

Title of Report	Increasing social connections
For Consideration By	Health and Wellbeing Board
Meeting Date	25 June 2026
Classification	Public
<u>Ward(s) Affected</u>	All
Report Author	Joia De Sa Consultant in Public Health

Is this report for:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Information to note	<input type="checkbox"/>	For actions to be allocated
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	For Discussion & input	<input type="checkbox"/>	For escalation (if issue is outwith Remit of HWB)
<input type="checkbox"/>	Decision		

Why is the report being brought to the board?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For an update on the progress made on implementing the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy priority on social connections • To seek further engagement from HWB members on the reflections from the work so far
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Provide a **summary** of the issue here:

<p>This report provides an update on the progress made by the Social Connections Group in implementing the Joint Local Health and Wellbeing Strategy priority on increasing social connections across City and Hackney.</p> <p>Key achievements include collaborative, system-wide action on five core priorities, securing non-recurrent funding for targeted work, and fostering stronger relational working among partners.</p>
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Has the report been considered at any other committee meeting of the Council or other stakeholders?

No

1. Background

- 1.1. Increasing social connections is one of the three current priorities of the Hackney Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022 - 2026, chosen after extensive consultation with residents and system partners.
- 1.2. In 2023, each HWB organisation was invited to nominate a 'social connections' lead to join a group co-chaired by Cllr Chris Kennedy and Joia de Sa, Consultant in Public Health. The group adopted a strengths-based approach of listening to and learning from partners who are currently delivering effective interventions across City and Hackney, to then develop a vision and priorities for action. This is shown below:

Together, we aim to strengthen the conditions which increase social connection in City and Hackney

Our priorities:

- TO WATCH**
 - Ensure digital transformation considers social connection
 - Strengthen social infrastructure in local communities
- TO ENABLE**
 - Increase awareness of services and support better connections between these
 - Build a culture of connection
- TO ACT**
 - Deepen our knowledge of what works for those who are most at risk of harm from isolation

- 1.3. The last update on progress from March 2024 is summarised below:
 - Membership of the Social Connections Leads Group was expanded to include colleagues interested in this agenda and the group has met

quarterly.

- Initial meetings defined objectives, established collective ownership, showcased best practice, explored definitions of social connection and its impact, shared resident insights, and examined national evidence to develop priorities for action.
- The group was finalising a local action framework, likely adopting an 'act', 'enable', or 'watch' approach, Membership has expanded to include three new Voluntary and Community Sector representatives for better sectoral representation and dissemination.
- The group is exploring regional measurement frameworks (e.g., GLA Civic Strength Index, UCL IGP's Citizen-led Prosperity Index) to gauge impact.
- It is actively linking with the Director of Public Health's annual report for 2024/5 on social capital to maximise learning and opportunities.

2. **Current position**

- 2.1. Following on from the update in 2024, the group benefited from facilitation expertise from Elspeth Paisley, System Convenor, Barking & Dagenham Community Locality Lead from the Local Government Association to help us develop a vision and priorities for action across City and Hackney (Appendix 1).
- 2.2. Subsequent meetings developed these priorities and have focused on these in turn, with the support of system partners to convene and facilitate these meetings.
- 2.3. Joia de Sa has also been able to secure around £200,000 of non-recurrent funding to support this priority. Some of the funding has been used to support voluntary and community partners to attend meetings, and for venue hire and logistics. After discussion with the group, the majority was decided to be used for a grant funding proposal to support priority 5.
- 2.4. In November 2024, over 60 system partners joined a meeting at the Oaktree Community Centre to discuss priority 2: strengthening social infrastructure, facilitated by Alice McCreadie from the LBH Spacebank project. This included an innovative 'speed dating' section, and provided examples of how to think collaboratively about how we can optimise the use of space for community benefit. That meeting provided a useful starting point for Alice's work which is now being taken forward in part through a Shared Power Collective, which came back to the group to report on progress in July 2025. The meeting also sparked multiple other collaborations.
- 2.5. In January 2025, partners came together to discuss priority 3: how to increase awareness of services and support better connections between these at the Marie Lloyd Centre facilitated by Annabelle Burns, Integration Lead at Homerton NHS Foundation Trust. This included a powerful exercise led by Jo Carter from Immediate Theatre, where we imagined interactions from multiple perspectives and sparked reflection about what may be possible through a relational way of working. The session also

- included discussion on existing resources and forums where partners can find out more about what is currently happening across City and Hackney.
- 2.6. In March 2025, we came together to discuss priority 4: building a culture of connection at Halkevi facilitated by Carrie Hirst from Hackney Council for Voluntary Services (HCVS). This involved lots of creative exercises and thinking about how to increase connection - as a result of the meeting at least 5 new meetings were set up and we heard that most attendees made between 2- 8 new connections.
 - 2.7. In May 2025 we held a meeting at the Artizan Street Library in the City of London to discuss priority 5: deepening our knowledge of what works for those most at risk of harm from isolation, facilitated by Thomas Shore and Joia de Sa from Public Health. This included an introduction to the Barbican and Community Libraries team. We discussed current research and local insight, and used this information to start to develop a funding proposal for non-recurrent funding that has been identified to support this purpose.
 - 2.8. In July 2025, we took a step back to listen and learn from different groups - hearing from Elspeth Paisley on her work in Barking and Dagenham, the Shared Power Collective on their work and hearing resident insights from the HCVS resident forums followed by a system summer social at the Garden of Earthly Delights, held in conjunction with HCVS and the City and Hackney Population Health Hub.
 - 2.9. In September 2025, we held a very successful system showcase on social connections at the Frampton Park Baptist Church, following an idea from our resident adviser, developed with the Community Health Champions and supported by a small group of system partners. This included a call out for system partners to showcase their work, and was attended by over 100 system partners.
 - 2.10. In November 2025, two training sessions were delivered by the Good Practice Mentors. The first focused on ripple effect mapping, which is a useful and practical evaluation methodology for projects working on social connections. The second focused on finding, engaging and providing a warm welcome to new people.
 - 2.11. The group had not yet met in 2026 due to reduced co-ordination capacity and several factors including awaiting internal LBH restructures relating to grants capacity to be completed.
 - 2.12. The group met on 2nd June 2026 to focus on the final priority 1 on digital transformation, and we hope to launch the co-designed funding programme for priority 5 later this year.
 - 2.13. The Health & Wellbeing Board is asked to consider the future of the Social Connections Leads Group and whether this should continue, and who should be responsible for co-ordination. So far, this has been co-ordinated by the Population Health Hub, who have much reduced capacity currently, and have pivoted to focus on support to the Neighbourhoods programme.

3. **Feedback on work of HWB organisations to contribute to this priority**
 - 3.1. Three responses were received to the survey asking HWB members for their view on the current strategy. The responses asking what HWB organisations have done to contribute towards achieving the social connections priority are summarised below:
 - 3.2. **Support for Specific Groups:** One organisation indicated that they have been providing opportunities for parents and young people to interact, take up support, and connect through early help offers, such as "Best start in life" and the youth offer.
 - 3.3. **Service & Volunteer Focus:** One organisation reported that they have been asking questions through outreach and research to understand how services support social connectivity, including how volunteers are encouraged to interact with staff and peers, and assessing if service waiting areas are welcoming to encourage social interaction.
 - 3.4. **Collaboration & Coordination:** One organisation responded that they have participated in the Social Connections Leads group, facilitating joint sessions with statutory and VCS partners, and coordinating/directly supporting Hackney's Lunch Clubs to improve social isolation.
4. **Key facts and/or data**
 - 4.1. It is hard to understand the current picture of social connection across City and Hackney, though as indicated in the previous update, there are a number of regional measurement frameworks that could be used to gauge impact.
 - 4.2. While the Hackney Residents Survey of 2024 did not specifically include a question on isolation or loneliness, it appears to indicate that feelings of community cohesion have increased.
 - 4.3. When considering priority 5, the group discussed a report commissioned by the Greater London Authority, in 2021, which analysed the Survey for Londoners (pre-COVID) and found that around 1 in 12 people in London experience severe loneliness.
 - 4.4. Groups who are more likely to experience this include those who are acutely poor, who are single or live alone, who have a long-lasting or limiting health condition, are going through life changes or being new in London and who feel different or are experiencing prejudice.
 - 4.5. The group also identified those with caring responsibilities as likely to experience severe loneliness, from local insight. All of these groups are being considered as we develop our funding proposal.
5. **Conclusions**
 - 5.1. The Social Connections Group has successfully progressed the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy priority, moving from foundational development to targeted action on five key priorities.

- 5.2. Through system-wide engagement, innovative collaborative events, and securing non-recurrent funding, the group has fostered greater relational working across City and Hackney.
- 5.3. Key reflections highlight the value of in-person connection, the necessity of funding for community participation, and the need for greater statutory partner engagement. While assessing the full impact is complex, the groundwork laid, particularly the forthcoming funding programme for those most at risk of isolation, represents significant progress towards building a more connected and resilient community across City and Hackney.

6. Recommendations

Reflections on the work so far are included below:

- 6.1. **Importance of connection in person.** The commitment to holding in-person meetings and collaborative events by the group has consistently demonstrated the enhanced depth and quality of connection achieved when partners come together physically. This underlines the importance of allocating time and resources to facilitate face-to-face interaction for sustained relational working and effective system-wide collaboration.
- 6.2. **Funding for community partners to participate** Securing non-recurrent funding has been helpful, not only for the logistical support of large-scale collaborative events but also to establish a dedicated collaboration fund for Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) partners. This fund acknowledges the essential contribution of VCS organisations and ensures their sustained participation in co-designing and delivering social connection initiatives.
- 6.3. **Limited engagement from statutory partners** Statutory partners' engagement in the Social Connections Group has been inconsistent, leading to the decision to open the group up to whoever wanted to participate across the system. That said, it is a useful space for statutory and community partners to come together and collaborate.
- 6.4. **Different ways to involve residents** Reflections on the work have highlighted the importance of exploring different, meaningful ways to involve residents in the co-design and delivery of social connection initiatives, moving beyond traditional consultation methods, and more could be done on this. The group has worked with a resident advisor from the Homerton and several community health champions but it remains an area for further development.
- 6.5. **Links to other workstreams** The impending conclusion of the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy in 2026 presents an opportunity to embed the learning and momentum from this work into future strategies, particularly through the lens of social capital and resilience being championed by Public Health. This also creates a strong basis for aligning efforts with the Communities function within the London Borough of Hackney (LBH), though further efforts are needed to strengthen links with City of London colleagues to ensure a holistic City and Hackney approach.

7. **Policy Context**

Please detail which, if any, of the Health & Wellbeing Strategy priorities this report relates to?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Improving mental health
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Increasing social connection
<input type="checkbox"/>	Supporting greater financial security
<input type="checkbox"/>	All of the above

Please detail which, if any, of the Health & Wellbeing Strategy 'Ways of Working' this report relates to?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Strengthening our communities
<input type="checkbox"/>	Creating, supporting and working with volunteer and peer roles
<input type="checkbox"/>	Collaborations and partnerships: including at a neighbourhood level
<input type="checkbox"/>	Making the best of community resources
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	All of the above

8. **Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)**

Has an EIA been conducted for this work?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Yes
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No

9. **Consultation**

Has public, service user, patient feedback/consultation informed the recommendations of this report?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	No

Have the relevant members/ organisations and officers been consulted on the recommendations in this report?

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Yes
<input type="checkbox"/>	No

10. **Risk Assessment**

To be confirmed - as plans progress

11. **Sustainability**

To be confirmed - as plans progress

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Appendices	1. C&H Social Connections Group Prio...