

Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee



TOWER HAMLETS

Monday, 21 June 2021 at 4.30 p.m.

Committee Room One - Town Hall Mulberry Place

Agenda

Chair: Cllr Bex White

Members

Vice-Chair:

Councillor Shad Chowdhury, Councillor Victoria Obaze, Councillor Gabriela Salva Macallan, Councillor Helal Uddin, Councillor Abdal Ullah, Councillor Andrew Wood,

Co-optees

Neil Cunningham
Joanna Hannan

Ahmed Hussain
Vacant
Dr Phillip Rice
Vacant

Parent Governors
Representative of Diocese of Westminster
Parent Governors
Parent Governors
Church of England Representative
Muslim Faith Community

Substitutes:

[The quorum for the Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee is 3 Members]

Further Information

Reports for consideration, meeting contact details, public participation and more information is available on the following pages.



Public Information

Viewing or Participating in Committee Meetings

The public are welcome to view this meeting through the Council's webcast system.

Physical Attendance at the Town Hall is not possible at this time.

Meeting Webcast

The meeting is being webcast for viewing through the Council's webcast system.

<http://towerhamlets.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

Contact for further enquiries:

Democratic Services,

1st Floor, Town Hall, Mulberry Place, 5 Clove Crescent, E14 2BG

Tel: 020 7364 0842

E-mail: farhana.zia@towerhamlets.gov.uk

Web:<http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk>

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Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee

Monday, 21 June 2021

4.30 p.m.

PAGE
NUMBER(S)

1. **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

To receive any apologies for absence.

2. **DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

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Members are reminded to consider the categories of interest, identified in the Code of Conduct for Members to determine: whether they have an interest in any agenda item and any action they should take. For further details, see the attached note from the Monitoring Officer.

Members are also reminded to declare the nature of the interest at the earliest opportunity and the agenda item it relates to. Please note that ultimately it is the Members' responsibility to identify any interests and also update their register of interest form as required by the Code.

If in doubt as to the nature of an interest, you are advised to seek advice prior the meeting by contacting the Monitoring Officer or Democratic Services.

3. **APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIR**

4. **CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE
TERMS OF REFERENCE, QUORUM, MEMBERSHIP AND
DATES OF MEETINGS 2021/22**

7 - 16

5. **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

17 - 28

To confirm as a correct record of the proceedings the unrestricted minutes of the meeting of the held on 14th April 2021.

6. **REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION**

6.1 **Covid 19 Update- Parks and Open Spaces**

A presentation to be made at the meeting.

6 .2 Education Priorities

A presentation to be made at the meeting.

6 .3 Violence, Vulnerability and Exploitation

29 - 46

A presentation to be made at the meeting.

7. ANY OTHER UNRESTRICTED BUSINESS CONSIDERED TO BE URGENT

Next Meeting of the Committee:

Thursday, 2 September 2021 at 6.30 p.m. to be held in the Committee Room One -
Town Hall Mulberry Place

Agenda Item 2

DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS AT MEETINGS– NOTE FROM THE MONITORING OFFICER

This note is for guidance only. For further details please consult the Code of Conduct for Members at Part C, Section 31 of the Council's Constitution

(i) Disclosable Pecuniary Interests (DPI)

You have a DPI in any item of business on the agenda where it relates to the categories listed in **Appendix A** to this guidance. Please note that a DPI includes: (i) Your own relevant interests; (ii) Those of your spouse or civil partner; (iii) A person with whom the Member is living as husband/wife/civil partners. Other individuals, e.g. Children, siblings and flatmates do not need to be considered. Failure to disclose or register a DPI (within 28 days) is a criminal offence.

Members with a DPI, (unless granted a dispensation) must not seek to improperly influence the decision, must declare the nature of the interest and leave the meeting room (including the public gallery) during the consideration and decision on the item – unless exercising their right to address the Committee.

DPI Dispensations and Sensitive Interests. In certain circumstances, Members may make a request to the Monitoring Officer for a dispensation or for an interest to be treated as sensitive.

(ii) Non - DPI Interests that the Council has decided should be registered – (Non - DPIs)

You will have 'Non DPI Interest' in any item on the agenda, where it relates to (i) the offer of gifts or hospitality, (with an estimated value of at least £25) (ii) Council Appointments or nominations to bodies (iii) Membership of any body exercising a function of a public nature, a charitable purpose or aimed at influencing public opinion.

Members must declare the nature of the interest, but may stay in the meeting room and participate in the consideration of the matter and vote on it **unless:**

- A reasonable person would think that your interest is so significant that it would be likely to impair your judgement of the public interest. **If so, you must withdraw and take no part in the consideration or discussion of the matter.**

(iii) Declarations of Interests not included in the Register of Members' Interest.

Occasions may arise where a matter under consideration would, or would be likely to, **affect the wellbeing of you, your family, or close associate(s) more than it would anyone else living in the local area** but which is not required to be included in the Register of Members' Interests. In such matters, Members must consider the information set out in paragraph (ii) above regarding Non DPI - interests and apply the test, set out in this paragraph.

Guidance on Predetermination and Bias

Member's attention is drawn to the guidance on predetermination and bias, particularly the need to consider the merits of the case with an open mind, as set out in the Planning and Licensing Codes of Conduct, (Part C, Section 34 and 35 of the Constitution). For further advice on the possibility of bias or predetermination, you are advised to seek advice prior to the meeting.

Section 106 of the Local Government Finance Act, 1992 - Declarations which restrict Members in Council Tax arrears, for at least a two months from voting


In such circumstances the member may not vote on any reports and motions with respect to the matter.

Further Advice contact: Janet Fasan, Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer, Tel: 0207 364 4800.

APPENDIX A: Definition of a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest

(Relevant Authorities (Disclosable Pecuniary Interests) Regulations 2012, Reg 2 and Schedule)

Subject	Prescribed description
Employment, office, trade, profession or vacation	Any employment, office, trade, profession or vocation carried on for profit or gain.
Sponsorship	Any payment or provision of any other financial benefit (other than from the relevant authority) made or provided within the relevant period in respect of any expenses incurred by the Member in carrying out duties as a member, or towards the election expenses of the Member. This includes any payment or financial benefit from a trade union within the meaning of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992.
Contracts	Any contract which is made between the relevant person (or a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest) and the relevant authority— (a) under which goods or services are to be provided or works are to be executed; and (b) which has not been fully discharged.
Land	Any beneficial interest in land which is within the area of the relevant authority.
Licences	Any licence (alone or jointly with others) to occupy land in the area of the relevant authority for a month or longer.
Corporate tenancies	Any tenancy where (to the Member's knowledge)— (a) the landlord is the relevant authority; and (b) the tenant is a body in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest.
Securities	Any beneficial interest in securities of a body where— (a) that body (to the Member's knowledge) has a place of business or land in the area of the relevant authority; and (b) either— (i) the total nominal value of the securities exceeds £25,000 or one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that body; or (ii) if the share capital of that body is of more than one class, the total nominal value of the shares of any one class in which the relevant person has a beneficial interest exceeds one hundredth of the total issued share capital of that class.

<p>Non-Executive Report of the:</p> <p>Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee</p> <p>Monday, 21st June 2021</p>	 <p>TOWER HAMLETS</p>
<p>Report of: Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer</p>	<p>Classification: Open (Unrestricted)</p>
<p>Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee Terms of Reference, Quorum, Membership and Dates of Meetings 2021/22</p>	

Originating Officer(s)	Farhana Zia, Senior Committee Officer
Wards affected	All wards

Executive Summary

This report sets out the Terms of Reference, Quorum, Membership and Dates of Meetings of the Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee for the Municipal Year 2021-22 for the information of Members of the Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee.

Recommendations:

The Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee is recommended to:

1. Note its Terms of Reference, Quorum, Membership and Dates of future meetings as set out in Appendices 1, 2 and 3 to this report.
2. Determine the preferred time at which the scheduled meetings will start

1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 The report is brought annually to assist new and returning Members by informing them of the framework of the Committee set out in the Council's Constitution.

2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 The report asks Members solely to confirm its constitutional arrangements and therefore they are not required to consider any alternative options.

3. DETAILS OF THE REPORT

- 3.1 Each year, following the establishment of the Committee at the Council's Annual Meeting, it is customary that the newly established Committee considers its procedural arrangements.

Overview and Scrutiny Sub-Committee Arrangements

- 3.2 At the Annual General Meeting of the full Council held on 19th May 2021, the Authority approved proportionality, establishment of the Committees and Panels of the Council and appointment of Members thereto. It delegated authority to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to establish its sub-committees.
- 3.3 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on the 24th May 2021 and agreed to set up three sub-committees, including this one, on which occasion they agreed the terms of reference for all three sub-committees. The groups have since submitted their nominations for membership which have been agreed by the Director of Legal and Monitoring Officer.
- 3.4 The membership of Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee for the municipal year 2020/21 are set out at Appendix 2 to the report.
- 3.5 Having been established by Council, it is customary that the committee (at its first meeting of the municipal year) notes its terms of reference, and quorum. These are set out in Appendix 1 to the report.
- 3.6 The Committee's meetings for the remainder of the year, as agreed at the same meeting of the Council, are also provided at Appendix 3.
- 3.7 Meetings are scheduled to take place at 6:30 p.m. except where the meeting falls within the month of Ramadan where they will aim to take place at 5:30 p.m. The Committee may wish to discuss an appropriate start time that suits its Members at the first meeting of the Committee.
- 3.8 It may be necessary to convene additional meetings of the Committee should urgent business arise. Officers will consult with the Chair and Members as appropriate.

4. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 When drawing up the schedule of dates, consideration was given to avoiding school holiday dates and known dates of religious holidays and other important dates where at all possible.

5. OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are

required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:

- Best Value Implications,
- Consultations,
- Environmental (including air quality),
- Risk Management,
- Crime Reduction,
- Safeguarding.
- Data Protection / Privacy Impact Assessment

5.2 Not applicable to this report.

6. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

6.1 This report recommends that the Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee note its Terms of Reference, Quorum, Membership, and Dates of future meetings as set out in Appendices 1 – 3. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

7. COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

7.1. The Council is required to establish an Overview and Scrutiny Committee to discharge the functions under sections 9F to 9FI of the Local Government Act 2000. Establishment of the Children and Education sub-committee is consistent with Part 1.6 and Article 6 of the Council's Constitution. The proposed membership of the sub-committee complies with the requirements of Schedule A1 to the Local Government Act 2000.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- None.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee Terms of Reference.
- Appendix 2 – Proportionality and Membership of Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee
- Appendix 3 – Meeting procedure and dates of meeting.

Local Government Act, 1972 Section 100D (As amended)

List of "Background Papers" used in the preparation of this report

List any background documents not already in the public domain including officer contact information.

- None.

Officer contact details for documents:

N/A

Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee

<p>Summary Description: The Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee has been established to scrutinise the provision, planning and management of children and young people's services – including children's social care; safeguarding children; children in care; SEN and education inclusion, troubled families and the Youth Offending Service (YOS) education, learning and schools; youth services; early years; education capital estate and youth & play services.</p>	
<p>Membership: 6 non-executive councillors – the chair and five councillors; and 6 co-opted members (consisting of: - a Church of England and a Roman Catholic representative; 3 Parent Governor representatives under paragraph 7 of Schedule A1 to the Local Government Act 2000; and a Muslim faith representative).</p>	
Functions	Delegation of Functions
<p>1. Reviewing and/or scrutinising decisions made or actions taken in connection with the discharge of the Council's children social care and education functions;</p>	None
<p>2. Advising the Mayor or Cabinet of key issues/questions arising in relation to children and education reports due to be considered by the Mayor or Cabinet;</p>	None
<p>3. Making reports and/or recommendations to the Council and/or Mayor or Cabinet in connection with the discharge of children and education functions;</p>	None
<p>4. Delivering (3) by organising an annual work programme, drawing on the knowledge and priorities of the Council, registered providers and other stakeholders, that will identify relevant topics or issues that can be properly scrutinised;</p>	None
<p>5. Holding service providers to account, where recent performance</p>	None

<p>fails to meet the recognised standard, by looking at relevant evidence and make recommendations for service improvements;</p>	
<p>6. Considering children and education matters affecting the area or its inhabitants, including where these matters have been brought to the attention of the sub-committee by tenant and resident associations, or members of the general public; and</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>7. The sub-committee will report annually to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on its work.</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>Quorum: Three voting Members</p>	
<p>Additional Information: Is contained in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Constitution A Part 1.6 and Article 6 (Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Scrutiny Sub-Committees / Panels) <input type="checkbox"/> Constitution A Part 4.5 (Overview and Scrutiny Rules) 	

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIPS 2021-22

AS AGREED BY THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AT ITS MEETING OF 24TH MAY 2021

CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE (Nominations for information - Panel to be appointed by Overview & Scrutiny Committee) (Seven members of the Council)			
<i>Labour Group (6)</i>	<i>Conservative Group (1)</i>	<i>Ungrouped (0)</i>	<i>Co-opted Members (6)</i>
Cllr Abdal Ullah Cllr Bex White Cllr Gabriela Salva Macallan Cllr Helal Uddin Cllr Shad Chowdhury Cllr Victoria Obaze	Cllr Andrew Wood Substitutes:- Cllr Peter Golds	N/A	6 co-opted members (consisting of: - a Church of England and a Roman Catholic representative; 3 Parent Governor representatives under paragraph 7 of Schedule A1 to the Local Government Act 2000; and a Muslim faith representative).

Quorum: The quorum for the committee is 3.

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**CHILDREN AND EDUCATION OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
SUB-COMMITTEE**

**MEETING PROCEDURE AND SCHEDULE OF MEETING DATES
2021-2022**

1. Chair and Membership

- 1.1 Sub-Committees will be chaired by a Member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. For this Sub-Committee it will be the Lead Scrutiny Member for Children and Education for 2021/22. The membership of the Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee has been determined by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

2. Frequency of meetings

- 2.1 The Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee will meet 5 times this year. The following dates are available in the Corporate Diary for 2021/22:

- ~~Monday, 14th June 2021~~ Monday 21st June 2021
- Thursday, 2nd September 2021
- Thursday, 21st October 2021
- Wednesday, 8th December 2021
- Monday, 28th February 2022

Meetings are scheduled to take place at 6.30pm. The Sub-Committee may arrange other meetings as and when necessary to consider any urgent issues as well as arranging meetings for detailed scrutiny reviews and challenge sessions.

Support to the Sub-Committee

- 4.1 The Divisional Director for Strategy, Policy and Performance, will be the senior officer lead and champion the work of the Sub-Committee.
- 4.2 The servicing of meetings will be undertaken by the Council's Democratic Services Team which will include:
- (a) Meeting room bookings, refreshments
 - (b) Agenda preparation and dispatch
 - (c) Taking minutes and recording of actions/decisions

(d) Dissemination of minutes and decisions

The Children and Culture Strategy and Policy Team will provide policy support to the Sub-Committee which will include:

(e) Research and analysis

(f) Work programme development

(g) Support with undertaking reviews and challenge sessions

(h) Drafting review reports and challenge sessions

5. Proceedings

5.1 The Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee will generally meet in public and conduct its proceedings in accordance with the rules and procedure contained in the Council's Constitution such as the:

(a) Council Procedure Rules;

(b) Access to Information Procedure Rules, and

(c) The Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules.

LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS

MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY SUB-COMMITTEE

HELD AT 5.30 P.M. ON WEDNESDAY, 14 APRIL 2021

ONLINE 'VIRTUAL' MEETING - [HTTPS://TOWERHAMLETS.PUBLIC-I.TV/CORE/PORTAL/HOME](https://towerhamlets.public-i.tv/core/portal/home)

Members Present:

Councillor Bex White (Chair)
Dr Phillip Rice (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Gabriela Salva Macallan
Councillor Andrew Wood
Councillor Kyrsten Perry

Co-opted Members Present:

Ahmed Hussain – Parent Governors

Other Councillors Present:

Councillor Asma Begum

Apologies:

Councillor Helal Uddin
Neil Cunningham

Others Present:

Sue May – Team Manager at Adopt London East

Officers Present:

Richard Baldwin – (Divisional Director, Children's Social Care)
Deion Grant – Team Manager Family Support and Protection
Mohammed Jolil – (Interim Head of Early Help)
Pauline Maddison – (Interim Director, Education and Partnerships)
Lissa-Marie Minnis – Service Manager Regulated Services & Resources
Nicola Mutale – Early Help Operations Manager
Sam Nair – Principal Social Worker - Children with Disabilities Team
Sara Rahman – Service Manager
Layla Richards – (Head of Strategy and Policy – Children and Culture)
Karen Simpson – Early Help Coordinator
Jonathan Solomons – (Strategy and Policy Manager - Children and Culture)
James Thomas – (Corporate Director, Children and Culture)

Mubarakat Uthman
Farhana Zia

– Senior Practitioner Social Worker
– Democratic Services Officer

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor Helal Uddin and Mr Neil Cunningham, Parent Governor gave apologies for absence.

Mr Ahmed Hussain, Parent Governor gave apologies for an early departure from the meeting.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

No declarations of disclosable pecuniary interest were made by the members.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes from the previous meeting of 9th February 2021 were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting and were signed off by the Sub-Committee.

Matters arising

Councillor Bex White, informed members she had received an update on the offer made by the Silver Employment group as well as on workplace testing for early years settings.

Councillor White said she had a discussion with Councillor Asma Begum and Councillor Rachel Blake about PPE.

- **ACTION:** Councillor White to share emails exchanged in relation to PPE, with other members of the Sub-Committee.

4. REPORTS FOR CONSIDERATION

4.1 Impact of Covid 19 Children's Social Care

The Sub-Committee received a verbal update on the impact Covid-19 is having on social care and the supporting of vulnerable children and families.

The Sub-Committee heard from Mr Richard Baldwin, Divisional Director for Children's social care, who stated that over the past twelve months the social care teams have had to use innovative methods to stay in touch with young people and their families. He said there had been a shift in how families relate to the Council and demand at the front-door had also been affected. He said there was plenty of new ideas as to how the Council can do things differently in the future.

The Sub-Committee heard from Ms Mubarakat Uthman, a senior practitioner on how contact with young people had been maintained throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

The main points made by Ms Uthman were:

- Prior to the pandemic, face to face visits were held with young people, this would involve engaging with them in age appropriate activities such as sharing food or playing games
- During the pandemic many visits have taken place via Teams and Zoom. Creative ways have been used to support young people to open up and talk about their issues and worries. Examples of this included using TikTok dances as an icebreaker to encourage open dialogue; to arranging a pizza delivery to the young person in a placement and sharing dinner and conversation with them.
- With young babies and toddlers, puppets have been used to interact with them, playing peekaboo and storytelling whilst speaking with their carers about the child's health, such as weight and eating habits.
- Virtual meetings can make it harder to hold difficult conversations due to privacy and confidentiality issues.
- Virtual meetings have been a positive addition to the tools a social worker can use to engage with young people, however face to face engagement is also necessary.

The Sub-Committee then heard from Ms Deion Grant, Team Manager in Family Support and Protection on how contact with young people had been maintained throughout the Covid-19 pandemic and how the welfare of staff had been managed.

The main points made by Ms Grant were:

- Despite their own fears about Covid-19, social workers continued to provide an excellent service to protect vulnerable children and families, especially for cases which involved neglect. Ms Grant said it was obvious to the social work team, that such cases could not be fully managed by virtual visits and therefore face to face visits continued throughout the pandemic.
- The pandemic had heightened fears among the looked after children and their families. Social workers had to reassure families that visits could take place safely. There was positive engagement from young people to return to education, with some more eager than previously.
- Social workers expected domestic violence cases to increase during the lockdown and as such discussions took place as to how the team would deal with this.
- Prior to the pandemic and the lockdown, social workers would meet in team meetings, to discuss cases and decompress. However, this moved to the virtual platform. As a team leader it was vital contact was maintained within the team and reflective practice, such as why are you worried, how are you feeling were encouraged and used.

- Senior management were swift in putting in place policies to support social workers, going out on visits and equipped them with PPE. This helped maintain the caseload and ensure there was not a backlog.
- Staff were encouraged to take annual leave and maintain a healthy balance between work and personal time.

In response to questions from members the following was noted:

- There had been no disconnect between conducting face to face visits and those held virtually. In respect to concerns about bruises which can be hidden, in an online scenario, Ms Uthman said of the cases managed by her, she had not experienced this, save for two cases that gave reason for concern. In both instances face to face meetings were conducted as they were considered as safeguarding issues and were thoroughly investigated. Mr Baldwin added that where there is a child protection plan or a safeguarding concern, regardless of the pandemic face to face visits had taken place.
- With regards to access to education, young people in a placement had been supported throughout the pandemic; most children were in school especially as they were classed as vulnerable children. However, children did experience stress and anxiety about the pandemic and missed their friends and social network, with a desire for things to return to normality. Children who did not want to return to school, during the height of the pandemic were given laptops to access online learning.
- In response to how mental health and wellbeing was managed during the pandemic, Ms Uthman gave examples of how vulnerable children had been supported, from providing a mobile phone to a teenager so she could stay in touch with her friends, to art therapy in schools for those dealing with bereavement. She recommended art therapy be made available to all children, especially those dealing with trauma and anxiety.
- Members commended the social workers for their efforts and said they appreciated how difficult it could be to engage with young people. Members were appreciative of the balance struck in social workers performing their work and being supported to take annual leave.
- In response to if people in need of support were being missed due to the pandemic, Mr Baldwin said the same relationships and processes were in place as previously. He said they maintained a close link with schools, and other stakeholders such as the police and health visitors ensuring concerns were picked up. He said there was an assumption that there would be additional pressure on social work from an increase in domestic violence cases, but this hasn't filtered through. Nevertheless, the service remained vigilant to this.
- In respect to how Tower Hamlets compared with other local authorities, in terms of caseloads and new referrals, Mr Baldwin said it was comparative to trends seen nationally and regionally. He said the

Corporate Director for Children and Culture met on a regular basis with his counterparts from other London Boroughs and likewise he did the same. He said data from professional organisations and Ofsted gave them information on the national picture around benchmarking.

- **ACTION:** Members stated it would be useful to have actual data in a report showing what the trends were and how this compared with other comparative boroughs. Mr Baldwin said he would discuss this with Mr Thomas, Corporate Director for Children and Culture and would bring the information requested to a future meeting of the sub-committee.

The Chair thanked the attendees for their contribution to the meeting and said their input had been invaluable, in helping members understand how social workers had supported vulnerable children and families.

The Chair summarised the main points of discussions as follows:

1. For the Sub-Committee to receive a written report on data trends and how Tower Hamlets compares with other comparative boroughs, in relation to the referrals and caseload to see if the right families/people are being supported.
2. Examples were given of the innovative methods used to support vulnerable children and families however would any of the new methods evolve into permeant changes to social work and could this lead of efficiencies, with social workers spending less time travelling or is face to face visits the best method to engage with young people. Councillor White said this ought to be discussed at a future meeting of the sub-committee.

4.2 Regional Adoption Agency

The Chair introduced this item and said a few years ago, central government had instructed local authorities to regionalise their adoption arrangements. Therefore, the adoption team at Tower Hamlets became part of the regional adoption agency called Adopt London East (ALE).

Mr Baldwin stated ALE had been in operation for about two years, with several areas including adoption moving to the regional agency. He introduced Ms Lissa Marie Minnis, the Service Manager for Fostering and Regulated Services and Ms Sue May, Team Manager at ALE, who gave a presentation to the sub-committee.

The key points from the presentation were:

- ALE was established in October 2019. At the beginning of the implementation phase there was a dip in performance however this has significantly improved.
- Explanation was provided regarding the categories A1 and A2. A1 referred to the time a child comes into care and the time it takes to place them with their adoptive family. A2 referred to the time from when

a court order is received, which gives permission to place a child for adoption to the time the child is matched i.e. the time the agency decision maker has agreed that the adopters are suitable for the adoptive child.

- Tower Hamlets average is 138 days whereas the England average is 182 days. The target is 121 days. ALE had made significant progress over the past two years in relation to closing this gap.
- Explanation regarding performance figures was provided to the Sub-Committee. There had been an increase of two in relation to the number of children to be adopted for 2020/21.
- The number of adoptions per year had decreased but this was partially due to court delays during the pandemic and the slow pace of courts operating virtually during the first lockdown. Ms May provided an explanation for the court delays and said she had worked with East London courts to address the challenges faced. She said there was also an increase in the number of contested adoptions, and this had added to the delay, albeit it effected a small number of children.
- With respect to the number of approved adopter families, the figure for 2020/21 was thirteen. There had been a dip in the recruitment of suitable families which was due to the agency being set up. However, Ms Minnis added that the number of matches had gone up. They had worked in partnership with ALE and this year had placed 5 children under fostering for adoption regulations. She said this limited the number of unnecessary moves for the child, with the long-term goal of the child being adopted by the family who is fostering them.
- Historic figures showing the number of adopters was provided per borough. It was stated that figures are difficult to segregate as the agency worked on a regional basis. The number of adopters for 2020/21 had increased to 22 at the end of the financial year.
- Ms May stated the number of adopter approvals had taken longer than expected but this was the picture nationally as well as regionally. She said difficulties had been experienced in staffing the 'recruitment and assessment' team but this had been resolved. There were ten adopter assessments booked within the next two months and she was hopeful they had turned the curve regarding the number of adopter families available.
- Specific campaigns had been run to encourage more adopters from black communities, with children from black ethnicities waiting the longest for adoption.
- A breakdown showing the budget and contributions made by each local authority was provided. Ms Minnis stated there would be an increase in cost for Tower Hamlets, due to an increase in demand for adoption services.

In response to questions from members the following was noted:

- In reply to what had become harder and what had got easier since regionalisation, Ms Minnis said Covid-19 had impacted the relationship they were developing with ALE. She said they had heavily invested in the success of the Agency so were focussed on making it work. Ms Minnis said meetings had become more difficult with teams based in different offices, with low attendance despite meetings being virtual. She said the demand for adopters and finding families was a challenge, but issues were resolved quickly to ensure there was no slippage in service.
- Ms May said the relationships with the children social work teams was growing. ALE supported teams in preparation of their key decisions on whether a child should be placed for adoption. She said close relationships were forming. A challenge for the agency was to understand the different organisational cultures, systems and structures each local authority had. Overall, there was a positive attitude in wanting to do what's best for the child and to work together to resolve issues.
- In response to if 22 adopter families was a low number of adoptees given the population of the east London boroughs, and if the families reflected the ethnic and religious mix required, Ms May responded saying 22 families was a relatively high number of families. She said ALE worked closely with other agencies in London and the voluntary sector and aimed to place children with families in London, as the child's extended community is London based.
- Ms May cited housing cost to be one of the reasons why prospective adopters were insufficient in number. She said one of the requirements was to have a spare bedroom and whilst they had been flexible about this, this was nevertheless the requirement. She added other factors such as London's young, transient population impacted on the ability to recruit adopters.
- Ms May said ALE was working with other stakeholders to develop training packages for social workers so to increase learning and widen the scope of adopters. She said they were working with American leaders in the field to see what can be done to increase capacity and recruit adopters particularly black adopters, for black children.
- Ms May stated there were many Asian adopters available and whilst there was a large Asian population in the region, there were very few children who required adoption from this community. She said this was a tremendous success of the Asian community.
- In response to what structures for accountability and oversight were in place, Ms May said the ALE reported to the partnership Board which comprised of the Directors who delegated their powers of decision down to Assistant Directors. She said the Board was attended by the Corporate Director for Children and Culture Mr Thomas and the Divisional Director for Children's Mr Richard Baldwin. Ms May explained all decisions such as budget, staffing and performance were discussed with the board.

- With respect to Member involvement, Ms May said it would be through meetings of the sub-committee that oversight would be provided. She said the sub-committee would receive six monthly updates on performance as well as the annual report of the ALE, which was required by regulation. Ms Minnis added on a local level the Permanency summit scrutinised and tracked all permanency cases to ensure any dips or drifts in performance could be quickly challenged and resolved.

The Chair thanked the attendees for their contribution to the meeting and said their input had been invaluable, in helping members understand the work of the regional adoption agency.

The Chair summarised the main points of discussions as follows:

1. Data from ALE had been impacted by Covid-19 and therefore it would be useful for the Sub-Committee to see data once normality had returned, in order to better understand the progress being made. The Chair said the sub-committee would appreciate a further report on this at a future meeting.
2. Oversight and input from members was important and therefore the presence of members on adoption panels was crucial. It helped members to understand individual cases, colouring the data and contextualise the figures being provided.

4.3 Children's Social Care and Early Help Update

Councillor Asma Begum, Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Children, Youth Services and Education introduced this item and said there would be a presentation from Mr Richard Baldwin, Divisional Director for Children Social Care followed by Officers from the service who would provide the Sub-Committee with an update on the Early Help service.

Mr Baldwin gave a presentation outlining the current position for the Early Help Service, the assurance mechanisms in place and the future developments for the service. He said the service was monitoring demand because they envisaged a higher need post-Covid19 and lockdown. He said the service was last inspected in the summer of 2019 and inspection of the service was never far away. He said the likelihood of further inspections with a focussed visit from Ofsted, a SEND inspection and Youth Justice inspection in the next twelve months. Mr Baldwin continued stating that performance data was monitored and challenged via various assurance processes such as the Improvement Board, Performance Surgeries as well as through peer reviews. He said continued efforts were being made to strengthen practice, by analysing data to ensure the quality of practice was excellent.

The Sub-Committee then heard from Mr Mohammed Jolil, Interim Head of Early Help, Nicola Mutale, Early Help Operations Manager and Karen Simpson, Early Help Coordinator.

The key points made by the Early Help Team were:

- The service helped families who did not meet the statutory thresholds, by getting involved as early as possible, with interventions to help those were in need.
- The Early Help service faced similar challenges described by social work colleagues. Face to face meetings had moved to an online platform, during the pandemic. Communication by phone and online were the methods used to engage with families, such as those shielding who required medicine and food assistance.
- 70% of referral were made via the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) process of which 60% were from the police. Cases were assessed by the MASH team who decided if the social care thresholds were met and if not, cases would be referred to the Early Help Team.
- Approximately 500 calls per week are received by the helpline of which 300 families are supported on a long-term basis over a period of six to nine months. Action plans for the families are put in place and those that are borderline are referred to the Social Inclusion Panel.
- The Early Help Hub is the front door service for accessing early help services. The hub operated a reduced service from the Town Hall throughout the pandemic as well as a phone line service to the community, their families, and other professionals within the local authority.
- Creative approaches had been used to reach out to families. For example, refugee families who had moved to the borough. They had been supported by providing housing, food vouchers as well as access to education.
- The Early Years' Service worked with the voluntary sector and weekly meetings were held with the Home Office on the next steps to improve outcomes for these families.
- One of the positives from the pandemic was the concept of 'the team around the family' which involved several professional coming together to support a family. Meetings were easier to conduct virtually especially given the time strains for healthcare professionals such as GPs.
- The pandemic had provided the opportunity to build relationships with partners and this had become a real strength. Virtual working had enabled teams to support families in a holistic way with everyone pooling resources and working together to support vulnerable people. For example, the Family Liaison team had supported the Royal London Hospital by being the first point of contact for doctors trying to support families, who had loved ones in intensive care and/or coma.
- The service had also supported families where individuals who had lost their jobs; parents who were unwell and were struggling financially by signposting people and helping with benefit claims to making referrals to food banks and supporting those who were shielding.
- The Early Help transition service had supported parents with children aged over eleven and found parent involvement to be a positive. The

school social work service was provided to 12 schools who buy into the service.

- Additional funding had been secured from the DfE whereby Tower Hamlets had been selected for a pilot. Sixteen schools were involved with eight being provided with a social worker in school. The purpose was to reduce the number of children coming into social care and the number of referrals made by dealing with issues locally. Due to the lockdown the pilot had been extended for another year until March 2022.

In response to questions from members the following was noted:

- Access to food was a big issue a few months ago and whilst the council has provided additional support for this, what has happened regarding access to food for refugees? The Sub-Committee were informed the Home Office allowed for a £5 voucher per day to be issued to individuals which they could use in Tesco's. However, conversations were taking place with the Home Office asking them to replace this with the Aspen Card, which would give families more choice as to where they purchase food from. Ms Mutale said refugees were accessing food banks in the borough as well as in neighbouring boroughs and as such Hackney had been invited to a multi-agency meeting.
- There were two pathways in relation to access to social workers in schools. The first was the buy-in service, where schools purchase their social worker from the Council and the other was the pilot with the DfE. The DfE were paying for the eight social workers to be in the secondary schools.
 - **ACTION:** Leaflet explaining the purpose of the pilot to be shared with Members of the Sub-Committee.
- The Sub-Committee were informed Tower Hamlets had been chosen for the pilot following a robust application process and results from the study were being fed back to Cardiff University who were taking forward the project. Mr Jolil said he's be happy to come to a future meeting to share the midway and final evaluations.
- **ACTION:** The Sub-Committee asked for the results of the pilot to be shared with them at a future meeting showing

The Sub-Committee then heard from Mr Sam Nair, Head of the Social Work Academy.

Mr Nair said the Academy was an enabling organisation which sat behind the social care mandate, whose goal was to support teams and change the culture of the organisation to provide excellent services. He said the Academy had five objectives from enabling social workers to ensure practise excellence to investing in a more stable permanent workforce as well as creating a culture of innovation.

Mr Nair said one of the key challenges was the recruitment of social workers and said at the beginning of 2018, 39.5% of staff were agency workers, which meant the budget was overspent. Over the last few years this had gradually improved to 13.2% agency staff, with over 87% permanent staff over the last year. Mr Nair said over 94 people had been recruited when the target was 45 people. He said that whilst several local and neighbouring boroughs had struggled with turnover and recruitment, Tower Hamlets had benefitted. He said that this was due to the culture shift in the organisation with staff feeling more confident working for the borough. He said their strategy going forward was to have specific campaigns such as 'refer a friend', with online campaigning getting people who know people to come and join. He said the aim for the next one to two years was to get 90 to 95% permanent workforce.

- Members had no questions for Mr Nair.

The Chair thanked the attendees for their contribution to the meeting and said their input had been invaluable, in helping members understand the work of the Early Help team and the recruitment of permanent social workers.

The Chair summarised the main points of discussions as follows:

1. That the results from the DfE pilot be shared with the Sub-Committee at a future meeting; and
2. The access to food for vulnerable families.

5. ANY OTHER UNRESTRICTED BUSINESS CONSIDERED TO BE URGENT

No other business was discussed at the meeting.

The meeting ended at 7.27 p.m.

Chair, Councillor Bex White
Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee

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Background Reading Papers

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Tower Hamlets strategy to reduce violence, vulnerability and exploitation affecting children and young people (2021–24)

Foreword and vision

Our shared vision is that every child and young person in Tower Hamlets is kept safe from violence and exploitation and supported to achieve their aspirations

In the Tower Hamlets Children and Families Strategy for 2019 to 2024, we set out our ambition to ensure that every child and young person in Tower Hamlets is healthy, safe and successful.

Every young person should be able to benefit from all that our borough has to offer: great educational opportunities, our beautiful open spaces, hobbies, creativity and sports, and the friendships and fun that are a part of growing up. The vast majority of children and young people live, play and study safely in Tower Hamlets. However, there is distressing and powerful evidence that some children and young people are facing unacceptable levels of risk in their lives. Serious violence and exploitation have devastating consequences for young people most directly affected, and for their families and friends. More generally, the fear of violence causes anxiety to many of our young people, and can prevent them from enjoying their childhoods.

Protection of young people is a priority for the Tower Hamlets partnership. In 2018, at the Mayor's Violent Crime Summit, the council, police, fire brigade and health partners committed themselves to a public health approach to violent crime. A range of strategic initiatives have been implemented over the past few years to better support and protect young people. Much progress has been made but there is a need to address these issues holistically through an overarching strategy with our positive ambition for children and young people at its heart.



John Biggs

Executive Mayor of Tower Hamlets

Councillor Asma Begum

Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Youth and Equalities

Councillor Danny Hassell

Cabinet Member for Children and Schools



Introduction

This Violence, Vulnerability and Exploitation Strategy is our borough's proactive, partnership-based approach to tackling criminal and sexual exploitation and serious violence affecting children and young people.

The strategy focuses on preventing violence through a whole-systems approach where different partners work alongside young people, families and the community to deliver evidence-based interventions to keep young people safe, to reduce risk and strengthen the protective factors in their lives. Implementation of the strategy will build on recent progress across the borough including a multi-agency Exploitation team and the development of a shared Violence Reduction Plan. Our strategic approach includes a greater focus on prevention and early intervention, developing a contextualised local safeguarding approach which focuses on the public environments where abuse occurs, and exploration of what more can be done to tackle violence and exploitation affecting young adults aged 18 to 24 as well as safeguarding those under 18.

Much progress has been made in Tower Hamlets in recent years, including through the Ending Groups, Gangs and Serious Youth Violence Strategy (2015 – 2018) but there is a need to tackle violence and exploitation holistically, with consistent, evidence-based interventions which avoid fragmented, crisis-driven responses. The governance arrangements reflect the importance of a joined up approach between community safety and child safeguarding agencies. The Vulnerable Young People and Exploitation sub-group of the Tower Hamlets Child Safeguarding Partnership will oversee implementation and the development of an operational plan. The Community Safety Partnership will have strategic oversight of the strategy, provide challenge through annual review discussions, and ensure this strategy is supported by wider violence reduction approaches across Tower Hamlets.

The strategy sets out the core principles and priorities which will guide our work. It will be followed with a detailed operational plan. This will be developed in partnership with young people, families and community organisations, and will ensure that there is clarity across the partnership about the support required and provided for young people and their families according to need and the level of risk they face. It will reflect emerging learning about the impact of the Coronavirus emergency on the borough's children and young people who have experienced bereavement and loss, family economic and social stress, and time away from education and their normal sources of support.

How we developed this strategy

The strategy builds on engagement with stakeholders across the borough since the Mayor's Violent Crime Summit since 2018. It draws on analysis and reviews including a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment¹, a Locality review conducted by the

¹ Williams, S. et al (2019) Taking a public health approach to violence in Tower Hamlets: a needs assessment, | The Lancet; vol. 394, Special Issue, S99, , 2019 DOI:[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(19\)32896-X](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(19)32896-X)

Violence and Vulnerability Unit, and a consultation and engagement process which included:

An online public consultation which ran for four weeks between August and September 2020

Engagement with young people: members of the Tower Hamlets youth council and young mayor's team, the children in care council, young people supported by the multi-agency exploitation team, and young people who are members of the Barts Youth Empowerment Squad all contributed their views in different ways

Discussions and feedback with members of the Community Safety Partnership, Tower Hamlets Safeguarding Children Partnership Vulnerable Young People and Exploitation Subgroup. Members of the Children and Families Partnership Board, and other stakeholders in the borough were also invited to provide feedback on the draft strategy.

The views and experiences of children and young people will remain at the heart of the borough's strategic approach to addressing violence, vulnerability and exploitation, and will be reflected in the operational plan and in communications for young people, families and communities.

Demographics, need and context

Tower Hamlets is one of the youngest and fastest-growing populations of any local authority in England. Between 2020 and 2024, the number of 10 to 24 year-olds is expected to rise from 61,467 to 63,7932. The borough's young population is diverse and aspirational: 163 languages are spoken in our schools³ and 47% aspire to a professional career⁴.

Yet, many young people in the borough grow up facing adversity. High child poverty and population density are independently associated with adverse childhood experiences⁵. In turn, adverse experiences in childhood are associated with negative effects over the life course, including a greater risk of violence victimisation.⁶ London neighbourhoods that have suffered high levels of violence are also likely to have higher levels of deprivation⁷. In Tower Hamlets, the second most densely populated local authority in the country, 27.3% of children live in low income families⁸, and many families live in poor quality, overcrowded housing. Recent analysis of the Crime Survey for England and Wales shows that "more than any demographic characteristics, area level deprivation was a key risk factor for violence

² GLA 2018-based housing-led population projections.

³ Tower Hamlets, 2020 Borough Profile (forthcoming)

⁴ Tower Hamlets, 2017 Pupil Attitude Survey

⁵ Dan Lewer, Emma King, Glen Bramley, Suzanne Fitzpatrick, Morag C Treanor, Nick Maguire, Miriam Bullock, Andrew Hayward, Al Story, The ACE Index: mapping childhood adversity in England, *Journal of Public Health*, , fdz158, <https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/fdz158>

⁶ Tower Hamlets Joint Strategic Needs Assessment spotlight on Family and Contextual Violence September 2019

⁷ Wieshman et al, Violence in London: what we know and how to respond. A report commissioned by the Mayor of London's Violence Reduction Unit, Behavioural Insights Team, February 2020

⁸ Tower Hamlets Borough Profile, 2020. Figures are for children living in households in relative low income before housing costs, from Children in low income families, 2018/19, Department for Work and Pensions

victimisation”⁹, pointing to the importance of a localised, area-based focus in tackling violence.

Education is a positive story and an important protective factor for young people in Tower Hamlets: at age 16, the educational attainment of young people is higher than the national average¹⁰. However, not all students thrive in education, with some groups less likely to leave school with good GCSE’s. Although permanent exclusions are rare in Tower Hamlets, fixed term exclusions rose by 39% between 2014/15 and 2017/18. Managed moves between schools and alternative provision referrals have also risen by 17% since 2014. ¹¹ As the Timpson Review of exclusions noted, all too often “fixed period and permanent exclusion can, rather than providing an intervention point to get the right support in place, entrench poor outcomes for vulnerable children”¹². The London Rescue and Response project notes a strong correlation between involvement in county lines exploitation and having been excluded¹³.

The vast majority of children and young people grow up safely in Tower Hamlets. However, a minority of children and young people face significant risks from serious youth violence and/or exploitation. Whilst every incident of injury or harm is one too many, declining volumes of knife crime with injury and serious youth violence offer a promising starting point for this strategy:

Year (April to March)	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Knife Crime Injury Victims 1-24	120	111	90
Knife Crime Injury Victims Not DA 1-24	114	110	79
Serious Youth Violence	310	323	286

An Equality Impact Assessment was prepared to support the development of the strategy. It draws on research and service-level data to provide an indication of which young people are likely to victims and/or perpetrators of violence and exploitation. Of particular relevance to this strategy is the age profile of victims and/or perpetrators which shows no clear cut-off at age 18: for example, around 3 in 10 of all victims and all suspects in recently recorded street-based knife crime are aged between 19 and 25 years. The partnership’s understanding of which children and young people are vulnerable to harm will continue to be developed through the life of the strategy with equality monitoring and analysis considered in each annual review. There will be a strong focus on culturally competent communications and support to the borough’s diverse young people and families, on ensuring that every young child and young person is receives support which respects their dignity and worth and on identifying unmet need and less visible impacts, for example, the impact of serious violence on girls and young women and of sexual exploitation on boys and young men.

⁹ Brennan, I. (forthcoming). Victims of serious violence in England and Wales, 2011 – 2017. College of Policing, quoted in Wieshman et al, op.cit

¹⁰ Tower Hamlets, 2020 Borough Profile

¹¹ Exclusions in Secondary Schools: Scrutiny Review

¹² The Timpson Review of School Exclusions, May 2019

¹² The Timpson Review of School Exclusions, May 2019

¹³ Rescue and Response County Lines Project, Strategic (August) Assessment 2019

The drivers of serious violence and exploitation affecting young people are complex and dynamic. Overall, the current picture in Tower Hamlets is one where a highly developed drugs market is considered to be a greater driver of violence than gang activity or post-code rivalries, and where the number of people reported to be involved in 'county lines' criminal exploitation is not as great as in some other inner London boroughs¹⁴.

The COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown have led to a decline in serious youth violence in the short term. The medium term impacts of the emergency are yet to be seen and are likely to be complex: with commentators pointing to hardship for young people and their families and time spent out of school and online creating conditions for greater vulnerability, transport and movement restrictions leading to increased local recruitment by county lines operators and reduced 'export' of young Londoners to counties, and disrupted drugs markets leading to greater violence¹⁵

Definitions and focus areas

The definitions used in this document largely follow government definitions:

Serious violence affecting young people: any offence of most serious violence or weapon enabled crime, where the victim is aged 1 to 24 years old.

Child Criminal Exploitation occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, control, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into any criminal activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial or other advantage of the perpetrator or facilitator and/or (c) through violence or the threat of violence. The victim may have been criminally exploited even if the activity appears consensual. Child Criminal Exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology. 'County lines' is a form of child criminal exploitation, and is a term used to describe gangs and organised criminal networks involved in exporting illegal drugs into one or more importing areas within the UK, using dedicated mobile phone lines or other form of "deal line". They are likely to exploit children and young people to move and store the drugs and money and they will often use coercion, intimidation, violence (including sexual violence) and weapons.

Child sexual exploitation is a form of child sexual abuse. It occurs where an individual or group takes advantage of an imbalance of power to coerce, manipulate or deceive a child or young person under the age of 18 into sexual activity (a) in exchange for something the victim needs or wants, and/or (b) for the financial advantage or increased status of the perpetrator or facilitator. The victim may have been sexually exploited even if the sexual activity appears consensual. Child sexual exploitation does not always involve physical contact; it can also occur through the use of technology.

¹⁴ Rescue and Response County Lines Project, *ibid*.

¹⁵ Crest Advisory 'County Lines after Covid A new threat', March 2020

A 'gang' is defined as a relatively durable predominantly street-based group of young people who see themselves and are seen by others) as a discernible group and engage in a range of criminal activity and violence. Level 1 - Peer Group – A small unorganised, transient grouping occupying the same space with a common history. Crime is not integral to their self-definition; Level 2 - Street Gang – A relative durable, predominantly street based group of young people who see themselves (and are seen by others) as a discernible group for whom crime and violence is integral to the groups identity; Level 3 - An organised criminal network – A group of individuals for whom involvement in crime is for personal gain. The gain is mostly measured in financial terms. Crime is their “occupation”.

The focus of this strategy is mainly on organised exploitation undertaken by groups or networks of adults or sometimes peers. It will complement and support other work to safeguard children and young adults from harm, including other kinds of harm outside the family such as the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation, which is the focus of the Prevent programme. We recognise that underneath the terms 'violence' and 'exploitation' are multi-faceted issues, victims are diverse and may also be perpetrators, and solutions may be complex. Some very serious instances of violence affecting young people may be driven by interpersonal rivalry, trauma or mental health problems. Partners will continue to work with young people and others to better understand and respond the changing local drivers of violence and to consider the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on these drivers.

Three principles will guide implementation of this strategy

1. The rights, potential and wishes of children and young people.

Children and young people's voices will shape all services. Staff will recognise the complexity of children's lives, always seek positive opportunities and never give up on children or young people or regard them as 'non-engagers'. Staff will respect the dignity and worth of everyone regardless of their abilities, gender, sexual orientation, religion or ethnic or religious background.

2. A whole-systems approach.

Partnership working will seek opportunities to meet children and young people's needs: working together and with residents and communities, with a shared sense of responsibility towards young people, so that young people get the right support at the right time. Parents and carers will be central to the way that partners support young people through a 'think family' approach.

3. A rigorous, dynamic approach to evidence.

Partners will agree priorities, identify interventions and evaluate impact using evidence. Evidence includes quantitative and qualitative data, and children and families' experiences and perspectives. The partnership will learn lessons from other areas, and will regularly refresh its knowledge, particularly in response to the Coronavirus emergency and its implications for adolescent safeguarding, and

in learning from thematic reviews, research and good practice within the borough and from organisations such as the Mayor of London's Violence Reduction Unit.

Promoting wellbeing and resilience from early years: Every Chance for Every Child

This strategy is underpinned by the commitment in the Tower Hamlets Children and Families Strategy to ensuring every chance for every child to be happy, healthy, safe and successful. The foundations of a safe adolescence lie both in children's early years and in an environment where children are listened to, are safe and valued, support to children and families in their early years and addressing adverse child experiences, safe spaces, an inclusive education system where all children can thrive, and the right support at the right time for children who need it such as children with SEND and those supported by children's social care.

This strategy complements other work focused on protecting children and young people from harm as they become independent and their peers and adults outside the family play an increasingly important part of their lives. Local authorities, working with partner organisations and agencies, have specific duties – set out in the statutory guidance "Working Together to safeguard children" – to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in their area and to tackle harms beyond the family, including those that children encounter online. The Tower Hamlets Safeguarding Children Partnership maintains oversight of work keeping children and young people safe and works closely with the Community Safety Partnership. Partners' work to safeguard children and young people from the influences of extremism leading to radicalisation through the Prevent and Channel programmes, action to address trafficking and modern slavery, and the action that partners take against gendered violence against girls and young women as part of the borough's Violence against Women and Girls Strategy all play a vital role in keeping young people safe and complement this strategy.

Priority One

Prevention and early intervention

What outcome do we want to achieve through this priority?

Children and young people at risk of exploitation or serious violence and their families are identified, get the support they need at the right time and are protected from serious harm as a result

Why is this important?

Violence is preventable, not inevitable. From 'Troubled Lives, Tragic Consequences'¹⁶ and other thematic reviews, it is clear that many children who are exploited or affected by serious violence have a difficult start in life with experiences of family violence, trauma and disrupted education, but that opportunities to identify them and intervene early are often missed. Young people from supportive and secure backgrounds can also become vulnerable to violence and harm outside the family. Effective early intervention will help protect young people against serious violence and exploitation, as well as against other kinds of harm including radicalisation and violent extremism.

Tower Hamlets' approach to early intervention will also focus on 'reachable moments', making sure that the right support is available for families and young people whenever it is needed, whether it is when a child goes missing, is arrested, has problems at school, or attends A&E. Projects such as the Violent Crime Reduction Project, for children and young people seen at the emergency department at the Royal London Hospital, the St Giles Trust's work with young people admitted to trauma wards at the Royal London Hospital, and the Breaking the Cycle of Violence project for children who have been arrested but not charged, offer rich opportunities for supporting young people, addressing trauma and mental health issues, and learning about how best to meet their needs.

'Trusted adults' – the family, friends and the adults who know young people well - are often best placed to support their resilience. Universal services such as education, health and youth provision will play a vital role in supporting young people's resilience and recovery. Such services can identify those who are vulnerable, strengthen the protective factors around young people, identify settings where young people can form healthy and safe relationships in daily life and online, and make sure that young people and adults from across Tower Hamlets' diverse communities can access timely and effective help if they are worried about a young person they know.

What actions will we take?

Develop communications in partnership with young people, community groups and families, and education providers so young people and families understand consent,

¹⁶ Troubled Lives, Tragic Consequences, Tower Hamlets Local Safeguarding Children Board, December 2015

what constitutes grooming, abuse and assault online and offline, and how to get help.

Equip staff across all agencies with consistent screening and assessment tools, skills, learning and improvement support to help them recognise and respond to the signs of serious violence, child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation and other forms of violence.

Work alongside parents, families, children and young people, voluntary, community, youth and faith groups to build understanding of exploitation and violence and to support positive futures for young people.

Continue to work with schools across the borough so that all children and young people remain in education and are supported to achieve their aspirations.

Continue to develop and act on an understanding of children who may be at risk of future harm and exploitation, including as a result of trauma and poor mental health, and key opportunities for intervention.

Audit existing and new interventions at 'reachable moments' to ensure a joined-up, timely and effective response to safeguarding children and young people and support parents/carers. This will include a focus on getting the right expertise and support in place for children and young people who are at risk from repeated exposure to violence, but may not meet thresholds for statutory intervention.

Develop and implement a locally-driven partnership approach to contextual safeguarding so that public spaces become safe spaces for all children and young people in the borough, with a focus on a responsible adult presence in safe spaces, including through detached youth work.

Build a focus on safeguarding adolescents and supporting their wellbeing and good mental health across post-pandemic recovery planning.

What outcomes will be achieved by (end of the strategy)?

- Children and young people at risk are effectively protected from harm through early intervention.
- Children and young people at risk of exclusion or dropping out of education are supported to stay in mainstream schools, where this is the best option for them.
- Young people and families from different backgrounds within our community know how to access support for themselves and their peers, and seek help when they need it.

How will we know we are making a difference?

- An increase in the use of the partnership exploitation screening tool to identify children where there are early signs of risk.
- Reviews of cases demonstrate that concerns are being identified earlier and action taken to avoid statutory intervention.
- A reduction in the numbers of children and young people in at risk groups.
- A reduction in the number of young people who are persistently absent from school without authorisation.

- A reduction in the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training.
- An increase in the number of children being identified by different stakeholders as at risk of exploitation or violence and receiving early support

Case study: keeping pupils safe after school

The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment on family and contextual violence reviewed temporal patterns in violent incidents in Tower Hamlets between 2015 and 2017 and found that incidents affecting children aged 10 to 16 years peaked in the after school period. During the autumn term 2020, the police-led Operation Teschel worked to reduce violence, robbery and anti-social behaviour during the after school period. The operation combined education and awareness for young people about how to protect themselves and their property, with high-visibility policing every weekday between 3pm and 6pm. The operation focused on areas surrounding schools, pupils' travel routes home, and places where groups of young people were congregating, based on concerns identified by schools in Tower Hamlets and on dynamic information and intelligence.

Priority Two

Protection and ongoing support for children and young people at the highest risk of harm and those who are survivors

What outcome do we want to achieve through this priority?

Children and young people who are affected by exploitation or serious violence receive appropriate, persistent support that helps to reduce the risks they face, find alternative pathways and rebuild their lives.

Why is this important?

Children and young people who are victims of sexual exploitation or criminal exploitation, or serious violence, are extremely vulnerable and at high risk of injury, harm and even death. They need support to address the multiple levels of abuse they face – physical, emotional, sexual and financial – as well the trauma and loss that may have contributed to their vulnerability in the first place.

Support is not straightforward. Young people who are victims of violence or exploitation may in some circumstances also be involved in harming others. Poverty and the ability to support families and siblings are an important driver for some young people. Services need to be persistent, flexible and trauma-informed to meet the needs of young people whose lives may be chaotic, or who may be subject to coercion, threats and debt bondage. Some children may be living outside the borough. Young people need to be heard and be part of their own safety planning: trust, hope and practical opportunities are part of keeping safe and recovery. Identifying the times, locations and contexts when young people may be at the greatest risk is an important part of safeguarding and the partnership will develop a contextualised safeguarding response to these risks.

Vulnerability does not stop when children reach their 18th birthday. 18 to 24 year olds make up some of those in the borough at the highest risk of harm, but their needs, and that of 16 and 17 year olds, may be different to those of younger children, with safe housing, work or training, as well as mental health, as priorities.

What actions will we take?

Provide children at the highest risk with accessible, responsive support from the exploitation team, and ensuring that wider care planning for all children with a social worker safeguards children effectively, reflecting best practice and taking into account contextual risks.

Ensure that children's wishes and feelings are central to decisions about their support and engage parents and carers as protective partners, sharing risks and solutions.

Promote the full utilisation of statutory and regulatory powers across the partnership to ensure that children and young people at risk of or suffering serious violence, child criminal and child sexual exploitation are protected quickly and effectively, building confidence amongst families and children that the system will make a difference.

Share information routinely, accurately, with consent wherever possible and in accordance with local protocols, which will be updated annually.

Share intelligence about individual cases and wider patterns of risk, including identifying and tackling contextual safeguarding risks.

Promote an approach to supporting survivors across the partnership which is centred on children and young people's needs and perspectives, is holistic, trauma-informed, and focuses on young people's strengths and the importance of building trusting relationships over a sustained period.

Develop a clear picture of the needs of young adults at the highest risk from violence and exploitation as victims and/or perpetrators, and agree a set of realistic, agreed actions underway to address these needs, with a focused use of capacity and resources across the partnership.

What outcomes will be achieved by (end of the strategy)?

- Professionals across partner agencies have the understanding they need of serious youth violence, child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation in Tower Hamlets to effectively protect and support our children and young people.
- Young people at the highest risk from violence and exploitation, as victims and/or perpetrators, are kept safe and are supported to fulfil their potential, develop positive relationships and improve their health and wellbeing.
- Effective measures are in place to reduce the risk to children and young people when they are in public spaces or online.

How will we know we are making a difference?

- Reviews of cases demonstrate that children and young people at the highest risk have been effectively safeguarded.
- Reviews of cases show that children and young people who are survivors of serious violence or exploitation have been supported to make progress with their lives, in education, work, relationships or wellbeing.
- Children and young people's feedback demonstrates they value the support provided.
- Reduction in reported incidents of violence or exploitation in key locations or at key times (such as the after-school period) across the borough

Case study: Putting children's wishes at the heart of support

Over a two-year period, Tower Hamlets' multi-agency exploitation team worked with a young person who was being sexually exploited at the time they were referred to the service. At first, the number of professionals involved was overwhelming, so the young person's social worker discussed with them who they wanted to work with, who they felt they had a good relationship with and how they wanted to engage.

Although fortnightly professional meetings continued, the young person themselves did not need to engage with all professionals all of the time. Over time, the risks to the young person reduced, they participated regularly in youth services and returned to education.

Case study: Making the borough a safer place for the most vulnerable children

In 2019, the joint project Operation Makesafe worked with local hotels to raise awareness of exploitation and around responsibilities for licensing. Hotel staff are primed to identify suspicious situations in relation to exploitation and protecting children. The project has been credited with improving the speed of reporting and better protecting children within the night-time economy.

Priority Three

Disrupting and pursuing those who pose a risk to children and young people

What outcome do we want to achieve through this priority?

The risk to children and young people from those who would seek to criminally or sexually exploit them, or involve them in violence, is reduced.

Why is this important?

Much of this strategy rightly focuses on supporting children, young people and their families to prevent harm. However, young people have the right to grow up a safe environment, where the activities of individuals, groups and gangs who seek to harm them are disrupted, and those that are trying to cause harm are held to account for their actions, including through the criminal justice system and through Modern Slavery legislation where appropriate.

Effective disruption and support to the most vulnerable young people goes hand in hand with building the trust of young people from all backgrounds and their families in public services and the police.

What actions will we take?

Support proactive intelligence gathering by the police, including the development of problem and subject profiles and network analysis, supported by other professionals. This will include understanding what more can be done to address the violence and exploitation linked to street drugs markets.

Promote proactive use of disruption techniques, and civil orders, to disrupt perpetrator contact with (potential) victims.

Support proactive pursuit of criminal prosecutions, focused on those who exploit young people for profit or gain.

Consider, within the multi-agency partnership the complexities of peer perpetration and the potential for victim/perpetrator overlap within this.

Build trust and cooperation between young people and local communities, and the police and public services, including clear and factual communications about incidents, ensuring that stop and search measures are seen to be used fairly, proportionally and respectfully.

What outcomes will be achieved by (end of the strategy)?

- Criminal activity is disrupted, and partners use the full range of available powers, including civil orders, to prevent perpetrators from contacting children and young people.
- Partners work together to ensure that perpetrators are prosecuted, focusing on those who have exploited young people for profit or gain.

- Young people at risk of harming others are prevented from doing so and receive the support they need to address their underlying issues.
- There is mutual trust and co-operation between our young people, communities and public services including the Police, and interventions, such as Stop and Search, are seen to be used fairly, proportionally and respectfully.

How will we know we are making a difference? (*)

- Reduction in knife crime injury victims aged under 25 years.
- Evidence that early information sharing on areas of concern is leading to successful proactive disruption.
- Increase in referrals of young people to the pan-London Rescue and Response service for intensive support.
- Feedback from young people shows an increased confidence in policing, and in particular stop and search.
- Active disruption and increased criminal prosecutions of those who exploit young people for profit or gain

*developing measures of progress for this priority is challenging, and these will be further developed as part of operational planning.

Case study: Acting swiftly to disrupt exploitation

A young person disclosed to a partner agency that they were staying in a high-end hotel and had sums of money and goods in the hotel room. When the agency contacted the council's Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub, the concerns raised led to an emergency strategy meeting being convened. Later the same day, the police went to the hotel, removed the young person to a safe place, and opened an investigation into exploitation.

Case study: Bringing perpetrators to justice

A recent operation concerned five girls where the offender received a custodial sentence in 2019 for two counts of causing a girl to engage in sexual activity, five counts of meeting girls following sexual grooming, supplying cannabis and an unrelated charge of making indecent photographs of children. The police and the council's Children's Social Care teams worked closely together throughout this case. Information and intelligence have been shared with the police by Children's Social Care that has led to and supported the criminal charges being brought against the perpetrator in respect of 15 child sex offences. The Exploitation team Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) coordinator supported all five young people throughout the court process. All of the children involved in the investigation were all supported by the CSE coordinator and Social Workers throughout the whole investigation including the court process. They were taken to court and given an opportunity to look around the court room. The CSE coordinator also supported this process with the police. Where it was felt by the police that the children were struggling or finding the process difficult, the CSE coordinator (a qualified social worker with enhanced training) and Social workers would go out and support the young people and feedback relevant information to the police and support them in giving statements.

Making it happen

Partnership working is vital to tackle exploitation and serious violence. Across Tower Hamlets, young people and residents, community and faith groups, and many services and projects are already working tirelessly to keep young people safe and support them. The challenge now is to enhance the level of strategic coordination in order to achieve the effective, decisive, timely support to children and young people envisaged in this strategy.

The Community Safety Partnership will have overall responsibility for the Violence, Vulnerability and Exploitation Strategy, ensuring links with Tower Hamlets' Violence Reduction Plan.

The Vulnerable Young People and Exploitation sub-group of the Tower Hamlets Safeguarding Children Partnership will be responsible for the delivery of the outcomes set out in this strategy. It will take the lead in developing a cross-agency operational plan, overseeing implementation and monitoring outcomes, reflecting new evidence and research in planning, and engaging with children and young people, families and community and faith groups, and voluntary and statutory organisations. The sub-group reports routinely to the Tower Hamlets Safeguarding Children Partnership and will report annually on progress against the strategy to the Community Safety Partnership.

The Children and Families Partnership Board, Health and Wellbeing Board, Safeguarding Adults Board, and Youth Justice Management Board, and head teacher consultative groups are important stakeholders and will be kept updated and engaged.

Reporting arrangements

