

Finsbury (Bunhill and Clerkenwell) Ward Partnership Meeting: celebrating our Covid-19 heroes

Location: Zoom Meeting
Time: 7:00-9:00pm
Date: Wednesday 13 October 2021
Chair(s): Councillor Valerie Bossman-Quarshie and Councillor Matt Nathan
Councillors and Speakers: Councillor Matt Nathan, Clerkenwell Ward Councillor
Councillor Valerie Bossman-Quarshie, Bunhill Ward Councillor
Councillor Phil Graham, Bunhill Ward Councillor
Councillor Una O'Halloran, Executive Member for Community Development
Michael Ryan, Chief Executive, St Luke's Community Centre
Olu Alake, Chief Executive Officer, The Peel Institute
Morgan Phillips, Heritage Assistant, Islington Museum
Sydney Alexander, Finsbury (Bunhill and Clerkenwell) Ward Partnership Coordinator

1. Agenda

- 1.1. Welcome and Introductions: Councillors and speakers
- 1.2. Co-chairs Councillor Nathan and Councillor Bossman-Quarshie introduce the reason for the meeting, housekeeping and agenda for the evening
- 1.3. Celebrating our community Covid heroes
- 1.4. Guest Speaker: LBI Heritage Team on reflecting on the success of Mutual Aid groups
- 1.5. Discussion: your reflection on the community response and looking forward
- 1.6. Feedback and summary from chairs
- 1.7. AOB and Close

2. Welcome, introductions and housekeeping

- 2.1. Co-chairs Councillor Nathan and Councillor Bossman-Quarshie opened the meeting and began with a round of introductions of those on the panel.
- 2.2. Councillor Nathan explained the housekeeping and zoom functions of the meeting to attendees.
- 2.3. Councillor Bossman-Quarshie welcomed attendees to this meeting to bring together the two wards to celebrate our local heroes. She said that while it's important to

acknowledge we are still in the pandemic, so many people in the community have come out in the past 18 months to really support their neighbours and we need to celebrate this. She added that the councillors wish they could give everyone an award, but will be celebrating just a few nominated individuals this evening. Councillor Bossman-Quarshie also noted digital divide that may be impacting attendance to the meetings and said that while we have not been able to have an in-person meeting yet, we hope to look at this for next time. She explained that tonight is about giving thanks to the community on behalf of the councillors, the London Borough of Islington Council and key stakeholders, and passed on to Councillor Nathan to introduce the next item.

3. Celebrating our community Covid heroes

- 3.1. Councillor Nathan introduced this agenda item to celebrate local community Covid heroes from the past 18 months. He mentioned that all nominations that have been received from the community and stakeholders will be discussed this evening, receive a certificate of recognition and be invited to the Mayor's Parlour for afternoon tea when we are able to do this safely. A few selected nominees will also receive vouchers.
- 3.2. Councillor Nathan thanked the businesses who donated the vouchers and the Old Street partnership for organising the donations through their URBAN CARD. The partnership is trying to support this card to bolster the local business community. Councillor Nathan said he wanted to put his thanks to the partnership on record and that all the councillors are really appreciative. He then started to go through the nominations received.
- 3.3. Councillor Nathan introduced the first nomination received for the Chef at St Luke's Community Centre and asked the Chief Executive at St Luke's, Michael Ryan, if he would like to say a few words.

Michael said that what the St Luke's service users appreciated is that right throughout the lockdown the kitchen staff were brilliant. When people couldn't get out and about, the chef has been absolutely fantastic in making sure that everyone is taken care of and everyone's needs are addressed.

- 3.4. Councillor Nathan thanked Michael for his words, introduced the next nominees within the over 55s team at St Luke's and asked Michael to introduce these staff members.

Michael explained that these staff were amazing in bringing food out to people, being at work every day during lockdown and keeping in constant contact with people on the telephone supporting them. They have continued their support since, helping bring people to get vaccinated and generally going beyond the call of duty. He added that it was wonderful to see them on the list of nominations received.

- 3.5. Councillor Nathan thanked Michael for his introduction and moved to the next nominee, an attendee at the meeting who runs the King Square Estate Community Centre.

Councillor Graham asked to introduce this nominee. He said that as well as working with St Luke's and volunteering and supporting their meal delivery through the pandemic, the attendee also helped in setting up the King Square Community Centre so a vaccination centre could be moved there. They have been very supporting all the way through and have been amazing working tightly with the Bunhill councillors and St Luke's to make everything run a bit smoother.

The attendee said thank you for the nomination. They added that it was not just them but a whole raft of people doing exactly the same to support others through the pandemic. They said that they personally wanted to thank everyone involved in King Square estate and everyone doing the work at St Luke's as well as everyone who has done what they can during the pandemic.

- 3.6. Councillor Nathan introduced the next nominee who had received what he thought was a nice succinct nomination with the reason given as 'because I can rely on her.' Councillor Nathan said that we have all learnt how vital it is to have people you can rely on at this time and we should all make sure we are that person for someone else.
- 3.7. Councillor Nathan introduced the next nomination for a few highlighted members of staff at St Luke's and asked Michael if he had any comments to share.

Michael said a few words about one member of staff attending the meeting. He explained that they helped everyone in St Luke's, service users in particular, over the pandemic and now have a role in the food hub which is crucial to many of the local residents. They kept the space clean and safe.

The nominated staff member attended the meeting and wanted to share a few words of gratitude. They said they are more than grateful to work at St Luke's. When they arrived they were not employed and St Luke's became a second home. It's the best place to work, and they said they are so happy to be part of this community and to be able to help in the food hub. They feel blessed every day that they have the opportunity to give to people and wanted to emphasise how luck they feel this community is for the support received.

- 3.8. Councillor Nathan thanked Michael and also asked him to say a few words on the next nominee, the Engagement Manager at St Luke's.

Michael said there was quite a lot to say about the Community Engagement Manager. They are fantastic in their role. They have been at St Luke's close to 3 years and do an absolutely fantastic job in reaching people and bringing them in, keeping in contact with them. He added that when you come to St Luke's everyone knows and loves this staff member because of how well they can keep in touch and contact people, and what struck everybody during the pandemic is how much genuine concern the staff member had for local residents and how that informs their work.

The Engagement Manager attended the meeting and thanked Michael for his words. They said that they felt blessed to have been at St Luke's in the pandemic and feels

proud that the staff were brave enough to serve the community. They said they were very proud of all the volunteers and community as a whole. They also said thank you to Islington councillors for their support and added they think there is the most beautiful community in these wards and are very blessed to be serving them.

- 3.9. Councillor Nathan asked Michael to introduce the next nominee, the Health and Wellbeing officer from St Luke's.

Michael said that they worked continuously through the lockdown running the food hub and now the new wellbeing hub which opened on 27th September. This staff member is absolutely fantastic in the way they have welcomed people in, the connections they have made with families and the work they have done with them.

The Wellbeing officer attended the meeting and said that it was a privilege to be part of St Luke's. They added that they were really pleased to be a part of this special community, living in Islington, it's a double privilege.

- 3.10. Councillor Nathan also asked Michael for a few words on the over 55 team from St Luke's that had been nominated as a whole.

Michael added that right from the very beginning the team had been great, they delivered food to people, kept in touch, encouraged them, supported them through getting vaccinations and reassured them when lots of people were down.

- 3.11. Councillor Nathan thanked Michael for that introduction. He then introduced the next two nominees who had both been nominated by someone who referenced each of them as a son who they wouldn't know what to do without and is always willing to support them when in need. The nominees were not at the meeting but have been contacted and will receive a certificate of recognition along with the other nominees.

- 3.12. Councillor Nathan asked Michael to introduce the next nominee, one of the volunteers at St Luke's.

Michael introduced the nominee and said they were great in terms of the time they gave during the pandemic with 5 days a week at the centre. They helped everyone and it was wonderful to get to know them. Michael added it was great to see them on this nominee list, representing the volunteers in the community.

The volunteer attended the meeting and thanked Michael for his words. They added they wanted to say a thank you to Michaela and the rest of the staff at St Luke's for all the work they did not just during the pandemic but before and after.

- 3.13. Councillor Nathan introduced the next nominee who had been put forward as someone's befriender. Councillor Nathan read out the reasoning for the nomination which explained that the befriender had called this person every night since 2020 and continued to do so even when they had Covid themselves. The nominated befriender had been their rock in this time and really showed the kindness strangers can have.

The nominee attended the meeting and shared that they feel very honoured to have been nominated. They explained that they had been matched with the person that nominated them through their company, who gave them the chance to volunteer during the pandemic. They found themselves alone in first lockdown and the person they befriended was as good for them as they were as a befriender. They were honoured this person thought of them.

- 3.14. Councillor Nathan introduced the next nomination which was for the Dustmen and Binmen across the ward. He added that the councillors present all know that when refuse collections goes wrong they heard about it, but during lockdown he didn't hear any complaints. He said that this was key to keeping our streets clean and hygienic and that he was really grateful for the excellent work our Dustmen and Binmen do.

Councillor Nathan went on to extend the thanks of the councillor to estate caretakers and community centre caretakers who do absolutely amazing work and he wanted to acknowledge them on record. He added that hopefully this Christmas will be different to last year and they will be able to have a special thank you lunch.

Councillor Bossman-Quarshie added her thanks to the estate team. She said that she has found the concierges have been amazing, even when it's something simple like being lost on a street they are always fantastic at supporting people. She also wanted to thank the refuse men who are always there to help you, alongside Tenancy Management Organisations and Tenancy Residents Associations who have been absolutely amazing, especially supporting during the pandemic when issues arose such as not being able to get access for food deliveries. This kind of work really shows what Islington is about and the one for all and all for one spirit here.

- 3.15. Councillor Nathan gave a huge thanks to the next nominee who has received their nomination as thanks for collecting food deliveries and checking in on people throughout the pandemic. Councillor Nathan said a huge thank you on behalf of the councillors and said it was a shame they could not attend.
- 3.16. Councillor Nathan introduced the next nominee who had been put forward for their role in and out of Covid facilitating people's wellbeing through running the REST support group. He added that support groups like this were really important work.

The nominee was in attendance and said thank you for the nomination which was really appreciated. They added that they wanted to give credit to Change, Grow, Live, and explained that the project they run is for people who are coming off prescribed medicine. They see a lot of people who struggle with issues such as anxiety and insomnia and provide a place to support people. The nominee added that in this time they have represented the issue at a parliamentary level to get changes across the UK in the way these medicines are managed and are grateful to have their work nominated.

- 3.17. Councillor Nathan introduced the next nomination which was for a group of people who had been nominated by a number of councillors. Councillor Nathan explain that these individuals are currently critical or were critical for their involvement in Mutual Aid networks. The work they did and continue to do is, and has been, transformative in terms of how a local response works. Councillor Nathan said that both he and Councillor Graham saw their casework explode as Mutual Aid found people in need that would never have picked up the phone. It was incredible to have the Mutual Aid groups as eyes and ears throughout the community ensuring no one was left behind. He said it was a profound experience and he's grateful to all the nominees.

Councillor Graham added that it was a shame everyone couldn't have been nominated as he is still seeing the power of this work in the WhatsApp group which still goes on. He echoed what Councillor Nathan had said about the group, saying that these people stepped up when they saw there was a need to be filled and put everything into it, no matter what they were going through themselves. He said that the work was outstanding and it was an absolute privilege to be part of working alongside them at the time. He hopes they will stay with us, as these groups are really needed even outside the pandemic. The reach the group have had was incredible, the councillors were hearing from people they had never heard of before, giving them the opportunity to support where they could. He finished by saying that they couldn't have had this event without mentioning the Mutual Aid groups.

Several Mutual Aid group coordinators attended the meeting. One thanked the councillors for inviting them to the meeting. They emphasised how important it was to say this was a group rather than individual effort, starting with the 500-600 volunteers that meant they could help run thousands of errands over this time. The nominee added that before the meeting they were reflecting on how none of the coordinators were traditional volunteer types, that they came from different backgrounds from IT to law to engineering and all become involved. They added one of the pieces of learning from this is that lots of people who may not have volunteered before will step up to support the community when needed. There are some other lessons to be learned and room for this to continue, with people taking over with fresh eyes to strengthen the group as they move forward.

Councillor Nathan responded that we can see the sentiment and understanding that we all want to look after each other's best interest shine through in this work. We are a community and need to keep our connections rather than going back to isolated lives. We've learnt a really powerful lessons over the past 18 months

Another Mutual Aid group coordinator added that they also wanted to emphasise that the coordinators were only some of the people involved, it was a shifting group and great to be a part of.

- 3.18. Councillor Nathan asked Olu Alake to introduce the next nominee, the coordinator of over 55 activities at the Peel Institute.

Olu said that the nominee has been absolutely magnificent in their role through Covid, If every single one of the over 55 group could nominate this person, they would have done. The nominee had a rough time over the period themselves being ill with Covid, no sooner had they come out of hospital than they started calling everyone registered to check on them and see how they were. They managed well over 300 calls as they cared about every single one of the people they supported. They continued with daily calls, at least once a week. Olu said they were absolutely phenomenal in commitment to over 55s at the Peel and earlier in the month, have also been recognised by being awarded an MBE. It was a shame they couldn't make the event today but Olu looks forward to seeing them at Mayor's Parlour when we can.

- 3.19. Councillor Graham wants to say a few words following this final nomination. He said that it has been touched on that the nomination really goes out to all the people of Finsbury. He said he saw a change in these 18 months in everyone, everyone you met on the street, everyone he and the other ward councillors had contact with as councillors were willing to help where they could, even if it was only in the smallest ways. He emphasised again that the community around Finsbury have been absolutely outstanding and that if these times have taught us anything, it's that we have a community here- one we can rely on and one we need to support. He said on behalf of councillors and councillors who couldn't be here that they will step up and support the community like the community supported everyone else and he is proud to represent this community.
- 3.20. Councillor Nathan closed this section of the meeting by saying that there are countless people out there equally deserving of our gratitude. He is looking forward to as many people as possible joining us at the Mayor's parlour in due course to celebrate further.

4. Guest Speaker: LBI Heritage Team on reflecting on the success of Mutual Aid groups

- 4.1. Morgan Philipps (they/them) presented the following presentation. Documents must be accessible to publish on the Ward Partnerships webpage. For a copy of the presentation documents please email the Ward Partnership co-ordinator at Sydney.Alexander@islington.gov.uk. A detailed summary of the slides has been included below:

Slide one: Mutual Aid Memories

Title slide with the heading 'Mutual Aid Memories: a collaborative project between the Islington Heritage Service and Islington's Mutual Aid groups.' The slide also includes the name of the presenter, Morgan Phillips, Heritage Assistant at Islington Museum, the presenter's pronouns (They/them) and the presenter's contact details (Morgan.Phillips@Islington.gov.uk). The title page has an image of four arms of different skin colours linked together by holding each other on the wrist.

For the past couple of months Morgan has been involved in the Mutual Aid Memories project, a collaboration between the Islington Heritage Service and Islington's Mutual Aid groups. They are going to quickly run through what the project has been doing up to this point, what their plans are for the future, and how attendees can get involved with the project as well.

Slide two: A brief explanation – what exactly is Mutual Aid

What is Mutual Aid? An informal group of Islingtonians, organised by ward, with the aim of helping each other throughout the pandemic.

Morgan explained that this help came in many forms, from shopping for neighbours' groceries to picking up medication for people to finding ways to sort out emergency home repairs. These were organised primarily through WhatsApp groups, which worked both as an organisational tool and a way for people to find social interaction even when they couldn't leave the house. While the practical help provided by people in these groups was the key purpose, the social aspect of Mutual Aid shouldn't be understated. One member of the St George's Ward group that they spoke to had fond memories of having regular Zoom dinners with other isolated members of their community, and looking at the pictures people had been sending of their food.

The council began working with these Mutual Aid groups to provide them with support and training in a variety of areas including adult social care and food provision. One of the examples of the collaborative work between Islington Council and the Mutual Aid groups is the variety of food support services they provided. The image on this slide was taken by Alice Robson, one of the Community Partnerships Managers, at the Andover Community Centre and shows the preparation for one of their Friday Food Surplus events with volunteers organising food boxes set out on tables.

These Mutual Aid groups have really defined the pandemic for many people. They provided so much help and support in a time when so many people were struggling, and maintaining those connections is going to be really important to the future of Islington's communities.

Slide three: The beginnings of the project

Aims:

- To tell the story of Mutual Aid in Islington
- To give a space for those who participated or were helped by Mutual Aid to reflect on and speak about their experiences
- To work together to find a way forward for continued solidarity and support locally

The first meeting between members of Mutual Aid, Community Partnership Managers, and the former curator of Islington Museum Roz Currie, took place in May 2021. It was during this meeting that it was decided that this needed to be a collaborative project between these different groups with an interest in it, with the members of Mutual Aid groups leading its direction and the Islington Heritage Service supporting them with the resources and experience we have in running these kinds of projects.

Slide four: Initial ideas

- Collecting: archives, oral histories, photographs
- Public displays: pop-up exhibitions, events, a website

Morgan explained the first meeting was also where the initial ideas for what the project could do were developed. One of the first ideas was some kind of collecting project, where the museum would facilitate the collecting of materials that will hopefully find a place in the Local History Centre. These archives could be anything from photographs and posters to official documentation, and it was initially proposed that there would also be oral histories conducted with a handful of people who were involved to capture their personal memories of lockdown.

The other initial idea was having some kind of public display where the things that were collected could be presented to people all over the borough. Some of the suggestions included having pop-up exhibitions that could go around public spaces across Islington, interesting events, and a website that could display the collected materials.

Although some of these things haven't yet come to fruition, the team have been able to make a start on getting many parts of the project underway.

Slide five: Mutual Aid Memories collecting events

Morgan explained that the team have hosted a few different memory collecting events, both in person at the Museum and Cally Clock tower learning centre and online, to give people an opportunity to respond to some of the questions that we had identified as being the core of this project:

- How has Mutual Aid changed your community?
- What does 'solidarity not charity' mean?
- What have you learned from Mutual Aid?
- What should Mutual Aid do after the pandemic?

The questions were shown on the slide. Morgan said they had had some interesting responses to these questions and some fascinating discussions with people who attended these events. Some people who attended the events were from the same ward groups but were meeting in person for the first time, which was wonderful to see.

One of the things that really emerged from these discussions was that the people who we spoke with really enjoyed being a part of Mutual Aid – they said that it was quick and easy to understand and it was possible to get stuck in right away, and they could do a lot of different things. They seemed to have built up positive relationships that were both organisational and fun which really helped them to make it through the pandemic.

The team also made a memorial space for people, to share their memories of anyone who was affected by Covid-19 which was shown on the slide. The memorial space is a glass wall with the title Islington Museum Covid-19 Memorial Wall written on large pieces of paper in the shape of hearts. Smaller heart shaped notes are placed on the wall. Morgan said they had added a

marker of their own for their mum, an NHS pharmacist, and others added notes for people that they missed because they weren't able to see them; a few kids even added notes for themselves because they were sad that they couldn't go out and see their friends. Morgan explained that having these spaces open has been a fairly successful way of creating a physical space for the project, but there has been more of a development in our digital spaces in these early phases of the project.

Slide six: The Mutual Aid Memories website

The slide shows a screenshot of the Website introducing the project and welcoming people to the side as follows: Welcome to Mutual Aid Memories, a project conducted by Mutual Aid groups from across the borough of Islington and supported by the Islington Heritage Service. This website is here to act as a space to display the work produced by people who were involved in the work of Mutual Aid. The screenshot of the website also shows a section which lists upcoming events which took place in the summer and a few of the headings for different sections on the website including: Home, Share your stories, Collected Memories, Online Memorial, The Future of Mutual Aid and Heritage Events

Morgan explained that one of the immediate outcomes of this project has been the production of a WordPress website for recording the outcomes of the Mutual Aid project. They took attendees through the functioning of the site and demonstrated what people can do to get involved with the project.

They showed that all events are listed on the [homepage of the website](#). Morgan then clicked onto the 'Share your stories' website heading on the left-hand side of the homepage. Under this section there is information on how you can share your memories and the stories of the pandemic with the museum either by email (Islington.Museum@islington.gov.uk) or by phone (020 7527 2837). If you are not sure what to write you can also find prompt documents, for example with questions and sentence starts, under this heading. Morgan then clicked on the 'The Future of Mutual Aid' heading on the left-hand side of the homepage. They explained that this is a section for anyone to leave comments on what they think about the future of Mutual Aid and the comments will appear on the website. Finally, Morgan clicked on the 'Heritage Events' heading which is a page where you can see some of the responses to the project questions that have been recorded at the memory events so far.

Slide seven: Our future plans – what's next

Morgan asked what's next for Mutual Aid Memories. They said that one of the primary things that came out of discussions between themselves, other Heritage Service members, the Community Partnerships managers, and several co-ordinators from different ward subgroups was that the project needs to have clearly defined guidelines and parameters that the people who were involved with Mutual Aid can be creative and lead the recording of their own stories without having to dedicate more time and resources than they have available. Of course, approaching the Heritage Service with their ideas and suggestions for project outcomes is an important part of our connection, but several people were unsure as to whether they'd have the time, understanding of the service, and resources to manage everything if they were completely driving the project forward.

The Heritage Service decided to produce a guide document has given some of these group co-ordinators a toolkit for organising and running their own memory collecting events, conducting interviews with members of their Mutual Aid groups and those who used their services, and how to use the Mutual Aid Memories website. The point of the guide is to let the Mutual Aid ward group co-ordinators know what the team is able to do to support them, while giving them the freedom to organise their own events with their specific groups in mind. If you are interested in getting involved with organising some community Mutual Aid events, you can get in touch with Morgan via email at Morgan.Phillips@Islington.gov.uk and they'll send you a copy of the guide.

The team will also be working on an exhibition which will hopefully be able to tour around the borough, with content produced by Mutual Aid group members and the Heritage Service, which will record some of the key stories that have emerged from the project thus far.

Slide seven: how can you get involved?

If you are interested in getting involved, you can check out the website at [this URL](#), or you can email either [Morgan Phillips](#) or [the museum](#) for more information

There's space in this project for it to grow with suggestions from ward group members, so if anyone attending was involved in Mutual Aid during the pandemic and are interested in getting involved or in moving the project along, Morgan asked that they please get in touch.

To get in touch you can email Islington.Museum@islington.gov.uk with general suggestions about the websites or memories to share, or you can email Morgan directly at Morgan.Phillips@Islington.gov.uk for more specific issues, for example access to the event guide for events of your own.

- 4.2 Councillor Nathan thanked Morgan for coming and giving an excellent presentation. He said that he was always amazed at the work of Islington's heritage team and asked if there were any questions for Morgan.
- 4.3 Olu Alake, Chief Executive Officer of the Peel Institute, said that this was a really fantastic project and asked if it is being shared with any other heritage institutions across Islington.

Morgan answered that the project is not being shared yet, it is currently just within the museum and local history centre. They mentioned that the team have lots of projects at the moment so are still pushing this project out and developing it. Once there have been more responses and there is a steadier base to the project they will reach out to other institutions, for example the London Metropolitan Archives.

- 4.4 Councillor Bossman-Quarshie also thanked Morgan for coming, congratulated them on the presentation and said the work was really interesting. She then asked if they are looking at working with some of the schools on this project and how they plan to engage with young volunteers. Councillor Bossman-Quarshie mentioned she has met lots of young volunteers and it would be lovely to share their stories across the borough and document how the baton has been passed on to the young.

Morgan answered that they are currently working on a number of other youth initiatives and part of the reason they produced documents to upload to the website is so that people can use them in different ways, including for classroom activities. Also, as ward groups can organise their own events using the guide they have produced, the ward groups can reach out to any volunteers involved to be part of the project, including young volunteers. Morgan explained that the main problem of the heritage service is that it is a small team that doesn't know everyone, the best way to get the most people involved is to reach out to those who do know everyone involved, for example the Mutual Aid group ward co-ordinators. They will look to reach out further into the youth community through them. The Youth Councillors are also coming to the museum to speak about other projects in a few weeks' time and we will mention this project to help engagement through them as well.

- 4.5 Councillor Nathan asked if there were any more questions. As no further questions came up, he thanked Morgan again for attending this meeting and said the councillors can't wait to see how it evolves through the next few months and look forward to supporting the team on this any way they can.

5. Discussion: your reflection on the community response and looking forward

- 5.1. To start off the discussion, Councillor Bossman-Quarshie introduced Executive Member for Community Development, Councillor Una O'Halloran who had been invited to the meeting to say a few words. Councillor-Bossman-Quarshie thanked Councillor O'Halloran for joining the meeting.
- 5.2. Councillor O'Halloran thanked Councillor Bossman-Quarshie. She introduced herself as the Community Development lead and said she had been asked to come tonight just to say thank you to all the local heroes and local people who got involved over the past 18 months.

Councillor O'Halloran said that Mutual Aid was amazing to see, especially how some people who had never used, visited or been a part of the community centres before threw themselves in and all got involved. People just worked together, and there were even people coming from outside of the borough just to help out. Councillor O'Halloran mentored that there were lots of areas with really strong Mutual Aid but she was really impressed by the people of Bunhill and Clerkenwell who were fantastic. From St Luke's to the Peel, there were people on day one not afraid to get out there and help, putting their own needs aside.

She also said that it was really important that we get this down as part of the history to leave for our young people, who should know this is what you do, this is how you get involved in a crisis. Councillor O'Halloran talked about how barriers were broken down and people connected in these months and said it was a real privilege to be a part of

with a lot of lessons to be learnt about what can happen when we do things a bit differently.

For her, it's about people and Councillor O'Halloran mentioned that it's important to note we are not out of this yet, for example we can see the impact on electricity and gas prices at the moment. She said that she just hopes Mutual Aid hasn't gone away, even if it looks different with some people volunteering and linking in to community centres in other ways. When needed, she believes people will spring into action again and reiterated once more that whether you took part in a big project or just checked in on someone, everyone in these wards are community heroes, and we really do want to make sure we get these stories shared. We definitely need to celebrate.

Councillor O'Halloran closed by saying a big thank you from everyone, especially from herself. As much as some parts of the job have been thought, she said the community has got to be the best side for her as you really see the best of people. She said a big thanks on behalf of all the council and the brilliant councillors in the South of the borough who are all about doing the work.

- 5.3. Councillor Nathan thanked Councillor O'Halloran for coming to be part of the event today. He also noted that someone had been left off the list of nominations and wanted it to be on the record that the councillors were very grateful to Thomas Neumark, previous Chief Executive Officer at the Peel Institute, for all the work he did during these months. Councillor Nathan then passed over to Councillor Bossman-Quarshie to introduce the three discussion questions for this part of the meeting.
- 5.4. Councillor Bossman-Quarshie said how the councillors were really keen to hear from those attending, to get qualitative data to help them look forward and hear your thoughts about what went well and how to get better.
- 5.5. Councillor Bossman-Quarshie introduced discussion **question one: what do you think has been the best thing about the community's response over the past 18 months?**

Councillor Nathan mentioned that exactly what we have spoken about tonight has been the best thing.

Councillor O'Halloran added that for here everyone working together in the community as a community was amazing, seeing people really helping each other out.

One attendee answered that the best thing was how strong the community was, the relationship with Mutual Aid and local business and how the councillors had really been part of the family on that. They wanted to hold on to that and were frightened about this role going away.

Another attendee said there had been beautiful partnerships they'd like to continue in the community.

5.6. Councillor Nathan introduced discussion **question two: what would you like to keep from the community response moving forward?**

Councillor Bossman-Quarshie said that we don't want to go back to business, that there will always be space for Mutual Aid and there's a really strong foundation from the community centres and all the great work people have been doing to build on. She also emphasised that the councillors are here to be the voice of residents and to hold them account for what people wanted to see.

5.7. Councillor Bossman-Quarshie introduced **question three: what do you think the role of the Ward Partnership should be to support these plans in the future?**

The councillors commented that they would like to hear about everyone's thoughts on future ward partnership meetings and what they might look like going forward.

Councillor Graham said that it was important to continue to build on the meetings, that the councillors want to hear what residents want and about the work of the community. They do not just want this to be a meeting with presentations but interactive. It needs to be a place from community feedback rather than people turning up and being told things. The councillors want to hear the community and resident voices.

Councillor Nathan agreed and explained that the meeting had been held online due to continuing restriction in venues and numbers but hopefully, future meetings will be face to face which will hopefully help with easier interaction and zoom fatigue.

Councillor O'Halloran suggested looking at how people do the meetings differently, including looking at different days and times, such as the weekend, or different formats like open days in local parks, or a park run with different stalls from community groups, centres and Mutual Aid. She also suggested having a meeting with lots of space for questions and interacting, for example putting a few sheets of paper on a table at an in person meeting with questions and give everyone sticky notes to add their thoughts. Another suggestion was that to look at engaging young people in the community or focusing on young people as a theme.

One attendee commented that they liked the idea of a kind of street party celebration - perhaps on the occasion of the Queen's Platinum Jubilee next spring as a bit of fun to follow-on from the pandemic gloom and a chance to see the community out. Another attendees added this was a good idea and that there is planning for a coronation party in King Square.

Another attendee that the ward partnership will be important to help sustain ongoing activity from the Mutual Aid groups. They said that other wards and Mutual Aid group coordinators are quite keen to keeping up a plan of activity in the word and recruiting volunteers. They also said it would be useful to think about how to manage and how to get in people to fill the key coordinator roles in the groups, as well as new volunteers, which community centres such as St Luke's and the Peel might be able to support with within the Ward Partnership.

6. Feedback and summary from chairs

- 6.1. Councillor Nathan thanked everyone for their contributions to the discussion and noted that it might be worth having a ward partnership meeting about the ward partnerships, given that it's a community meeting and key that there is the right input from as many people as possible. He invited any final comments from the attendees and panel of speakers.
- 6.2. An attendee commented that the evening had been a wonderful way to celebrate and thanked the brilliant contributions of the Finsbury community over this difficult and unprecedented time.
- 6.3. Olu Alake said a massive thank you to everyone for their engagement and talked about how amazing it has been to see how much of a community has been forged in difficult circumstances. He said that with everyone trying things and getting involved he believes we are coming out of this stronger and is looking forward to build on all of the work that has happened so far in his new position at the Peel.

Councillor Nathan welcomed Olu to the community in this position.

- 6.4. Michael Ryan said a big thank you to everyone and noted that it was great to see so many people at the event. He thanked those who helping co-ordinate the meeting and finally, said a thank you to the local councillors for all their support in the past 18 months. He said that through everything St Luke's has done the councillors have been so supportive and helpful and that he has worked across many different boroughs and never seen support like they have here in Islington.
- 6.5. Councillor Graham said that tonight has shown just how much of a helpful community we have, everyone who has spoken, spoke about someone else and that's what it is all about. He thanked everyone for their response to the pandemic and said that making those phone calls and helping out saved people's lives and mental and physical health. He said that the community kept the councillors going, kept them on their toes, which is what they need, and did outstanding work
- 6.6. Councillor O'Halloran added that she was glad that the chance to thank people in person would come up, because checking in really mattered and matters now. She said that the things people did, however little, meant so much. That it was a real team effort and has been a privilege to be a part of. She said that we have to thank people properly next year in person and that it's important we continue to remember.
- 6.7. Sydney Alexander, Finsbury Ward Partnership Co-ordinator, noted that people can contact her to be added to the mailing list for information about future Ward Partnership meetings via email at Sydney.Alexander@islington.gov.uk. You can opt out of communications from us at any time by contacting this email. She added that for more information on Ward Partnerships including previous meetings, you can visit the council's [ward partnership webpage](#).

7. AOB and Close

- 7.1. There was one additional question from an attendee in the meeting chat about Mutual Aid groups in Highbury West. Councillor Bossman-Quarshie replied that the attendee can get in touch with her and she will share the information and further contacts on this. There was no other business.
- 7.2. Councillor Nathan thanked everyone who supported the meeting with nominations, everyone for attending and the nominees. He said that all the little things everyone has been doing over the past 18 months has really added up to something big to be proud of. He also noted that it has been useful to get some feedback and how we might do these meetings in the future and that the councillors will continue to consider this for the next meeting. Councillor Nathan handed over to the co-chair, Councillor Bossman-Quarshie, to close the meeting.
- 7.3. Councillor Bossman-Quarshie also thanked everyone for support the event and said she wanted to end with a focus on community.

C for the courage that everyone has shown in these difficult times.

O for the offering of love and support that we have seen.

M for mobilised and the mobilised community that left no one behind, sharing in a spirit of care.

M for memories. As we keep going forwards it is important that we remember and support each other.

Unity. U for the unity of family, friends and neighbours over the past eighteen months.

N for nice and the kindness we have all shared with each other.

T for together, it has been a pleasure to service this lovely community who have all come together in the past two years.

Finally, she emphasised the Y for you, at the end of community is you. Councillor Bossman-Quarshie said thank you for coming tonight, thank you for doing everything you are doing and finished by saying together we can achieve so much as we have heard about this evening.