

Overview & Scrutiny PDSQs 20.09.2021

Questions	Response
Item 6.1 Understanding the impact of Covid-19 in Tower Hamlets – Follow Up	
<p>1. Impact on local authority finances and services says on p59 <i>"Early in the pandemic, the Government pledged to provide 'whatever it takes' to local authorities to cover the cost of dealing with the crisis. However, there is feedback in the sector that this commitment has not yet been fulfilled."</i> What was the surplus on COVID grants reported at the end of 2020/21?</p>	<p>The Council had £8.4m of Contain Outbreak Management Fund, £3.5m of non-ringfenced Covid emergency grant and £2.6m of Council Tax Hardship Fund which were reported as unallocated in the 2020-21 provisional outturn report to Cabinet on 28/7/21. These grant amounts have been carried forward to 2021-22 for ongoing expenditure and reduced income.</p>
<p>2. Given that suicide rates did not increase (which seems to be matched by global analysis) how sure are we that mental health did get worse as the report implies? - how much of the activity this year is a cumulative catch up and how much is a genuinely new demand for mental health services? - it would have been really useful to see a month by month change in various MH statistics from before the pandemic to now.</p>	<p>There are indications and evidence that mental health worsened due to the pandemic: For example, as mentioned in Appendix I, 63% of respondents in the June 2020 LBTH Covid Impact Resident survey said the pandemic had a negative impact on their mental health.</p> <p>Information on the month-to-month change in demand for mental health services before the pandemic and after it started was recently presented to Health and Adults Scrutiny Sub-Committee meeting on 16 September 2021 and is available to view here. This includes information on month-by-month A&E attendance /liaison psychiatry, the number of calls to the Mental Health Crisis Line, the number of referrals to Community Mental Health Teams and referrals to Tower Hamlets Talking Therapies; from 2019 to 2021.</p> <p>This data does not distinguish between new demand for mental health and demand from existing mental health service users, though new referrals typically relate to new demand. Feedback from staff working in mental health is that people's experience of the COVID-19 pandemic have resulted in some experiencing mental illness for the first time, and some with existing problems finding their symptoms worsening.</p>
Item 6.2 LB Tower Hamlets Poverty Review	

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<p>1. There are several mentions of language barriers in the report, for example p25 <i>"Digital exclusion and language barriers were a major topic of discussion in focus groups."</i> but none of the findings relate to the poor written and spoken English of too many residents, but as the report says p27 <i>"Moving into work has a strong poverty payoff"</i> - why was teaching English not one of the findings as that would greatly broaden the range of jobs available?</p>	<p>The review team heard about the support provided by WorkPath to residents who face barriers to work, and – as part of this discussion - about the new ESOL and Functional Skills programme launched in September 2020.</p> <p>The report recommends a partnership programme to improve skills and access to decent work with opportunities for progression. Some residents on low incomes face multiple barriers to work and we recognise that improving English language skills will be an important part of tackling these barriers, alongside other issues identified in the review discussions including caring responsibilities, income maximisation, skills, confidence, and uncertainty about the impact of working on benefits entitlements.</p>
<p>2. How much additional funding has so far been earmarked to tackle poverty in Tower Hamlets as a result the Poverty Review?</p>	<p>The purpose of the review was to make recommendations to inform future poverty reduction interventions by the council and its partners. Following discussion at Cabinet, there will be a process of planning which will consider resource implications.</p>
<p>Item 6.3 Strategic delivery and performance reporting – Q1 2021/22</p>	
<p>1. Measure Number 73 - What % of staff paid over £60k p.a. are BAME? as I believe we track this number internally</p>	<p>We use the top 5% measure as a strategic indicator because it is a well-established former best value performance indicator that is still used by many local authorities. The top 5% measure is used for benchmarking our performance against others. We provide top 5% data to the LGA and we publicly report it in our gender (and ethnicity) pay gap report, too.</p> <p>The starting salary for top 5% of staff is lower and therefore the number of staff in that band is higher.</p> <p>Top 5% of staff that are BAME (June 2021)</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 32.6 percent of our senior staff are BAME • FTE: just over 68 full time equivalent staff. • Top 5% salary: ca. £55k in June 2021. Top 5% can vary slightly over the course of the year and from year to year. <p>% of staff paid over £60k that are BAME (June 2021)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 29.3 percent of staff earning £60k+ are BAME • FTE: just under 45 full time equivalent staff.
<p>2. Paragraph 3.13 Indicators that are falling short of the minimum expectation highlights</p> <p><u>Health, social care and safeguarding</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People who are more independent after being supported through reablement services • People using social care who receive direct payments as part of self-direct support <p>OSC had a call-in on day ops last municipal year so do you think that the resulting decisions taken at the time has led to impacting this target negatively? Is this something that needs reflecting on for reconsideration?</p>	<p>In quarter 1, 47.5% of people were more independent following a period of reablement (54 out of 114), against a target of 75%. In the previous quarter this was 55%. New hospital discharge arrangements from September 2020 introduced a “discharge to assess” approach. Combined with the impact of the pandemic, we are seeing people leaving hospital at an earlier stage and with increased needs, complexity, and dependency. These needs are not always the right fit for a short term reablement service however, ensuring a good quality service for everyone who can benefit from effective rehabilitation and reablement; remains a priority for the Council and the NHS. (As it is practice week, you may like to view this short film featuring an Occupational Therapist from Reablement interviewed by one of our Service Managers – Consolate talks about a case example and the importance of communication):</p> <p> Consolate - Reablement and the importance of Communication.mp4</p> <p>The number of people receiving a Direct Payment to arrange their own care and support was 583 at the end of quarter 1 (there were 25 new direct payment arrangements during this period however 28 ceased). Our target for this year is 650 however there has been a net decrease in the last six months. Work continues to improve awareness and promote Direct Payments and ensure that processes for setting them up are straightforward. Support is available to those who choose</p>

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	<p>to arrange their care and support in this way and Direct Payments give people with care and support needs greater choice and control.</p> <p>We do not consider there is a direct correlation between changes to day services and the above indicators. Changes to day services had a positive impact in that there are 2 new Direct Payment arrangements as a result of these changes.</p>
<p>Item 6.4 Budget monitoring report 2021-22 as at 30th June 2021 (period 3)</p>	
<p>1. Hadley House fire costs which are not covered by the Council's insurance policy. Is that an external policy or the £10 million earmarked reserve we hold for self-insurance?</p>	<p>A claim has been lodged against an external insurance policy. Costs not covered by the policy will need to be borne by the Housing Revenue Account (HRA).</p>
<p>2. Appendix A p25 "This forecast also includes a Fire Safety team that are undertaking and documenting the results of fire risk surveys on the external walls of privately-owned high-rise properties. In 2021/22 this team will be funded from EWS grant that has been held in reserve specifically for this project and will therefore not impact on the forecast outturn" how much and from whom is this EWS grant?</p>	<p>The EWS funding formed part of the New Burdens money received by LBTH from MHCLG and totalled £275,773. This money was not drawn down and used in 2020/21 due to the outturn position of the Authority and has been carried forward on the balance sheet to be applied in 2021/22 to fund the fire safety team. This is General Fund spend and the MHCLG funding is forecast to be used in full during the year.</p>
<p>Item 6.5 New Electric Vehicle Charging Delivery Plan 2021-2025 and funding towards new public charging points.</p>	
<p>1. The £500k CIL will help generate annual profits of over £500k by 2025 - why is it appropriate to use CIL rather than borrowing to create an income generating asset which will so quickly pay for itself?</p>	<p>Borrowing is the last resort if there is no identified funding that can be used for projects. In this case, the installation of EV charging infrastructure falls within the intended uses of CIL funding.</p>
<p>2. Will LBTH be installing EV chargers on THH estate car parks?</p>	<p>Yes, some site THH sites are included in a list of identified sites.</p>

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<p>3. When, how many & where will LBTH be installing EV chargers for its own vehicles own its own land?</p>	<p>There is a project to install charging points within council depots to support electrification of the council's fleet. It is estimated these will be installed in 1st quarter of financial year 22/23:</p> <p>Each charger can charge two vehicles:</p> <p>Poplar Recreation Ground – 5 chargers</p> <p>Vehicles relocated from the Car Pound, location TBC assumed Blackwall– 10 chargers (10 for Parking/Trading Standards, 10 for Pest Control). Mopeds can only be charged with a standard domestic plug and do not require charging infrastructure, however plug sockets need to be supplied!</p> <p>Toby Lane – 15 chargers (5 for Catering, 25 for Passenger)</p> <p>Victoria Park (excluding St Marks Yard) - 2 chargers</p> <p>Toby Club - 6 chargers</p> <p>Blackwall – Up to 46 chargers the figure includes vehicles displaced from the Town Hall.</p>
<p>4. Why are rapid charging points not being considered for residential charging or across the board instead of having several types of charging?</p>	<p>The space required for rapid chargers often makes them difficult to fit on residential streets. They are also much more expensive often costing 5 times as much as standard fast chargers (£35,000-£40,000).</p> <p>Furthermore, there are widespread concerns that frequent rapid charging impacts on battery life span. They are more suited for occasional use or to satisfy the needs of high mileage users such as</p>

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	Taxi's and commercial vehicles.
5. Could these charging points have an impact on current residents parking spaces?	Not all charging points would have dedicated charging bays. But charging points that did have them, would be used by residents that are freeing up parking spaces in the area to charge.
6. "3.8 260 7kw fast chargers will cost around £2,000,000" or £7,692 per charger - this seems excessive given that the retail price of such a charger is under £1k	Around £7000 is the usual overall cost of installation, grid, and the costs of the charging point. It can cost more depending the costs of connecting to the grid.
7. Would residents need permission from LBTH to instal their own chargers off street in their front or back garden?	No
8. Are 1,100 chargers going to be sufficient for 6,000 vehicles? Some residents may leave their vehicles in the space located next to the charger for days at a time if they do not use a car daily – meaning there will be limited turnover of spaces.	We monitor for this occurring. This hasn't happened for the 80-lamp column and 24 fast chargers we already have in operation. One potential solution if overstaying were to occur would be a fee to discourage it.
9. What is the assumption that a 6:1 ratio of vehicles to chargers is sufficient based on? Early adopters of EVs may be more frequent users of vehicles, so current usage is not necessarily indicative of future usage. Does the council have data on how long the average car in the borough remains in its space?	In its calculations of the number of charging stations needed in the future, the International Energy Association (IEA) has recommended on a European level a ratio of 10 EVs to 1 charging connection. On that basis the current levels of EVs in the Borough would require 100. We currently have just over 100 with a further 80 which are already commissioned and due to be available in October. This will be followed by another 150 lamp column chargers by the end of March 2022 taking

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the total to more than 300.

Item 6.9 Lease Renewal at Sutton Street Depot, 6 Sutton Street, London, E1 0AY

1. “...1.3 However, on expiry of the lease, the Council did not seek possession to recover the property and the tenant remained in occupation.” why did the Council not seek possession in June 2018 and then left the site unused for 3+ years?

At the expiry of the previous lease the Council reviewed options for the site and concluded a renewal with the existing tenant would best serve its short-term interests, while retaining flexibility for the medium term. The lease negotiations included agreement on works to be undertaken, and it is not unusual for lease negotiations of this complexity to take an extended period. Because of the complexities of landlord and tenant legislation we were limited in our ability to charge the tenant rent during the negotiating period, as this would have risked granting them greater security of tenure.