

Tower Hamlets Local Area Agreement 2008-2011

1. Introduction

The Tower Hamlets Partnership welcomes the opportunity to negotiate a new Local Area Agreement for 2008/09-2010/11. Performance against the current LAA has been strong and the existing agreement has supported the delivery of key local priorities through strong local leadership, enhanced partnership working and improved mechanisms for service planning and delivery.

The new agreement will set out some of Tower Hamlets' key priority areas for the next 3 years. The Partnership's proposed priorities have been identified following extensive consultation and are based on hard evidence. The Partnership's proposals strike a good balance between national and local priorities, and reflect the impact of major regional developments including the Olympics and Thames Gateway.

The delay in providing some aspects of the national Local Area Agreement framework, including the recently released national indicator set and operational guidance, has not impeded the development of the agreement in Tower Hamlets; significant work has taken place over the past year to ensure that we are well placed to negotiate a new three-year LAA.

2. Development Process, LAA Structure and Shape

It is a government expectation that local priorities from the Sustainable Community Strategy will form the core of the negotiated improvement targets within the LAA. During the course of 2007/08, the Tower Hamlets Partnership has undertaken a full review of its SCS - known locally as the Community Plan - and this renewed strategy, providing a vision and priorities for Tower Hamlets to 2020, will be launched alongside the new LAA over the summer of 2008.

The LAA will help deliver the refreshed Community Plan vision and they have been developed together. The emerging agreement is the result of consultation with local residents and detailed discussions with local partners. A strong local evidence base has been prepared to help inform its development, including a detailed borough profile and needs analysis. A cross-partnership working group has been created to help develop the new Community Plan and LAA, and this group will continue to operate in 2008 as it develops further the priorities and actions, and the framework to deliver them.

Tower Hamlets Community Plan to 2020, and the new LAA, will be structured around four themes:

- A Great Place to Live - including housing, planning, transport and waste
- A Prosperous Community – covering learning, worklessness and enterprise
- A Safe and Supportive Community – bringing together support for the most vulnerable residents with community safety issues
- A Healthy Community – including public health, access to primary care and mental health

Underpinning these four themes is the idea of One Tower Hamlets - reducing inequalities, bringing local communities together, strong local leadership and personal responsibility.

Although the refreshed Community Plan and LAA have been developed together, there are a number of significant differences. Most obviously, the Partnership's refreshed Community Plan is a long term strategic document based on a vision of the borough to 2020, whereas the LAA is a three-year agreement. The requirement for the LAA's designated 35 targets to be taken from the national indicator set also restricts the Partnership: many of its priorities are not captured adequately within the 198 indicators, and where this is the case local targets will also be used.

There has been significant discussion within the Partnership about the shape of the LAA. The national guidance makes clear that the agreement should not be a collection of unrelated performance indicators but seen as a package. The Partnership's focus in developing the LAA, and identifying the designated 35 targets, has been on ensuring that it is cohesive, reflects resident and elected Member priorities, is based on sound evidence and will have an impact over the three year timescale. Prioritised inclusion criteria were agreed to support the inter-Partnership negotiation process and ensure a consistent approach. In particular, two criteria were given a significant weighting in the development process:

- LAA priorities should have a strong partnership focus and not relate solely to one Partnership organisation as a service provider
- One Tower Hamlets should be the primary focus within the agreement – reducing inequality and supporting cohesion

3. Priorities and Indicators

The development process and guiding principles which have supported the agreement's development are set out above. The proposed improvement priorities and designated indicators for the LAA are attached. Below is a textual summary of the LAA, providing an outline of the reasoning behind the selection of some of the key priorities and accompanying indicators.

A Great Place to Live

The central focus of One Tower Hamlets – fostering cohesion and tackling inequality – is strong throughout the agreement. Meeting housing need, raising educational attainment and addressing the skills gap to improve employment opportunities are all vital in addressing the underlying inequalities that undermine cohesion. In addition, it was felt important that improving resident perceptions of cohesion should be represented within the LAA's designated targets through the indicator from the new Place Survey which measures the proportion of people who believe people from different backgrounds get on well together.

Improved outcomes for residents are at the heart of the borough's vision and the Partnership recognises its role in helping to improve the quality of place. The indicator relating to general satisfaction of local people with their area has been included within the borough's designated targets, acknowledging the importance of the Partnership, and partnership-working, in helping to drive resident satisfaction.

Sustainable development is central to the Partnership's approach and the integration, and balance, of economic, social and environmental needs is a key consideration in the new Community Plan. Tackling climate change is an increasingly important priority for the area and was a strong theme from this year's resident consultation. The Partnership's emphasis on issues with a strong partnership focus within the LAA means that the potentially more challenging indicator – the reduction of CO2 emissions in the area, rather than from local

authority operations – has been identified for inclusion within the borough’s designated 35 targets.

It is acknowledged that recycling rates are low in comparison to both the London and national averages and that there is a need for continuing performance improvement over the next three years. Recycling will feature in the borough’s LAA and the Partnership will maintain its strategic approach on moving management of waste up the agenda, in line with both the national and regional strategies.

Environmental cleanliness remains a key concern of residents, and issues such as graffiti and litter play a significant role in driving local perceptions. Effective partnership working is essential in this area and the indicator has been identified for inclusion within the LAA to support the improvement focus.

There is insufficient housing in the borough to accommodate the level of need and availability of affordable housing is a growing concern of local people. Nearly a quarter of the borough’s residents included affordable housing as one of their top three concerns in the last borough-wide perception survey, which is significantly more than both the London average and opinion within Tower Hamlets in the previous year. Increasing long term housing supply and affordability is a key Partnership priority that will be reflected within the borough’s agreement. It is proposed that the indicators relating to net additional homes provided and the number of affordable homes delivered will be included within the LAA’s designated targets. It is felt that a particular area of focus within this needs to be on family homes.

The Partnership is committed to improving housing across all providers in the borough and was disappointed to note that the indicator from the national set relating to Decent Homes includes only Council stock. In addition to the inclusion of the Decent Homes NI, the Partnership intends to capture its priority relating to housing standards and tenant satisfaction across all social landlords with local indicators, which cannot form part of the LAA 35.

Reducing road casualties is an LAA priority for the borough. There has been an increase in the number of people killed or seriously injured on roads within the borough in the past year and partnership working is essential in this area, particularly to improve performance on Transport for London’s road network.

The Partnership recognises that a thriving Third Sector is a key part of creating a strong and cohesive community and an essential partner in delivering the Local Area Agreement and the wider aspirations of the Community Plan.

A Prosperous Community

Tower Hamlets has the highest economic growth rate in the country with high levels of productivity and business enterprise. The working population of Canary Wharf alone is now in excess of 90,000 people and Tower Hamlets is expected to accommodate some 150,000 additional jobs by 2016, through the expansion of Canary Wharf and the development of the Thames Gateway. Up to 40,000 of these jobs will be generated by the Olympics and Olympic legacy development. However, Tower Hamlets still has a relatively weak labour market with a low level of skills; many residents are unable to take advantage of the employment opportunities that are available in the borough. Unemployment is over double the national rate and over a quarter of these residents are long-term unemployed. Tackling worklessness is a key partnership priority and is essential to delivering the Community Plan’s vision. Tower Hamlets

has already signed up to a 3% improvement in the employment rate across the 5 Olympic boroughs by 2012 through the City Strategy. It is proposed that the indicators from the national set relating to the employment rate and working age people on out of work benefits are included within the LAA's designated targets.

The proportion of people living in Tower Hamlets aged under 19 stands at 28%, which is significantly above the inner-London average of 18%. Ensuring that these young people have the skills for employment is a major challenge. Although the proportion of Tower Hamlets pupils achieving grades A*-C has increased to 56.7%, up from 26% in 1996, this is still below the national average. Five indicators from the national set relating to positive activities, skills and employment for young people have been included within the provisional 35, in addition to the statutory 16 DCSF indicators, reflecting their importance in the borough.

Child poverty is strongly associated with families experiencing worklessness and the effects of poverty in terms of education, health, crime and future life prospects are well documented. Although there are concerns with the specific indicator in the national set, reducing the incidence and effects of child poverty has been identified as a designated improvement priority.

The Tower Hamlets Partnership has designated a basket of four of its LAA indicators for Working Neighbourhoods Fund reward grant: working age population claiming out of work benefits in the worst performing neighbourhoods (NI 153), achievement of level 2 and level 3 qualifications by 19 (NIs 79 and 80) and the proportion of 16-18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training (NI 117). These indicators reflect the Partnership's approach to targeting worklessness, including both a commitment to impacting on the employment and benefit rate in the short term and a long-term, early intervention and preventative approach.

A Safe and Supportive Community

Crime remains the main concern of residents in Tower Hamlets as evidenced in perception surveys and other consultation, despite year on year reductions in overall crime levels within the borough. Both the violent crime and serious acquisitive crime rates remain higher than the London average and have been identified for inclusion within the borough's 35 designated targets. There is a very strong partnership dimension to tackling these issues through preventative work, communications and enforcement. This includes not just the Council and the Police but others including RSLs, the third sector and, of course, residents.

Tower Hamlets also has the second highest perception level of ASB in London and tackling this is a local priority; the indicator from the national set relating to dealing with local concerns about anti-social behaviour and crime by the local Council and Police has also been identified for inclusion. In addition, the indicator relating to arson incidents features within the designated 35. Deliberate fires are a key component of anti-social behaviour and Tower Hamlets has a higher number of arson incidents relative to population than any other London Borough.

Half of all crime is committed by those who have come into contact with the criminal justice system previously; it is estimated that reoffending in Tower Hamlets costs the borough in excess of £45 million every year. Reducing reoffending will remain a Partnership priority and it is proposed that the indicators relating to the reoffending of young offenders and offenders under probation supervision will be included within the designated LAA targets.

Drug treatment will also feature within the borough's LAA. Drug misuse is a major component of anti-social behaviour and custody drug treatment shows high levels of usage amongst those

responsible for acquisitive crime. The importance of reducing drug supply and use, and addressing residents concerns, is also reflected within the agreement with the inclusion of the indicator relating to perceptions of drug use or drug dealing as a problem.

The Partnership supports the preventing violent extremism agenda and acknowledges its central importance to community cohesion. The Partnership also understands the importance of a locally developed partnership approach and, as a Preventing Violent Extremism Pathfinder, has led innovative work in this area. The indicator relating to building resilience to violent extremism has been selected for inclusion within the borough's designated LAA targets.

Support for older people and vulnerable adults is an important priority for Tower Hamlets and plays a significant role in delivering the One Tower Hamlets vision. This priority is captured throughout the agreement, for example, through the inclusion of targets relating to people with learning disabilities and mental ill health in employment. The Partnership recognises the significance of support to carers, and its strong partnership dimension, within the agreement. This is important both in terms of support to vulnerable people and in enabling carers to continue with their lives, families, work and contribution to the community.

A Healthy Community

It is acknowledged that health, as a local priority, must be reflected significantly within the LAA. Tower Hamlets has poor health compared to the London and UK benchmarks: the borough records an average life expectancy of 77.4 years, ranking 349th out of 408 local authority districts in Britain. Mortality rates from both the 'big killers' (cancer and circulatory disease) are high; the borough's cancer mortality rate is the highest in London, and the circulatory disease mortality rate is second highest. Poor health has a wider socioeconomic impact and Tower Hamlets has a high rate of incapacity benefit claimants relative to London as a whole. It is felt that the health indicators in the national set do not capture well local priorities. However, a number of indicators have been identified for improvement targets within the LAA which will have a significant impact in improving health outcomes for local people within the three year-timescale.

Recent data shows that obesity levels in Tower Hamlets children are above the London average and rising in line with the national trend. A strong partnership approach to tackling childhood obesity is essential, encouraging lifestyle change and addressing environmental barriers. The indicator relating to obesity among children in year 6 has been identified for inclusion within the LAA designated improvement targets. Teenage pregnancy remains a concern and will also feature within the LAA. Although the under 18 conception rate has been declining, there is evidence that this improvement is slowing and Tower Hamlets' rate remains higher than the national average.

Mortality rates for cancer are high in Tower Hamlets and this is linked to high smoking rates, particularly for Bangladeshi men. The adult smoking indicator will provide a strong focus for improvement within the LAA. In addition, the indicator relating to all-age all cause mortality is included within the LAA, providing a good proxy for life expectancy.