

Cabinet 24 March 2021	 TOWER HAMLETS
Report of: Will Tuckley, Chief Executive	Classification: Unrestricted
Action Plan in response to Overview and Scrutiny Committee's 'Review of London Borough of Tower Hamlets' Response to COVID-19'	

Lead Member	Mayor John Biggs
Originating Officer(s)	Afazul Hoque, Head of Corporate Strategy & Policy
Wards affected	All wards
Key Decision?	No
Forward Plan Notice Published	19 February 2021
Reason for Key Decision	This report was assessed as not meeting the key decision criteria.
Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome	1. People are aspirational, independent and have equal access to opportunities; 2. A borough that our residents are proud of and love to live in; 3. A dynamic outcomes-based Council using digital innovation and partnership working to respond to the changing needs of our borough.

Executive Summary

This report details the Executive response to the OSC's recommendations of the report on the Council's Response to COVID-19.

Recommendations:

The Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Consider the review (Appendix 1) of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Review of London Borough of Tower Hamlets' Response to COVID-19 and agree the action plan (Appendix 2) in response to the review's recommendations.

1 REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 The Council's constitution requires the Executive to respond to recommendations from the OSC.

- 1.2 The attached report is the Executive's response to the recommendations arising from OSC's review of the Council's response to the COVID-19 Pandemic to September 2020.

2 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 To take no action, or not to agree the action plan is not recommended as the report outlines work undertaken by Councillors, officers and external partners to identify areas of improvement and the Council's response which identifies actions it will take to respond to these scrutiny recommendations.

3 DETAILS OF THE REPORT

- 3.1 OSC aimed to offer an alternate view of the Council's response to the pandemic and reflect local feedback on the plans in place to support residents. OSC has also aimed to capture the borough's response (not just Council) and understand what we have learnt and will do differently if there are subsequent waves.
- 3.2 Following the very first virtual OSC meeting in May to consider the Council's response to the pandemic and feed into the Council's recovery plans, OSC and its Sub-Committees held a number of virtual meetings throughout June and July 2020 to listen to community insight and consider the immediate and long term challenges the Council will be facing.
- 3.3 OSC's scrutinised activity in response to the pandemic, made recommendations on what the Council and partners need to consider as it recovers and returns to business as usual, and reflected on how the Council might improve its pandemic plan and be better placed to respond to a pandemic re-occurrence.
- 3.4 OSC made 18 recommendations in their review to the Council's Response to COVID-19 in three areas: strategic and cross-cutting (7); health and wellbeing (8) and children and young people (3). The report with recommendations is attached at Appendix 1.

Recommendation 1: COVID-19 Impacts Commission

Establish a commission to collate and disseminate information (including specifically to Overview and Scrutiny and other members) on impacts of COVID-19 on residents and stakeholders, service users and services and develop an understanding on long term trends of COVID-19, including differing demand for office space and housing and health services.

Recommendation 2: Digital Inclusion

Produce a new digital inclusion strategy that looks at how the Council could actively help those who are digitally excluded to get online, building on the 2015-18 strategy.

Recommendation 3: VCS support

That the Council and its partners directly support the Voluntary and Community Sector to transition in recovery, and work together to develop a sustainable model for the sector.

Recommendation 4: BAME Communities

That the borough's Test and Trace Programme utilise local networks; including GP practices, community and faith organisations to target these groups to increase uptake and understanding of the test and trace programme.

Recommendation 5: Council finances

- A. Audit all saleable assets with an assessment for sale against a long-term cost-benefit analysis
- B. Assess impact on services of proposed job losses, particularly post-furlough (in October)
- C. Produce a report on approach to commercialisation for 2020-21, and 2021-22; particularly in Parks and Culture. The Commercialisation Board to explain overall approach to OSC in 2021/22
- D. Scrutiny leads to review in depth their areas of savings and income as part of quarterly budget monitoring

Recommendation 6: The Local Economy

That the Council works with partners to undertake scenario-planning to model the impact on the local economy and start to plan mitigation.

Recommendation 7: Ensure market traders are provided with business development support to increase their resilience and if future grants become available better support market traders to ensure their COVID-19 costs are covered in the same way as was offered to other businesses.
Health and wellbeing

Recommendation 8

Support voluntary and community organisations to ensure vulnerable and isolated residents have adequate access to food, particularly for:

- A. Families – where children and young people are vulnerable to food poverty;
- B. Older people – where poor health or mobility may hamper their ability to access food; and
- C. Reinststate a food delivery service for the most vulnerable in our community.

Recommendation 9

The Council should part fund and work with other funding providers to ensure this need continues to be met by our VCS.

Recommendation 10

Further analysis should take place on the causes of need to understand how much was pre-existing and exacerbated by the pandemic, versus how much is new need relating to job losses or social distancing impacting on informal caring networks

Recommendation 11: Shielding vulnerable residents

Maintain and resource local pathways beyond September with Primary Care Networks for shielding in anticipation of subsequent waves.

Recommendation 12: Local test and trace

Report on the effectiveness/performance/reach of local test, trace, isolate programme as part of the ongoing response to the pandemic – with results reviewed before the winter flu season to reduce the severity of a second wave.

Recommendation 13: Rough sleepers

- A. Develop a sustainable approach that delivers the same results keeping rough sleepers off the street. Requesting and lobbying government for funding, including through London Councils.
- B. Review the quality of its short-term accommodation, especially in instances where families with children have been placed in accommodation with shared facilities and amenities
- C. The Council and its partners should map the increase in referrals and where they came from as well as the paths individuals subsequently took
- D. Develop a sustainable approach to support those with No Recourse for Public Funds and lobby government to ensure this group is not left at risk.

Recommendation 14: Domestic Violence Support

Proactively communicate using a range of channels and community languages the support available for victims of domestic violence and ensure resource is planned to meet potential increase in demand.

Recommendation 15: Care Homes

That the Health Scrutiny Committee undertake a review of learning of the response to the pandemic by engaging care homes, residents' families and other stakeholders to identify long term recommendations for improvement.

Recommendation 16: Recovery for children

The recovery programme for children in Tower Hamlets should include the input of specialist teachers. Emphasise not just on 'catch up' but on the social-emotional needs of young people, especially vulnerable children and those with SEND to ensure a successful transition back to school. Schools should be engaged to identify curriculum and attainment gaps and what additional tuition and after school clubs could be conducted to address this.

Recommendation 17: Free School Meals

That Children's and Education Sub-committee review the rollout of the National Voucher Scheme in TH as an effective replacement for the Council's Universal Free School Meals programme.

Recommendation 18: Mental health support

Young people are more likely to be affected by COVID-19 with anxiety and depression, with factors such as security, housing security and living quality related to the increase.

- A. Ensure effective signposting to services such as housing and benefits as quickly as possible.
- B. Establish a mental health partnership put in place to co-ordinate remedial plans across relevant sectors like education and housing.

4 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The Council has a Public Sector Equality Duty under the Equality Act (2010) to have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct under the Act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share those protected characteristics and people who do not; and
- Foster good relations between people who share those characteristics and people who do not.

4.2 A number of positive impacts are expected as a result of undertaking actions in response to OSC's recommendations:

- Digital inclusion - the Council has been working to improve access to internet and digital resources for residents: programmes to improve digital skills for older residents and BAME communities; providing devices and good quality broadband connections; allocation of laptops and broadband access to vulnerable and disadvantaged children. In 2021, the Council will be consolidating the actions taken to date under a more coordinated approach in anticipation of greater partnership-working across the borough;
- BAME communities - local implementation of the NHS test and trace programme based on four priority areas: operations, community mobilisation and communication, data and intelligence and pilots (primary care pilots) - making specific reference to address those communities who are most vulnerable;
- Vulnerable residents - actions to protect our most vulnerable have included: contact centre has been mobilised with guidance and onward referral pathways developed; food delivery focus is on supporting people to access supermarket delivery slots, with the Council supporting a volunteer click and collect service; medications delivery;
- Older people - we have carried out a thematic review seeking to achieve the following objectives in relation to the response to the Covid-19

pandemic and care homes: to identify areas of good practice in the response from local health and social care agencies; to identify any gaps or lessons learned; to identify a set of recommendations for local health and social care partners to take forward in the event of any future peaks in the virus;

- Children and Young People - the Bronze Group (Pandemic Response) for Children's Mental Health has developed a pathway document that can be used by professionals to accurately signpost families to appropriate support; support remains available for families whose financial and employment situation has changed including from Tier 2 and Tier 3 services both within the local authority and from within the wider partnership; more detailed partnerships exist in each area as needed; so for instance the mental health in schools transformation teams are in place and will be looking at how to respond to the pressures or specific experiences from COVID-19.

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 No other statutory implications.

6 COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

6.1 It is envisaged that the responses will be delivered through existing resources and therefore there are no additional financial implications arising from the recommendations within this report. However, in the event that additional resources may be required to deliver particular aspects of the plan, these will need to be considered as part of the council's budget setting and medium term financial strategy.

7 COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

7.1 Section 9F of the Local Government Act 2000 stipulates that provision of executive arrangements by a local authority must include an Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

7.2 Consistent with this obligation, Part B – Responsibility for functions and decision making procedures, Section 30, of the Council's Constitution comprises the Overview

and Scrutiny Procedure Rules, which provide that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may consider any matter affecting the area or its inhabitants. The Committee may also make reports and recommendations to Council or the Executive in connection with the discharge of any functions which are the responsibility of the Executive.

- 7.3 The Recommendation of the report requests that the Mayor in Cabinet considers the review (Appendix 1) of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Review of London Borough of Tower Hamlets' Response to COVID-19 and agrees the action plan (Appendix 2) in response to the review's recommendations.
- 7.4 Where the Overview and Scrutiny Committee makes a report or recommendations to the authority or the Mayor or Executive, the Committee shall by notice in writing require the authority or Mayor or Executive:-
- (a) to consider the report or recommendations;
 - (b) to respond to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee indicating what (if any) action the authority propose, or the Mayor or Executive proposes, to take; and
 - (c) if the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has published the report or recommendations, to publish the response.
- 7.5 The Recommendation is therefore within the scope of the Mayor in Cabinet's powers under the Constitution.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

None.

Appendices

- OSC's Review of LBTH's Response to COVID-19
- OSC's Review of LBTH's Response to COVID-19 Action Plan

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

None

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Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Review of London Borough of Tower Hamlets' Response to COVID-19

[Publish Date]



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Chair's Foreword

In April 2020 the Overview & Scrutiny Committee members met remotely for the first time for an informal meeting to consider the Council's response to the COVID-19 Pandemic. The months that followed were devoted to evidence gathering and analysis to understand how the Council has supported residents throughout the pandemic and how they can continue to do so in view of a second wave, the summaries of which are included here.

As lockdown restrictions continue to ease and the borough gradually begins to get back into the rhythm of delivering for residents, there are three main challenges ahead:

1. Preparing for a second wave of the pandemic
2. Assessing and planning for the financial and economic impacts of the pandemic over the coming year
3. Preparing the borough in the long term for new economic realities and tackling the inequalities the pandemic has exposed and will deepen

This report's main recommendation is for the Council to put a Commission in place to identify and respond to the long-term challenges of COVID-19, in a similar way it did with Brexit.

With COVID-19 cases creeping up (as of early September), time is of the essence to ensure the Council is prepared to respond should a second wave be forthcoming. All our recommendations are focussed on the most pressing issues the Council can be addressing now. They are designed to be as practical as possible and are being published now in the hope that action will be taken soon.

This report is intended to be a concise and focused look at the Council's response and will not capture everything the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and its Sub-Committee have reviewed in the past few months. A more comprehensive list of evidence and data is available on the Council's website at the Overview & Scrutiny Committee pages. I'd also encourage you to view the video recordings of our meeting which can be accessed via the website.

Challenging as the pandemic is and as challenging as our borough can be, Council staff have proved themselves focused on protecting and delivering for residents. We want to thank them for their dedication and pay tribute to all the personal sacrifices made.

Through these times, the borough at large has been at its best; with residents coming together to support their neighbours. With all the talk of what can be improved let's not forget what positive things need to be retained and cherished too.



Councillor James King, Chair - Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Recommendations

Strategic and cross-cutting

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A. Ensure effective signposting to services such as housing and benefits as quickly as possible.

B. Establish a mental health partnership put in place to co-ordinate remedial plans across relevant sectors like education and housing.

Introduction

The World Health Organisation (WHO) classed coronavirus as a pandemic on 11 March 2020 and the Multi-Agency Tower Hamlets Pandemic Plan was activated on the same the day, triggering the creation of the borough's Partnership Pandemic Committee to oversee the local response. As the pandemic forced the Council to adapt its services and redeploy resources to support the local emergency response to the pandemic, so too did the Overview & Scrutiny Committee (OSC) adapt its work programme to consider how Members can best support the Council and residents during the crisis, and lead on local-led scrutiny of the operational response and recovery plans.

OSC began its scrutiny of the Council's response to COVID-19 in April 2020, following up with monthly reviews at OSC virtual meetings, and further Sub-Committee reviews on portfolio-specific topics in July and August.

OSC has found the Council's response to be far-reaching and comprehensive since the pandemic outbreak in March 2020, and that LBTH and partners were deployed effectively to address priority issues arising from the pandemic. The Pandemic Plan was quickly revised and published, with a range of hierarchical governance structures put in place in an emergency response arrangement.

Significantly, OSC feel that many of the issues which have presented themselves were not born out of COVID-19 but were pre-existing and exposed by the pandemic. Issues such as digital inclusion, loneliness, mental health, health disparities for BAME groups and inadequate food provision for elderly and vulnerable people are all issues that existed long before the emergence of COVID-19.

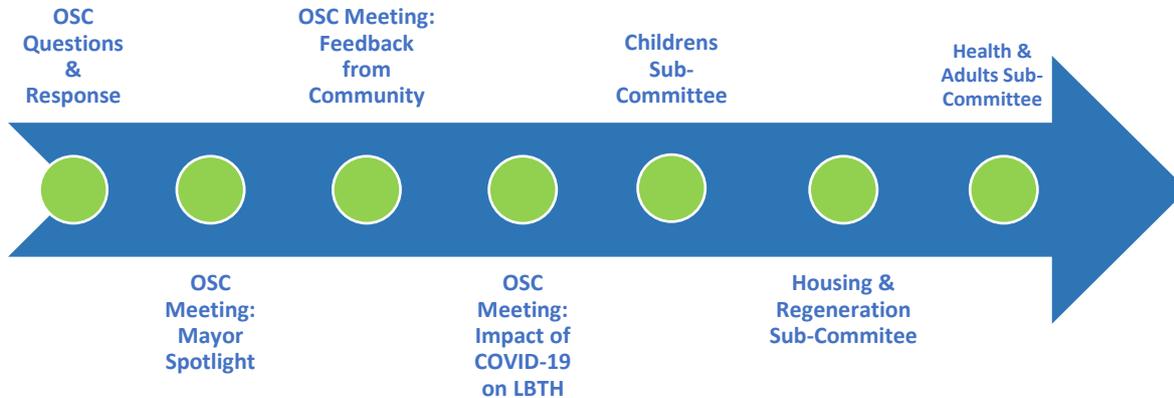
The Council's Cabinet has assessed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Tower Hamlets so far and has attempted to predict the impact going forward.

Cabinet has also:

- recognised the need to work differently to adapt and meet the needs of our community - developing new ways of delivering essential services and working out how some of the new ways of working can be made permanent.
- renewed the Council's Strategic Plan to recognise the new journey the borough will be undertaking in recovering from the pandemic. OSC support the work of the Council's Cabinet to date and have made the recommendations in this report to bring attention to areas which need further action and support.
- assessed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Tower Hamlets so far and has attempted to predict the impact going forward.
- recognised the need to work differently to adapt and meet the needs of our community - developing new ways of delivering essential services and working out how some of the new ways of working can be made permanent.
- renewed the Council's Strategic Plan to recognise the new journey the borough will be undertaking in recovering from the pandemic.

Our recommendations are focused on areas where progress from the Cabinet is not as detailed.

Summary of Evidence: April 2020-August 2020



OSC began its scrutiny of the Council's response to COVID-19 with the submission of written questions to Council services on 24 April 2020, with responses received on 4 May.

This was followed by the first virtual meeting of OSC on 21 May which provided an opportunity for Members to review the response they received to their written submission and featured a spotlight with the Mayor, Chief Executive and Director of Public Health.

A meeting was then held on 22 June to gather external views on the Council's response from members of the community and partner organisations. They provided valuable insight into the impact of the Council's response to COVID-19 on the community and covered areas of health, employment, housing and the community and voluntary sector.

The latest OSC meeting to consider the impact of COVID-19 on Tower Hamlet was held on 27 July and this was then followed by Scrutiny Sub Committees' meetings to consider the issues specific to their portfolio areas:

- Health and Adults Scrutiny Sub-Committee meeting 23 July: Local COVID-19 Outbreak Plan; Impact of COVID-19 on Mental Health;
- Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee meeting 13 July: Moving forward on COVID-19; and
- Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee meeting 11 August: Overall Context and financial pressures; Children's Social Care and Early Help; Education and SEND.

OSC Questions (24 April 2020)

The Committee submitted a number of key questions to Council services which focused on the Council's operational response to COVID-19. The submission covered a range of areas including strategic oversight of the pandemic, financial impact, engagement with community groups, intelligence, care workers, BAME communities, communications, housing, and young people.

Spotlight Session (21 May 2020)

The Committee reviewed the Council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and scrutinised the plans in place to support the recovery from the crisis at a two-hour question and answer session with the Mayor, Chief Executive and Director of Public Health.

The Committee focused on a wide range of areas including:

- How effectively the Council has spent the additional funding provided by government and what new financial pressures the pandemic has placed on the Council.
- Whether the Council's strong housing policy at the top level has translated into effective frontline service provision.
- How the Council is using data to inform their planning and decision making.
- How effective the Pandemic Plan was, and lessons learnt.
- The sustainability of redeploying staff.
- How the Council has communicated with residents who are digitally excluded.
- Whether local input, expertise and knowledge will be used to support Test and Trace.
- If adequate plans are in place during the transition out of lockdown to continue to support food deliveries to those residents who will still rely on it.
- How the Council will maintain social distancing once the lockdown has eased, and how residents will be consulted on these changes.
- How the Council will be working with TFL to free up space for people to safely move around the borough.

The full session can be viewed at: https://towerhamlets.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/487147

Insight Session - Community & Partner feedback (22 June)

The Committee invited a few well-placed members from the community and in partner organisations to provide community insight and consider the immediate and long term challenges the Council and the borough will be facing.

OSC heard from Pam Bhamra, Chair of Tower Hamlets Housing Forum and Director of Operations at Tower Hamlets Community Housing. Pam detailed the following key issues:

- Importance of replacing and reinventing community centres with online activities
- overcrowding in households as a hindrance to people isolating effectively, allowing the virus to spread more easily, and straining home schooling
- isolation and loneliness as critical to individual health and wellbeing
- discussed the ways in which the Council, GLA and partners had housed the homeless population

Ian Parkes, Chief Executive of East London Business Alliance (ELBA), provided his feedback on the impact on businesses and the economy. Ian highlighted the following:

- ELBA had received no notifications of business closures or insolvency
- Small businesses will not be able to keep running beyond 3 months if lockdown does not end reasonably quickly
- The VCS required support, particularly with overheads
- Support for education leavers in 2021 who had lost out on significant learning time would be required

Dr Jackie Applebee and Dr Naureen Bhatti, Chair and Vice Chair of Tower Hamlets LMC, provided a summary of the key health challenges the borough is facing and highlighted the following:

- High levels of deprivation and a large BAME population provide additional challenges for Tower Hamlets
- The necessity of a robust, locally organised, community test, track, isolate and support programme.
- Mortality in care homes has been significant, with care homes in Tower Hamlets having over thirty deaths.
- The lack of community testing and PPE for care home staff and for key workers is likely to have led to unnecessary transmission of the virus early in the pandemic
- Assessment and treatment of other conditions has been put on hold and will have ramification
- the worsening of pre-existing mental health issues or suffering mental illness for the first time due to anxieties regarding COVID 19.

Sister Christine Frost and Muna Ali from Neighbours in Poplar fed back their experiences and findings:

- The lack of internet access has made issues of isolation more acute and the reliance of the Council to communicate via digital methods has excluded many older and younger residents.
- The vast scale of mental health issues has been highlighted and exacerbated by the pandemic.
- The necessity to support our most vulnerable residents with access to hot meals.

The full session can be viewed at: https://towerhamlets.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcast_interactive/488475

OSC meeting (22 July 2020)

OSC considered the Council's Understanding the Impact of COVID-19 on Tower Hamlets report. This was a very comprehensive report and much of the evidence put forward has informed the findings of this report. The Chair invited the Committee to provide comments on the Committee's draft COVID-19 report and additional representations were made from committee members about:

- Communication within the community
- Uptake of testing and importance of test and trace
- Shielding provision
- Care Homes Support Plan
- Delivery of recovery plan for Children, Young People and Schools
- Free School Meals
- Support for social distancing in the built environment
- Budget recovery
- Grant support for Market Traders

COVID-19 Resident Impact Survey

The Council conducted a self-selecting Covid-19 impact survey earlier in the summer. This was hosted on the Council's consultation and engagement hub and promoted via social media, newsletter and through voluntary and community sector contacts. Because this was self-selecting, caution must be exercised when drawing

conclusions. It is indicative rather than representative and was used alongside other evidence to assess the impact. The impact report in turn informed the update of the Strategy Plan, which is in the Appendix

The COVID-19 resident impact survey found generally respondents were satisfied with the way the Council and partners are managing their response to the pandemic and further highlighted concerns inform the detailed recommendation below.

Scrutiny Sub-Committee meetings

In addition to the evidence considered at OSC, scrutiny Sub-Committees have also met to undertake further scrutiny. The following summarises the key points raised at their meetings and informs the recommendations made in this report.

Health and Adults Scrutiny Sub-Committee

Local Outbreak Control Plan:

- There is recognition that effective communication is essential to inform and reassure different groups and settings across the borough on how to prevent further outbreaks and reduce transmission of infection.
- Intelligence nationally and locally suggests that uptake of testing and self-isolation is lower amongst the south Asian communities.
- Shielding support from government will be reduced in the coming months.
- Co-morbidity (such as diabetes and high blood pressure) is considered a likely factor in leading to COVID-19 related deaths.

Impact of COVID-19 on Mental Health services:

- There is an increase in referrals amongst 18-39-year olds. Surveys conducted by University College London suggest young people are more likely to be affected by COVID-19 with anxiety and depression. The findings suggest job security, housing security and living quality are factors related to the increase.
- Young people are more likely to adapt to new virtual resources which can enable initial contact much faster. However, people's experiences vary when it comes to effective support and treatment in present COVID-19 conditions.
- There is an emerging concern of mental health issues amongst children, younger people and their families.

Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee

- The Council has provided suitable self-contained temporary accommodation for rough sleepers - over 200 individuals were placed into emergency accommodation which included more than 40 cases with no recourse to public funds.
- The Council is developing an Exit Plan, which would include developing a single offer for everyone taken in as part of the pandemic, recognising the difficulties that will be encountered for those with No Recourse to Public Funds and the cost implications to the Council.
- The Council is maximising income by ensuring that rough sleepers claim Housing Benefit.

Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee

- The Sub-Committee noted that COVID-19 had shone a light on inequalities, and that these could be exacerbated further and would lead to poorer outcomes for young people and their families, higher demands for support and increased financial pressures on the Council.

- The directorate has gross overspend of £5.5m (reported in July) – this forecast includes the impact of COVID-19 estimated at £4m: Children’s Social Care £0.7m, Education & Partnerships £0.3m, Youth Services & Commissioning £2.1m, Sports, Leisure and Culture £2.2m and Children’s Resources £0.1m.
- The Scrutiny Lead has focused on issues relating to Council led delivery of services for children and young people. It was noted that the response of our schools had been a real strength for the Borough.
- There had been a significant increase in the directorate’s expenditure which the Council had identified pre COVID-19. To this end a SEND recovery plan had been submitted to DfE in December 2019. Since then, there has been a further significant increase in the directorate’s expenditure, both actual and forecast, for several reasons including:
 - support for those families with no access to other funds.
 - increase in the level of support to special educational needs and disabilities including ongoing pressures in relation to the high needs funding block
- Attendance at school is mandatory again. Schools will also have to stagger break and lunchtimes, as well as start and finish times, to keep groups apart and reduce foot traffic in canteens, corridors, and doorways.

Key findings and Recommendations

Strategic and cross-cutting

Recommendation 1: COVID-19 Impacts Commission

The COVID-19 Pandemic Committee provides strategic coordination of the multi-agency response and oversees the implementation of the Pandemic Plan. It has strategic oversight of the system-wide risks/issues registers, reviews key policy developments, engages with the Borough Resilience Forum, and coordinates communication across partners.

However, in moving from a pandemic response mode to recovery, there is a need to establish recovery oversight and coordination.

OSC will ensure that scrutiny of the ongoing response to COVID-19 will be incorporated into the 2020/21 work programme as the Committee continue to hold the Council to account, reflect the voice and concerns of residents, and supports the organisation to make robust and informed decisions.

In order to allow for greater transparency and insight in the Council's response and recovery efforts, and to provide better oversight of the key strategic decisions which will be made, an identifiable group whose remit is to collate, validate, and disseminate information about COVID-19 impacts is needed. Robust information needs to be shared with members, including those with scrutiny responsibilities. In this way, confidence and trust can be maintained across the Council, including support for decision-making in the weeks and months ahead.

Recommendation 1: Establish a commission to collate and disseminate information (including specifically to Overview and Scrutiny and other members) on impacts of COVID-19 on residents and stakeholders, service users and services and develop an understanding on long term trends of COVID-19, including differing demand for office space and housing and health services.

Recommendation 2: Digital Inclusion

OSC's discussions with residents and community organisations highlighted digital inclusion to be a key issue facing the borough. The Council's Digital Exclusion Strategy 2015-2018 notes that around 86% of residents have access to the internet and there are a number of residents, especially some older residents, residents with disabilities and BME residents, as well as residents who live in social housing, who require significant support to be able to use online services.

COVID-19 resident impact survey told us that 6.9% of people surveyed were accessing and 10% needed to access but weren't currently getting information about what is on offer in their community. People also told us they were more digitally active, including 16.7% saying they were using the internet more confidently. Neighbours in Poplar informed OSC that for many of the people they support, the lack of internet access has made issues of loneliness and isolation more acute and the reliance of the Council to communicate via digital methods has excluded many older and younger residents from receiving key information.

The Committee was informed that the Council was releasing key information via weekly e-newsletters, updates on the website and through social media channels. Whilst the Council also engaged with residents through other methods such as leafletting, digital billboards and banners, the increased reliance on digital methods serves to highlight the need to increase digital literacy in the borough.

Similarly, Tower Hamlets Housing Forum noted the importance of replacing and reinventing community centres with online activities however there remains many

residents unable to access these services and therefore left feeling the gaps left by the absence of the physical activities they replaced.

Recommendation 2: Produce a new digital inclusion strategy that looks at how the Council could actively help those who are digitally excluded to get online, building on the 2015-18 strategy.

Recommendation 3: VCS support

VCS organisations have played an integral role in LBTH's response to COVID-19, with 74 VCS organisations known to be offering support to residents (as of 15th May). OSC heard from Neighbours in Poplar who identified and supported many vulnerable residents with the provision of a hot meal. OSC does not understand how their can be such a reliance on a small VCS organisation to ensure residents are provided with a hot meal and requests that the Council reviews its provision in this area, especially as we enter the winter months when a second wave of the Pandemic could emerge.

Furthermore, the Committee identified that during the pandemic many people who have not historically been involved in community activism have engaged, volunteered and helped to set up mutual aid groups. The Council needs to ensure it does all it can to support and sustain the interests and participation of this group as we move further into the recovery and many of these people will have to return to work and may not have as much time to offer.

VCS in Tower Hamlets fed back that future financial viability is main concern due to loss of income and future funding uncertainty. There are concerns that the economic recovery will not keep pace with support to the sector being phased out, leading to financial pressures and potential closure. One report estimates 1 in 10 UK charities faces bankruptcy by the end of the year. Some have concerns about ability to adapt/offer service in safe way (e.g. if can't offer remotely) and lack of suitable IT infrastructure to work differently.

ELBA highlighted similar concerns and noted that while many organisations have thrived and have been able to tap into emergency funding sources and response funds, many have struggled and will need help to get back on their feet. They will need the full range of skills – from legal, HR, ICT, digital, financial strategies. ELBA advised that we need to start looking at how we can build a better eco-structure for the community sector – from support and development for their leaders to improving digital and data capability.

It's clear to the Committee that the VCS will play a vital role in support residents in the boroughs recovery efforts and potential second wave and the Council needs to consider how they can better work with the voluntary sector to identify vulnerable residents and ensure that there is sustainable model of support in place.

Recommendation 3: That the Council and its partners directly support the Voluntary and Community Sector to transition in recovery, and work together to develop a sustainable model for the sector.

Recommendation 4: BAME Communities

OSC heard from Dr Jackie Applebee and Dr Naureen Bhatti who informed the Committee that having a large BAME population provides additional challenges for Tower Hamlets. COVID-19 impacts society unevenly and Public Health England's review of disparities in the risk and outcomes of COVID-19 found that that the likelihood of testing positive and dying with COVID-19 is higher for Black and Asian ethnic groups when compared to White ethnic groups. The report notes that people of Bangladeshi ethnicity had around twice the risk of death than people of White

British ethnicity. People of Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, Other Asian, Caribbean and Other Black ethnicity had between 10% and 50% higher risk of death when compared to White British. This was supported by analysis from Queen Mary University which showed that people of South Asian ethnicity had 1.9 times the risk of being infected with coronavirus and those from Black ethnic groups had 1.6 times compared to those of White Ethnicity. It also highlighted higher levels of infection linked to deprivation.

Additionally, the Council's *Understanding the Impact of COVID-19 on Tower Hamlets* report noted that in addition to higher risk of COVID-19 deaths, the existing risk factors associated with mental health are likely to be exacerbated as changes to mental health services and the economic downturn kick in.

Recommendation 4: That the borough's Test and Trace Programme utilise local networks; including GP practices, community and faith organisations to target these groups to increase uptake and understanding of the test and trace programme.

Recommendation 5: Council finances

The Council is facing extreme financial challenges partially due to the growth in demand for services, finding savings increasing difficult to make, as well as the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic which has had a profound impact on the budget and, consequently, on its financial planning expectations.

There has been a large cost of the pandemic response efforts. The significant impact on the Council's budget includes an estimated funding shortfall of £35.72m for April, May, and June 2020- equivalent to an additional £108 per resident. The funding shortfall is a combination of increased spending and loss of income - which has led to an estimated net additional spending of £55.12 million, with the government, so far, only committing to provide just £19.4 million from its COVID-19 support grant. While OSC recognises the need for expenditure on pandemic response, it continues to be concerned about the Council's financial discipline and budget management, and considers there is improvement to be made here – not the least of which includes greater scrutiny involvement in budget setting generally, and COVID-19 recovery specifically.

OSC discussions focused on issues relating to projected overspends and plans to mitigate this, the likelihood of further slippages, and the Council's reserves – and enquired as to what controls would be in place for holding budget holders accountable for overspending. To which it was noted that budgets were managed in line with the Council's constitution including the finance and procurement regulations. Members also heard that to mitigate the impacts of COVID-19 on budget overspend, officers had introduced additional controls, and intended to put in place further controls to ensure this, including applying restrictions over recruitment and strengthening the internal mechanisms in holding budget holders to account.

Overspending has been a problem particularly in the children's and adult's directorates over recent years. As a result of COVID-19, every bit of money spent now makes a huge difference. The Council's reserves are diminishing, and now given the COVID-19 spending and funding shortfalls, our reserves have reduced below £20 million which puts it in a bad financial position. Over the last two years, Children's and Adults' directorates have recorded significant overspends, leading to substantial withdrawals from our reserves to fill the gap.

Recommendation 5 :

- A. Audit all saleable assets with an assessment for sale against a long-term cost-benefit analysis
- B. Assess impact on services of proposed job losses, particularly post-furlough (in October)
- C. Produce a report on approach to commercialisation for 2020-21, and 2021-22; particularly in Parks and Culture. The Commercialisation Board to explain overall approach to OSC in 2021/22
- D. Scrutiny leads to review in depth their areas of savings and income as part of quarterly budget monitoring

Recommendation 6: The Local Economy

OSC was pleased to hear from ELBA that they had no notifications of business closures or insolvency. However, the key challenges for businesses are impending as most small businesses will not be able to keep running beyond 3 months if lockdown does not end reasonably quickly. While there has been relatively little feedback from firms in high distress, this may change in the months ahead as businesses reopen and begin to incur costs whilst their revenues are slower to recover. Lockdown arrangements have resulted in changes to business accommodation needs in the short-term.

Moving into recovery and with lockdown lifted, many business centres/sites have remained closed and may stay this way in the medium term. In a survey conducted in early May, 350 LBTH businesses responded and reported their top 3 issues to be paying rent (61%), staff wages (61%), reduced customer/footfall (74%). The Council needs to understand the impact this will have, and the support required to mitigate for this in both the short term and long term.

As part of the Committee's focus on the impact of COVID-19 on Tower Hamlets, OSC was informed that whilst pre-COVID-19 unemployment levels in LBTH had fallen, a significant proportion of workforce are in low paid, part time or insecure employment.

The economic situation has likely dampened work opportunities that may support people out of poverty. In-work poverty had increased, and this group made up a significant proportion of deprived households. This group are also likely to be experiencing financial hardship due to COVID-19, with knock-on effects for child poverty and 'first 1000 days' of a child's life.

The COVID-19 resident impact survey shows more than 50% of residents identified there has been a negative impact (extremely negative or fairly negatively) on their employment status and work, and respondents named support for residents who are unemployed or reduced in income (35%) as their top concern.

Tower Hamlets may have been hardest hit by economic downturn than most given the number of residents in sectors hit hardest such hospitality and retail, with 19% of LBTH residents working in the distribution, hotel and restaurant sector in 2016-19. Moreover, increased levels of deprivation are indicated through a high increase in food bank use and emergency food requests, welfare and debt advice. As of June 2020, 16% of the working age LBTH population had been furloughed.

Recommendation 6: That the Council works with partners to undertake scenario-planning to model the impact on the local economy and start to plan mitigation.

Recommendation 7: Support for Market Traders

The Committee noted the importance of local markets in supporting people into work and enabling residents to access affordable food and other goods. Given the nature of their work, Market Traders have been particularly hard hit and face difficulty sustain

their business throughout the pandemic. A survey conducted by the National Market Traders Federation reported that 65% of market & street traders have been forced to close.

At OSC meeting in July it was noted that as part of the Discretionary Grants Scheme funds have been made available to support local businesses, however the Committee were concerned that only 10% was allocated to Market Traders. This meant traders could only apply for grants of £720 for full time traders and £360 for part time Traders - £360.

Other authorities have provided much higher grants:

Authority	Grant
Southwark	£2500 to £5000
City of London	£700 for one day
Greenwich	£1,500
Islington	Up to £3000
Havering	Sum equivalent to six months' rent for pitch

OSC was informed that Tower Hamlets approach, while not offering as much money, has been designed to support traders as quickly as possible. Other boroughs have implemented a first come first served basis or require very comprehensive financial records, evidence of continued rental costs and/or spending proposals for grant funds. This means that many eligible applicants will miss out altogether or awards will take much longer to evaluate and process and may vary greatly from the advertised maximum.

The Committee have been subsequently been advised that following the first round of the Discretionary Grant those market traders that were eligible in the first round were given a second grant of £720 for full-time traders and £360 for part-time traders which brings it much closer to other authorities.

In acknowledging the on-going impact on market traders, the Committee recommends the Council provides development support to market traders to ensure they can continue in a COVID-19 secure way and ensure local residents can continue to benefit from the variety of benefits they bring. The Committee also recommends that if the government provides future grants then market traders are recognised and supported in the same way as other businesses.

Recommendation 7: Ensure market traders are provided with business development support to increase their resilience and if future grants become available better support market traders to ensure their COVID-19 costs are covered in the same way as was offered to other businesses.

Health and wellbeing

Recommendations: Food provision

Tower Hamlets came into the pandemic with high but improving levels of deprivation and employment. Since lockdown, there has been an increase in financial hardship from a reduction in income. One of the clearest signs of changing circumstances has been the surge in food bank use and demand for emergency food packages. First Love Foundation food bank saw a 700% increase in support between 16th March and 14th April 2020 compared to previous year. Additionally, 47% of residents needed help with benefits & 32% were in debt. Job loss from Covid-19 was an influencing factor.

OSC and Health Scrutiny Sub-committee have previously expressed concerns about the Mayor's decision to authorise the closure of the Meals on Wheels Service last year. The pandemic and subsequent lockdown has thrown fresh light on the vulnerability of many elderly and disabled residents, especially when they are unable to get to the shops easily or struggle to cook for themselves. This was highlighted to the Committee in the testimony provided by Neighbours in Poplar. We commend Neighbours in Poplar, St Hilda's and Darul Ummah for stepping into the breach by voluntarily providing hot meals to vulnerable residents. The Committee asks that in view of a second wave, the Council provides the VCS with support to ensure residents' needs are met and they are not relying solely on the work and resources of the VCS.

Recommendation 8: Support voluntary and community organisations to ensure vulnerable and isolated residents have adequate access to food, particularly for:

- A. Families – where children and young people are vulnerable to food poverty;
- B. Older people – where poor health or mobility may hamper their ability to access food; and
- C. Reinstatement of a food delivery service for the most vulnerable in our community.

Recommendation 9: The Council should part fund and work with other funding providers to ensure this need continues to be met by our VCS.

Recommendation 10: Further analysis should take place on the causes of need to understand how much was pre-existing and exacerbated by the pandemic, versus how much is new need relating to job losses or social distancing impacting on informal caring networks

Recommendation 11: Shielding vulnerable residents

A significant number of adult social care users are shielding (1285 as of 9th June), with consequent risks to mental and physical health from stricter social distancing restrictions. OSC was encouraged by the provision in place to support these residents but note that the Council needs to ensure this is sustained as shielding support from government is reduced. OSC was informed that the Council set up a dedicated COVID-19 helpline which focussed on supporting residents that are shielding. Furthermore, a food hub was established at the Professional Development Centre which delivered boxes of food directly to residents who are self-isolating or shielding and awaiting their first government delivery.

The Council engaged 24 VCS food providers including four schools and offer capacity support with funding and access to supplies, so they could meet demand and increase their capacity and offer. From July, residents who were self-isolating and could afford to purchase their own food were referred to the Council webpage which has information on local groceries that offer deliveries or a click and collect service. Volunteers were available to pick up shopping for self-isolating residents' 'click and collect' orders and drop it off to their homes. Residents who could not

afford to purchase their own food were referred to local foodbanks to arrange food parcels.

Recommendation 11: Maintain and resource local pathways beyond September with Primary Care Networks for shielding in anticipation of subsequent waves.

Recommendation 12: Local test and trace

Dr Jackie Applebee and Dr Naureen Bhatti emphasised the importance of a robust, locally organised, community test, trace and isolate programme to drive the infection and hence death rate down. Countries that have done this from the beginning have done well and New Zealand has managed to all but eliminate the virus. Dr Applebee and Dr Bhatti there are good examples of local systems in the UK which have worked to keep levels of infection down. Independent SAGE is clear that locally based community contact trace programmes are what is needed. OSC is pleased to see that these arrangements are being carefully considered and implemented in the borough. As part of the Local Outbreak Plan, the Health Scrutiny Committee was informed that the Council is working closely with communities to implement a test and trace system which works for everyone in Tower Hamlets, especially those groups that we know are at higher risk of infection and serious complications from infection.

As an example of how this works, over the ten days before the 24th of June there were 13 people with positive tests. Following contact with these individuals, 95 contacts were identified and 93 were contacted. Each of those will have been contacted and been provided advice on whether they need to self-isolate

Recommendation 12: Report on the effectiveness/performance/reach of local test, trace, isolate programme as part of the ongoing response to the pandemic – with results reviewed before the winter flu season to reduce the severity of a second wave.

Recommendation 13: Rough sleepers

Tower Hamlets has a higher prevalence of rough sleepers with high support needs. Emergency government and local interventions have had a positive impact, significantly reducing rough sleeping levels in a very short time period and preventing homelessness. The 'Everyone In' scheme, set up to ensure rough sleepers housed in hotels or emergency accommodation and including NRPF, enabled rough sleepers to get health and substance misuse support. The Council has provided suitable self-contained temporary accommodation for rough sleepers - over 200 individuals were placed into emergency accommodation which included more than 40 cases with no recourse to public funds. The Council commissioned 24/7 on-site support and floating support at the commercial hotels as most rough sleepers brought in directly off the streets had complex needs – substance misuse, severe mental health and physical ill health, and, without the required support it would not have been possible to sustain those placements in commercial accommodation.

The Committee were informed that the key challenge now is to sustain the positive impact on rough sleepers, mainly due to resource implications of providing ongoing support. Exit plans may take 12-18 months to come to fruition, and new rough sleepers will be found on streets. Additionally, rough sleepers moving on from current hotel provision with higher needs will need hostels/supported accommodation. These are in short supply & have cost implications. The Council is developing an Exit Plan, which would include developing a single offer for everyone taken in as part of the pandemic, recognising the difficulties that will be encountered

for those with No Recourse to Public Funds and the cost implications to the Council. The Council is maximising income by ensuring that rough sleepers claim Housing Benefit.

Recommendation 13:

A. Develop a sustainable approach that delivers the same results keeping rough sleepers off the street. Requesting and lobbying government for funding, including through London Councils.

B. Review the quality of its short-term accommodation, especially in instances where families with children have been placed in accommodation with shared facilities and amenities

C. The Council and its partners should map the increase in referrals and where they came from as well as the paths individuals subsequently took

D. Develop a sustainable approach to support those with No Recourse for Public Funds and lobby government to ensure this group is not left at risk.

Recommendation 14: Domestic Violence Support

The consensus nationally is that the imposed lockdown increased domestic violence abuse as some victims went into lockdown with their abusers. A Women's Aid survey found 67% of survivors currently experiencing abuse said it had got worse since COVID-19, and 78% said COVID-19 had made it harder to leave their abuser. Evidence in Tower Hamlets shows a more nuanced picture, as reports initially indicated that there was a 5% decreased in domestic abuse reported in March and April compared to 2019. A spike in MASH referrals with a domestic abuse component also supports the concerns. It appears that staff interacting with residents is an important mechanism for abuse being detected or disclosed.

Recommendation 14: Proactively communicate using a range of channels and community languages the support available for victims of domestic violence and ensure resource is planned to meet potential increase in demand.

Recommendation 15: Care Homes

The impact of COVID-19 on staff and residents in care homes through the epidemic has been substantial. Tower Hamlets has 5 residential & nursing homes -a comparatively small number. As of May, one is rated CQC outstanding, two good, and 2 requires improvement.

The Health Scrutiny Committee was informed of the borough's ambition to ensure all care homes in Tower Hamlets are places with excellent infection control and any risks of outbreaks are identified quickly and contained, as part of the *Tower Hamlets Local Outbreak Plan for COVID-19*. Dr Applebee and Dr Bhatti informed OSC that mortality in care homes has been significant, with some care homes in Tower Hamlets having 37 COVID related deaths (as of 27 May).

The lack of community testing and PPE for care home staff and for key workers in general is likely to have led to unnecessary transmission of the virus. OSC were pleased to hear that this has improved as the pandemic has progressed and support the ambitions put forward in the Local Outbreak Plan. We need to ensure a sustained focus and improvement in this area is delivered.

Recommendation 15: That the Health Scrutiny Committee undertake a review of learning of the response to the pandemic by engaging care homes, residents' families and other stakeholders to identify long term recommendations for improvement.

Children and young people

Recommendation 16: Recovery for children

Schools and early years provision closed on 20 March 2020 for all but key worker and vulnerable children, and there has been an expectation of home learning for all children since then. Attendance during lockdown remained low (an average of 200 pupils in school, 589 in childcare), especially amongst vulnerable children – but increased week on week. From the Council’s COVID-19 resident impact survey we know that schools reopening was one of respondents’ top four concerns (24%).

OSC echoes the concerns presented in the *Understanding the Impact of COVID-19 on Tower Hamlets report* that the quality and consistency of supported home learning does not match the classroom and that home learning will be harder for some than others (e.g. harder if no internet access or if in an overcrowded household). For a borough with comparatively high attainment levels and high child poverty levels, the longer-term consequence is that the disruption to education could undermine the gains made in educational achievement to date and widen inequalities.

Building on the issues identified in the Council’s Impact report, ELBA highlighted this a prevailing and long-lasting consequence of the epidemic. We will need to help make up for lost time for school and college students. ELBA have heard from schools that disadvantaged pupils are really the ones who are being most impacted – with very low completion rates of the remote work being set.

We will need to help schools and colleges rekindle motivation and confidence for all pupils, particularly those who may have fallen behind. Help will be needed for students from disadvantaged backgrounds who are leaving education this summer and in summer 2021 – school, college or university - to enter the jobs market, which will be fiercely competitive. All the factors which placed them at a disadvantage in getting good jobs and careers before, will be amplified post-COVID.

Recommendation 16: The recovery programme for children in Tower Hamlets should include the input of specialist teachers. Emphasise not just on ‘catch up’ but on the social-emotional needs of young people, especially vulnerable children and those with SEND to ensure a successful transition back to school. Schools should be engaged to identify curriculum and attainment gaps and what additional tuition and after school clubs could be conducted to address this.

Recommendation 17: Free School Meals

Pre-COVID-19, all primary school children received free school meals. The National Voucher Scheme that has largely replaced free school meals is only going to eligible families.

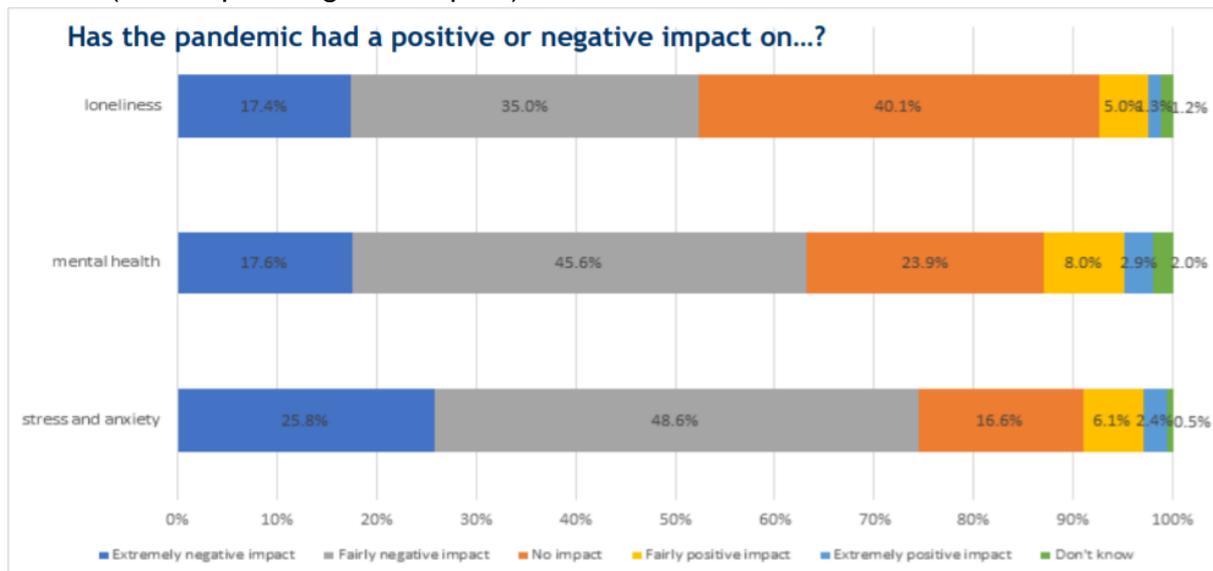
Recommendation 17: That Children’s and Education Sub-committee review the rollout of the National Voucher Scheme in LBTH as an effective replacement for the Council’s Universal Free School Meals programme.

Recommendation 18: Mental health support

The detrimental impact of the lockdown of residents’ mental health is a primary concern for OSC given the prevalence of mental health issues was already high as we entered the pandemic. The ‘pent up’ demand for mental health during lockdown plus new demand has led to London-wide modelling suggesting a 20-30% surge in mental health demand as lockdown eases.

The COVID-19 Resident Impact Survey carried out by Healthwatch Tower Hamlets confirms the variable but overall negative impact of COVID on loneliness (52% report

negative impact), stress & anxiety (74% report negative impact), and mental health overall (63% report negative impact).



The Health Scrutiny Committee was informed that young people are more likely to be affected by COVID-19 with anxiety and depression, with factors such as security, housing security and living quality related to the increase.

Number of calls made to the Tower Hamlets Mental Health Crisis line since lockdown: 743 in March, 882 in April, 811 in May Across the areas covered by ELFT, mental health bed occupancy reduced by 60% during lockdown due to reductions in admissions.

Support from the VCS sector can also support tackling isolation and its associated mental health effects. For instance, the food delivery programme delivered by Neighbours in Poplar has reported some of these benefits.

It is vital that Mental Health services do not become overwhelmed and residents get the

Recommendation 18:

Young people are more likely to be affected by COVID-19 with anxiety and depression, with factors such as security, housing security and living quality related to the increase.

A. Ensure effective signposting to services such as housing and benefits as quickly as possible.

B. Establish a mental health partnership put in place to co-ordinate remedial plans across relevant sectors like education and housing

Conclusion

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee, through this review, recognises the substantial work undertaken to support residents and stakeholders of Tower Hamlets throughout this pandemic. The objective of this review was to ensure through the lens of scrutiny we can capture learning and ensure we can plan for future waves and the through joint working with partners can support the social and economic recovery of the borough.

This report will be sent to Cabinet for the Executive response to our recommendations and we will need to work collaboratively with the Cabinet and partners to ensure actions identified are actioned.

Appendix 2: Review of London Borough of Tower Hamlets' Response to COVID-19 Action Plan

Recommendation	Action	Responsibility	Completion Date
<p>Recommendation 1: COVID-19 Impacts Commission</p> <p>Establish a commission to collate and disseminate information (including specifically to Overview and Scrutiny and other members) on impacts of COVID-19 on residents and stakeholders, service users and services and develop an understanding on long term trends of COVID-19, including differing demand for office space and housing and health services.</p>	<p>Work to understand and address the wider impacts of the pandemic has been a core focus of the last year and continues into 2021. The work is being carried out by a range of committees and forums. This includes the Health Scrutiny Sub-Committee, Tower Hamlets Together partnership and the Health and Wellbeing Board working to understand and address the wider impacts on health, the Growth and Economic Development partnership working on economic impacts and the Children and Families Partnership Board working on the impact on children and young people.</p> <p>Last year, this work was brought together in a detailed analysis on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic which was presented to Overview & Scrutiny and to Cabinet in July 2020. The 'Dealing with the Impact' workstream as part of our approach to recovery continues to bring this work together on an ongoing basis.</p> <p>We do not consider that adding a Covid-19 Impacts Commission would be of value at the present time due to this and the level of resource being put into managing the ongoing pandemic. However, we will review this position in July 2021 as we agree that it would be useful to carry out further detailed work on the impact of the pandemic.</p>	Mayor/ Denise Radley	July 2021
<p>Recommendation 2: Digital Inclusion</p> <p>Produce a new digital inclusion strategy that looks at how the</p>	<p>The Tower Hamlets Annual Residents Survey shows that a growing number of residents have internet access. This has increased from 9% of residents in 1998 to 88% of residents in 2013 and then 92% of residents in 2019.</p>	Cllr Bustin/ Sharon Godman	May 2021

<p>Council could actively help those who are digitally excluded to get online, building on the 2015-18 strategy.</p>	<p>However, some groups are less likely to have internet access, including: 57% of residents aged 60+ having access to internet compared to 99% of residents aged 18-34 years old; 69% of disabled residents have access to internet compared to 95% of non-disabled residents; and lower income households have low levels of access to internet with 77% of residents from social grade DE having access compared to 92% of residents from all other grades.</p> <p>The Council has been working to improve access to internet and digital resources for residents:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • programmes to improve online access including an online beginning computer course to develop basic IT skills and explore the internet being offered at Ideas Stores • LETTA Trust Schools, Poplar Harca, the East End Community Foundation and Community Fibre to provide devices good quality internet connect and training for parents. Poplar HARCA, the LETTA Trust, the London Borough of Tower Hamlets, the East End Community Foundation, Morgan Stanley and the Lehman Foundation are providing £100,000 funding to support 200 families initially, with Community Fibre providing broadband connections worth over £24,000. • During the Covid19 Pandemic, the council are managing the order and allocation of up to 2,500 laptops and broadband to vulnerable and disadvantaged children • The council was awarded £20,000 by the LGA in October 2019 as part of its Digital Inclusions programme to help reach out to residents who lack the skills, infrastructure and confidence to go online. As part of this the council is using the Digital Logbook (DLB) as a medium to support and encourage residents receiving support through WorkPath and from the Benefits Outreach Advisors to get online to 		
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	<p>do their business with the council and other public services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The council also funds several VCS organisations to address digital exclusion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Limehouse Project - DigiTIES Project – aims to prevent digital exclusion (and social isolation) in older adults ○ Newham Newdeal Partnership - aims to build the confidence of older residents (over 50s) to go online using tablet devices ○ Wapping Bangladesh Association – Digital First aims to engage socially isolated BME older adults aged 55+ who are not computer literate and are digitally excluded ○ Society Links – E-Safety Champions will train local women to become 'champions' for e-safety in the community; champions will go into schools and community groups to spread their knowledge to young people and parents/carers ○ Sport Foundation – build the digital resilience of children and young people and raise the awareness of online safety with parents <p>For 2020-21, the council will be consolidating the actions taken to date under a more coordinated approach in anticipation of greater partnership-working across the borough. The Digital Portfolio Board would be happy to brief OSC in 2021 on progress of Digital Inclusion.</p>		
<p>Recommendation 3: VCS support That the Council and its partners directly support the Voluntary and Community Sector to transition in recovery, and work together to develop a sustainable model for the sector.</p>	<p>VCS support is a central tenet of the new VCS strategy, brought to Cabinet in November 2020. The Council’s commitment, as set out in the strategy, is to work together with VCS partners, not only as part of the COVID-19 response, but towards recovery and beyond that in the post-covid environment.</p> <p>The Strategy sets out an approach whereby we continue to work with VCS organisations that we fund through grants and commissioning, to enable</p>	<p>Cllr Ronald/ Sharon Godman</p>	<p>Ongoing - April 2021 update</p>

	<p>them to adapt their work to deliver outcomes in a way which is appropriate to the covid response. We have also agreed a Covid Community Fund to help VCS organisations that are an important part of the covid response to adapt their organisation and activities.</p> <p>The Council's website is updated on a weekly basis to reflect grant and training to support VCS organisations – https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/lgnl/community_and_living/community_grants/Funding_for_voluntary_and_community_organisations.aspx</p>		
<p>Recommendation 4: BAME Communities That the borough's Test and Trace Programme utilise local networks; including GP practices, community and faith organisations to target these groups to increase uptake and understanding of the test and trace programme.</p>	<p>In addition to the previous actions listed which have all continued, since the last update the GP care group has staff recruited who can speak other languages i.e. Bengali. Moreover, promotional material in other languages i.e. Bengali and Somali is being provided to residents.</p> <p>Work to engage the BAME communities will continue throughout the pandemic. The latest work in this area has shifted more towards engaging the BAME communities in Tower Hamlets around the Covid 19 vaccinations. This includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our Covid19 Ambassadors are on the streets talking one-to-one with residents (including in community languages) • We have 365 COVID-19 Community Champions who form a network of residents receiving regular updates to share with friends, family and others; through weekly webinars with them, we can provide accurate information whilst getting a good sense of the issues and concerns of our residents, helping us to tailor our response. • We are listening to the concerns and questions from residents exposed to misinformation and are proactively putting information out there to set the 	<p>Cllr Blake/ Denise Radley</p>	<p>Complete</p>

	<p>record straight and encourage uptake. For example, we worked with NHS colleagues on a video featuring GPs and medical experts addressing key concerns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our fortnightly Bengali e-newsletter provides updates on vaccine programme, safety efficacy and why it is important for everyone to take up vaccination • We work closely with faith groups and community leaders on delivering key messages In vaccine safety to the communities they serve. • Promoted film with partner East London Mosque specifically tailored for faith communities about the vaccine and why it is individual duty to get vaccinated to protect oneself and the communities • Shared video from Somali partner organisation, Women’s Inclusive Team about vaccine specifically to reach our Somali community • Highlight the vaccine stories of local heroes. Along with traditional council channels, all these video have been shared through community and engagement routes like: Community Whatsapp groups; our Covid champions network and partner networks including InterFaith Forum, QMUL, local NHS (all partners in Covid communications pandemic group which meets weekly to share insight / work on covid and vaccines and together to increase reach of messages and work) • We are developing leaflets on vaccines, in English and community languages to be handed out by our Covid ambassadors on the ground and also shared through food banks, testing sites, partner organisations and idea stores etc. • To help counter vaccine hesitancy among black residents, we’ve filmed with a black doctor and followed the journey of vaccination for a black patient to specifically reach out to this group and encourage confidence in vaccine and uptake. The film will be published on council channels from next week •Planning vaccine messages in our outdoor advertising spaces at next 		
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	<p>availability; Spaces currently have stay at home message which is critical and continues to be important. We are sourcing case studies of residents from different ethnic communities who have been vaccinated and can share their experience and why they got vaccinated – adding human element encourage uptake</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Looking to commission focus groups with top ethnic groups in the borough to generate greater local insight into what messages, visuals and campaigns resonate with them, to build wider local insight • Our public health team plan to hold vaccine Q&A session for residents to answer questions from residents or discuss issues/concerns. There will be sessions held in community languages to ensure inclusive for all our residents in the borough 		
<p>Recommendation 5: Council finances</p> <p>A. Audit all saleable assets with an assessment for sale against a long-term cost-benefit analysis</p> <p>B. Assess impact on services of proposed job losses, particularly post-furlough (in Oct</p> <p>C. Produce a report on approach to commercialisation for 2020-21, and 2021-22; particularly in Parks and Culture. The Commercialisation Board to explain overall approach to OSC in 2021/22</p>	<p>A. A review of assets to identify assets for sale to identify assets for sale to maximise capital receipts has been completed.</p> <p>B. Review the impact of pandemic on council services through the Council’s recovery and reconstitution workstream.</p> <p>C. The Commercialisation Board, chaired by the Corporate Director Governance, was established in December 2019. Alongside the chair, the remaining Board members are the Corporate Director Resources, Corporate Director Place and the Head of Mayors Office, with support provided by the Portfolio Management Office and Strategy, Policy and Performance. A Commercialisation Delivery Group (CDG) has been established to drive forward the development of robust business cases for identified opportunities and drive the delivery of commercial projects. The CDG,</p>	<p>Cllr Bustin/Kevin Bartle</p> <p>Mayor/ Denise Radley</p> <p>Cllr Ronald/ Kevin Bartle</p>	<p>April 2021</p> <p>July 21</p> <p>Ongoing</p>

<p>D. Scrutiny leads to review in depth their areas of savings and income as part of quarterly budget monitoring</p>	<p>consisting of Divisional Directors and Heads of Services across all Directorates, will also focus on building a greater 'Commercial Culture' in the Council. The group has engaged with the East London Business Alliance (ELBA) to source reputable businesses who can transfer commercial principles, ensuring commercial mindsets and skillsets are fostered to support the effective delivery of commercial services. The Council has a target to generate £500k in 2021-22 and £2m in 2022-23 from pursuing greater commercialisation.</p> <p>The CDG's Directorate Representatives are currently tasked with undertaking a prioritisation exercise with their DLTs to further establish a list of commercialisation activities to progress. Business cases will be developed for those activities that score highly for both ease of delivery and amount of income produced. Finalised business cases will be presented to the Commercialisation Board who will provide final approval before these projects are implemented.</p> <p>The Executive supports greater scrutiny of budgets within portfolios.</p>	<p>Overview and Scrutiny Committee</p>	<p>2021/22</p>
<p>Recommendation 6: The Local Economy That the Council works with partners to undertake scenario-planning to model the impact on the local economy and start to plan mitigation.</p>	<p>Review the impact of the pandemic on the local economy and put in place steps for economic recovery</p>	<p>Cllr Uz-Zaman/Vicky Clark</p>	<p>April 2021</p>
<p>Recommendation 7: Ensure market traders are provided with business development support to increase their resilience and if</p>	<p>Work with market traders to re-open as/when government restrictions are eased and continue to provide business development support in addition to financial support, where government grants provision is available.</p>	<p>Cllr Uz-Zaman/Vicky Clark</p>	<p>April 2021</p>

<p>future grants become available better support market traders to ensure their COVID-19 costs are covered in the same way as was offered to other businesses.</p>			
<p>Recommendation 8 Support voluntary and community organisations to ensure vulnerable and isolated residents have adequate access to food, particularly for: Families - where children and young people are vulnerable to food poverty; Older people - where poor health or mobility may hamper their ability to access food; and Reinstate a food delivery service for the most vulnerable in our community.</p>	<p>Set up a hub which takes in food from redistribution charities and corporate donations and distributes this food weekly to up to 25 organisations Set up a crowdfunding campaign to increase food supply Redirected a large corporate food donation to foodbanks across the first lockdown Supported two foodbanks in their fundraising efforts via Spacehive Supported organisations through the Children's Society Co-ordinated Crisis grant Facilitated a charitable donation of £10,000 to Age UK Offered to assist organisations in writing funding bids to increase their own supplies Worked with VCTH to ensure we have volunteers on standby who can assist residents who need help collecting food Delivered a Summer food and activity scheme by commissioning clubs run by the VCS Set up the borough's first food pantry which will be managed by a mutual aid group</p>	<p>Cllr Ronald/ Cllr Bustin/ Sharon Godman/ Vicky Clarke</p>	<p>Ongoing - April 2021 update</p>
<p>Recommendation 9 The Council should part fund and work with other funding providers to ensure this need continues to be met by our VCS.</p>	<p>The approach within the developing VCS Strategy is to see organisations such as the Council as anchor institutions, that will help position the sector on a more sustainable and financially independent footing. This involves promoting funding opportunities to the sector and, particularly through our funding of Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Service, supporting organisations to be able to make high quality bids for funding. We are exploring ways of diversifying the funding of the sector including joint work on partnership bids, supporting crowdfunding appeals for the sector and</p>	<p>Cllr Ronald/ Sharon Godman</p>	<p>Ongoing - update in April 2021</p>

	<p>proactively working with funders and commissioners, as well as capacity building VCS to maximise the funding that the VCS secure, through being the provider of choice.</p> <p>Work with London Funders and local funding organisations for the voluntary and community sector to develop a Funders Forum to co-ordinate and establish funding priorities for the borough.</p> <p>Draft a joint funding protocol to support local VCS-statutory sector applications – with private sector support where possible - for external funding by establishing an agreed basis and structures for such partnership bids.</p>		<p>March 2021</p> <p>March 2021</p>
<p>Recommendation 10 Further analysis should take place on the causes of need to understand how much was pre-existing and exacerbated by the pandemic, versus how much is new need relating to job losses or social distancing impacting on informal caring networks</p>	<p>A poverty review has begun. This will review data – including on the impact of the pandemic - and engage with stakeholders and residents in order to develop strategic recommendations to inform future short term and longer-term poverty reduction interventions, with a particular focus on child poverty and poverty affecting older residents. . . As noted in the report, the impact of poverty caused by the pandemic has been profound, particularly highlighting low levels of financial resilience on the part of our lowest income residents, some of whom were on the cusp of requiring support from food banks etc pre pandemic . Consequently, a great deal of activity will be directed towards addressing those impacts whether they relate to pre-existing or new need.</p> <p>The council’s existing activity includes the delivery of a suite of projects to provide financial assistance and maximise income including the resident grant scheme and the provision of the discretionary housing payments to pre-empt the threat of homelessness. We will also continue to deliver the broader tackling poverty programme and initiatives on employment support to address the root causes of poverty.</p>	<p>Cllr Bustin/ Sharon Godman Cllr Uz-Zaman/ Vicky Clarke</p>	<p>April 2021</p>

<p>Recommendation 11: Shielding vulnerable residents Maintain and resource local pathways beyond September with Primary Care Networks for shielding in anticipation of subsequent waves.</p>	<p>Shielding for clinically extremely vulnerable residents has been re-introduced in Tower Hamlets since 20th of December 2020 when London went into Tier 4. It is expected that the shielding end date will be extended to 31st of March.</p> <p>Government has sent formal letters to people in shielding list. New letters will be sent to those newly added on the list. The letter makes the person eligible for statutory sick pay.</p> <p>Advise of residents in this category is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do not meet with anyone you do not live with unless they are part of your support bubble. Try to stay 2 metres away from other people within your household. • Stay at home as much as possible and not to travel unless essential. • Do not attend work if you cannot work from home. You may be eligible for Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) or Employment Support Allowance (ESA), and the formal shielding letter you receive will act as evidence. • Do not go to the shops. Use online shopping if you can, or ask others to collect and deliver shopping for you (friends and family, or NHS Volunteer Responders). • Continue to go outside for exercise, but to avoid busy areas to minimise the chance of coming into close contact with others. • Do not go to a pharmacy. If friends and family are not able to collect your medicines for you, and you and/or the pharmacy are unable to arrange a volunteer, then you will be eligible for free medicines delivery. • Continue to seek support from the NHS for your existing health conditions. You can access a range of NHS services from home (Health at Home). • Children who are still considered clinically extremely vulnerable after 	<p>Cllr Blake/ Denise Radley</p>	<p>ongoing</p>
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	<p>a discussion with their doctor should not attend school.</p> <p>LBTH response Communication: The council webpage has been updated. The content has been shared with other stakeholders Primary care is supporting proactive contacts to CEV individuals who are either new on the list or have been identified previously as most in need of extra support. All residents in this category have been sent texts, emails and letters informing them of the local support offer</p> <p>Contact centre (3030): The contact centre has been mobilised. Cross referrals set up between primary care and the contact centre. Scripts, guidance and onward referral pathways developed</p> <p>Food delivery: Focus is on supporting people to access supermarket delivery slots, and the council also supports the volunteer click and collect service where people are unable to obtain a delivery slot if the need is urgent. Since 20th of December, 36 people have been either supported directly or indirectly supported with food delivery. Another 18 residents have been offered basic support.</p> <p>Medications delivery: Local pharmacies are offering home delivery of medications if required. Residents can also seek NHS volunteers help.</p>		
<p>Recommendation 12: Local test and trace Report on the effectiveness/performance/reach of local test, trace, isolate programme as part of the</p>	<p>On top of NHS test and trace, locally the GP care group has been commissioned to contact those who the national NHS test and trace team has been unable to reach. This includes those who tested positive and their households. Locally, the team is now reaching 77% of cases by phone.</p> <p>The local service includes, phoning, emailing, door knocking and signposting</p>	<p>Cllr Blake/ Denise Radley</p>	<p>Complete</p>

<p>ongoing response to the pandemic - with results reviewed before the winter flu season to reduce the severity of a second wave.</p>	<p>to local support services. Since the start of local contact tracing programme in early November 2020, 1731 people have been engaged through phone calls, emails texts and door knocking. An interim report was presented to the Health Scrutiny Committee). (A copy can be provided if required). In addition, the data pack has been developed. (The latest summary slide of this data pack can be provided if required)</p> <p>The work around test and trace locally continues, and will do so through the pandemic. As such, this is an ongoing action."</p>		
<p>Recommendation 13: Rough sleepers A. Develop a sustainable approach that delivers the same results keeping rough sleepers off the street. Requesting and lobbying government for funding, including through London Councils. B. Review the quality of its short-term accommodation, especially in instances where families with children have been placed in accommodation with shared facilities and amenities C. The Council and its partners should map the increase in referrals and where they came from as well as the paths individuals subsequently took</p>	<p>A. Lobby government for adequate funding and to reduce rough sleeping and prevent homelessness B. Develop a Temporary Accommodation Reduction Plan to secure improvements in the cost and quality of temporary accommodation C. Work with partners to improve referral pathways for those at risk of rough sleeping and implement initiatives for early intervention and rehousing D. Put support in place for those brought in under COVID-19 who potentially have no recourse to public funds</p>	<p>Cllr Hassell/Vicky Clark</p>	<p>April 2022 April 2022 April 2022 June 2021</p>

D. Develop a sustainable approach to support those with No Recourse for Public Funds and lobby government to ensure this group is not left at risk.			
<p>Recommendation 14: Domestic Violence Support</p> <p>Proactively communicate using a range of channels and community languages the support available for victims of domestic violence and ensure resource is planned to meet potential increase in demand.</p>	<p>Work to communicate the support available for victims of domestic violence continues as business as usual. This includes a review of our webpages and service directory to make sure they are up to date and accessible to different audiences, training and awareness events to train professionals to support victims effectively, adapting our support services to ensure they are still able to remain open to support people. More recently, we have undertaken Comms around roles of neighbours and pharmacies via the Ask Ani Campaign.</p> <p>To cater for any surge in demand we have commissioned an enhanced Domestic Violence Casework Service. This will ensure an additional 3 caseworkers to support victims. This service has now gone live (as of 4/1/21). We have seen an increase in DA referrals to this service which is being monitored.</p> <p>Additionally, VAWG Steering Group partners and communities are regularly contacted to review and support any needs in relation to DV. Monitoring of DV figures take place to enable forward planning. Currently, no surge has been seen amongst MPS, CSC and ASC, however a DV spotlight at the O&S is taking place for March which will explore this further.</p>	Cllr Islam / Denise Radley	ongoing
<p>Recommendation 15: Care Homes</p> <p>That the Health Scrutiny Committee undertake a review of learning of the response to the</p>	<p>The health scrutiny review has now been completed. The report outlined key responses to the Covid-19 pandemic in care homes to date (these are detailed in length in the report). In addition, the scrutiny report also detailed a thematic review carried out looking at the covid response in care homes and made the following conclusions:</p>	Cllr Blake/ Denise Radley Cllr Salva- Macallan (Health and	Complete

<p>pandemic by engaging care homes, residents' families and other stakeholders to identify long term recommendations for improvement.</p>	<p>Lessons learned</p> <p>Following the early deaths from Covid-19, LBTH initiated and completed a learning review. The review covered the period 13th March – 30th June 2020 and involved qualitative interviews with a total of 25 people, which included staff working in partner health and care organisations, care home providers and care home residents and family members.</p> <p>The review identified the following areas of good practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Council led a proactive response, frequently going beyond national guidance and anticipating future guidance bulletins - Positive partnership working at both the strategic and operational levels - A strong commitment to multi-disciplinary and multi-agency learning; the lead GPs and Infection Control Nurse in particular were highlighted as key resources by the care home providers - Embracing of digital and online technology as a new way of working <p>The review also made the following recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To build on good partnership working to develop a multi-agency and multidisciplinary Covid-19 or pandemic pathway with detailed and clearly defined roles for different agencies to address any future wave of the virus or new pandemic as part of the Tower Hamlets Outbreak Control Plan - To develop a formal communication strategy to promote the pathway to a range of agencies and to families and carers, identifying a clear role for the voluntary sector in engaging with and hearing the voices of service users and their families who are necessarily powerfully impacted by the situation <p>Next steps</p> <p>The key priority over the coming month will be the implementation of</p>	<p>Adults Scrutiny Sub-Committee)</p>	
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	<p>vaccinations; the focus being on increasing uptake amongst staff and agreeing timelines and logistics for the administration of second doses.</p> <p>- In addition to this, the support outlined above will all be maintained, with outbreak prevention and management continuing to be the primary goal.</p> <p>This is an ongoing piece of work throughout the pandemic, and as such will continue beyond April 2021</p>		
<p>Recommendation 16: Recovery for children</p> <p>The recovery programme for children in Tower Hamlets should include the input of specialist teachers. Emphasise not just on 'catch up' but on the social-emotional needs of young people, especially vulnerable children and those with SEND to ensure a successful transition back to school. Schools should be engaged to identify curriculum and attainment gaps are and what additional tuition and after school clubs could be conducted to address this.</p>	<p>Schools have already been deploying "recovery curriculums" to address any deficits resulting from the long period of school closure. Schools have also been ensuring a focus on the non-educational issues that may have emerged during lockdown including mental health, bereavement and economic difficulties.</p> <p><i>Schools continue to provide high levels of support to all of the children who attend. During the autumn term when schools were open, in person education continued to be heavily disrupted due to high numbers of cases leading to isolation. Since the start of 2021, schools have largely reverted to remote learning due to them being closed to all by the most vulnerable and children of key workers. All schools, with the support of the Tower Hamlets Education Partnership (THEP) have become increasingly skilled in the way that home education has been provided however it will never replicate what can be taught in school. Schools are very clear that the long-term implications of the large amount of missed time in school will not only be academic but also social and emotional. One of the key issues remains access to electronic devices, which continues to impact on many families who do not have access. The council, THEP and schools have distributed a large number however it is still estimated that there is a deficit of around 10000 devices. Kevan Collins has been appointed as the Education Recovery Commissioner at the national level and THEP will ensure the effective local delivery of any recommendations and resources to support the catch-up</i></p>	<p>Cllr Begum/ James Thomas</p>	<p>April 2021</p>

	<i>effort.</i>		
<p>Recommendation 17: Free School Meals</p> <p>That Children's and Education Sub-committee review the rollout of the National Voucher Scheme in TH as an effective replacement for the Council's Universal Free School Meals programme.</p>	<p>Agreed - scrutiny should review the national programme's implementation in TH -The national voucher scheme came to an end in September 2020. Despite some significant initial difficulties with the system, this scheme worked well to ensure that children who were entitled to free school meals received vouchers to enable their families to purchase additional food. Some schools decided not to use the voucher scheme choosing either to provide food directly to their most vulnerable families.</p> <p><i>The Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee looked at the issue of access to food for vulnerable children and families during their October meeting. The national programme had significant issues, but many schools were able to overcome these to make use of scheme. Since the summer, more local solutions have been put in place to support families. Schools are best placed to know which of their families are most at risk and have worked closely with other professionals within the council and voluntary sector to support families who do not have access.</i></p>	<p>Cllr White (Children & Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee)</p>	<p>May 2021</p>
<p>Recommendation 18: Mental health support</p> <p>Young people are more likely to be affected by COVID-19 with anxiety and depression, with factors such as security, housing security and living quality related to the increase.</p> <p>A. Ensure effective signposting to services such as housing and benefits as quickly as possible.</p> <p>B. Establish a mental health partnership put in place to co-</p>	<p>The Bronze Group for Children's Mental Health has developed a pathway document that can be used by professionals to accurately signpost families to appropriate support. Support remains available for families whose financial and employment situation has changed including from Tier 2 and Tier 3 services both within the local authority and from within the wider partnership.</p> <p>We have a mental health and learning disability bronze group which reports into the silver group. This brings together all the partners including housing and children's/ education. A separate group has also been established to look at the Somali Community, mental health and covid.</p> <p>More detailed partnerships exist in each area as needed; so for instance the</p>	<p>Cllr Blake/ Denise Radley/ James Thomas</p>	<p>complete</p>

<p>ordinate remedial plans across relevant sectors like education and housing.</p>	<p>mental health in schools transformation teams are in place and will be looking at how to respond to the pressures or specific experiences from covid.</p> <p>The impact of Covid19 on children and young people will be kept under review and plans are being developed to meet increased levels of need – for example access to increased online and telephone based counselling and crisis support.</p>		
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