

Cabinet 9 March 2022	 TOWER HAMLETS
Report of: Sharon Godman (Director of Strategy, Improvement and Transformation)	Classification: Unrestricted
Annual Equality Report	

Lead Member	Councillor Asma Begum, (Statutory Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Children, Youth Services, Education and Equalities)
Originating Officer(s)	Iqbal Raakin, Afazul Hoque and Emily Fieran-Reed
Wards affected	All wards
Key Decision?	No
Reason for Key Decision	This report has been reviewed as not meeting the Key Decision criteria.
Forward Plan Notice Published	
Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome	Outcome 4 - Inequality is reduced and people feel that they fairly share the benefits from growth Outcome 8 - People feel they are part of a cohesive and vibrant community.

Executive Summary

This report details work the council has been undertaking since March 2020 to address inequalities facing our communities. It provides a focus on some of our key activities being delivered by services across the council. The report complements and adds further details on equalities to the regular performance reports received by Cabinet. The report demonstrates the council's commitment to creating cohesive communities that are strong, fair and inclusive and our commitment to meeting the statutory duties set out by the Equality Act 2010.

Recommendations:

Cabinet is asked to note and agree the contents of the Tower Hamlets Council Annual Equality Report at Appendix 1.

1 REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1. The Tower Hamlets Annual Equality Report highlights key achievements from April 2020 to November 2021 in relation to the council's equality objectives. Through our investment, interventions and activities, we are addressing the inequalities identified through analyses of local data, reviews and wider engagement with the local community. The achievements detailed in the report covers key equalities work area including our Borough Profile, Borough Equality Assessment, Poverty Review, Black Asian and Minority Ethnic Inequality Commission, Covid-19 Impact Assessment and digital

2 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

The council could choose not to publish its progress against inequality in the borough. Equality is already embedded throughout the council's plans, strategies and activities; however, it is considered that reporting on our progress against known equalities helps demonstrate the council's commitment to addressing inequalities and meeting its statutory duties under the Equalities Act (2010).

3 DETAILS OF THE REPORT

- 3.1. Tower Hamlets is a proud and diverse borough and equality is at the heart of everything we do as a council and with our partners. The council's strategic plan has three main priorities and eleven outcomes which provide a framework for our equality objectives. Every year we review our equality objectives and reflect on the changing needs of the borough, including the latest inequalities faced by the community. Our annual equality report provides an opportunity to highlight some of the equality work and difference we are making for our communities.
- 3.2. We are at the early stages of starting the development of our new strategic plan for 2022 onwards. This will be informed by a range of information including about our population following the publication of the 2021 Census. This information, along with changing national and local priorities, will help shape our strategic responses, especially future equality objectives.
- 3.3. We deliver programmes and activities to meet our existing equality objectives and address inequalities in the context of the profile of the borough. For example there is more housing built in Tower Hamlets than most other areas. We have the second highest number of social housing properties let by registered providers in London (2020/21) housing some of our residents with the greatest need, from diverse backgrounds. We also have some of the best educational outcomes in the borough whilst having the highest child poverty rate in England. We invest significant amount into our Voluntary and Community Sector, including the £9.3 million Local Community Fund which in the last year (October 2020-September 2021), supported almost 5,000 young people and families, 345 older people with befriending services, 2,262

residents with healthy living, 1003 residents with employment and skills, 770 residents with digital inclusion and awareness and contributed to tackling inequalities.

3.4. In the last two years we have also been listening and understanding what is happening in our communities. We have undertaken reviews and assessments to inform our investment and interventions tackling inequality. We have committed to report back to Cabinet on delivery progress for all of the reviews that we have conducted. Some examples are below:

3.4.1. The Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Inequality Commission was set up in September 2020 to examine the inequalities experienced by Tower Hamlets Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Communities. The Commission made 29 recommendations and we allocated £1.5 million funding to drive forward inclusion work for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities focusing on health, education, employment and community leadership.

3.4.2. We also undertook a Poverty Review in the Spring/Summer of 2021 to identify what more needs to be done to support our most vulnerable residents against the backdrop of the pandemic. The review team looked at a range of matters including a focus on child and pensioner poverty and considering the work that Tower Hamlets council has done to support residents living on a low income.

3.4.3. We have collaborated with partners across the borough to review and understand the barriers to digital inclusion in Tower Hamlets and have spoken with a range of organisations supporting our communities to get online. We have identified gaps in this provision that need to be addressed and developed an action plan which sets out a range of good practice and actions that will improve services across the borough to tackle digital exclusion. We have set up a Digital Inclusion Steering Group to have an oversight of the actions and respond to any changes in need.

3.4.4. We also undertook Covid-19 impact assessments looking at impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Tower Hamlets. This included highlighting disproportionate impacts on different equality groups and understanding the impact going forward including any challenges and opportunities. The assessments looked at impacts that were temporary, impacts that change and vary over time, impacts that may emerge once temporary cushioning is removed when interventions are faded out, and longer-term persistent impacts. For example, there are indicators that show that the mental health impacts and the economic impacts of the pandemic have disproportionately impacted on women. Loneliness and social isolation also increased amongst older and disabled people.

3.5. Some of the findings drawn from the reviews and assessments that relate to equalities include:

- People who are digitally excluded are more likely to have one or more of the following features:
 - are older
 - do not have formal qualifications
 - are in the lower socio-economic groups
 - have a disability
 - are not confident in their literacy
- People of Black Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds are more likely to live in poverty compared to those of a White British ethnic background and are more likely to be diagnosed with a mental health problem.
- There are indicators that show that in the mental health impacts and the economic impacts of the pandemic have disproportionately impacted on women and that violence against women and girls had increased.
- Inequality and poverty go hand in hand - across London, some families have a much greater risk of being in poverty, including families with a disabled family member, families from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, lone parents with children, and larger families.
- Older people are vulnerable to loneliness, especially since the pandemic, exacerbated by many not using technology to maintain social contact in lockdown (the 'digital divide').
- People with a disability experienced loneliness and social isolation during the pandemic due to feeling unable to access society safely.

3.6. Key achievements against inequalities in the borough are highlighted within the Annual Equality Report (at appendix one). These are arranged according to our Strategic Plan priority areas. Outlined below is a summary of some of our activity and interventions found in the report:

3.6.1. WorkPath is an employment service which aims to provide jobs, support, and training for residents of the borough. Workpath supported 252 women, 468 Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic residents and 74 disabled residents into employment (Apr 20-Sep 21). The council also delivers a Women into Construction programme which in 2020-21 supported 6 women into jobs in the construction industry.

3.6.2. Our **English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)** classes take place at Idea Stores across the borough and operate at a range of levels, including Pre-Entry (for beginners in the English language) to Level 1 (for those with little or no understanding of English). From September 2020 to July 2021, 645 residents completed ESOL courses with Idea Store Learning with 98% pass rate. Tower Hamlets has the second highest number of participants and course completions in London.

3.6.3. Healthy Schools London is an Awards Programme run by the Greater London Authority that aims to reach out to every London child, working with schools to improve children and young people's wellbeing. In 2020-21, Tower Hamlets schools achieved the highest

number of Healthy School London awards in every category — Gold (58) Silver (97) and Bronze (84).

- 3.6.4. Education, Employment and Training (EET):** Our Young WorkPath service works with young people to help them make choices about their future, get into further and higher education, training and work. In March 2021 there were 207 more young people in **education, employment or training** compared to the same period in the previous year (5,997 in total). Latest available information puts us in the top quartile of performance in London.
- 3.6.5. School Streets** are pioneering schemes to transform roads outside schools, so that pedestrians and cyclists can use them safely at school start and finish times. School Streets aim to encourage activity, reduce pollution, and help growth, learning and development. In 2020/21, 5,610 primary school aged children (21.8% of the primary school pupil population) benefitted from a healthier and safer environment around their schools through School Streets at 15 schools.
- 3.6.6. Hate Crime:** through our unique No Place for Hate campaign, we have engaged 1978 residents to raise awareness of hate crime and improve reporting and have recruited 10 new hate crime champions (2020-21). We are seen as an example of best practice nationally.
- 3.6.7. LGBT events and engagement:** Tower Hamlets has the 5th highest level of reported LGBT hate crimes in London. In the last year there have been several incidents raising concerns around safety for LGBT people. Through events and activities, we engaged 1,204 people to raise awareness of and combat prejudice against the LGBT community while celebrating LGBT achievements and diversity.
- 3.6.8. Disabled housing:** Through Project 120, we have delivered 146 wheelchair accessible homes. We have also rehoused 21 applicants in wheelchair accessible properties (Apr 20-Oct 2021).
- 3.6.9. Social/Affordable Housing lets:** 749 (77.3%) of social/affordable housing lets were made by to households from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic origin (2020-21).
- 3.6.10. Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)** remains a significant concern in the borough and we are exploring ways to tackle it. Between September 2020 and September 2021, 4,384 domestic abuse offences were recorded in the borough, which was the 2nd highest in London for this period. The council provides services to support victims of violence against women and girls. From April 2020 to September 2021, 283 (97%) victims of violence against women and girls felt safer after engaging with our victim support services. Satisfaction has risen by 2.1% between 2019/20 and 2020/21. We

also provide other services such as delivering training and running campaigns to tackle male violence, improve safety of women and increase reporting of VAWG incidents, such as the Sanctuary Scheme to the security of a domestic violence victim's home, 'Stop and Think' education programme for people who were arrested for buying sex and the 'Domestic Abuse, No Excuse' campaign.

- 3.6.11.** Through the Local Community Fund, the council also funds the Families Safe and Secure in Tower Hamlets project. This project supports families that have lived through domestic violence or sexual assault to address the trauma they have faced and learn about what a healthy relationship looks like. It also raises awareness amongst the Tower Hamlets community of domestic abuse and how to report it. Between October 2020 and October 2021, 556 residents benefited from this service.
- 3.6.12. Every Child Online:** We distributed 10,383 and donated 250 laptops to children and young people and pledged a further £50,000 towards £1 million crowdfunding target to get 'Every Child Online'
- 3.6.13. Community equality networks:** we have reviewed our community equalities networks and commissioned community groups to provide six equality networks and an Equalities Hub, including new Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic as well as Women's networks. The networks celebrate diversity, enable the voice of people from different equality groups to be heard, and promote understanding between different communities.
- 3.6.14.** The Council considers **social value** in the way it procures. This is thought about during pre-procurement stages and throughout the Commissioning cycles (i.e., during consultation, tendering, contract award etc.). Through the social value benefits gained through our procurement process, our contractors have committed to spending £23,700 to support schools and young people and £7,200 towards work experience placements for Tower Hamlets residents with learning difficulties.
- 3.6.15. Covid-19 engagement:** provided **£338k** funding to community groups to engage with, disseminate messages to and gather insights from different communities on Covid-19 and its impact (Apr 20-Sep 21). For example, we funded engagement projects with the Somali community focusing on women and families; men; younger people and older people. We also funded engagement projects with young people, undocumented migrants, the Bangladeshi community, Black African residents and commissioned a young adults social research and marketing campaign.
- 3.6.16. Staff:** In 2020 more than half of top 5% earners in the council were women (52.4%) and almost a third (30.1%) were from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds. Tower Hamlets has the third

highest proportion of staff in London who are from Black Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds – both top 5% earners and across all staff. In its role as an employer, the Council has also been addressing inequalities. Some examples:

- in April 2021 our staff Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Empowerment Network engaged with around 100 staff on how to deal with ‘microaggression’.
- The Council delivered a three-part leadership and management training programme for staff from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds,
- The Council has worked to reduce stigma around mental health and support staff (including the use of Mental Health First Aiders),
- The Council has signed up to Race at Work charter to support staff from Black Asian and Minority backgrounds.
- The staff Women’s network held a Women’s Network Event in November 2020 focused on Domestic Violence and Career Development for women.
- We are currently ranked 125 out of 500 organisations in Stonewall’s Workplace Equality Index and have put in place an action plan to do more in our work for LGBT staff.
- We are proud to have an all-women team delivering the new town hall project, taking forward the type of work that is usually dominated by men.

3.7. There have been significant achievements on equality in Tower Hamlets. But there is still more to be done. The priorities arising from our key equalities work, such as the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic commission, Poverty Review and Covid impact assessment give us some priorities and direction. These will be important in enabling us to identify equalities objectives for the borough and incorporating them at the centre of the Council’s strategic plan for 2022-23.

4. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

4.1. The Tower Hamlets Annual Equality Report 2020-21 demonstrates the council’s commitment to the public sector equality duty by providing examples of how it ensures that equality is at the heart of everything the council does from the money it spends, to the people it employs to the services it provides. It sets out some of our work to address inequality since March 2020.

4.2. It also supports the council’s broader equality objectives as set out in the Tower Hamlets Plan 2018-23 and rolling three-year Strategic Plan of tackling inequality by building a strong, inclusive, and fair borough.

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.

6. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 6.1. The Mayor in Cabinet is requested to note and agree the contents of the Tower Hamlets Annual Equality Report 2020-21.
- 6.2. Any funding utilised to achieve the equality objectives have been contained within relevant revenue budgets and there are no other specific financial implications.

7. COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

- 7.1. The council's legal requirements in respect of the Public Sector Equality Duty are embedded in the body of the report.
- 7.2. The Annual Equality Report highlights the council's commitment to promoting equality and diversity for both service users and staff.

Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- None

Appendices

- Appendix 1 - Tower Hamlets Annual Equality Report 2020-21

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

- None

Officer contact details for documents:

N/A

