

Cabinet 23 Sept 2020	
Report of: Sharon Godman – Divisional Director Strategy, Policy and Performance Will Tuckley – Chief Executive	Classification: Unrestricted
Community Cohesion Plan ‘Our Tower Hamlets: A plan for a more cohesive community 2020-25’	

Lead Member	Councillor Asma Begum - Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Community Safety, Youth and Equalities
Originating Officer(s)	Iqbal Raakin – Strategy and Policy Manager Emily Fieran-Reed – Senior Strategy and Policy Manager
Wards affected	All wards
Key Decision?	No
Forward Plan Notice Published	Not required
Reason for Key Decision	This report has been assessed as not meeting the key decision criteria.
Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome	It covers the following outcomes from priority 1 and priority 2 of the strategic plan. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People feel they are part of a cohesive and vibrant community (Outcome 8) • Inequality is reduced and people feel that they fairly share the benefits from growth (Outcome 4)

Executive Summary

Following the publication of the Government and GLA social integration strategies, the London Borough of Tower Hamlets is developing a community cohesion plan which sets out its priorities with a series of commitments to strengthen cohesion in the Borough. The Council wants the Borough to continue to be a place where people feel they belong and where people feel they get on well together and have an equal voice. *Our Tower Hamlets: A plan for a more cohesive community* is a five year plan which sets out our approach to do that by focusing on three key Priorities:

- Priority 1 – Connected People: Cultivating and strengthening positive relationships.
- Priority 2 – Involved and empowered community: Greater engagement and participation in public life.

- Priority 3 – Equality: Valuing diversity and advancing equality of opportunity.

Recommendations:

The Mayor in Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Agree the London Borough of Tower Hamlet's Community Cohesion Plan, including the commitments under each of the priority areas (noting that the versions of the Plan that will be launched to the public will be in plain English)

1 REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 The Council wants the Borough to continue to be a place where people feel they belong and where people feel they get on well together and have an equal voice. *Our Tower Hamlets: A plan for a more cohesive community* is a five year plan which sets out our approach to do that.
- 1.2 In order to meet our obligations under the Equalities Act, the Council is required to set and publish equality objectives that are specific and measureable which we will achieve, including against the aspect of the Equalities Act about cohesion - the duty to "foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not."
- 1.3 Our engagement has revealed that many people in Tower Hamlets feel that they are leading parallel lives -living alongside each other but not truly mixing, nor building strong and positive relationships

2 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 Do not develop a London Borough of Tower Hamlets Community Cohesion Plan and continue to include community cohesion objectives within the Strategic Plan and engage with the Government and the Greater London Authority where opportunities arise to do so in the delivery of their respective social integration strategies, as well as deliver all actions we are mandated to by Government. However, without a clear commitment to cohesion and how we will approach this in the borough, the risk is that this would be disjointed and lacking in purpose and therefore impact.

3 CHANGES TO THE PLAN

- 3.1 The COVID-19 pandemic and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement has highlighted new issues that can have an impact on community cohesion. As a result, some additional commitments have been included to the plan which has been predominantly taken from the recently renewed strategic plan. Feedback from MAB and some further feedback from relevant services have

also been incorporated into the plan. Much of the new commitments added relate to volunteering, digital inclusion, and tackling inequalities faced by BAME and other protected characteristics.

- 3.2 In summary changes and additions have been made to the following areas of the plan:
- Some commitments under each of the 3 priority areas
 - The table in section 5 of the plan entitled ‘How will we know this is working?’

4 DETAILS OF THE REPORT

Background

- 4.1 By ‘community’ we mean people from different backgrounds and interests who live, work or study in Tower Hamlets.

Tower Hamlets has adopted the definition of Community Cohesion linked to the Cattle and Denham reports. This definition is widely accepted, and is embedded in both national and regional approaches to social integration.

It states that *a cohesive society is one in which:*

- *there is a common vision and sense of belonging by all communities;*
- *the diversity of people’s backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and valued;*
- *similar life opportunities are available to all; and*
- *Strong and positive relationships exist and continue to be developed in the workplace, in schools and in the wider community.*

- 4.2 Community cohesion is underpinned by the Equality Act 2010, which states that public authorities must have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
 - Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

- 4.3 The Council is required to set and publish one or more equality objectives that are specific and measureable which we should achieve to meet all or part of our duty. We will do this by embedding the commitments within this Cohesion Plan within our Strategic Plan.

Community Cohesion has become more of a high profile priority nationally and regionally in recent years, with an independent review into opportunity and integration conducted by Dame Louise Casey in 2016. The Government published its ‘Integrated Communities Strategy’ Paper in February 2019.

Also in March 2018, the Greater London Authority (GLA) published a social integration strategy for London entitled '*All of Us – The Mayor's strategy for social integration*'.

- 4.4 In June 2019 the Home Office launched its 'Indicators of Integration Framework'. The Greater London Authority has also produced headline measures for social integration. We have considered these measures in developing this plan.
- 4.5 We know through our Annual Residents' Survey (2019) that 78 percent of residents in Tower Hamlets feel that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together. In London as a whole 75 per cent of residents feel that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together (Survey of Londoners, 2019).

5 Remit of the Plan and Outstanding issues not covered in the plan:

- 5.1 The plan represents a pulling together of different aspects of the Council's existing work that can be shaped to maximise the impact on cohesion. It is largely intended to be cost neutral.
- 5.2 Throughout the development of the strategy, including the public consultation, a range of cohesion matters which were beyond the scope of this strategy to fully address. They are being addressed through the existing work programmes of council services and Partnership groups, for example, the Community Safety Partnership will be working to address crime and anti-social behaviour and its impact on people's confidence in the community. Some of these wider matters include:
- Crime and anti-social behaviour and its impact on people's confidence in building connections and a sense of belonging
 - Digital exclusion
 - Impact of overcrowding and affordability of private rent on inequality
 - Poverty and economic inequality
 - Perceptions of gentrification.
 - Support for local business.
 - Diversity of the makeup of individual schools
- 5.3 The Council will continue to fulfil its role as an enabler of community development and connections and where possible provide the space and opportunities for positive relationships to form and skills to develop so that communities can thrive.

6 Developing the Plan

6.1. We have developed this Plan using feedback on cohesion that we have received from residents, community stakeholders and partners in the last 5 years including in interviews, surveys, events and discussions (such as engagement in the development of the Tower Hamlets Plan, Strategic Plan, the Community Cohesion Pilot programme etc.) We have also considered the Government and Greater London Authority social integration strategies.

6.2. To complete this picture, we have also cross-referenced with data from existing sources including:

- Our residents' survey
- Our Borough Profile
- Public consultation on the draft community cohesion plan
- British Integration Survey: The Challenge 2019
- Census results
- UK Electoral Statistics
- ONS – Taking Part Survey
- GLA – Population Estimates

7 Commitments in the Plan

9.8 There are 3 priorities in the plan:

- Priority 1 (Connected people) commitments focus on 4 key focus areas:
 - Our Places and Spaces
 - Children and Young People
 - Community Projects
 - Loneliness and Social Isolation
- Priority 2 (Involved and empowered community) focuses also on 4 key focus areas:
 - Celebrating diversity
 - Strengthening leadership and bringing leaders together
 - Effective volunteering
 - Participation and social action
- Priority 3 (Bridging the equalities gap) focuses on commitments understanding and addressing inequality including re-prioritising our diversity networks, Implementing the Poverty Proofing the School day project and continuing to work with our partners to tackle hate crime through the No Place for Hate Campaign and finding new ways to educate children about hate crime in schools.

8. Public consultation

- 10.8 Public consultation on the cohesion plan took place from 28th October 2019 to 8th December 2019. It took two main forms: 1) Online Survey through the council's consultation hub; 2) Community research and face to face engagement.
- 10.9 We also worked with Toynbee Hall, who have done community research on community safety and community cohesion, with 224 people participating in their research. Some of the learning from this work has also informed the plan.
- 10.10 A variety of methods was used to publicise the online questionnaire. This included:
- Social media publicity (led by communications)
 - Advertisements on plasma screens in LBTH buildings such as Idea stores throughout the consultation
 - TH Now e-newsletter
 - The Council's VCS newsletter
 - Publicity through THCVS website, mail out and twitter account
 - Yammer
 - Head Teachers Bulletin
 - Direct Mailings
 - S106 cohesion programme list (around 70 residents and stakeholders)
 - No Place for Hate mailing list
 - THIFF mailing list
 - THCVS mailing list
 - Announcement at Welcome to Tower Hamlets event
- 10.11 Community Researchers are ordinary Tower Hamlets residents who are trained in Participatory Appraisal. Participatory Appraisal is an empowering approach to engagement that seeks to build community knowledge and encourages grassroots action. It uses a lot of visual methods, making it especially useful for participants who find other methods of participation intimidating or complicated. The Researchers do not undertake surveys but instead, aim to have conversations with members of the community, in the ordinary locations where they are e.g. parks, cafes etc. The style of the research results in deep levels of insight.
- 10.12 Community Research work undertaken by the community researchers and supported by staff in Strategy and Policy included engagement and gathering insights from the following:
- Tower Hamlets Local Voices (a forum for disabled people)
 - Tower Hamlets LGBT Community Forum
 - Tower Hamlets Interfaith Forum (THIFF)
 - Tower Hamlets Youth Council
 - Tower Hamlets Parents and carers conference

- Somali Event in Idea Store
 - Queen Mary University students
- 10.13 In total 219 people participated in the consultation. Amongst them 191 participated in the community research and 28 people through the online consultation. This is being considered alongside range of existing engagement data.
- 10.14 People across a range of protected characteristics engaged with the consultation and we undertook targeted engagement with particular groups, as described in 6.5.
- 10.15 There was a high level of participation from young people (16-24 year olds). 20 Youth Council members and 60 QMUL students participated in the community research. We have also identified older people as a group who we would like to hear more from during the process to further develop and implement this strategy.
- 10.16 We have gained significant insights from the community research and online surveys. The main themes from the community research fell within two overarching areas- *connectivity* and *inclusion*. Below are some of the key-headings with an explanation of how we are responding to the feedback.

Key messages (You Said)	What is being done as a result (We did)
Maximise use of public and green spaces and remove barriers to access	<p>One of the focus areas in priority 1 is 'open and shared spaces'.</p> <p>Below is an additional commitment that was added under Priority 1 :</p> <p>Waiving street closure and other administrative charges when residents apply to close local streets for community events such as for street parties (Priority 1)</p>
<p>People want to connect with others - A lot of participants spoke about wanting more opportunities to connect with other residents, particularly with groups they wouldn't ordinarily mix with.</p> <p>People do not always have confidence to take the first step to interact with a neighbour or someone from a different background. They feel safer to stay within the boundaries of what they</p>	<p>One of the three priorities is on connectedness which has many commitments that can help in developing connection.</p> <p>A neighbourliness campaign is already in the plan. Another commitment on the launching of the neighbourliness fund has been elaborated to include that the fund will encourage neighbourhood based social interaction projects to help remove barriers to</p>

<p>know and are used to.</p>	<p>interaction.</p> <p>Also added more evidence base on the impact of neighbourliness</p>
<p>Some wanted to connect more across cultural boundaries. This was particularly the case for Bengali and Somali residents who felt there was need for these two communities to come closer together.</p>	<p>We talk about bringing people from different backgrounds together. The nature of the programme will reflect the needs of particular communities in the area. Where there are tensions between communities in an area the development of the programme will reflect that.</p>
<p>Some participants felt that there is a difference in resources that are available for different groups in the community- this was particularly the case for some Somali residents and people from other cultures who felt the borough was weighted towards benefiting Bengali residents</p>	<p>We have not responded to this specifically in the plan however we are launching a new community group for Somali residents that will work with local stakeholders to improve inequalities within the Somali community. The Council has also launched Granby Community Hall which is a community space available chiefly to Somali residents and community organisations.</p>
<p>Disability and LGBT+ to be more prominent in the plan</p>	<p>Disability and LGBT+ is now explicitly included in two of the commitments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launching a new fund to enable community groups to hold events that celebrate particular parts of the community and its overall diversity e.g. disabled, LGBT+, faith communities and women. (priority 2) • Re-prioritising our diversity networks to empower the community to identify and tackle inequalities they share with others and to enable their voice to be heard in shaping the future of the borough. This includes provision for disabled, LGBT+ and faith communities. (priority 3) •
<p>Perception of Gentrification</p>	<p>We have commitments that look at accessible and inclusive spaces for all</p>

	<p>in new developments and removing barriers to maximising use of community facilities (i.e. halls), open and green spaces in the Borough including through planning obligations for privately managed open space in new developments. This can help remove the perception of socio-economic inequality in developments.</p>
Tackle socio-economic disparities	<p>Commitments are already in the plan that directly tackles socio-economic disparities through design of spaces, employment for BAME women and tackling poverty.</p>
Better use of existing community assets	<p>A commitment is there about reviewing our Community Hubs to improve access to them by a wider range of community groups and residents and to create opportunities for new connections. (priority 2)</p>
Perception of crime and anti-social behaviour	<p>Whilst we would defer to the Community Safety Plan to address these issues we recognise that there is an impact on cohesion and there are also commitments with regards to tackling hate crime in the plan.</p>
Young people better supported	<p>Commitments are included in the plan with regards to young people in both priority 1 and 2. We have also recently launched 'Every Chance for Every Child', our strategy for children and families for the next five years.</p>
More community events to bring different groups of people together.	<p>This is included in different commitments within priority 1 and 2 of the plan such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting the Great Get Together campaign and encouraging local residents and groups to do events or street parties • Delivering activities within the Liveable Streets programme that bring people together who

	<p>are from a particular neighbourhood but from different backgrounds.</p> <p>Also added:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Added Support, coordinate or deliver events and programmes that bring people together such as the Summer Events Programme and Community Safety Day.
<p>Language was a very big issue locally because of some of the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • this is a barrier to different groups coming together, creating division and exclusion. • Some felt their own communities should be making more effort to learn English and integrate with others. • Some felt marginalised in areas where many people speak languages that they don't understand and didn't like the fact that so many residents are able to live locally without learning English. <p>Others viewed language diversity more positively, as it enabled them to feel safe and welcome as newcomers to the borough because there were lots of people they could communicate with. This helped them to integrate quickly and feel part of a local community.</p>	<p>In priority 3 there is a commitment enabling take up of more Skills for Life training which includes ESOL provision and developing a new element of the programme to support participation in community life.</p> <p>We are using as an outcome measure</p>

9. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 In carrying out its functions, the Council must comply with the public sector equality duty set out in section 149 Equality Act 2010, namely it must have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful conduct under the Equality Act 2010, the need to advance equality of opportunity and to foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 9.2 We have completed an Equality Analysis Quality Assurance Checklist for 'Our Tower Hamlets: A Plan for a More Cohesion Community 2020 - 2025' and determined that a full Equality Analysis will not be required for this paper. This

is primarily because the Plan will strengthen the Council's commitment to meet its Equality Objectives as it will set out the cohesion (and equalities) outcomes it will be working to achieve (people have strong and positive relationships with others from the same and different backgrounds; people have a common vision and a greater sense of belonging in the community; and similar life opportunities are available to all) and the things the Council will be doing in order to achieve them. A number of the commitments draw on and strengthen the Council's existing work on addressing inequalities across the borough.

10. OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

10.1 None to note.

11. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

11.1 This report seeks agreement to the London Borough of Tower Hamlet's Community Cohesion Plan. There are no financial implications. However, any costs arising from the implementation of the plan will need to be contained within existing service budgets or considered as part of the council's Medium-term Financial Strategy.

12. COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

11.1 In carrying out its functions, the Council must comply with the public sector equality duty set out in section 149 Equality Act 2010, namely it must have due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful conduct under the Equality Act 2010, the need to advance equality of opportunity and to foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

11.2 The Community Cohesion Plan is designed to have an impact on people with a protected characteristic as defined under the Equality Act 2010. The Council is required to take all reasonable actions to properly understand that impact. The consultation identified in the report demonstrates that the Council has complied with this duty.

11.3 In order for consultation to be valid it must take place whilst the decision is at a formative stage and be properly considered by the Council. This is also evidenced in the body of the report showing legal compliance with the Council's duties.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- None

Appendices

- Appendix 1 - Cohesion Plan
- Appendix 2 – Cohesion Plan Summary Version

Background Documents – Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012

- None

Officer contact details for documents:

N/A