

DALSTON4LONDON
EVALUATION REPORT
FEBRUARY 2010

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Contents

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Methodology
- 3 An assessment of the impact of Dalston4London's various activities
- 4 Key findings and issues
 - 4.1 Engagement and style
 - 4.2 Tackling deprivation and exclusion
 - 4.3 Doing business with the Olympics
 - 4.4 Training opportunities and specialist assistance
 - 4.5 Anchored in Dalston
 - 4.6 Holistic approach to business support and development in a community
 - 4.7 Funding, sustainability and continuity
 - 4.8 The need for a permanent Dalston community-based structure
 - 4.9 Dalston Square
- 5 Data on outputs
- 6 Learning points and broad conclusions
- 7 Recommendations

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1 Introduction

Dalston is a distinct area in the London borough of Hackney. It is north of Shoreditch and the City of London and is spread across the arterial Kingsland Road and Kingsland High Street, which in turn are bustling streets of shops and small businesses. To the east is London Fields, to the west, the more affluent districts of Islington, and to the north is Stoke Newington.

Dalston itself is an exciting area of cultural and ethnic diversity, marrying strong working class and various immigrant traditions with newer ones, including, in the last few years, the growing gentrification of the area. Even so, more than half the housing in Dalston is socially rented, and the number of people claiming Jobseekers Allowance is one third higher (at 9.3% - September 2009) than Hackney as a whole, and twice the national average. Over one fifth of Dalston's working age population are claiming out-of-work benefits. Other indicators also show it as an area with considerably higher than average disadvantage and poverty. Nevertheless, Dalston as a neighbourhood is changing both physically (including a major and at times controversial development in Dalston Lane) and socially, with a growing reputation for its attractive and interesting mix of shops, cultural and creative activities and events, ethnically diverse restaurants and shops, and the famous and long-established Ridley Road street market.

Dalston4London is an innovative, three year project designed and implemented by Hackney Co-operative Developments (HCD). HCD has over many years established a good track record as a co-operative and business support agency. It saw an opportunity to use its insight and experience to develop a new strategic approach in delivering such support with a strong neighbourhood focus, linking to new possibilities HCD had been working on. Using money from the London Development Agency's Opportunities Fund it has, since April 2007, developed a range of valuable and valued services to both new and established local small businesses in the Dalston town centre (in the London Borough of Hackney). Specifically, D4L set out to deliver "*individual assistance and to bring local businesses and other stakeholders together as a Collective Force to change the image of Dalston and help to make the area and the people ready and able to benefit from the London 2012 Olympic Games and related improvements.*" such as rail and station improvements in Dalston. This was the first of two main aspirations.

The second clear aspiration was wider, but connected to the first. HCD itself is an unusual creature, being a well-established, entirely local, not-for-profit company. It has a significant portfolio of local office and retail property and an excellent reputation both as a landlord for local small businesses and as a significant and principled player in local community developments, especially in cultural fields. From this position it proposed to strengthen its role, through the D4L project, by fighting to establish Dalston as a "*... vibrant and inclusive place where new and existing small businesses and social enterprises can flourish and where the local community and visitors can find a wide variety of attractive products/ services, typical of the area's immense diversity*". This aspiration has a particular reference to HCD's longer term plan to establish Dalston's 'cultural quarter' in and around Gillett Square.

This evaluation looks at how successful D4L has been in achieving these two aspirations.

2 Methodology

HCD based its original proposal for the D4L project on its local knowledge and experience of the needs of Dalston's existing and potential small business sectors. The proposal was solidly backed by suggestions of practical actions, including improved information flows to BAME businesses and women owned businesses to facilitate access to mainstream support services, the developing of "clustering", and organising effective collaboration between businesses on networking, marketing and mutual support.

It was agreed that the evaluation should have a strong focus on the impact of these actions. As this report shows, the specific, measurable outputs have clearly been achieved. Whilst these achievements are examined, our evaluation tries as well to tell the story of how this happened, commenting on some of the main lessons learned and how things have changed.

As over 400 businesses have been assisted by D4L in the period of the project, and several significant events have been organised under its banner, UKRP agreed with HCD to interview a representative cross-section of businesses and stakeholders operating in Dalston. Using a specially designed topic guide in a structured, face-to-face interview format, we asked those a range of questions about the stated key activities of D4L and obtained evidence and opinion on the effectiveness and impact of the initiative. In almost all cases, interviews took place at respondents' premises in the heart of Dalston. We also agreed that we would interview staff delivering the projects, and a selection of partners and other stakeholders operating in and around Dalston. This was to get a three-dimensional view of the contribution and impact of the D4L initiative. These interviews were conducted both face-to-face and by telephone, again using a topic guide to ensure consistency.

We therefore set out to raise key questions about the progress, success and sustainability of the various activities undertaken as part of the D4L project, looking in particular for any developments and ideas about new opportunities that people might highlight. Finally, we sought evidence and views that would cast light on the impact that HCD were keen to have independently assessed. In particular, D4L wanted to see if it could help local businesses take advantage of opportunities linked to the 2012 Olympic Games, the new rail station being built at Dalston Square and cultural 'hub' being developed locally. The interviews were backed up and informed by extensive background and desk research.

We undertook 10 in-depth interviews with local businesses, four interviews with D4L and HCD staff and three with other partners and stakeholders. These categories happily overlapped at times, with many of the businesses enthusiastic about (and willing to comment on) wider community and cultural developments in Dalston and Gillett Square. Staff also had personal commitments, interests and active involvement in these wider developments.

We agreed to produce a report that addressed a series of 'particular questions' about D4L's impact, on the one hand, and key learning points to emerge from the project design and delivery on the other. We have decided to write the report by, firstly, setting out and then substantiating our key findings. Our conclusions address the 'particular questions', and make a number of recommendations.

3 An assessment of the impact of Dalston4London's various activities

Dalston4London agreed with the LDA to deliver a project from April 2007 to March 2010. D4L/HCD employed two full-time specialist workers; a Programme Manager and an Enterprise Support and Network Manager. Both were also skilled and experienced business advisers with extensive local knowledge and strong connections to the Dalston neighbourhood and the businesses in it. The funding also enabled D4L to have a part-time publicity and website officer, and good administrative, financial and leadership support from HCD. The outputs to be achieved over the three year period were:-

- to deliver individual assistance to at least 360 new and small Dalston businesses.

- to help create 40 new small businesses.
- to work with other stakeholders as a collective force to change the image of Dalston.
- to assist in making Dalston a vibrant and inclusive place, with expanding businesses and a wide variety of attractive products and services typical of the area's wide diversity.
- to maximise Dalston's benefiting from the opportunities being created by the 2012 Olympics, the new transport links and developments to Dalston's built environment.

Business support

The personalised support given by D4L to a wide range of small businesses operating in Dalston was appreciated both by the businesses we interviewed and by wider interest groups who are putting a lot of energy into establishing the area as a hub for arts, media, cultural and other exciting neighbourhood-based activities. D4L's data also shows great success at engaging and working with local BAME businesses. But D4L's short term funding appears to have raised local expectations that cannot realistically be met in terms of services to small business in the future. The most common sentiment we noted in interviews was summed up in a single question: "Where will we go now if D4L is no longer there?"

One focus of D4L was to seek out new business opportunities for its clients arising from the 2012 Olympic Games, and organising access to training, especially on procurement procedures and prerequisites. We found no evidence that any small businesses were able as yet to claim that they had won new business arising from the Games, though there was some hope expressed that in 2012 increased visitor numbers in the area might see a temporary increase in trade. New skills learned about how procurement works in the private and public sector have, however, enabled some local businesses to get into new, 'non-Olympic' markets, such as printing for a local authority and doing more business with schools.

Despite initial hopes, there is also little evidence of 'clustering' taking place in any organised way to help small businesses compete more effectively for contracts. Informally, and only on a very small-scale, a number of complementary businesses have nevertheless been drawn together to supply things like food, other goods and services for events in Gillett Square.

Local businesses were brought together on occasions for events, and the facilities were established for a regular Friday morning 'business club' where people could drop in for advice and networking, but in the main, advice and support was 'one-to-one' either at D4L's welcoming offices in the heart of the neighbourhood, or at businesses' own premises.

One particular 'group' activity that was very successful was the Bradbury Street Area Community Association (BACA). D4L staff played a vital role in bringing businesses together with the police and others to look at significant community safety and environmental improvements to a street that only a few years before had been in a very poor state. Several new businesses are now established there, and the association and D4L were instrumental in bringing about the alcohol ban that has made the street and neighbouring Gillett Square, safer and attractive.

A vibrant and inclusive place

In the period of this project there is no doubt that Dalston has undergone a major and very noticeable change in image. D4L has played a central role in this. Of course, other factors have contributed, and it is impossible to apportion praise with any degree of accuracy. But from the interviews it was clear that local businesses and others concerned with Dalston's future saw D4L and HCD as playing a very significant role in helping Dalston become a place where people could visit, shop, do business and take part in cultural and social events. In particular the emergence of Gillett Square as an attractive venue for events, especially for music and entertainment, together with the establishment of Café Oto across the road, and the attraction of the Vortex Jazz Club, all with D4L's assistance, are making Dalston a vibrant and important 'cultural hub' in east London, an attraction for visitors as well as local residents.

Dalston Square and the new transport links

In relation to the major building project at Dalston Square (the new Station, plus housing and retail development) we found no evidence yet of any gain for local business. Clearly some retail outlets (eg cafés) have benefited from the presence of the temporary workforce onsite, but none of the firms we met could report any business benefits so far. In fact, in the short term, nearby businesses we talked to felt they had actually lost trade due to diverted traffic and loss of passing trade. There was, however, general optimism in the medium term - the development would be good for business eventually, even if it increased competition. The new transport links are already having a big effect locally on house prices, and significantly more people are going to be passing through Dalston Square when the new station opens. New business opportunities will emerge to add to those coming from the needs of the residents of the new housing around Dalston Square. But in saying this, several local businesses said they would miss the advice and support they had been getting from D4L, and that this sort of help would be needed to take full advantage of these opportunities.

The cultural quarter

We found that the effort and energy that has come out of the D4L project has helped create a focus on developing a cultural quarter in Dalston and, in particular Gillett Square, and that this has been widely appreciated. With D4L being part of HCD, this has enabled concerted and effective actions to be taken to raise the profile of important issues in planning for the area, for example, in dealing with a range of issues adversely affecting businesses and trade locally, and in bringing new and small businesses to play an active part in cultural events and the supply of day-to-day goods and services, especially those involved with catering and the arts. Examples of this include the very successful 'What Now for Dalston' event, work with businesses in Bradbury Street on environmental improvements, and several of the large events in Gillett Square. Gillett Square saw a range of events that involved both local people and businesses, including *Cuba 50*, food fairs and various large scale art and film shows, unusual all-day special activities and popular play equipment for children. D4L had an important role in helping the Gillett Squared business get established and assisted it in organising the big events in the Square, which also showcased local businesses and attractions of the neighbourhood. D4L also gave technical support to get the important and informative Gillett Square website going. See <http://www.gillettsquare.org.uk/>

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Ending funding for D4L is likely to leave a large gap in what locals see as vital support to small businesses in the area; none of those interviewed could name another agency they could go to for help.

Overall, it is clear that, over the last three years, D4L has been able to make an important contribution, both because it was part of the HCD and via its range of services. It has highlighted key issues to do with 'What Now for Dalston' by bringing people together to focus on effective community-based planning for the future. It has also had 'down on the ground' capability and capacity to draw a wide range of small businesses and enterprises into new activities and opportunities that have made Dalston a better place for trade and co-operation. The loss of this capacity will be felt both by individual businesses and by everyone working towards the making Dalston a "more vibrant and inclusive place".

4 Key findings and issues

4.1 Business engagement and style

- D4L has been very effective in engaging a significant and wide-range of Dalston's small businesses and offering a personalised and practical business development service to them. It has exceeded its targets.

- In terms of offering small business support in a personalised way, the work and personal style of the D4L team appears to have been crucial and stands as a model of good practice.

The data shows over-achievement in engaging with and supporting target local businesses (see Section 5 below). Over 400 businesses have taken advantage of the services offered. But it is the impact of this that is important. D4L has good publicity and a useful, informative website. It is the dedicated and personal local work that has made a significant difference. Proactive 'community work' skills have been put to very good use here by all the staff - not waiting around for people to come into the office, but going out to local shops and businesses, following up staff members' contacts especially in the BAME community, tapping in to HCD's long experience of giving business advice and support in the area. This has been very successful. 'Walking the beat' by D4L's Enterprise Support and Network Manager, as well as following up leads and contacts from the Programme Manager, ensured that the project had regular contact with a wide range of local people and was able to give and get information informally but effectively. This local, team-style of work has been a key factor in the success of this aspect of D4L's work in relation to 'businesses created' and 'businesses supported' targets.

After initial contact, a D4L staff member sits down with new clients, whether they are just setting up or are existing businesses coming in for specific support. Typically, they will complete a form together, using this as a basis for discussion. Usually this becomes the starting point for developing a business plan, almost always needing more work by the client. An estimated 40% do not pursue the plan. Staff believe this is in some ways quite positive because the business people involved have at least looked at the realism of their plans and started to test their ideas more rigorously. And businesses know that they can always come back for more help at some future point. Referrals come by word of mouth and local publicity. Another important source is tenants and prospective tenants of HCD itself who need help in business planning, or in making the business case for taking on renting HCD premises. Because HCD has a long history of delivering business support services in the area, and as some staff are well-known and well-connected with particular local communities, there are many self-referrals or informal contacts that lead to a take-up of the D4L service. The website and D4L newsletters also have brought in enquiries and full referrals for the service, as well as providing information about developments and opportunities in the area, promoting Dalston, HCD and Gillett Square beyond the immediate neighbourhood.

These direct and customised services from D4L were regularly mentioned and commended in our interviews. The features rated most highly by the businesses we interviewed were: being very local; being very flexible; having good local knowledge; providing information on courses and specialist help; offering assistance with putting policies together, such as to meet the procurement requirements of major firms; having access to premises, and most especially, the personal service. Some also rated highly the opportunity to join in local business networks and events. Others, however, had hoped for more help with this aspect and, interestingly, had wanted more opportunities for local business-to-business contacts.

4.2 Tackling deprivation and exclusion

- Local small businesses assisted by D4L are contributing to tackling deprivation in the area.
- Some of the small businesses have created jobs and offered 'inclusion' opportunities to local people.

Three of the newer businesses interviewed that had been helped by D4L were being run by people who had lost their specialist jobs and were setting up in business for the first time. They praised the help they were getting on business planning, links to courses and help with marketing and other opportunities through D4L. Each one spoke specifically about the problems

of trying to run a service or business whilst at the same time finding time for training to learn new skills and make the contacts needed to succeed. Three other businesses focused on providing opportunities in music and work-focused training for people who were finding it hard in the labour market. This included one business working with young people who had got into trouble with the law, one offering out-of-school club activities and another assisting refugees, asylum seekers and migrant workers with language and employment development. It was not a requirement of the funding that data should be collected on how many new jobs were created in the 400 businesses assisted by D4L, but clearly a significant number were. D4L and HCD might not be 'blowing their own trumpet' enough about this achievement.

On a broader front, events in Gillett Square are attended by people from the neighbourhood and housing estates, as well as from outside Hackney, and this brings additional custom to the surrounding shops, many of which take stalls for the day. They are encouraged by D4L in the Square to do business and to raise their profile locally.

A small grant fund administered independently by the HCD Trust to assist HCD businesses to improve their facilities has also been invaluable in helping some get going when they have little access to loans or savings.

4.3 Doing business with the Olympics

- Business opportunities for the businesses surveyed arising from the development of the 2012 Olympic Games facilities and services were perceived, at this stage, as negligible.
- Learning about major companies' and public sector procurement processes has, however, been of use in helping small businesses organise and prepare themselves for winning work in new sectors and being prepared fully to get on 'procurement' lists.

The great hope was that small enterprises in Dalston could, with assistance, win business connected with the 2012 Olympics. What is clear is that interest in the possibilities led many small firms to take up places via D4L on training courses on preparing for the procurement requirements. This led to a few local businesses systematically putting together the policies and the paperwork that major procurers require, and this did enable them to win some new (but not 'Olympic') contracts. One company won new public sector printing contracts from a local authority in this way. Twenty local businesses also went on to develop 'an environmental policy and action plan' to strengthen their positions in getting on 'procurement lists'. It is also evident from the interviews that attempts to form 'clusters' of similar or complementary small businesses that might achieve higher visibility and be more able to bid for bigger contracts, did not come about. It is not clear whether this is because this would have been a step too far for local businesses or because, in reality, the purchasers of services are not interested in such clusters. From the interviews it was also apparent that individual businesses had not been very proactive themselves, for whatever reasons, in building such alliances.

4.4 Training opportunities and specialist assistance

- D4L has been able to link local firms to business skills training programmes and to sources of assistance they would not otherwise have known about.

Support and information facilities in Hackney for small business remain patchy and poorly coordinated (as documented in other reports over the last seven years). Nevertheless, D4L was able to link Dalston businesses with opportunities through East London Business Place (ELBP), East London Business Association (ELBA) and, more locally, Hackney Council of Voluntary Service (HCVS). One especially innovative development brokered by ELBA and D4L was the link with UBS on business mentoring. Employees of UBS, a global financial services organisation, were matched to local small businesses for a one day event in Dalston which focused on business development and included one-to-one mentoring sessions. The feedback from both sides was

very positive. In August 2008, 15 Dalston businesses took part, and the following year another 14 did the same. Some of the introductions made in this way have led to enduring mentoring relationships.

Small numbers of local businesses attended procurement and energy saving training events, and information events on grants and loans. D4L has linked local businesses to mainstream training providers. Ten businesses took part in Leadership and Management programmes and twenty two employees of local firms attained level two in 'customer service' through Train to Gain. But in the main people said they relied on D4L local staff for information on training, grants and opportunities, recognising the fact that many of these businesses had only one or two staff and could not, as one said, "...close the shop and go off on courses".

It is appropriate to comment on this conundrum here. Many businesses in the area are being run by very committed, hard-working people who put in hours of work, often struggling to acquire new skills, such as marketing, book keeping and business planning. The local neighbourhood-based service that D4L developed has been very useful here, in an area that is actively encouraging a range of firms to respond to new business opportunities for culturally diverse shops, restaurants, entertainment and other services. Some enterprises have developed because energetic entrepreneurs have found a niche that needs filling. Without necessarily having previous knowledge of, say, hairdressing or printing, they have used their business skills to establish a successful new enterprise. They need assistance of a different kind from the artist, crafts-person or skilled artisan who is going into business for themselves for the first time.

Both types of business have made major inroads in Dalston. They are all small, very focused on customer delivery, and they need precisely the sort of 'drop in' local service that D4L has been able to offer. They also need to be linked into the local issues that are so vital in bringing the area up into the 'vibrant and inclusive' place it is becoming.

4.5 Anchored in Dalston

- More generally, D4L has helped fill a strategic vacuum in the Dalston area by bringing people together to focus on key local issues and helping to establish forums and resources to take action on local concerns and aspirations.
- D4L's status as part of the long-established Hackney Co-operative Developments (HCD) has been crucial to its credibility, acceptability and usefulness to local businesses.

These two conclusions go to the core of our evaluation of the impact and context of the D4L project. D4L has played an important role in assisting local businesses both to create and to become part of a growing, vibrant culture around Gillett Square and more widely. As a model of both support and development, the D4L initiative shows how effectively a practical business service can be, linked to a wider long-term, community and cultural development strategy. One established High Street business, which is very grateful for the immediate and practical business support received from D4L, had in the process become a huge fan of the new cultural and leisure events and activities being developed in nearby Gillett Square. They saw it as good for business and good for the area, and they were clear that HCD and D4L were central to it happening.

D4L also had an important role to play in the *What Now for Dalston?* initiative. This had brought together over 100 local people and businesses to focus on planning that involved local people focusing specifically on the town of Dalston within Hackney borough. The event had been well-attended because of preparatory work by D4L. Most important in its success was the attention D4L paid to assembling a range of well-informed speakers, ensuring that several major local issues were raised and addressed. And its impact has been long-lasting as it has led to local people getting actively involved in the Dalston Town Master Planning exercise, which is now co-ordinated by the local authority.

4.6 Holistic approach to business support and development in a community

- HCD's role as a 'not-for-profit' landlord with a considerable portfolio of local commercial premises housing local businesses puts it in a strong position to broker much-needed business services through D4L and to act as an advocate for better informed physical, political and cultural solutions to local problems.
- In turn, from the clients' point of view, D4L appears to have helped HCD enhance its services to business tenants and to improve its general communications.

Staff and some of the businesses indicated that HCD's role as landlord had been their first contact. New businesses as well as those looking to move to better premises, often turned to HCD and they took advantage of D4L's business planning support services to help put together their case for taking on new premises. HCD's clear commitment to businesses that are able to enhance Dalston's developing role as an interesting place for music, the arts, events, and a range of food outlets and restaurants, also attracted both potential tenants and clients. It is the evaluators' view that if resources were available in the future, more could be done to 'cluster' some of these newer tenants/ clients. Many could supply goods and services to each other as well as combine forces from time to time in order to offer larger customers a co-ordinated service on a larger scale (e.g. food with entertainment; training and catering; printing and promotion of events).

4.7 Funding, sustainability and continuity

- In a time of acute recession, D4L has been a unique provider of hands-on business support for small firms. But funding for this work is short-term and is not, apparently, being continued by local or London-wide funders, despite its proven effectiveness and a measurable, continuing need for it.

There does not appear to be a viable source of funding to continue current D4L services at any substantial scale after April 2010. The businesses interviewed repeatedly told us they either did not know where to find business advice and help apart from D4L, or that the advice they had sought elsewhere had been poor or not what they wanted. It seems there will be little to fill the gaps left by D4L and, importantly, there is poor co-ordination and inadequate promotion of the very limited services that may remain. Valuable insights into, and knowledge of, what local businesses actually want, need and use will rapidly be lost as the individuals involved with the D4L project are forced to move on to other things.

4.8 The need for a permanent Dalston community-based structure

- D4L and HCD itself have clearly demonstrated the efficacy of strong local partnership working, involving community, creative/cultural and commercial small businesses especially around Gillett Square.
- Several of the businesses and stakeholders interviewed see a clear need for a more permanent local partnership structure, building on successful collaborations around the arts and cultural industries, informal education activities, physical and environmental improvements and the growth of small businesses in the area. This structure might be a new kind of Trust. Though strongly based on local community-based organisations and businesses, it would need robust, committed and formal links with local authorities and other major stakeholders.

The physical and cultural developments around Gillett Square and, more widely, in the High Street and beyond, are remarkable. They are part of a long-term vision shared by an ever-growing and increasingly diverse group of people. D4L has undoubtedly added to the local impetus behind these developments, positively drawing more small and creative businesses into the experience. Besides the businesses we interviewed, there are many others - individual performers, established audiences, visitors and local families - who are committed now to

joining in and making Dalston the ‘vibrant and inclusive’ place that the project has always aspired to create. The challenge is ‘What next for Dalston?’ in this context. Whilst collaborations with the local authority and big business are clearly important, there is also an energy and enthusiasm around locally to explore the possibility of setting up a Trust to take the next steps.

4.9 Dalston Square

- It is unclear at this moment, despite extensive questioning, exactly what small businesses in the area think will be the effect of building the new Dalston Square station. Whilst there are fears about some loss of business, this is balanced by others who see new opportunities. They will clearly need assistance to take full advantage.

We detected a realistic and mainly positive ‘wait and see’ stance from the local businesses we interviewed on this topic (see table 3 below). Two retailers said they welcomed the competition. Several others, though, said that, despite promises from the developers, information on what was going on and associated business opportunities was patchy at best. For local firms to have the best chances of winning additional business, they feel they need early information and an opportunity to showcase their services. Without D4L on their doorstep, it is unclear how this will come about.

5 Data on outputs

The LDA and HCD/D4L agreed some specific outputs related to supporting businesses and helping new business starts, with additional targets on achieving diversity. As tables 1 and 2 show, over the three year period, D4L has exceeded all of its agreed targets. These included 360 ‘businesses supported’, of which 60% would be BAME, at least 30% at least would be ‘woman owned’ and 10% owned by people with disabilities. Of the target of 40 “businesses created” over the three year period similar targets were agreed. Three hundred and sixty seven businesses have fully engaged with the business support offer, of which 290 were classed as BAME, thereby exceeding the original target by 100%

Table 1 Dalston4London: Businesses Supported 2007-2010

Number of businesses assisted by Dalston4London 2007-10	Agreed target number over 3 years	Actual	Exceeded Target by
TOTAL	360	367	7 (+3%)
Of which: BAME owned business	144	290	146 (+100%)
Women-owned business	54	138	84 (+ 150%)
Owned by a person with a disability	18	27	9 (+ 45%)

Table 2 Dalston4London: Businesses Created 2007-2010

Number of businesses created by Dalston4London 2007-10	Totals
Contracted target	40
Actual - achieved	42

Table 3 D4L Evaluation: *Businesses interviewed in-depth for the evaluation*

Businesses interviewed	New business	Established business	Tenant of HCD	Retail/ shop/ restaurant	Training	Services	Music	Involved in Gillett Sq events
Business #1		✓	✓	✓	In part			✓
Business #2		✓	✓	✓	In part			✓
Business #3		✓				✓		✓
Business #4	✓			In part	✓			
Business #5		✓			✓			
Business #6	✓			✓				✓
Business #7	✓					✓		In future
Business #8	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓
Business #9		✓	✓		✓		✓	In future
Business #10		✓		✓			✓	✓
Totals	4	6	4	5	3	2	3	6

6 Learning points and broad conclusions

D4L and HCD asked themselves the following questions, and required the evaluation to comment on them as well, as part of pinpointing lessons for similar initiatives in the future. We summarise our view below

- *Were the objectives, targets and activities devised realistic and, in retrospect, did the project take the right approach to tackling problems facing businesses in the Dalston area?*

We believe the output targets were realistic. They were also delivered to a good quality standard, giving both new and established businesses in the area very useful practical assistance. The reach achieved into BAME communities and women owned businesses was exceptional. The hope of linking more of Dalston's very small businesses at this stage to the 2012 Olympics has proved a step too far, however. We conclude, as well, that it is too early to say how well local business will do out of the Dalston Square developments. The evaluation has pointed up several businesses that are interested in somehow being more closely linked to other local firms in order to compete effectively for work with new or bigger clients, and this we see as a role for D4L or a successor initiative. A great success has been increasing local business awareness of current activities and of the future commercial possibilities of the Gillett Square area's cultural and creative activities. A shared interest in attracting more customer-visitors to the new shops and businesses has become a lot clearer over the life of the D4L project.

- *How effective has the relationship been between the different activities of HCD, such as supporting local businesses with workspace and those cultural activities taking place in Gillett Square?*

As documented in this report, there has been considerable value in HCD being able to offer local work and business space to rent. In addition there has been HCD's institutional and staff commitment to developing Gillett Square through the Gillett Squared initiative and support to key institutions such as the Vortex and Café Oto. Into this mix has come D4L with its capacity to offer business support services. This kind of synergy - marrying together different capacities -

hugely adds to the 'social capital' required to underpin efforts to create the vibrant and inclusive place to which everyone involved aspires. However, in our view, given how new and vulnerable some businesses are locally, that continuing practical support and encouragement is still needed. These enterprises cannot be taken for granted, even though they are enthusiastic about the possibilities of the area. Whilst there are always harsh realities to be faced in business, there is a concern that some of these newer enterprises, especially those in catering, may go to the wall without additional help with marketing and with finding sustainable niches.

7 Recommendations

1. Major funders and strategic bodies in east London need to overcome short-termism in their funding for local business support as well as for the development of new and sustainable structures to consolidate partnership working in the arts, cultural collaborations and community support in Dalston.
2. Given its position and credibility, HCD is well-placed to co-ordinate a substantial bid to BIG Lottery's 'Reaching Communities' fund to develop a new Trust to consolidate collaborative working on arts, cultural and business activities in Dalston. There is an immediate need for some structured preparatory work, focusing initially on establishing who should be involved in the collaboration and moving on to the design of a dynamic new Trust structure.
3. If possible, there should be a continuation of business support and development services provided through HCD, taking full advantage of the cultural, educational and strategic roles played by HCD. Local access to practical business support will be severely diminished by D4L's demise.
4. HCD should also establish a formal link to Hackney Borough Council's Town Centres Team in order to consolidate existing collaborations, forge new ways of working and create mechanisms to deliver joint events, services and physical improvements in Dalston.
5. Close collaboration is needed, led by HCD and London Borough of Hackney, to identify and broker access to practical business support for the clients of D4L, to ensure that they know where, if anywhere, support can be found, what they can expect from HCD and, if possible, to strengthen links with other east London business support and training organisations.
6. There is a need to respond to interest from local businesses who want to collaborate more with each other, do more business-to-business trading, find new business and customers, not necessarily only through the Olympic Games but also from established and developing enterprises across East London.

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