


Cabinet 03 June 2020	 TOWER HAMLETS
Report of: Will Tuckley, Chief Executive	Classification: Unrestricted
#TowerHamletsTogether: Our response to COVID-19	

Lead Member	Mayor John Biggs
Originating Officer(s)	Afazul Hoque, Head of Corporate Strategy and Policy, Clare Matthews, Corporate Strategy and Policy Manager
Wards affected	All wards
Key Decision?	No
Forward Plan Notice Published	26 May 2020
Reason for Key Decision	N/A
Strategic Plan Priority / Outcome	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. People are aspirational, independent and have equal access to opportunities; 2. A borough that our residents are proud of and love to live in; 3. A dynamic outcomes-based council using digital innovation and partnership working to respond to the changing needs of our borough.

Executive Summary

This report presents the council's response to the coronavirus pandemic. In one of the most unprecedented times in history the council has rapidly adapted our services and redeployed resources to support local emergency response to the pandemic, simultaneously overseeing a major business continuity effort to ensure that its workforce has been able to continue to work safely and in-line with government guidelines. Doing this effectively has required close cooperation with partners at the national and regional levels, as well as close partnership working with local public sector organisations and civil society.

The council's response has focused on mobilising new ways of working across its workforce very rapidly, ensure our essential services remained resilient, working with partners to support our vulnerable residents and those isolating and ensuring effective governance and performance management structure to support decision making and continuous improvement to our way of working.

Recommendations:

The Mayor in Cabinet is recommended to:

1. To note the contents of this report outlining the council's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and plans for the proposed next steps.

1 REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 To provide the Mayor and Cabinet with an overview of the structures and wide range of activities undertaken by the council across the borough in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

2 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 2.1 Do not review the council's response.

3 DETAILS OF THE REPORT

- 3.1 The World Health Organisation (WHO) classed coronavirus as a pandemic on 11 March 2020 and the Multi-Agency Tower Hamlets Pandemic Plan was activated on the same the day, triggering the creation of the borough's Partnership Pandemic Committee to oversee the local response. Two days later the WHO declared Europe the centre of the global pandemic and the UK Government officially moved into the 'Delay' phase of the national strategy.
- 3.2 Over subsequent weeks, national Government's across the world have introduced a range of stringent suppression interventions to limit the reproduction rate of the virus and protect the capacity of healthcare systems. In the UK these 'lockdown' measures are unprecedented in peacetime, effecting every aspect of peoples' lives including enforcement of social distancing requirements, the closure of schools and the effective shutdown of large parts of the economy. The economic consequences of the 'lockdown' are projected to be historic, with some worst-case scenarios projecting UK economic output to shrink by up to 30% in Q2.
- 3.3 London, like many of the world's major cities, has been affected more seriously than the rest of the UK, with the capital having the highest age-standardised mortality rate of all UK major cities. This can be partly accounted for by the fact that the outbreak occurred earlier in London than elsewhere meaning the virus had more time to spread before 'lockdown' measures were introduced. Recent analysis from the Office for National Statistics has also shown higher levels of deprivation and ethnicity are likely to be compounding the virus' death toll, with deprived and BAME Londoners most exposed and vulnerable.
- 3.4 The significance of such inequality is also seen in the economic fallout from the pandemic. Whilst in general terms London looks to be slightly less affected by the crisis than other regions due to its diverse economic base, the GLA suggests this hides what amounts to a 'Tale of Two Cities' – for example whilst London has a larger share of jobs that can be done remotely, it also has a higher proportion of jobs in sectors that have been shut down. As with previous economic downturns,

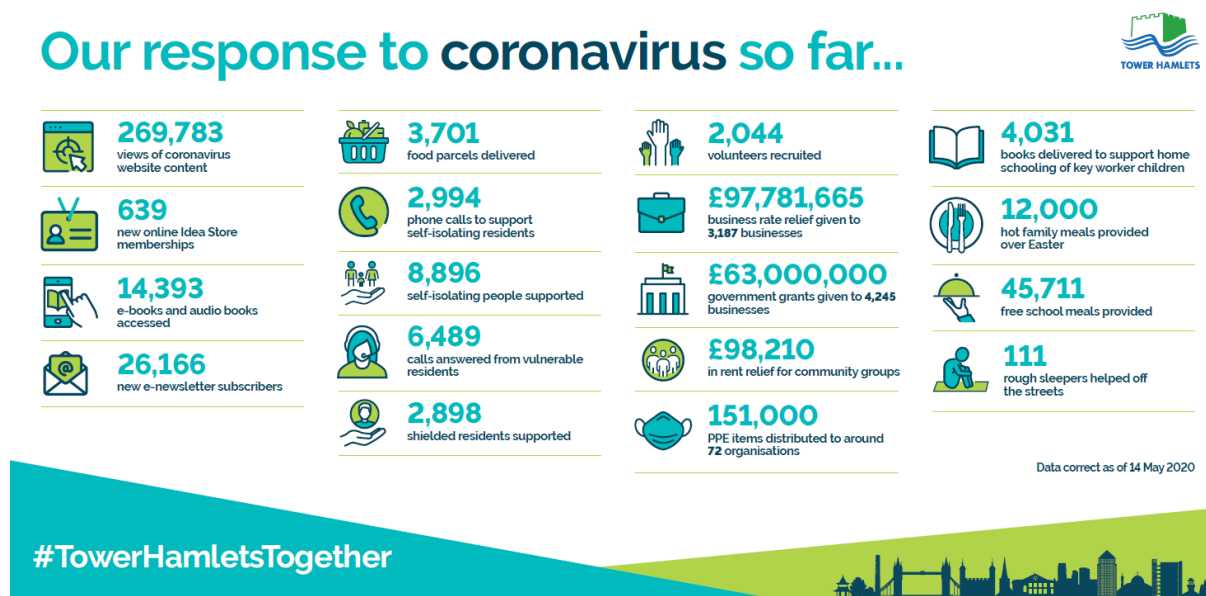
residents in 'lower-skilled' work are more likely to be vulnerable to the negative effects of recession than those in high-skilled graduate jobs.

3.5 It is in these exceptionally challenging circumstances that the council has rapidly adapted its full range of services to re-deploy resources on the local emergency response to the pandemic, and simultaneously oversee a major business continuity effort to ensure that its workforce has been able to continue to work safely and in-line with government guidance. Doing this effectively has required close cooperation with partners at the national and regional levels, as well as close partnership working with local public sector organisations and civil society.

3.6 The council's response has focused and delivered the following:

- A collective political and organisational leadership during the pandemic has delivered strong support to residents at a uniquely challenging time
- Our essential services across the council have remained resilient
- We have where necessary, reduced and/or adapted services to cope with the pandemic – This has largely been effective
- The peak in hospital discharges was significantly lower than expected and our services have coped well – we have not needed to use the Care Act Easements
- We have delivered on significant additional responsibilities – shielding, food/support for vulnerable people, testing, PPE, business grant and support
- Pandemic Committee, Borough Resilience Forum & internal BECC/Gold/silver arrangements have worked well – all adapted to the specific circumstances of Covid-19
- All within the context of the significant impact of Covid-19 on residents, businesses and civil society
- We have developed new ways of working, very rapidly and supported staff and our delivery partners to continue with delivering

3.7 The table below provides a summary of some of our key deliverables so far:



3.8 Appendix 1 provides a more detailed report of the council's response and some of our key deliverables up to 8th May 2020. Appendix 2 sets out governance structure that has been established to lead on response to the pandemic setting out responsibility at strategic, tactical and operational levels of decisions. The structure chart incorporates work with a range of local partners who have been key to the borough wide response. Finally, Appendix 3 provides the performance dashboard as

of 14th May 2020 which provides weekly update on key performance measures across the silver groups and this is reported to CLT Gold and Pandemic Committee.

Next Steps

- 3.9 We have started work with partners and other stakeholders to develop what reconstitution and recovery will look like. Our approach is to:
- ensure the social, economic and health recovery of the borough
 - coordinate multi-agency and cross-sector approach to ongoing pandemic responses and recovery
 - ensure a safe transition out of lockdown for the council and its residents
 - reconstitute and recover (an updated set of) council services, democratic processes, and priority projects
 - review and manage budget implications of the pandemic to ensure financial sustainability
 - review, update and embed transformation and change
 - recognise effort and commitment of staff and community during crisis
 - support the healing process, following the loss of friends and colleagues
 - secure successful, timely step down of the lockdown and recovery phases moving to a new normal
 - learn from our experiences of dealing with the pandemic and feed that into our future work
 - ensure consistent council and partnership information and communication
- 3.10 Our framework for reconstitution and recovery will focus on the following seven areas:
- Continuing pandemic response
 - Getting back to business
 - Workforce and wellbeing
 - Dealing with the impact
 - Making most of new way of working and innovation
 - National and local priorities
 - A new landscape
- 3.11 Discussions have begun already with statutory and non-statutory partners and community leaders about how we can collectively support the borough through the on-going pandemic and recovery. A separate report which provides more details is on the Cabinet agenda.

4. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The council has a legal duty under the Equality Act 2010 to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. The council's equality policy sets out a clear commitment to ensure equality is at the heart of everything we do from the money we spend, the people we employ, to the services we provide. The policy applies to all aspects of the council's functions and is especially pertinent at the time of a pandemic.
- 4.2 As a borough we have worked alongside our statutory partners, Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) organisations, faith organisations and businesses to ensure the varying needs of our residents are met at this extraordinary time. All residents will be impacted by COVID-19 in some way or another and it is important that as a local

authority we recognise this and have the appropriate provisions in place to help mitigate any impact where possible.

- 4.3 Initial broad scoping of the potential equality risks and impacts categorised by protected characteristic but also including other vulnerable groups has taken place. This information has been collated with some engagement with the boroughs Voluntary and Community Sector Organisations and council services but much more engagement will be needed to develop a comprehensive picture. As we develop a more detailed understanding of the impact and needs in Tower Hamlets around COVID-19 and what our collective response looks like, we will generate a more sophisticated understanding of the equalities picture.
- 4.4 Through national and regional data we know that older people, those with underlying health conditions and BAME people are particularly vulnerable to coronavirus. In terms of other groups, it is too early to have conclusive data about groups proportionately affected directly by coronavirus, from a health perspective. We would expect that socio-economic deprivation would be a major factor in increasing susceptibility to worse health outcomes relating to COVID-19. As the data picture becomes clearer, we will need to adopt our response accordingly.

5 OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:
- Best Value Implications,
 - Consultations,
 - Environmental (including air quality),
 - Risk Management,
 - Crime Reduction,
 - Safeguarding.
 - Data Protection / Privacy Impact Assessment.

6 COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER

- 6.1 The financial effect from Covid-19 response related expenditure, reduced income (including Business Rates, Council Tax and fees/charges) and the implementation timing of agreed savings will need to be monitored through 2020-21 budget monitoring and considered as part of the 2021-24 medium term financial strategy (MTFS) budget setting process.
- 6.2 A report on the Council's financial response to the Corona virus (COVID-19), agreed by Individual Mayoral Decision on 9 April 2020, is available through the link provided in the Background Documents section below.

7 COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES

- 7.1 To enhance the ability of public bodies, across the UK, to provide an effective response to tackle COVID-19 the Government enacted the Coronavirus Act 2020 (the Act). The legislation is time-limited for two years. The Act allows the UK government to switch on the new powers when they are needed and to switch them

off again once they are no longer necessary; based on the advice of Chief Medical Officers.

- 7.2 The Act contains provisions relating to a range of local authority functions. The Government has also issued various COVID-19 guidance. These and the legislation have been applied by the council when carrying out relevant functions/duties. **The responses set out in the report are within the council's general powers.**
- 7.3 Changes to the council's services which result in changes to services, staffing levels, roles and employment terms and conditions must be in line with the council's organisational change procedure and relevant legislation.
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Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents

Linked Report

- None

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – #TowerHamletsTogether: Our response to COVID-19 report
- Appendix 2 - Tower Hamlets Pandemic Response Structure
- Appendix 3 – CLT Gold Dashboard

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

- **The Council's financial response to the Corona virus (COVID-19)**, Individual Mayoral Decision, 9 April 2020
<http://democracy.towerhamlets.gov.uk/documents/s166123/193%20-%20IMD%20Covid%20Finance%20Report.pdf>

Officer contact details for documents:

Or state N/A