



**Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission on 10 March 2026
Update on future plans for Carnival Arts in Hackney.**

10 March 2025

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1. **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

1.1 On 27 January 2025, the Cabinet agreed to discontinue the annual £0.5 million Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL) funding for a full Hackney Carnival road parade, totalling £1mill over two years, due to a significant financial deficit. The Council committed instead to work alongside carnival organisations to support alternative carnival activities in the borough beyond a one-off large-scale event. The Council and Carnival community will also explore other options for funding future carnivals, such as through sponsoring and fundraising.

1.2 This report updates the Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission on the subsequent work to support the sustainability of Carnival Arts in Hackney and the work undertaken to develop alternative plans for Carnival Arts since the 2025 Cabinet budget decision.

1.3 Key Progress and Actions:

1.3.1 Stakeholder Engagement and Capacity Building: The Council continues to invest in carnival arts, activities, and community engagement through a stakeholder-led approach. This effort includes a significant £100k transition programme for 2025/26, funded by £70,000 from NCIL and £30,000 from Arts Council England. The programme's purpose is to support strategic capacity building, advocacy, and a 2025 showcase event.

1.3.2 Independent Governance: An external sector-expert has been appointed as Strategic Lead to explore the feasibility of establishing an independent charitable trust or similar model. The goal is to create an entity for carnival groups for long-term sustainability, independent governance and access to external funding. A well-run trust can empower communities and attract grants, philanthropy and earned income that local authority services cannot.

1.3.3 Funding and Feasibility: Given the Council's financial deficit a funding landscape review was completed in January 2025. The review assesses the feasibility of sponsorship and fundraising to cover the cost of the Hackney Carnival (previously in 2024 delivery costs were £900,000). It concludes that securing large-scale funding is unlikely due to restricted arts grants, the event's sporadic history, and the presence of existing large carnivals like Notting Hill Carnival. Ethical considerations and a lack of dedicated capacity further complicate securing sponsors. The high costs, low probability of full cost recovery, and difficulty in maintaining long-term partnerships mean the Council would likely still need to invest.

1.3.4 Carnival Hub: Potential for locating an underused Council-owned site for a "Carnival Hub" is being explored, although securing capital funding and a sustainable business model remains a significant challenge, and would be contingent on the formation of an independent governance structure.

1.3.5 Programme Delivery: A showcase event, Our Carnival Ore Story, was delivered in December 2025 by an external sector-expert. Options for future support for Carnival Arts by the Council's Culture team could include focusing on resident-focused activities and

supporting a smaller-scale Carnival Arts programme open to all Hackney-based groups working with Carnival.

1.4 **Challenges:**

1.4.1 **Collaboration:** The core issue is the large number of stakeholder groups (17 in total), which are very different from each other in terms of their resources (capacity) and how involved they are (engagement). This diversity makes it hard for them to work together effectively (collaboration), ultimately slowing down the process of agreeing on a sustainable way to operate.

1.4.2 **Communication:** Despite repeated efforts, some stakeholders continue to express a lack of awareness regarding the permanent cessation of funding for the full Carnival event.

1.4.3 **Sustainability:** The ultimate success of the independent model hinges on genuine collaboration and tenacity from the stakeholders. The Council acknowledges the risk that the process may not result in a financially or structurally sustainable entity, potentially requiring ongoing support.

1.5 **Next Steps:** The Council will continue to support the development of the potential independent trust model whilst ensuring Carnival Arts in Hackney and the legacy of Carnival in Hackney continue to have a public presence. The Council aims to shift its role from lead facilitator to one of stewardship, influence, and advocacy.

2. **CONTEXT TO SCRUTINY PAPER**

2.1 As reported in the Council's budget 2025 to 2026 Hackney Council needs to save £25 million from 2025 to 2026 and over £50m in the following 3 years. Source: (<https://hackney.gov.uk/budget>).

2.2 Necessary savings are being driven by increased costs for statutory services relating to but not exclusively for Homeless Prevention, Care Support and Family Intervention. With expenditure expected to continue to rise alongside inflationary increases the Council is reviewing all of its outputs across all service areas.

2.3 On 27 January 2025, the Cabinet agreed to discontinue the annual £0.5 million Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL) funding for a full Hackney Carnival road parade, totalling £1mill over two years, due to a significant financial deficit. This means there will not be funds made available from NCIL to fund Hackney Carnival [a Carnival in Hackney]. The Council committed instead to work alongside carnival organisations to support alternative carnival activities in the borough beyond a one-off large-scale event. The Council and Carnival community will also explore other options for funding future carnivals, such as through sponsoring and fundraising.

2.4 This cultural and social impact of this decision was subject to a [Scrutiny meeting on 10 February 2025](#), and resulted in a number of recommendations, highlighted throughout Section 6 of this paper.

3. PURPOSE OF SCRUTINY MEETING

3.1 To receive an update on the work undertaken to support Carnival Arts in Hackney, and to follow up on the [suggestions](#) made by the Commission following its meeting on 10th February 2025.

3.2 The Living in Hackney Scrutiny Commission requested to receive an update on the work undertaken to develop alternative plans for Carnival Arts since Cabinet agreed to discontinue the use of Neighbourhood Community Infrastructure Levy (NCIL) funding for a Carnival Parade in January 2025. The discussion is seen as timely given that it has been over a year since the Commission discussed the decision and considered options for an alternative programme that celebrates Carnival culture on [10th February 2025](#).

4. INTRODUCTION

4.1 A meeting was held with Carnival Stakeholders (17 groups who are part of the Stakeholder Group defined through their long participation in Hackney Carnival) on 09 January 2025 to explain the current situation around Carnival and the Council's financial deficit.

4.2 Post the cabinet decision and aforementioned Stakeholder meeting, Scrutiny was held on 10 Feb 2025, this included a number of Carnival representatives who also met with the Chair in a pre-meeting.

4.3 In early March 2025 a strategy and vision meeting was held with Carnival Groups that reflected upon the Scrutiny recommendations and gave the Carnival groups the agency to vision how they may want to develop in the light of restricted funding.

4.4 The groups identified they would like to develop independence from Hackney Council and to develop models and skills to operate as a group who can fundraise and deliver a Carnival (or Carnival events) in Hackney autonomously, with support rather than leadership from the Council. The following is predicated on these ideas and ideals.

5. RESPONSES TO KEY AREAS OF INTEREST & SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Collaboration, co-production and engagement

LiH Scrutiny recommendation: Arts & Culture creates a clear engagement plan which outlines how staff, councillors, Carnival stakeholders and residents will be engaged to help shape any work to identify possible external funding for a Carnival parade or shape an alternative programme that celebrates carnival culture.

LiH Scrutiny recommendation: Arts & Culture establishes a working group with staff, councillors and Carnival stakeholders to target investment for 2025/26, consider options for future Carnival activities, and develop a longer-term stakeholder engagement and oversight model.

5.1.1 Overview: Key achievements over the last year have centred on collaboration, co-production, and engagement, leading to a diverse programme of cultural support and interventions. The Culture Team at Hackney Council, with guidance from the Assistant Director for Culture, Libraries and Heritage and the Cabinet Member for Culture, has successfully facilitated sector-led work. This effort included capacity building, strategic planning for a legacy programme, and artistic delivery. Crucially, Hackney Council has maintained its role in leading and facilitating group meetings for all 17 carnival stakeholder groups.

5.1.2 Outputs: The strategic capacity building programme has produced various key outputs. All groups linked to the Carnival Stakeholder Board have been given fair and equal chances to participate in every phase of this process. The work completed so far is outlined in the programme below.

5.1.3 Collaboration and Engagement - establishing vision and values

- The Culture Team held a Carnival Away Day on 08 March 2025 at Hackney Archives to establish a shared vision for collaboration. The session focused on setting programme priorities, values, and vision for the joint work, including discussions on optimal working methods, meeting scheduling, and communication strategies. The Vision and Values should be presented in the summary report and included in the presentation.
- The planning and delivery of key carnival elements are managed through monthly Carnival Stakeholder Meetings. These meetings are chaired by the Assistant Director or the Cabinet Lead for Culture and serve to align strategic understanding, discuss expected outcomes, and facilitate stakeholder input.

5.1.4 Project Delivery Sub-Groups

The following start-and-finish or ongoing sub-groups have been established:

- **Arts Council Sub-Group (Start and Finish):** Oversaw the development and direction of an Arts Council bid.
- **Event Sub-Group (Start and Finish):** Generated ideas for the format and delivery of an event, working with the appointed Artistic Lead.
- **Terms of Reference Sub-Group (Start and Finish):** Tasked with redefining the Terms of Reference for the Carnival group to reflect the absence of a carnival and develop a new strategic operating model.
- **Trust Sub-Group (Ongoing):** Focuses on exploring the potential structure and form of a trust entity for Carnival Stakeholders, working closely with the appointed Strategic Lead.
- Semi-regular Sub-Group meetings as start-and-finish projects.

- Development of Terms of Reference: A stakeholder-led TOR is being developed through the dedicated sub-group.

5.1.5 Plan and Budget

- Delivery of a collaborative 12-16 month plan and budget focusing on Artistic Showcase, Strategic & Capacity Building activities, and Self-Advocation.
- This plan informed the decision to make an application for funding to Arts Council England.

5.1.6 Funding and Core Project Elements

- The Culture Team secured approximately **£30,000 from the Arts Council England Project Grants (ACE-PG)**, matched by **£70,000 from NCIL**, totaling a **£100,000 programme budget**. The ACE-PG outcome was received in May 2026. These combined funds support three core elements:
- **Strategic Development and Capacity Building:** Ongoing project to appoint an independent specialist to lead the development of a trust or similar model and explore business/operational options for a Carnival hub.
- **Creative Support:** An independent specialist was appointed to lead the development of a carnival arts-focused event, which took place in December 2025.
- **Making the Case (Advocacy):** Ongoing project involving an independent specialist to lead a programme of advocacy support for individual organisations and the Carnival as a whole, including data collection and asset creation.

5.1.7 Independent Specialist Roles

The £100k programme budget funded independent specialist roles, appointed with input from Carnival stakeholders:

- **Artistic Lead appointment - Pax Nindi:** Role completed; the associated showcase event at Chats Palace was delivered in December 2025.
- **Strategic Lead appointment - Frank Sweeney, Great British Carnival:** Ongoing support focusing on capacity building and strategic advice, particularly exploring a constituted model (e.g., a Trust or other entity).
- **Making the Case/Advocacy appointment - Manuela Benini:** Ongoing support to help Carnival groups effectively communicate their stories to potential funders and other stakeholders.

5.1.8 Delivery/Events

A key success is in bringing the Stakeholder Group together to better understand their shared commitment to Hackney Carnival. There is clear and evident passion. All elements outlined by the groups in terms of the use of the £100k funding have been delivered or are on track to be delivered. This will result in the groups participating in:

- an two-day event in 2025 - Our Carnival Our Story

- examples of best operational models for a Trust or otherwise, and
- an understanding of what structure might be needed to run and maintain a 'carnival hub'
- a suite of resources that they can use individually and collectively as Carnival groups.

The carnival event, produced by Pax Nindi at Chats Palace in December 2025, was a display of unity for the carnival groups that participated. In the evaluation the groups noted that they enjoyed being able to see each other's work, engage with each other and that they enjoyed having food and drinks provided. It was noted that the venue was relatively small, and that audience figures were low. This demonstrates potential for future events, highlighting that events do not need to include all groups at once, and in fact there may be more dynamic ways of working or presenting carnival arts in Hackney.

Challenges: Collaboration, co-production, and engagement among the 17 Carnival groups present notable challenges. While all groups share a desire for a future carnival, they vary significantly in their approach, commitment, and capacity. This diversity, alongside differing learning styles and engagement styles can make progress slower and less impactful. The Council is able to support the development of a bespoke operational model; however, its success will depend on tenacity and genuine collaboration from all stakeholders.

The group's diversity means members have different needs, goals, skills, and viewpoints. Members were reminded of a revised Code of Conduct, which is now in effect for as long as the Council continues to facilitate and chair the Stakeholder meetings. Adherence to this Code will help improve the group's dynamics.

5.2 Communications

LiH Scrutiny recommendation: Arts & Culture creates a clear communications plan, to be delivered alongside the engagement plan, to ensure all staff, councillors, Carnival stakeholders and residents understand the decision to discontinue funding, what it means for future Carnival activities, and the next steps.

5.2.1 Overview:

Communication regarding the changes to Carnival has been consistent and clear with stakeholders since January 2025. A Council statement on Hackney Carnival by the Cabinet member for Culture was publicised on 09 Dec 2025 to provide an update on the Council's commitment to continue to invest in carnival arts in the borough, despite having to make a difficult budget decision on the full carnival parade costing £1million.

Information has also been made publicly available via the Council's news section, the Love Hackney website, and directly to anyone contacting the Culture Team about Carnival.

The limited public and media response since the decision suggests the messaging has been received and understood without objections. Furthermore, very few emails were received concerning stall participation during the usual Carnival period.

However, Carnival groups have expressed continued disappointment, with some struggling to fully comprehend the implications of the decision despite clear communication through meetings, minutes, and other messages.

5.2.2 Outputs

- Various meetings with Carnival Groups and minutes.
- Council and Love Hackney websites.
- Email enquiries and automatic response.

5.2.3 Successes: The decision was communicated appropriately. Significantly, all formal complaints and expressions of dissatisfaction came only from the direct Carnival Stakeholders. The wider public registered general acceptance or no substantial opposition through official channels, suggesting the impact is specific to the stakeholder community.

5.2.4 Challenges: Clear communication remains a priority, as some stakeholders have indicated they were unaware of the funding shortfall and the resulting pause to Carnival. This is despite multiple updates being shared. With a stakeholder group made up of 17 representatives from different Carnival organisations, not all members are able to attend meetings or review minutes regularly, which can lead to gaps in awareness.

While public communications beyond the stakeholder-led Carnival event planned for December 2025 have been limited, this does not reflect the substantial work progressing behind the scenes to support future delivery.

5.3 Governance, accountability and monitoring

LiH Scrutiny recommendation: Arts & Culture sets out how it will support Carnival stakeholders to explore opportunities for the establishment of a charitable trust to coordinate, support and facilitate a carnival parade and/or related activities.

5.3.1 Overview: The Strategic Lead role, currently held by Frank Sweeney/Great British Carnival, was established to support Carnival groups in building capacity and addressing needs in two main areas: establishing an independent Trust model and determining the requirements for constituting and operating a central Carnival Hub building.

A key part of this work is redefining the relationships between the Carnival groups themselves and with the Council. This is driven by the stakeholders desire for the Council to step back from being the primary facilitator and lead partner of the Stakeholder group, shifting away from sole delivery and risk.

The Council will transition from being the sole accountable body to implementing shared accountability with a competent board, improving governance through compliance with trust and charity regulations, and clarifying roles and responsibilities. The Council will maintain a role of stewardship, influence, and advocacy for Carnival, focusing on the protection of public value.

Moving independent governance, compliance, and safeguarding to the Trust offers significant benefits: stronger accountability outside of the Council, enhanced credibility with funders, and greater long-term resilience. The Strategic Lead is therefore tasked with developing a clear roadmap outlining the future responsibilities of both the Trust and the Council.

5.3.2 Outputs: Ongoing project to deliver a bespoke, optimal operational and business structure for the Carnival groups. This includes a model for establishing and running a dedicated Carnival space or Hub under the resulting trust.

5.3.3 Successes: There has been good engagement from a limited number of groups in attending and engaging with capacity building and learning opportunities.

5.3.4 Challenges: Engagement levels vary across groups, with some focused primarily on participation in Carnival. This reflects differences in interests, capacity, skills and experience. As a result, there is a risk that the proposed capacity building, workshops, research and engagement activity may not yet produce a financially or structurally sustainable model, and could require continued core funding to be viable.

5.4 Alternative funding models

LiH Scrutiny recommendation: Arts & Culture maps all relevant funding opportunities for Carnival activities, including those across other sectors such as education, employment, health and social care or community safety, and provides advice and information to support Carnival stakeholders with funding applications or crowdfunding efforts.

5.4.1 Overview: The long-term sustainability of Carnival Arts in Hackney, including the potential return of a Hackney Carnival event, is closely linked to establishing an independent delivery model, such as a Trust. This would unlock access to a broader range of funding streams beyond Council budgets, including Arts Council England, National Lottery Heritage Fund, trusts, foundations, sponsors and individual donors, increasing overall investment in carnival activity.

While this model is being developed, the Council will continue to apply for funding on behalf of stakeholders and in support of carnival arts locally. Current strategic work, part-funded by Arts Council England, is focused on Trust development and exploring cross-sector investment spanning education, employment, public health, heritage and culture-led placemaking.

Although external fundraising for a large-scale, annual Carnival presents challenges in the current climate — particularly without core Council match funding — the focus remains on building a resilient, future-facing model. This transition period is supported by £70k NCIL funding for 2025/26 and a £30k Arts Council award, enabling strategic development and a strong foundation for the future of Carnival Arts in Hackney.

5.4.2 Outputs

- Better understanding of how to approach funding for Carnival Arts in Hackney.
- Building a relationship with Arts Council England, which can hopefully be extended to further develop the next stages of the strategic projects that have been undertaken.

5.4.3 Successes: Successful bid to Arts Council England for £70k, developing opportunities for further funding. Clear understanding of the trust & foundations and sponsorship landscape and challenges.

5.4.4 Challenges: While fundraising for a large-scale annual Carnival is challenging, particularly without Council match funding the priority is developing a resilient, future-focused model. This transition is supported by £70k NCIL funding for 2025/26 and a £30k Arts Council award, laying strong foundations for the future of Carnival Arts in Hackney.

5.5 Identifying spaces to deliver activities

LiH scrutiny recommendation: Arts & Culture sets out the work underway to identify underused buildings and spaces across the estate of the Council and its partners which could be repurposed as a “Carnival Hub”, and how Carnival stakeholders will be involved in considering potential options going forward.

5.5.1 Overview: Carnival Groups are seeking a permanent 'Carnival Hub' space for offices, creative work, and storage to support year-round activity and job creation within the borough, potentially aligning with wider regeneration projects.

5.5.2 Outputs: The Culture Team is exploring options with Regeneration and Strategic Property Services to identify potential sites. It has been established that with the Council financial position that whilst this may be a concept to further explore the reality of supporting this may be difficult, alongside other logistical issues highlighted in challenges.

5.5.3 Successes: The potential for a carnival hub space is recognised as a way to physically anchor Carnival arts in the borough, deliver community space, studios, archives, and co-creation spaces, and support year-round activity and job creation. The Strategic Lead is currently exploring the feasibility of the idea. It is understood that this would be a long term goal is deemed feasible and that the implementation of a trust or other operational model would be a priority to be able to deliver this.

5.5.4 Challenges: Funding and Property: There is currently no capital funding or site secured. The Council's financial situation makes providing peppercorn rent on any commercial space unlikely. **Governance and Sustainability:** The project is ambitious without an overall organisation (trust or delivery vehicle) in place to run it. Management requires clear governance and a viable business plan. **Group Capacity:** The majority of carnival groups lack the resources to cover overheads or contribute to the hub's revenue, which means the Council would retain liability for running costs and programming without a diverse funding income model. **Asset Review:** A key challenge to mitigate is the Council's Properties asset review.

6. CONCLUSION

6.1 The Council has made the difficult decision to discontinue annual NCIL funding for a full Hackney Carnival due to a significant financial deficit. In response to Scrutiny recommendations, the focus has shifted to supporting the long-term sustainability of Carnival Arts in Hackney. Key progress includes a stakeholder-led engagement process, a successful £100k transition programme funding strategic capacity building, and exploration of an independent charitable trust model. While collaborative challenges persist among the 17 groups, the work is moving towards establishing a self-sustaining entity capable of future fundraising, independent delivery, and exploring the feasibility of a Carnival Hub. The Council will transition its role from lead facilitator to one of stewardship and advocacy, with a significantly reduced budget for Carnival Arts embedded within the Culture Team.

6.2 The Council is committed to supporting Carnival Arts and resident-focused activities, in line with its NCIL Culture funding. Furthermore, the Council acknowledges its role in supporting the development of a potential new Trust or alternative model for stakeholders to function as an independent body with autonomous fundraising, including providing advocacy.

6.3 The Council has made the difficult decision to discontinue the annual NCIL funding for the full Hackney Carnival due to a significant financial deficit. The focus has shifted to supporting the long-term sustainability of Carnival Arts in Hackney, in line with Scrutiny recommendations.

6.4 Key progress includes:

- A stakeholder-led engagement process.
- A successful £100k multistrand transition programme to fund strategic capacity building.
- Exploration of establishing an independent charitable trust model.

6.5 While collaborative challenges persist among the 17 stakeholder groups, the work is moving towards creating a self-sustaining entity that is capable of independent delivery, future fundraising, and exploring the feasibility of a Carnival Hub.

6.6 The Council's role is transitioning from a lead facilitator to one of stewardship and advocacy, with a significantly reduced budget for Carnival Arts embedded within the Culture Team. The Council remains committed to supporting Carnival Arts and resident-focused activities, including advocating for the development of a potential new Trust or alternative independent model.