


<p style="text-align: center;">Non-Executive Report of the: <b>Health and Wellbeing Board</b></p>	
<p><b>Report of:</b> Somen Banerjee, Director of Public Health</p>	<p><b>Classification:</b> Unrestricted</p>
<p><b>Local plan and health update</b></p>	

<p><b>Originating Officer(s)</b></p>	<p>Katy Scammell, Associate Director of Public Health</p>
<p><b>Wards affected</b></p>	<p>All wards</p>

### **Executive Summary**

At January’s Health and Wellbeing Board, members were informed that the borough’s Local Plan is in the process of being updated, with plans for it to be adopted by autumn 2025. The new Local Plan will set out a vision, strategic priorities, and a planning policy framework to guide and manage development in the borough for the next 10 to 15 years, in line with the planning policy requirements set out by national and regional government.

The physical environment has a significant impact on health and wellbeing. The greatest opportunity to influence how the built environment impacts on health is through the Local Plan.

To inform the new Local Plan, Tower Hamlets Public Health has reviewed the evidence to understand how planning policy can positively impact on residents’ health. This review will form the basis of the public health evidence for the emerging Local Plan health policies.

### **Recommendations:**

The Health and Wellbeing Board is recommended to:

1. Consider the main findings from the Spatial Planning and Health JSNA (2023) Air Quality JSNA (2023) and discuss the planning policy actions that can be taken to improve health and wellbeing in the borough.
2. Respond to the Stage 1: Regulation 18 draft Local Plan consultation when this goes live in the summer.

### **Health and Wellbeing Strategy:**

The Health and Wellbeing Strategy is grounded upon 6 principles that matters most to residents of Tower Hamlets.

1. Resources to support health and wellbeing should go to those who most need it
2. Feeling connected and included is a foundation of wellbeing and the importance of this should be built into services and programme
3. Being treated equally, respectfully and without discrimination should be the norm when using services
4. Health and wellbeing information and advice should be clear, simple, and produced with those who will benefit from them
5. People should feel that they have equal power in shaping and designing services and programme that impact on their health and wellbeing
6. We should all be working together to make the best use of the assets we already have that support people's health and wellbeing.

Detail how this report relates to one or more of these principles:

The Spatial Planning and Health JSNA (2023) Air Quality JSNA (2023) enables us to take an integrated approach to healthcare and social determinants service provision as well as to influence spatial design and place-based decision making which will see many benefits to our residents and communities.

Our needs assessment attempts to understand what the health and wellbeing in Tower Hamlets looks like; what we should be doing; what are we doing; what we can do better; and what more do we need to know.

Understanding residents' needs is crucial to reducing health inequalities and improving health and wellbeing for the population of Tower Hamlets. These two JSNAs highlight some key strategic priorities for improving health, preventing illness, and reducing health inequalities and underpin the health evidence for our Local Plan.

These needs assessments advocate for action to improve health through spatial design improvements and protecting our most vulnerable residents from harm and in doing so strive to consider all the principles outlined in the health and wellbeing strategy to help shape the Local Plan.

## **1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS**

- 1.1 The Local Plan is a key policy document that has the power to influence health and wellbeing in the borough.
- 1.2 The Board have an important role to play in informing the Local Plan's development.

## **2. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 2.1 The Board could choose not to consider how the Local Plan can support health and wellbeing, but this is not recommended as the Board has a key role to play in informing the strategy.

### **3. DETAILS OF THE REPORT**

#### **The Local Plan**

3.1 At January's Health and Wellbeing Board, members were informed that the borough's Local Plan is in the process of being updated, with plans for it to be adopted by autumn 2025 (see Linked Report below). The new Local Plan will set out a vision, strategic priorities, and a planning policy framework to guide and manage development in the borough for the next 10 to 15 years, in line with the planning policy requirements set out by national and regional government.

3.2 The Local Plan is a critical tool for a planning authority to plan proactively and positively for development by focusing on the community needs and opportunities in relation to places, housing, economy, infrastructure, local services, and other areas. It also seeks to safeguard the environment, adapt to climate change, and enhance the natural and historic environment.

3.3 From late January to early March 2023, the Local Plan team undertook a six-week new Local Plan early engagement consultation. The consultation used several mediums to engage stakeholders including social media, a dedicated StoryMap website, newsletters, press releases, posters, and leaflet drops. Consultation events took place online through structured webinars and informal virtual drop-ins, coupled with several in-person drop-in sessions and formal presentations at the newly opened Town Hall. More targeted engagement was undertaken through 1:1 feedback sessions with hard to reach groups. Engagement was strong with over 6000 website visits, 500 document downloads, 115 attendees at events, 127 emailed submissions, 50 survey responses and 215 contributions on the dedicated StoryMap website. The Local Plan Team has reflected on the consultation and will consider options to increase engagement for the regulation 18 draft local plan consultation later this year.

3.4 Planning officers are now drafting policies for the emerging Local Plan, with a view to formal consultation commencing towards the end of summer or early autumn. The draft policies will be informed by evidence-based documents, monitoring data and collaboration with stakeholders from internal working groups. The policies will be refined through an iterative process to ensure there is sufficient opportunity for officers to offer input and reach consensus.

#### **The importance healthy environments**

3.5 As detailed in the January Health and Wellbeing Board paper, the physical, social, and economic environment in which we live and work has a significant impact on health and wellbeing; recognised by residents during the Health and Wellbeing Board Strategy consultation, with residents commenting on the importance of having safe, social spaces near their home; and highlighting the impact that housing, green spaces, and air quality has on their health and wellbeing.

3.6 The greatest opportunity to influence how the built environment impacts health is through the Local Plan. Therefore, it is critical that the Health and Wellbeing Board play an active role in informing the development of this key strategic document.

3.7 To inform the new Local Plan, Tower Hamlets Public Health has produced a Tower Hamlets Spatial Planning and Health Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) (2023) and Air Quality JSNA (2023). The following two sections outline the main findings from these evidence reviews, with proposals for shared actions across Tower Hamlets.

### **Spatial Planning and Health JSNA (2023)**

3.8 The Spatial Planning and Health JSNA (2023) reviews the evidence on this topic and highlights how relevant Local Plan policies can be applied to achieve better health outcomes.

3.9 The evidence highlights that a healthy place is one that supports and promotes healthy behaviours and works to reduce health inequalities for people of all ages. It provides people with opportunities to protect and improve their physical and mental health and supports community cohesion and wellbeing. It is a place which is inclusive and promotes social interaction. It also meets the needs of children and young people, supporting them to grow and develop, as well as being adaptable to the needs of an increasingly elderly population and those with dementia and other sensory or mobility impairments.

3.10 Planning is recognised in the literature as playing an important role in influencing the wider determinants of health. Planning policies can directly or indirectly contribute to protecting and improving people's physical and mental health and thus help tackle health inequalities. Successful planning can help improve the economic prosperity of an area by providing land for development and jobs, deliver good quality new development and protect and enhance the environment. Increased prosperity enables people to make and afford healthier life choices.

3.11 In preparing the Spatial Planning and Health JSNA, Public Health assessed the evidence-base against several themes. Their key findings from this review are outlined below:

- **Neighbourhood design:** The evidence highlights that places that provide opportunities for people to lead physically active lifestyles can positively impact both people's physical and mental wellbeing. The opposite can also be true: where the design of a place creates barriers by making it difficult, unpleasant, or inconvenient to be active, people are less likely to live an active lifestyle. To achieve active places, ten square metres of high-quality play space for each child can be allocated on all new developments to protect or re-provide existing amenity play spaces. Ensuring play spaces are positioned at least 50m away from highly used roads helps ensure that vulnerable residents (at a heightened risk of negative health outcomes due to

exposure to air pollution) are not impacted when playing. National design guides can be used to ensure the places and environments residents inhabit have a positive effect on behaviour.

- **Housing:** The literature outlines how living in good quality and affordable housing is associated with numerous positive health outcomes for the general population and those from vulnerable groups. To help influence the design of new developments, a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) policy can help to mitigate negative impacts to health and to maximise positive opportunities. There is limited evidence on the health impact of permitted development and therefore further research is needed to understand this. To help meet the needs of a residents with Learning Disabilities and for those with other disabilities and long-term conditions including autism, we need to maximise opportunities outlined in the Accommodation Plan, as well as to consider how we best meet the needs of older adults.
- **Natural and sustainable environments:** There is a very significant and strong body of evidence linking contact and exposure to the natural environment with improved health and wellbeing. The literature highlights the importance of creating more new green spaces and protecting existing green spaces, as well as encouraging the creation of community allotments, gardens, and pocket parks. Community engagement is essential to support sustainability and encourage community ownership. Measures to improve air quality also have a wide range of co-benefits beyond improving health and reducing health inequalities, such as economic and environmental improvements including climate change adaptation and mitigation.
- **Transport:** Transportation plays an important role in supporting daily activities. Research shows that active travel (cycling, walking and use of public transport) can increase physical activity levels and improve physical and mental wellbeing. Prioritisation of active travel can also reduce over-reliance on motorised transport, contributing to improved air quality and a reduction in road injuries. Active travel can be encouraged through planning such as car-free developments, parking policies and safeguarding lands for public transport.
- **Food environment:** The food environment plays an important role in promoting a healthy diet. It is a complex system influenced and determined by several factors, including a person's proximity to food retail outlets and the type of food available. The success of the current Local Plan policy to restrict over-proliferation of hot food takeaways could be expanded to protect more children and young people by not permitting new food takeaways from within a 400 metres (previously 200m) walking distance from existing or proposed primary or secondary schools.

### **Air Quality JSNA (2023)**

3.12 The Air Quality JSNA reviews the literature on air quality and health, along with evidence on how air quality can be improved. Addressing this issue requires

numerous actions, with planning policy playing an important role in delivering some of these.

- 3.13 Clean air is a basic requirement of a healthy environment, with air pollution being the largest environmental risk to public health. Tower Hamlets does not meet the World Health Organisation's air quality standard and has the 9th highest mortality rate attributed to human-made air pollution in London, as well as being higher than the London and England average.
- 3.14 In January 2023, a paper on Tower Hamlets Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) was considered at the Health and Wellbeing Board (see Linked Report below). This outlined the importance of air quality and health, the current picture in Tower Hamlets and the priority actions for the borough over the next five years across seven broad themes.
- 3.15 The Local Plan provides the opportunity to develop more detailed actions that the council can take to improve air quality through planning levers.
- 3.16 The Air Quality JSNA intends not to duplicate existing thinking within the AQAP but rather focuses on the key evidence-based considerations for action to improve air quality in Tower Hamlets that is not addressed through the AQAP. Specific consideration is given to:
- The evidence highlights the urban planning can improve outdoor air quality through policy that promotes active travel and modal shift (as detailed above).
  - Exploring measures to reduce exposure to indoor air pollutants in the home and in settings where vulnerable residents frequent, such as schools, hospitals, and care homes. Consideration should be given to embedding NICE guidance on indoor air pollutants within Council decision making processes.
  - Embedding evaluation in the design of initiatives will enable the council to gather evidence of effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of Local Plan policy efforts into further research. This will also help to understand the synergies between air quality and complementary agendas such as carbon and climate change.

#### **4. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 Relevant equality impact assessments will be carried as required as part of the Local Plan Review process. Such assessments are requirements set out in the Town and Country Planning Regulations.

#### **5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Any costs arising from meeting the priorities highlighted in this report, in line with the requirement to meet the Public Health Outcomes Framework (as set by the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities) and Local Plan health priorities,

will need to be funded via the Public Health Grant. The Tower Hamlets Public Health Grant allocation for 2022/23 is £37.4m.

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## **Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents**

### **Linked Report**

- New Local Plan, Health and Wellbeing Board paper, January 2023. Link here: [LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS](#)
- Air Quality Action Plan, Health and Wellbeing Board paper, January 2023. Link here: [LONDON BOROUGH OF TOWER HAMLETS](#)

### **Appendices**

- None

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

#### **List of “Background Papers” used in the preparation of this report**

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

- These must be sent to Democratic Services with the report
- State NONE if none.

#### **Officer contact details for documents:**

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