematic foci
- CLOA meetings were held in person until March 2020, but they have been online since the pandemic
- CLOA has introduced a national programme of thematic roundtables that are currently underway
- The survey was launched from 19 September to 3 October, and was communicated via the CLOA e-bulletin, a CLOA email to London members, and an email from London Councils to members
- The survey received only 13 responses, eight of which were corporate, three were individual, and two were non-members.
- There were mixed views on the value of London CLOA meetings as they are currently constituted
- A key finding was that respondents wanted future CLOA meetings to be either hybrid or virtual
- London Councils added that they run a variety of officer networks, including the London Culture Forum, and the GLA run their own culture officer networks. From their perspective, given that CLOA meeting attendance is often below 10 London boroughs and the time and resource required to service CLOA is significant, it is difficult to justify continuing to support London CLOA on this basis without a radical change in format. However, they wish to hear the views of others.
- The chair ended by highlighting the next steps – no decisions will be made at this meeting as he is keen to hear the views of attendees. Conversations will take place with the national CLOA chairs and those who have expressed an interest in leading London CLOA in the future. Conversations will also take place with London Councils about their role going forward, and we will then develop options regarding London CLOA's future.

The chair opened the floor up to questions. An attendee asked if any present had completed the survey, and a number indicated in the affirmative. Another attendee noted that CLOA is a helpful forum to discuss and speak about sports, and thanked CLOA for providing a platform to make that connectivity. The chair thanked the attendee, and added that engaging on these issues via CLOA emails could be possible in the future if a need was to arise.

A question was asked about whether any attendees have attended the national mini-conferences and whether the CLOA newsletter is helpful. One attendee responded in the affirmative to both.

One attendee noted that they are part of other specialist networks related to their area of interest, parks. Deciding whether to attend CLOA meetings will vary depending on the agenda and the time

investment, but meetings on topics unrelated to their field of interest can yield useful information at times, dependent on individual value. The chair noted that corporate membership has different people in different subject areas inside councils, which can be a challenge.

4. Updates from attendees on latest cultural developments

- LB Richmond and Wandsworth have obtained approval to launch a cultural social prescribing programme. They have put out a callout for submissions to be rolled out in January, and they have awarded funding to four organisations so far; an additional application phase will close in November.
- The chair updated that two London local authorities, Tower Hamlets and Lambeth, have been awarded £5m by the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHCR) for a Health Determinants Research Collaboration (HDRC) to work with local communities to address the social, economic and environmental factors that impact people's physical and mental health. The successful organisations will put together a research strategy within the next year. LB Islington has also received development award funding from NIHCR to become a full HDRC in 2023/24
- London Youth Games have appointed a new chair, Geoff Thompson, who has worked in youth development since the 1980s. LYG has met with borough Leaders following the May elections, and they intend to engage with subregions in due course.