



INVESTORS IN PEOPLE REPORT

London Borough of Tower Hamlets

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On behalf of Investors in People South

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14/0028

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■ Introduction

This report covers the findings of the latest Investors in People review of Tower Hamlets against the whole framework. Further information about the organisation can be found in the Review Plan.

The principal mechanism used to conduct the review was a series of individual and focus group interviews with a cross section of staff, held between 3rd – 14th March 2014. 174 people were interviewed during this visit.

A collection of relevant documents was submitted during the review. These included the People Strategy, Staff Survey results, L&D plans and various examples of communication. The Assessor was also made aware through the assessment of numerous social media channels, Union pamphlets, keen bloggers and press interest (including Panorama BBC 01/04/14) which all provided additional context and background to this assessment. However, Investors in People is primarily concerned with how effective Tower Hamlets is as an employer and this is the focus of this report.

A feedback session was given by the Investors in People Lead Specialist on site at the end of the interviews to the Talent Strategy Manager (Tina Dempsey). Many thanks to Tina Dempsey who, along with Moynul Islam, ably project managed the assessment. This was a very well-organised Investors in People review. The Assessors would like to take this opportunity to thank all staff for the frank, open and honest discussions held during the review visit. Many thanks also for the hospitality of the organisation.

The feedback report is written against the ten indicators of the Investors in People Standard as requested by the client.

The organisation was being assessed against the whole of the wider framework (39 evidence requirements of the Core Standard and 157 evidence requirements of the wider framework). The report is structured against the 10 indicators and within that the 'Your Choice' topics as set out in the Investors in People Summary of Themes within the Single Framework within an Organisation Context (published by TSO).

■ Executive Summary

The conclusion is that the Investors in People Standard Silver status has been gained. 92 of the 157 Evidence Requirements of the Wider Framework are met. This means that Tower Hamlets meet in total 131 of the 196 relevant Evidence Requirements of the whole Investors in People Standard.

In 2010, Tower Hamlets changed its leadership model and became one of four London Councils to have a directly elected Mayor. The Mayor is personally accountable for the delivery of the Mayoral priorities. During the interviews people explained how the model operates with officers of the council (employees) making recommendations that are then accepted or rejected by the Mayor. The current Mayor is Lutfur Rahman. Elections are taking place in May 2014 which are high profile and have already had a great deal of press interest. As part of the changes the internal council leadership model also changed. There is no longer a Chief Executive (the Mayor is the executive decision maker) so a Head of Paid Services was appointed. This is similar to the role of Chief Operating Officer in other organisations and is focused on the day-to-day operational management, implementation of strategy to deliver on the Mayor's priorities which are:

- Increase affordable family-sized housing;
- Improve attainment and invest in out of school activities;
- Reduce crime and ASB;
- Tackle worklessness;
- Improve cleanliness and the public realm.

There is much evidence of progress on these priorities as the Mayor's current term of office nears its conclusion. Tower Hamlets has built significantly more homes than any other borough nationally and its schools are held up as a model of good practice (Transforming Education for All: the Tower Hamlets Story). There has been excellent progress on increasing recycling rates and the borough is cleaner than it has been for some time. Resident satisfaction is high at 82%, 4% up on 2011/12 levels. The workforce are well aware of these achievements and took deep pride in their contribution. A significant proportion of the staff are also residents of the borough. There has been a longstanding commitment for the workforce to reflect the community and this continues to be a keen focus of the current Mayor with good results at all but the highest levels of management. Good efforts are being made around youth unemployment and the Council has written into contracts the need for contracted organisations to offer apprenticeships. The Council itself has a successful apprenticeship programme that has assisted around 400 people. This commitment to addressing worklessness is important as the borough remains one of the poorest in the country with the worst child poverty.

As an employer Tower Hamlets Council has much to celebrate and be proud of. All staff recognised that Tower Hamlets is a good place to work. Posts that are advertised attract a high number of applicants as the Council has a good reputation. There is little doubt that Tower Hamlets has many of the systems and processes one would expect to find in a large, mature organisation. Most are working well and this in itself does much to satisfy the Investors in People Standard. The majority of the top team understand employee engagement and recognise that the way in which people are led, managed and developed is central to raising performance and its continued success. There are some role model, inspirational leaders in Tower Hamlets. As in many large organisations there remain a minority of management chains where systems and processes are not consistently applied and the Assessors found evidence of a low engagement approach (not involving staff, not valuing them, not developing them) of 'tell and pay' or command and control.

There is scope for Tower Hamlets to move from a relatively successful but mechanistic approach to engagement to really building it into the culture and the way we do things around here, all the time and in

all places. This would go a long way to challenging and converting some of the employees who do not feel that they are experiencing all the benefits of working with Tower Hamlets. This is acknowledged by the Council too and a renewed effort is being made to focus on behaviours with a new Leadership Behaviours framework being piloted in Development and Renewal. This assessment found that the need for this is there and the focus on now just 'what' managers are delivering but 'how' will be important to take the workforce through the next round of transformation.

The next period of transformation will run much more smoothly if senior leaders continue to build the trust of staff and Service Heads have built bridges with their teams. Some (a minority) have a job on their hands to win over hearts and minds.

It will be important for leaders and managers to demonstrate a caring side to people, to help guide them through change. To show that, Tower Hamlets will need to continue to develop and value those people that remain in the organisation, and treat those that leave with respect and dignity.

There is no sense of complacency at Tower Hamlets and the Council does have initiatives in place to help with change including the Think Tank and the People Strategy. These will no doubt deliver benefits over the next period of time. However, many interviewees felt the need to use this exercise to remind leaders to remain empathic and demonstrate emotional intelligence in the next period of time to try and maintain high levels of employee engagement through another period of adversity.

■ Areas of Strength

The following is a list of good practice characteristics or features found during the course of the visit. These are recognised as being of good practice or exceeding the requirements of the Investors in People Standard: -

- Tower Hamlets was described as a more effective and impactful organisation over the past three years. There is a very clear vision and purpose that has been communicated and largely embraced by the workforce. There is a clear structure that is aligned to the strategy and has clear lines of accountability. The 'golden thread' from Community Plan to Strategic Plan to Section Plans was strong and well-known to people. The 'Plan-Do-Review' model espoused by the Investors in People framework is the embedded operating model at the Council.
- The performance framework is embedded and there are clear key performance indicators in place that are rigorously monitored and reviewed throughout the year. The Council challenges itself through setting stretch targets that rise year on year and push the Council to improve on already high standards. The cuts have resulted in an even sharper focus on performance management and delivery. The Council has reduced headcount by 400 without compulsory redundancies or a drop in performance.
- The Executive Mayor/Head of Paid Services model appears to be working well in terms of delivery and offering clear direction and leadership to the workforce.
- The immense commitment to the organisation and approach to their work displayed by everyone the Assessors met. Their pride in Tower Hamlets and the work it enabled them to do was obvious and tangible. People highlighted the 'Tower Hamlets Way' and commitment to providing a quality service to residents.
- Tower Hamlets staff are passionate about the work that they do, and have a strong belief in the Councils' core values. The Council has remained true to the values through massive change and there was little evidence of culture dilution. There is a strong commitment to ensuring that staff have the necessary skills and development to undertake their jobs effectively.
- There is plenty of activity from HR to align people strategies to the objectives of Tower Hamlets. This is including a more robust focus on performance management and some difficult conversations. Although painful for some, people recognised that a necessary recalibration of performance is taking place as the Council continues to strive to deliver more with less.
- There is a sound range of leadership, management and development processes from induction, through to one-to-one's and feedback and performance review discussions. These work well and are supportive of the organisation's vision, values and objectives. The majority of managers were described as friendly, encouraging and supportive.
- Engagement as measured by the staff survey has remained high since the Spending Review (savings of £100m made) at 69%. Over the last year there has been a strong focus on addressing feedback points from the previous survey and an IIP health check and staff have been impressed by the seriousness with which the top team have responded. Everyone reported much improved visibility and communication from the top through initiatives such as roadshows.
- Investment in learning and development has remained very strong. There is a substantial budget which is used to implement the 'grow our own' philosophy of the Mayor and Directors. The Navigate programme represents good progress in identifying and developing talent.
- Tower Hamlets uses the Equality Framework for Local Government and is subject to external review. The latest visit gave the Council an 'excellent' rating – the only Council in England to currently hold this highest rating. Virtually all employees confirmed that Tower Hamlets does provide equal opportunities and is living its value of 'valuing diversity'.

- Smarter working has been embraced by most people who like the greater flexibility this offers. This system has been refined in light of employee feedback and is generally seen to be working well for employer and employee.

■ Possible Areas for Development

The feedback points are offered in the spirit of continuous improvement. Actions may help the organisation develop further and embed best practice: -

Leadership and Management

1. Press on with the roll-out of the refreshed Leadership & Management Framework that is being piloted. There is a need for senior leaders to articulate and model the behaviours. It is hoped that this would provide a framework for all managers to understand (and be reviewed against) what and how the Council expects its managers to operate. The ultimate aim would be to reduce the number of managers who are not engaging their people, for example, those that show a lack of trust and micro-manage people and those at the other extreme who have little or no relationship with the people they supposedly lead. Some managers did not feel that they have been robustly reviewed on their people management capabilities and the focus was squarely on 'achieving results' without really focusing on 'how' and the potential damage to staff some leave in their wake.
2. Crystallise the various strategies, initiatives and frameworks that exist (e.g. People, Talent Management, Workforce Planning, Recognition, Take a Chance scheme) to ensure they really deliver positive change for people. Ensure these quickly turn from paper into meaningful outcomes for people and that they are owned and led by Directors as well as HR. In some management chains it was apparent that manager discretion rules and results in patchy application of policies, including Smarter Working. Some reported a cynical 'do it for the accreditations' attitude towards people processes from some managers to the disappointment of their staff.
3. The primary experience of the Tower Hamlets culture comes through the line manager. Some appear to struggle to perform the people management element of their role sufficiently well (e.g. poor, infrequent one-to-ones and team meetings) or reported to be under too much work pressure to fully focus on the people side. Many managers are focused on the pressures of tasks or are spending too much of their time managing upwards while not providing inspirational leadership to their teams. What on-going development and challenge are managers getting on their people management skills? While most (not all) had received some 'training' on becoming a manager there needs to be more on-going challenge and development on the softer skills. It was interesting that in most cases people said that they would not feel comfortable taking issues with their manager to HR and would far more likely go straight to the unions. HRBPs may want to reflect on that, build relations and make themselves slightly more accessible to staff.
4. There is a challenge for Service Heads to become the figureheads for their remits. Some claimed not to have seen or heard the person they now ostensibly work for. There remain reports of a minority of leaders lacking emotional intelligence and still maintaining fear and blame cultures. Service Heads need to close the gaps with their people and become the local inspirational, role model leaders who are respected by staff. Directors need to be challenging Service Heads who continue to get poor feedback from their staff through surveys and other mechanisms such as 360-degree feedback.
5. While there is a clear golden thread in terms of planning, this could be strengthened even further when it comes to setting individual objectives in the PDR. Not everyone was able to recount their objectives and some could be more tightly and specifically linked to this year's plans. Ensure all managers are skilled at setting meaningful, motivational objectives for members of their teams. Equally, awareness of team performance and KPIs was not high in some teams so not all staff were really engaged as a team beyond their own personal workload.

6. Directors and managers could do even more to help support staff understand the political environment in which they work. The Assessors found some evidence of blurring of lines between strategic and operational roles and responsibilities.

Employee Engagement

7. There were some 'moans and groans' about technology (Aggresso and Agilysis) and systems ('bureaucratic') that frustrate people and do to an extent undermine the positive work around the people agenda. Don't be too quick to dismiss some genuine concerns around workload and the 'little things' that do impact on staff's working lives, morale and view of Tower Hamlets as a good employer. These would also include the frustrations caused by the desk booking system in Mulberry Place and the poor working environment and conditions of staff in some buildings away from the Town Hall.
8. Staff seek more trust and involvement notably from Service Heads down. Allow frontline staff to take more of a lead on improving how Tower Hamlets works so that they are involved in improving the things that frustrate them. Agree a continuous improvement methodology that can be used by local teams and facilitated by line managers, to engage those doing the work in genuine change, innovation and improvement. Agree an approach to developing and supporting a continuous improvement culture across Tower Hamlets. Creating tools such Continuous Improvement boards at each location, in each team, helps provide a performance improvement focus at the frontline level. In many cases the best ideas come from the frontline. There was some general feedback that the 'doers' are not involved enough and feel quite disconnected to the decision makers.
9. Innovation is likely to come from front line and generation Y staff and it is important that senior leaders make it as easy and effective as possible for suggestions to float upstream. Strengthen the upward feedback of ideas. Some organisations have a system that gives feedback up the chain and then CMT respond to the questions and ideas that come up. Seek to develop further 'reverse mentoring' opportunities for the senior leaders. There are plans to re-introduce the staff suggestion scheme and this may help but many good ideas will come from effective team meetings and away days run by managers that genuinely want to involve and engage their people in performance improvement.
10. While smarter working is generally going well there were some issues raised. These included the difficulty of having team meetings and establishing the team bond, sharing learning and knowledge and collaborative working. It was suggested that some managers need to better actively manage this and recognise what the team might lose by not getting together as frequently.
11. While it is easy to say that social responsibility is at the heart of what the Council delivers, not everyone felt that there was a real internal corporate social responsibility strategy for employees. This could be the focus of a working group of interested people and would focus the workforce on charitable activity and provide the option of volunteering.
12. Ensure there are improved employee relations with trade union representatives and that HR maintain exemplary practices that are beyond reproach. Ensure that an agreed Partnership Working Agreement is in place and is followed. Having positive employee relations with effective trade union partners will be important as the Council enters the next phase of transformation.

Learning and Development

13. Be more explicit in evaluating the impact of learning and development and people management strategies on specific performance indicators and encourage Directors and Service Heads to be involved in this task. There is no doubting the top-level commitment and belief that training improves performance but when pushed further it was apparent that there was not much real analysis and evaluation of impact on KPIs or how L&D builds capacity taking place in some directorates.
14. Ensure that the substantial learning and development budget gets to where the needs are. Too many people in local teams reported being told there was no funding for training. There may be a need to review the budget split between central and directorate or at least to hold local managers more

accountable for delivering on identified training needs. Staff expressed frustrations around ‘ghost courses’ (courses they wanted, were shown on the system but were not being run) and were not sure where accountability for this lies – themselves, OD or their line manager.

15. Continue to develop coaching so that in time it will be seen as part of the culture. Equally, broaden out mentoring opportunities to more people. These are seen as important development and retention methods and will help with succession planning and talent management.

16. It will be important for leaders and managers to demonstrate a caring side to people, to help guide them through change. To show that, Tower Hamlets will need to continue to develop and value those people that remain in the organisation, and treat those that leave with respect and dignity.

■ Assessment Findings

Indicator 1: Business Strategy

EVIDENCE REQUIREMENTS														
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13		
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25			
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			

The organisation has a vision/purpose, strategy and plan (Core Standard)

Explicit core values are in place to support organisation vision and ethos (7, 11, 13, 17, 19, 23, 24)

The Mayor has been very clear on the vision, purpose and strategy and along with the Head of Paid Services has communicated this well through a range of channels. There are measurable priorities in place for each of the five Community Plan themes. The four core values remain in place and are:

- Achieving results
- Engaging with others
- Valuing Diversity
- Learning Effectively

The values have been incorporated into the performance review process and the message from HR is that the ‘how’ is as important as the ‘what’ when it comes to performance and delivery. It is important that all leaders model this as well, the feedback from staff is that current perception on how the values stack up internally is that ‘achieving results’ is the strongest of the values, ‘engaging with others’ is the weakest. Work is taking place to strengthen the use and linkage between the values and leadership and management behaviours. These need to be owned, modelled from the top and managers need to be reviewed against them.

“On an annual basis we look at values as part of our planning to ensure we are living the values.”

“The elected Mayor model has given us even greater clarity of purpose and pace.”

“The Think Tank is providing governance around transformation. There has been some leadership churn but there is no leadership void.”

“We are achieving the highest employment rates in 15 years.”

“The roadshows have helped to make sure we know where we are going, we need more of that.”

“A year ago senior management communications was not good, but they’ve improved on that, they responded well.”

People are involved in planning (Core Standard)

People and stakeholders are involved in strategy development (ERs 8, 14, 20)

Representative groups are consulted when developing the plan (Core Standard)

Tower Hamlets has a very clear direction and set of priorities in the 2013 – 2014 Strategic Plan. There are good opportunities for people to contribute to the planning process through roadshows and away days. There is a good involvement of stakeholders with local resident forums, feedback on policy changes, all part of a democratic process. Most people felt that this was the case but some local teams did not feel that their management chain was good at involving the ‘doers’ in performance improvement and business planning. Relations with trade union representatives are under some pressures at the moment, but both sides said that ultimately they were constructive and consultative on most issues.

“We are part of the heart of the community.”

“I can see the bigger picture now and am more aware of what we are doing.”

“They could manage financial messages better. We need to keep it honest and treat staff as adults.”

“The way we manage change in the next two years will be important. We need to make sure we bring our people with us. I hope we can reflect on how we did it previously and learn lessons.”

Staff were able to discuss the Tower Hamlets’ aims as a given and how these applied and motivated them in their own role. These are routinely discussed in staff meetings and everyone agreed that communication had improved in the last 12 months, in part following staff survey and IIP health check feedback. It was encouraging to hear people talk in terms of Tower Hamlets being an organisation that enabled them to deliver work they are proud of and make a positive difference to the community.

Key performance indicators are used to improve performance (ERs 9, 15, 21)

KPI’s are in place and are reported on regularly following a performance management framework with performance reports and management dashboards firmly in place. There is credible evidence and plenty of examples of Tower Hamlets improving performance including around education and building homes. If performance dips senior management are keen to explore the story around that and take action to improve. The performance report includes a narrative on issues and a forward look.

Social responsibility is taken into account in the strategy (ERs 10, 12, 16, 18, 22, 25)

Social responsibility is entwined in the fabric of Tower Hamlets and the values align the strategy to social responsibility. There could potentially be more internal focus on what social responsibility means to Tower Hamlets. Not everyone felt that there was a real internally focused corporate social responsibility strategy and that although the work was focused on improving local society some pushed Tower Hamlets to go further internally. This could be the focus of a working group of interested people.

“As we move from Windows XP to Windows 7 we are donating old stock to children in care.”

Indicator 2: Learning and Development Strategy

EVIDENCE REQUIREMENTS														
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
16	17													
✓	✓													

Staff learning and development strategy is defined (ERs 5, 8, 12)

There remains a huge top-level commitment to learning and development evidenced by the significant investment. The Learning and Development Strategy & Plan 2014/15 reiterates the commitment, responsibilities and framework around training. This sets the ideal of what should be happening very well, but requires further embedding, particularly within Directorates (e.g. the evaluation framework). The Plan does highlight seven key corporate learning and development needs including leadership and management development to equip the Tower Hamlets managers with the knowledge, skills and behaviours to navigate their teams through change, project management skills and delivering customer excellence.

Workforce planning, employee engagement and talent management have a bigger focus now at Tower Hamlets and frameworks have been created for each. Managers were able to discuss succession planning in most cases and a significant number of people have gained promotion in line with the Council's preference for 'growing our own'. There are a relatively high number of temporary promotions and people acting up. The interviewees were divided about the merits of this, recognising on the one hand the developmental positives but stressing the short-term nature of the arrangements were not always helpful. Interviewees were able to describe how they use the performance review discussions and one-to-ones to discuss their career aspirations. Tower Hamlets are encouraging key talent using the Navigate programme. This is improving the facilitation of career discussions (subject to the capability of line managers to do this well).

Individuals, including managers, confirmed that they have the opportunity to be involved in identifying their own learning and development needs via the appraisal and the resulting Personal Development Plans (PDP). The appraisal and regular one-to-one's provide everyone with the forum to discuss their development and career aspirations.

"We use far less consultants now, we want to give the opportunities to our own people to shine. Where they are used they are tightly managed, expected to provide knowledge transfer and where we really need the skills."

"The approach to planning learning and development is bottom up through the PDR and top down."

"The guidance is that learning and development should be integral to team planning. It has not been a strength but has been more of a focus in the last year."

"Training is available if it is free and ideally you do it in your own time, that is my experience."

New ways of developing staff are being used (ER 6)

Plans take account of learning styles (ERs 10, 15)

People are engaged in decisions about own learning (ERs 9, 13, 14)

All staff have access to appropriate development

Most people spoke very highly of the learning and development offered by Tower Hamlets. Good efforts are made to ensure that training is tightly focused on the organisations' priorities. There is a good mix of internal and external experts used to deliver training. People can adapt training to their preferred learning styles thanks to the range of methods available, although most had not conducted learning styles questionnaires to know how they best learn. Development methods were found to include courses, on-the-job, e-learning, conferences and shadowing.

"The PDR here is not linked to pay, it is focused on development. It is less tick box now."

"It feels like training is on the back burner. You've got to find courses yourself and when I did my manager said there was no money."

"You ask for training through the PDR and don't hear back."

"It is so hard to break out of admin, you get stuck."

"Training is there but you are not directed."

There is a culture of continuous learning (ERs 16, 17)

Top managers demonstrate their role as lead learners (ER 7)

The overall culture of the organisation very much projects the message that learning and development is valuable. Managers have demonstrated their own commitment to personal and professional development with all of those interviewed describing extensive personal and professional development. Not all managers are leading and promoting learning and development locally and too many staff said there was no time for training suggesting it is not being prioritised by managers.

Indicator 3: People Management Strategy

EVIDENCE REQUIREMENTS														
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	
X	X	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓	X	X	✓	X	✓	✓	

Equality and Diversity are in place (ER’s 7, 12, 15, 20, 23, 28)

There is a long-standing strategic approach to equalities and diversity in this multi-cultural borough. One Tower Hamlets sets out the strategic actions taken to employ a workforce that fully reflects the community it serves. Progress is overseen by the People Board. The Council has in the last year implemented its own in-house temporary resourcing service for the local community.

Understanding of, and respect for, diversity at both organisation level (e.g. ethnicity, age and gender) and individual level (individual differences in style or confidence, for example) is strong across the organisation. Tower Hamlets uses the Equality Framework for Local Government (Excellent rating) to benchmark its practices. Valuing diversity is one of the core values. Everyone considered that this was applied internally as well as externally. There remain specialist groups (BME, LGBT, Disabilities) that keep the focus alive. But efforts need to be continuous and there is scope for raising the profile further still. The challenge Tower Hamlets faces of increasing the number of employees from a minority ethnic background into the higher levels of management is well-known. The Navigate programme is intended to be part of the solution to this.

Equality of opportunity in relation to learning and development was considered to be embedded at Tower Hamlets and through regular performance management and the line management one-to-ones everyone felt that they had equal access to opportunities.

- “You are respected and there is a respectful culture for all.”*
- “They know how to respect people, when you respect people they go the extra mile for you.”*
- “Equalities is high in the organisation’s consciousness. But we are still having an equalities behaviours and attitudes refresh.”*
- “Equalities is deeply engrained, it is not an add-on.”*
- “My wish would be for more BME women in senior positions to get more diversity of thinking in the leadership. Overall, it is a good place to work but some individual managers set the wrong tone.”*

**Work-life balance and staff wellbeing are given appropriate priority (ERs 7, 13, 16, 21, 24, 29)
Diversity and work-life balance links to Organisation Improvement Strategy**

Since moving out of Anchorage House the use of smart working has intensified and there is now a desk booking system in the Town Hall. The majority of those interviewed spoke positively about the approach and the flexibility it gives them. There were many examples of flexible hours, flexitime, homeworking and return to work support. It is a hard working environment. Within this setting, people described how most managers support them to balance their in and out of work lives. Leaders emphasised that having stressed staff is not in anyone’s interest and gave examples of steps they had taken to ensure people do not work excessive hours. The vast majority of people recognise the benefits of the work-life balance strategies (people like homeworking) and flexible working arrangements are used where possible. A minority of people reported having managers who did not believe in homeworking and took unilateral decisions on flexible working arrangement requests, with staff not feeling able to challenge.

- “There is the flexibility and trust and integrity to work at home.”*
- “They don’t want to hear it but desks are a real issue at Mulberry. It creates a huge amount of tension and I have witnessed stand up rows about the bookings.”*
- “Some managers are not comfortable with homeworking, which does not help the wider system work.”*
- “HR is a real management function here, you wouldn’t go to them with a concern.”*
- “HR and managers tend to close ranks if you raise concerns. Managers are protected here even though all the evidence from surveys and staff is painting a picture, they don’t tackle the problem managers.”*
- “Flexible working arrangements depend on the manager.”*

Recruitment and selection processes are effective in engaging quality staff (ER’s 6, 11, 14, 19, 22, 27)

Recruitment ensures a diverse, talented workforce

Recruitment and selection is done well in most cases and most people believed it resulted in a diverse and talented workforce. All people involved in recruitment must attend training first. Internal vacancies are promoted and to an extent people felt that the process worked well. Not everyone felt it was fair and cited examples further up the organisation where it would appear that opportunities were not advertised or where vacancies were a 'done deal'. Top managers were able to describe how the people recruited not just fit with the culture of the organisation but also the organisation strategy. People can be recruited for specific skills and this all contributes to creating the talented and diverse workforce that exists at the organisation.

"The interview was slightly one dimensional, more could be done to promote Tower Hamlets as a dynamic borough and the career opportunities it offers."

Constructive feedback is valued (ER's 9, 17, 25)

Through the amount of monitoring and discussion at Tower Hamlets most people reported receiving and giving good levels of balanced feedback. The twice-yearly appraisals are central to this and most get regular one-to-one's as well. The staff survey enables people to give feedback to the organisation and this is taken seriously and acted upon. CMT have worked hard in the last year in providing staff with the opportunities to feed up their thoughts but there is scope for further upward feedback. While the culture is changing in some management chains it was very apparent that some staff do not feel that it is safe to challenge. Some felt that leaders were too quick to dismiss valid, constructive feedback as 'moaning' rather than really listening to what people are saying and seeing it as an opportunity to improve.

"I wasn't successful for an internal job but the feedback I got helped me with my next application."

Appropriate structures and systems make the most of peoples' talents (ER's 10, 18, 26)

There have been numerous restructures and some name changes of directorates in recent times. There was a general consensus that the structure provides promotion opportunities and where these are more difficult everyone described how there were other development opportunities available such as secondments.

"There is a high expectation and a recognition that people want to do a good job."

Indicator 4: Leadership and Management Strategy

EVIDENCE REQUIREMENTS														
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13		
✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		

Leadership and management capabilities for now and the future are defined (ER 4) L&M development strategy links to organisation improvement strategy (ER 7)

There is a Leadership and Management Framework in place. When shown it managers were familiar with it but it did not have a very high profile and managers did not feel that they were given a great deal of feedback against it. This has been recognised by the Council too and a refresh is underway with a pilot taking place in Development and Renewal. There is no doubt that a renewed attempt to set out behaviours is required. Managers are very focused on 'what' they need to deliver but staff reported far less focus by themselves and their managers on the 'how'. Staff were very clear that it is the 'how' that needs to change in many cases.

Managers are reviewed and supported to acquire capabilities (ERs 5, 6, 10, 11)

To date the approach to leadership and management development has been 'training' rather than 'development' and it was apparent that more on-going development of the softer skills is to be encouraged. People did speak positively of the previous Aspiring Leaders programme. Leadership and Management

Development is a priority in the L&D Plan 2014/15. The extent to which managers are routinely reviewed against leadership behaviours is patchy and it was apparent that some managers are not comfortable discussing or reviewing behaviours.

“The Aspiring Leaders course helped me a lot, it gave me practical experience, a mentor, external coach and I had to complete and present a management report.”

“The behaviours side of management is missing, the framework exists but is not modelled.”

“It is a task-driven organisation and it needs reminding not to lose sight of the people and the importance of behaviours.”

“The Corporate Manager’s Network helps to set out management messages.”

“I would like more consistency between managers, so they apply rules equally.”

“I had some management development a long, long time ago.”

Everyone is encouraged to develop leadership capabilities (8, 12, 13)

The competencies have been created for all, and there is a general understanding through the values that everyone can be, and is expected to be a leader. All of those interviewed recognised that everyone has a part to play and there is a growing recognition of the importance of accountability. The line management system encourages accountability through PDR and one-to-one meetings. However, not everyone really recognised leadership capabilities and developing the sense of leadership at every level might be part of the next phase of organisational development at Tower Hamlets, building on what is already in place.

Indicator 5: Management Effectiveness

EVIDENCE REQUIREMENTS														
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13		
✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	X	X		
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25			
X	X	X	✓	X	X	X	X	✓	✓	✓	X			

Managers are effective and can describe how they lead, manage and develop their people (Core Standard)

Managers are role models of leadership, teamwork and knowledge sharing (ER’s 5, 6, 7, 9, 14, 15, 16, 17, 22, 23)

There is a culture of openness and trust (ER’s 10, 13, 21, 24)

Most staff described good working relationships with their line managers, who were seen to largely live up to their responsibilities. While Tower Hamlets are undoubtedly on a path towards a high level of consistency in people management, there were still some inconsistencies. There has been a high level of management turnover in some management chains and there are a relatively high number of interim managers and this extends to senior leaders. This was not seen as a big issue by those involved but people management does appear to be suffering in some management chains. A number of people described poor people management and were unsure if this was being robustly addressed or if anyone even knew about it. It was interesting that in most cases people said that they would not feel comfortable taking issues to HR and would far more likely go straight to the unions. HRBPs may want to reflect on that, build relations and make themselves slightly more accessible to staff.

“Levels of engagement are not high in our area due to the oppressive management style.”

“Individuals are not very secure and are suffering from poor management.”

“Leaders are more visible and are making an effort through blogs and coffee mornings.”

“The Council as a whole is really good, it is individual managers and pockets of managers who let it down.”

“One-to-one’s are useful to discuss workload but that is the extent of it.”

“The focus is on the task, nothing more.”

“Team meetings are sporadic and used to tell us what we are doing wrong, it would be good to be constructively involved in improvement but there is not much listening.”

“I am a really bad manager, I know I should be doing all this stuff but I’ve too much work to do. To be honest no-one checks on the management stuff, just the outputs.”

“Here, it is the classic case of people leave managers not the organisation. It is a good Council to work for, but they do not deal with bad managers at all well.”

“The central functions are not where they need to be in providing support to their internal customers. Finance and HR are not enabling the workforce they are sucking time. We work really hard and they are making life more difficult rather than easier.”

“Some areas are achieving results, but has anyone checked the morale? At what cost to the staff?”

“There is a high turnover of staff in our area due to management. You get worked to the bone with very little training, get some experience and then leave and go and work somewhere much nicer.”

Coaching is part of the culture (ER’s 8, 12, 19, 25)

For a number of years now managers have been exposed to the idea of developing people through applying coaching skills, but at interview it was not recognised as commonplace by staff. There was some evidence of informal coaching by managers but this was only in pockets. Any new leadership development programme might want to contain coaching to allow this this important approach to seep further into the culture.

People are helped to develop their careers (ER’s 11, 18)

People held positive views on career opportunities and most were positive about how opportunities were promoted. The amount of acting up has created opportunities for people. The one-to-one’s, PDRs and Navigate along with generally good staff-management relations all help to make staff feel that their career is developing. Within the appraisal there is the opportunity to discuss aspirations and most people feel they get sufficient guidance to build and develop their career at Tower Hamlets. There were plentiful examples of individuals progressing and expanding their roles and good use of secondments and projects which were viewed as developmental. That said, there is no room for complacency and some staff felt pigeon-holed with managers who did not seem interested in developing them beyond their current role. Others reported internal vacancies feeling like a ‘done deal’ and felt that they were there merely to make up the numbers.

Indicator 6: Recognition and Reward

EVIDENCE REQUIREMENTS														
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	✓
16	17	18	19											
✓	X	X	✓											

Reward and recognition strategies (ER 6, 7, 8, 12, 18)

Success is celebrated (ERs 11, 17)

Despite the huge amount of change there is a lot of strong evidence of seeking to value and celebrate good performance, with a whole range of interventions including bonuses, going the extra mile vouchers, thank you scheme and staff award ceremonies (where the Mayor and other senior leaders present the awards). Most (not all) managers are good at verbally thanking and recognising staff contribution. Tower Hamlets has developed its reward and recognition strategy and ensures that it is fair and competitive in the market, the Council pays the London Living Wage.

“I get thank you emails from the Head of Service and from colleagues.”

“There is some heavy leaning on goodwill. Some more praise from my manager would be welcome.”

Leaders and managers understand the importance of motivating their people and most (not all) have a feel for how to do so with good examples provided of individual’s preferences being taken into account, for example, public or private recognition. Several managers described how they had got better at acknowledging the important contribution made by people as a result of management development or being reminded at manager’s events.

**Representative groups are involved in developing reward strategies
What motivates people is understood (ER's 4, 9, 10, 15, 16)**

The reward and recognition approach is reviewed intermittently to ensure it remains effective and competitive. There may be value in formalising the recognition strategy even further through consultation with all representative groups to ensure that the strategy reflects what staff want within the constraints that exist. Equally, managers could get better at checking in with their staff as to what motivates them and how they like to be recognised. Overall, though people believe Tower Hamlets is a good employer in comparison with other boroughs and many people had experience of working in other boroughs. Beyond the reward and recognition provided by the Council and its managers, there is a high level of intrinsic job satisfaction that drives a good amount of additional discretionary effort that the Council and its residents undoubtedly benefit from.

Indicator 7: Involvement and Empowerment

EVIDENCE REQUIREMENTS														
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	X	X	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	✓
16	17	18	19											
✓	X	X	✓											

People are involved in decision-making (Core Standard)

People are supported and trusted to make decisions (ER's 9, 15)

Effective consultation and involvement is part of the culture (ER's 6, 7, 12, 13, 17)

Knowledge and information is shared (ER's 5, 10, 14)

Tower Hamlets does have a range of forums in place that allow for consultation and involvement. The framework of meetings gives people the opportunity to contribute. There are also various working parties and staff meetings focused on both strategic and operational issues. People described it as an innovative Council with most able to put forward ideas and feel supported in trying these ideas out.

Internal communication systems at Tower Hamlets appear to be working well. Indeed, everyone confirmed that communication had improved again over the last year. This is in part due to changes in the leadership and efforts to be more open. CMT have made additional efforts to be visible, put on roadshows and get out to offices and this has been noticed by people. There was some feedback that not all Service Heads are making sufficient effort to be the figurehead for their people. There was a real sense of disconnect in a minority of sections between frontline staff and Service Heads. It is hoped that on-going efforts, away days attendance at team meetings would all help to give Service Heads the opportunity to show they are with their staff and do take a genuine interest in the work.

"They do listen, I can say I don't think that's going to work and they will listen to my opinion."

"There are lots of interims in leadership positions and decisions take for ever."

"The procedures make it difficult to be flexible."

"I don't get to hear what other departments are doing, we are in a bubble."

"Better communication has given me a greater sense of belonging."

"There could be far more involvement of frontline staff in improvement."

Ownership and responsibility are encouraged (Core Standard)

People are committed to success (ER 16)

People can challenge the way things work (ER's 11, 18)

There is a culture of continuous improvement (ER 8)

There is a sense of ownership and pride in working for the organisation (ER 19)

Most people feel trusted in their roles and confirm that they are given the space and autonomy to make the decisions they feel are necessary on a day-to-day basis. There is a high degree of pride in working for the organisation. There is a will from the top to empower people. Most senior leaders interviewed were speaking the language of engagement – listening to staff and wanting to remove obstacles that prevent

them from working effectively. In some cases this is systems and processes but in other cases it is management behaviours. This approach needs to go much further and be felt in all management chains. Not all managers have signed up to this more empowering approach. While there is the will to continuously improve, staff did not feel that this was done at the local level in a structured, considered way. Not all felt able to speak up and challenge in their management chains. There was recognition that this did not come from senior leaders but from other levels of management.

"I can challenge, if I don't agree you can say so."

"I am proud of the Council and the work we do. This is the only Council I know that is providing this particular service that is making a real difference to local families."

"We have some team meetings but they are tick the box stuff not focused on improvements."

"It has been a long time since we were able to directly engage with the Section Head. We need more direction, visible leadership and listening."

"We don't have access to emails in 2014. We are reliant on the line manager, who is not reliable."

Indicator 8: Learning and Development

EVIDENCE REQUIREMENTS														
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	X	✓	X	X	✓	✓
16	17	18	19	20										
X	X	✓	X	X										

Learning and development resources are used effectively (ERs 4, 8, 13, 16)

Innovation and flexibility of approach (ER 5)

Learning is an everyday activity (ERs 8, 11)

All learning is valued and celebrated (ERs 6, 10, 14, 15, 18)

The PDRs, one-to-ones, significant investment and quality of training interventions have combined to ensure that learning continues to have a high profile at Tower Hamlets. Everyone described plenty of learning by doing and good interaction with colleagues and that helped ensure that learning is part of the culture at Tower Hamlets. People recognise that this is not always typical of organisations and people ranked the on-going learning and development as one of the reasons they choose to stay at Tower Hamlets.

While there is no doubting the scale of the investment, there is no room for complacency. There are some groups of staff who did not feel that their training needs were being addressed. In some areas there appeared to be a gap between staff and OD. This missing link here are of course managers, yet staff reported managers 'blaming' OD for the lack of training opportunities or budget. Some staff do not feel that managers make the time for training to happen. There is e-Learning available and some like this, but it was apparent that not everyone has had a positive experience of it yet or is sufficiently motivated to discover what it can offer. People did feel that learning achievements were celebrated. It was apparent that this is a 'heads down, get on with the work' period of time for some people and sadly, training was suffering as a result. That said, many confirmed that they are learning a great deal by doing and the number of people acting up or on secondment is high.

"There are hundreds of courses but very few dates for any of them."

People are given the opportunity to achieve their full potential (ER 9)

Personal Development is supported (ER 19)

There was confirmation that the leadership are good at broadening roles and providing people with stretching opportunities. Most but not all believed that demonstrated that personal development is supported at Tower Hamlets. The experience of some was that training was only available for the immediate role they were performing now. This appeared to be as much to do with line managers not spending the time guiding and coaching them in developing them.

Mentoring is used (ER's 7, 20)

The organisation has a long-standing use of the phrase mentor and mentoring but there is not a formal programme of mentoring that people are aware of. Formalising mentoring further and identifying and developing mentors represents the next step. Aside from passing on knowledge and skills, this would also potentially have relevance to efforts to secure and pass on the Tower Hamlets culture to recent recruits.

Induction (ER 3)

Most staff joining Tower Hamlets from outside described the organisation as friendly and welcoming, and outlined an effective introduction to their work with support from their manager and colleagues. New starters spoke warmly of the coach tour of the borough and the corporate day. At the local level the picture was not so positive. On-going vigilance is required to ensure that between line manager and OD all staff get a good local and corporate welcome to Tower Hamlets and the initial training and support they need to be productive as quickly as possible. Those changing roles described variable local inductions to new roles and often described an 'in at the deep end' experience that was less than ideal.

Indicator 9: Performance Measurement

EVIDENCE REQUIREMENTS													
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	X	✓	X	X

The contribution of people strategies is measured and evaluated (ER's 6, 10)

Impact on KPI's can be described (ER 7)

Performance improves as a result (ER's 11, 13, 14)

Career prospects improve (ER 12)

Flexible and effective approaches to measuring return on investment are used (ER 8)

ROI in people is reported to stakeholders (ER's 9, 11, 14)

There is a long-standing evaluation of learning and development framework in place that sets out the approach. Evaluation is taking place following training sessions. Annual L&D reports have been produced that capture key learning and development activities and some impact and testimonials. This is a good start and it is hoped that in future years with clearer measures of success established upfront and stronger links to KPIs a deeper understanding of impact will be possible.

The ability of the organisation, particularly CMT and managers outside of OD, to describe the impact of their people investment on specific KPIs was still not as strong as it could be, but there is no doubting their belief in the contribution L&D has played in Tower Hamlets.

"Our understanding and approach to risk has improved thanks to training."

"The record of achievement this term is amazing and would not have been possible without the training."

"We have got sickness down from 16 days to 5.5 through training managers and using the systems."

People believe that their career prospects have improved as a result of the development they have undertaken in the organisation, and how they have been managed in most cases.

Indicator 10: Continuous Improvement

EVIDENCE REQUIREMENTS														
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	X	✓	✓

Effective feedback methods are used understand people's views on how they are managed (ERs 6, 7, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15)

Information from external review is used to identify areas for improvement including the last Investors in People report (ER 4, 5, 8, 10)

People recognise that Tower Hamlets is a good place to work and that there is a top-level commitment to protecting the workforce. The contributing factors were the learning available, the flexibility with which they could manage their work, line management, clarity of vision and supportive colleagues.

There has been an on-going drive to continue to improve Tower Hamlets as a place to work, particularly over the last year. There is no sense of complacency as evidenced by the use of internal review (e.g. Social Worker Health checks, staff survey and accompanying action plans, Council committee structures) but also external review (statutory and regulatory bodies) and there is no shortage of external opinion and critique of Tower Hamlets.

A number of managers were able to discuss how they had improved their management style and approach through attending management development but also through attendance at management meetings.

“Communication is so much better. The roadshows and directorate newsletters and team briefings are all now in place and delivering.”

While there is a commitment to continuously improving (e.g. Think Tank) people did not recognise a particular approach to it. Consider forming Continuous Improvement Groups to focus on key Tower Hamlets priorities. Each group would have a chair and a representative sample of people. A Continuous Improvement Framework would document and set out the scope (e.g. drive performance and learning within Tower Hamlets). Representatives from around Tower Hamlets would sit on the groups on the basis that they can move the agenda forward. There is not a Tower Hamlets wide continuous improvement methodology. This has been shown to help identify improvements at the local level in other organisations as well as helping involvement and engagement levels by involving frontline staff in removing obstacles.

“We have a way to go on flexible working. We are making employees do more of that and self-service but at present it is making life harder for them not easier.”

“IIP is more embedded in the culture here than it is in other councils I’ve worked at.”

Recommendation and next steps

Having carried out the assessment process in accordance with the guidelines provided for Investors in People Specialists by Investors in People – United Kingdom Commission for Employment and Skills, the Investors in People Specialist is totally satisfied that London Borough of Tower Hamlets meets the requirements of the Investors in People National Standard at the Silver level of accreditation.

Investors in People accreditation is granted indefinitely, with a proviso that an interaction is undertaken within 18 months of accreditation and a full assessment takes place no greater than 3 years apart. Assessments can be undertaken at any time and more frequent assessments are recommended to maintain levels of good practice and continuous improvement.

The organisation should discuss the timing of the next assessment with their Investors in People Specialist, using the Improvement Planning Meeting to agree the best strategy for future use of the Investors in People framework.

Customer Satisfaction Questionnaire

Both the Investors in People Specialist and Investors in People South would welcome your feedback on this assessment and you will shortly be supplied with a Client Satisfaction Questionnaire from Investors in People to complete. Particular importance is placed on the feedback given by client organisation's on Specialists, therefore we would very much appreciate it if you would complete the questionnaire.

Promoting continuous improvement

We support organisations at every stage of the Investors in People journey, helping them to realise the power of their people, optimise their performance and achieve their full potential. We see Investors in People as the People Partner for sustainable people solutions.

Please contact your Account Manager Marie O'Sullivan, on 020 7728 3098 or email Marie.OSullivan@iipsouth.investorsinpeople.co.uk to find out more about Investors in People and how we can help your organisation.

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Outcomes table - evidence requirements framework matrix

Core Standard										
Total number of core evidence requirements assessed - 39										
Total number of core evidence requirements met - 39										
	Indicators									
ERs	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10
1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
4	✓	✓	✓		✓				✓	
5	✓		✓						✓	
6	✓									



Wider Framework										
Total number of additional evidence requirements assessed - 157										
Total number of additional evidence requirements met - 92										
	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10
4	Core	Core	Core	X	Core	✓	✓	✓	Core	✓
5	Core	✓	Core	X	X	✓	X	✓	Core	✓
6	Core	✓	✓	X	X	✓	✓	✓	X	X
7	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	X	X	X	✓
8	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	X	✓	X	✓
9	✓	✓	X	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	X
10	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	X	✓	X	X	X
11	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	X	✓	X	X
12	✓	✓	✓	X	X	X	✓	X	✓	X
13	✓	✓	✓	X	X	✓	✓	X	X	X
14	✓	✓	✓		X	X	✓	✓	X	✓
15	✓	✓	✓		X	✓	✓	✓		✓
16	✓	✓	X		X	✓	✓	X		
17	✓	✓	X		✓	X	X	X		
18	✓		✓		X	X	X	✓		
19	✓		✓		X	✓	✓	X		
20	✓		✓		X			X		
21	✓		X		X					
22	✓		X		✓					
23	✓		✓		✓					
24	✓		X		✓					
25	✓		X		X					
26			✓							
27			X							
28			✓							
29			✓							
Total	19	13	16	0	8	10	10	9	1	6