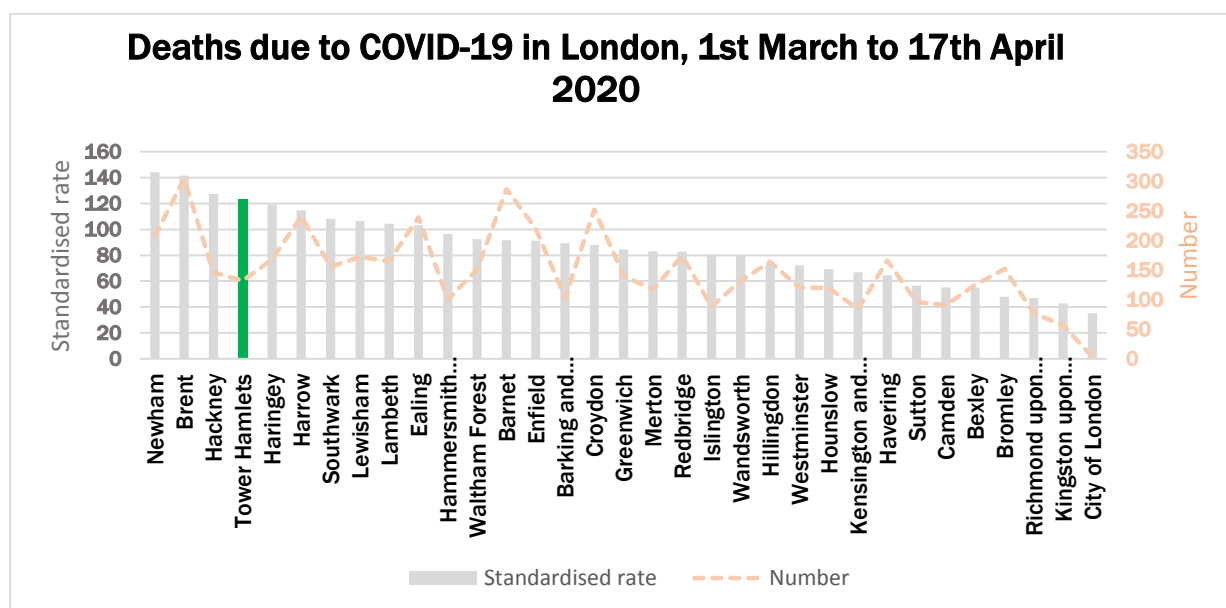


# #TowerHamletsTogether: Our response to COVID-19



# 1 Introduction

- 1.1 The World Health Organisation (WHO) classed coronavirus as a pandemic on 11 March 2020 and the Multi-Agency Tower Hamlets Pandemic Plan was activated the same 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.
- 1.2 Over subsequent weeks, national Governments 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.
- 1.3 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. National analyses show that death rates are strongly linked to deprivation and ethnicity, with death rates significantly higher in certain lower paid occupations (including taxi drivers, bus drivers and carers) and amongst Black and Bangladeshi groups.



**Graph 1**

- 1.4 The Office for National Statistics published detailed analysis of Covid-19 related deaths between 1 March and 17 April 2020. The same level of detailed analysis is not yet available for more recent deaths. The analysis showed that in that period, 132 Tower Hamlets residents died due to Covid-19. This figure has increased since and further details can be found in in paragraph 1.80. Comparison with other London Boroughs showed:
- Based on the number of COVID-19 deaths, Tower Hamlets is 19<sup>th</sup> highest out of 32 London Boroughs

- Based on age-standardised mortality rates - which adjusts for age - Tower Hamlets has the 4<sup>th</sup> highest mortality rate due to COVID-19 in London during this period
- COVID-19 mortality rates in Tower Hamlets are significantly higher for both men and women when compared to England
- COVID-19 mortality rates in Tower Hamlets are significantly higher for women when compared to London but rates are similar for men

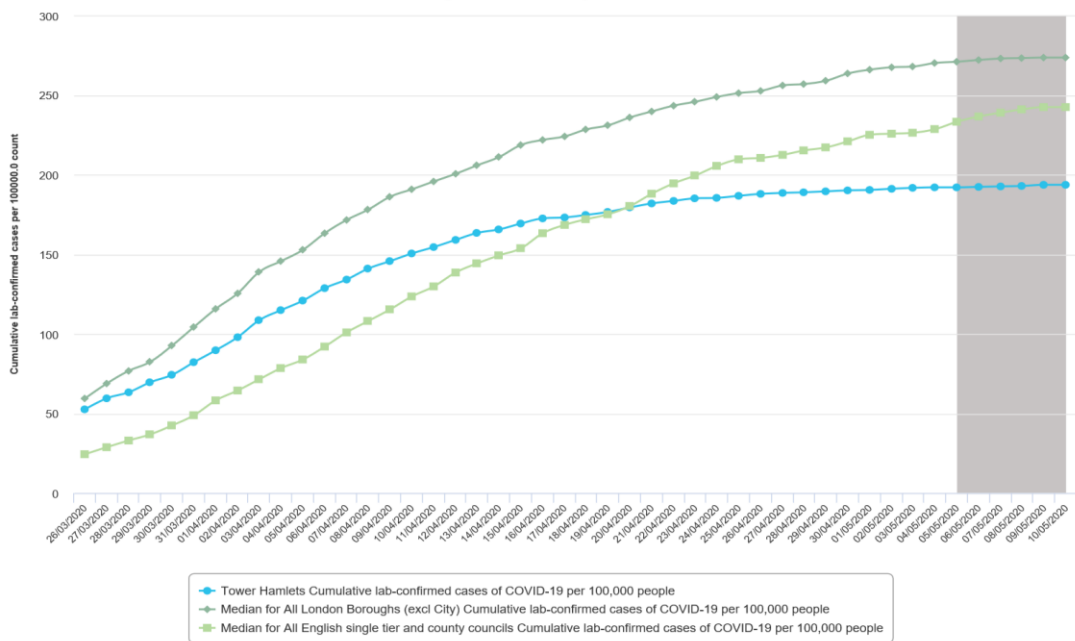
1.5 The Clinical Effectiveness Group in Queen Mary University have shared analysis with us on the number of cases of Covid-19 identified on GP databases (not deaths but suspected or confirmed cases). We currently only have the headlines, but these have indicated that when adjusted for age, the prevalence rate for South Asian (primarily Bangladeshi) is 1.9 times and for Black ethnicity 1.6 times the white population.

Note: the background colours of the bars above represent the quartiles of the values for all English single tier and county councils. The green area is the range for the lowest 25 per cent of councils, the olive area and orange area are the range for the middle 50 per cent of councils, and the red area is the range for the highest 25 per cent of councils. The line between the olive and orange areas represents the median, a typical value for an average council.

Tower Hamlets compared with All London Boroughs (excl City) and all English single tier and county councils, latest available non-provisional day

| Area   | Cumulative lab-confirmed cases of COVID-19 | Cumulative lab-confirmed cases of COVID-19 per 100,000 people | Daily lab-confirmed cases of COVID-19 | Daily lab-confirmed cases of COVID-19 per 100,000 people |
|--|--|---|---------------------------------------|--|
|  | 05/05/2020                                 |   |                                       |  |
|  | Count                                      | Count (per 100000 people)                                     | Count                                 | Count (per 100000 people)                                |
| Tower Hamlets  | 610  | 192.0   | 0                                     | 0.0  |
| Median for All London Boroughs (excl City)             | 699  | 270.9   | 3                                     | 1.1  |
| Median for All English single tier and county councils | 667  | 233.2   | 5                                     | 1.9  |

Cumulative COVID-19 Cases per 100,000 people, Tower Hamlets compared with All London Boroughs (excl City) and all English single tier and county councils



Note: the area of the chart in grey indicates provisional data. Not all cases tested for in this period have yet been incorporated into the data, and as such case numbers in the grey area are likely to be

**Graph 2 Tower Hamlets cumulative cases per 100,000**

1.6 As of 11 May there were 615 cases. The graph shows cumulative cases since the start of the epidemic. These show that the Tower Hamlets trajectory of lab confirmed cases has in

general followed the pattern of London, but overall rates have tended to be lower. This reflects the young population age profile of London (older people are more likely to have been tested because until recently testing happened almost exclusively in hospitals). As is the case with the rest of London, cumulative numbers have now plateaued (ahead of the rest of the country as the epidemic wave started earlier in the capital)

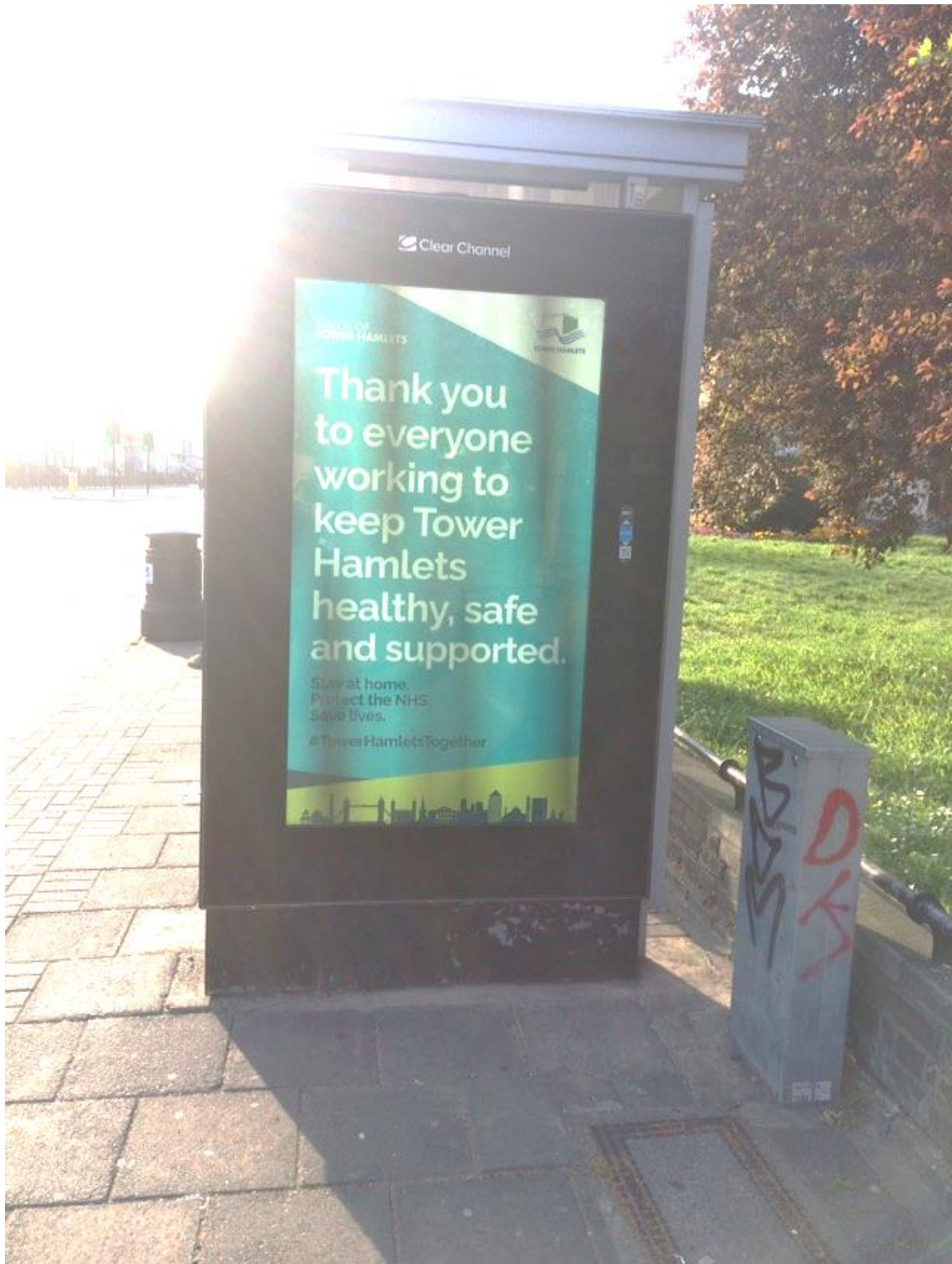
- 1.7 There has also been significant economic fallout from the pandemic. Whilst in general terms London looks to be slightly less affected by the crisis than other regions due to its diverse economic base, the GLA suggests this hides what amounts to a 'Tale of Two Cities' – for example whilst London 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.
- 1.8 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 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.

#### **Local Resilience Arrangements**

- 1.9 In early March 2020, the borough's COVID-19 Pandemic Committee was set up chaired by Director of Public Health, Somen Banerjee. The Committee brings together partners including the council, Bart's Health, East London Foundation Trust, GP Care Group, Clinical Commissioning Group, London Fire Brigade, Metropolitan Police and Tower Hamlets Council for Voluntary Services and acts as the main forum for overseeing the strategic, multi-agency response to the pandemic as well as the implementation of the Pandemic Plan. Beneath the Pandemic Committee, and reporting directly into it, are a series of 'Silver' groups that coordinate partnership activity across key operational areas – these include Health & Social Care, Children's Services, Community Mobilisation, Excess Deaths and Communications (the Tower Hamlets Pandemic Response Structure can be found at Appendix 2)
- 1.10 As the pandemic escalated, the council's Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) was constituted as a 'Gold Command' group to provide the executive oversight and decision making in respect of the council's pandemic response, as well as overseeing its risk and issues register and ensuring business continuity arrangements were implemented. Alongside the formation of 'Gold Command', the Borough Emergency Control Centre (BECC) was activated on 20 March, to monitor the council's operational response to the pandemic. The BECC has been operating seven days a week, initially providing a daily (now weekly) situation report on the resilience of key council services and a Horizon Scan flagging future issues. The situation report, once signed off by CLT, is reported into the London Local Authority Gold (LLAG) to assess resilience of council services across all London boroughs.
- 1.11 In addition, the London Borough of Tower Hamlets Resilience Forum (BRF) brings together Category 1 Responders (organisations at the core of emergency response e.g. emergency services, local authorities, NHS bodies) and, as and when required, Category 2 Responders (e.g. Health and Safety Executive, transport and utility companies - "co-operating bodies") and representatives from the voluntary, faith and business sectors. It seeks to ensure that multi-agency emergency planning, emergency response and consequence management are undertaken in a coordinated manner, based upon locally agreed priorities. The forum, chaired by Richard Tapp, (Borough Commander) London Fire



Brigade receives daily updates from London Resilience Forum and maintains and manages the Borough risk register and ensures resilience.



### **Health & Social Care Silver Group**

1.12 The Health & Care Silver Group is the main forum for coordinating the maintenance and, where required, adaptation of essential health and social care services within Tower Hamlets to maximise the availability of provision during the pandemic and trouble shoot major risks. It has created a series of 'Bronze' groups to address specific risks and issues identified during the pandemic, enabling Silver to ensure service resilience, quickly

redeploy resources and protect the most vulnerable by providing they receive the care they need.

- 1.13 Meeting on a weekly basis the group, Chaired by the Joint Director of Integrated Commissioning, brings together senior managers from across primary care, acute care (hospitals), community healthcare, adult social care, public health, housing options (homelessness), substance misuse and adults safeguarding. The group has benefited from already strong health and social care partnership arrangements through the Tower Hamlets Together (THT) partnership.

### **Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)**

- 1.14 Many of the council's services and those provided by its partners or commissioned providers require Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to safely deliver care and support, especially those operating in the provision of personal care. The supply of PPE to those who need it has become a key concern of the pandemic, as international supply chains have become stretched and national distribution arrangements struggled to keep pace with demand. Locally, some adult social care providers have reported difficulties obtaining PPE with providers raising concerns that stocks are being diverted to the NHS. Other providers have been successful in sourcing PPE supplies themselves, but the situation is fluid and can change on a weekly basis.
- 1.15 In order to provide greater resilience to local supplies of PPE the council has built up its own PPE stockpile providing a 72-hour supply of PPE that commissioned external services in Tower Hamlets can use in the event of supply chain failure. The council has also joined a pan-London procurement initiative to secure an interim provision of PPE to provide boroughs with contingency supplies of equipment for a six-week period while Clipper (the central government route for procuring of PPE) is mobilised.
- 1.16 To date more than 151,000 items of PPE have been provided to care home staff, as well as for residents with caring responsibilities and other frontline staff who are maintaining essential services.
- 1.17 To access these supplies the council has established clear pathways for care providers to follow, and PPE guidance has also been issued by the council setting out the type of equipment that should be used in different scenarios and settings. Throughout the pandemic, public health has provided PPE and social distancing advice to staff and stakeholders. Consistent guidance drawn up by public health on PPE usage has been agreed and communicated to teams and providers – for both health and social care staff and non-health and social care staff. Guidance and training on use of PPE has been shared and disseminated across health and social care partners – a virtual training session for carers and those with personal budgets and direct payments has been held by GP Care Group.

### **Hospital discharge & surge planning**

- 1.18 A core challenge related to pandemic planning was the expected surge in demand for acute health care, and the additional pressure this would place on social care services to support timely discharge in order to keep hospital beds effectively utilised. The Government published new national service requirements for hospital discharge on 30 March, directing all hospitals to establish an 8am-8pm, 7 days a week discharge service to facilitate the discharge of all medically optimised patients.
- 1.19 To help meet this challenge, an Integrated Discharge Hub was established at the Royal London Hospital within the space of a week to speed up the process of discharging non-emergency patients from acute care into residential or home-based care. The Hub draws together a multi-disciplinary team of social work, nursing, Occupational Therapy, Physio

and Brokerage professionals from across the partnership. Standardised packages of care are offered at the point of discharge, followed by a more personalised review and care package one - two weeks following hospital discharge.

- 1.20 Over 300 patients have been referred through the service since the end of March, with just over 50% of these Tower Hamlets residents. 90% of patients have been successfully discharged home with care and support, with the remaining 10% discharged to nursing and residential homes, supported accommodation, and newly commissioned step-down facilities. 25% of patients have been discharged the same day, and over 50% within one day, a significant improvement in performance compared to historical discharge times. Capacity is generally holding up well. Significant progress has also been made on finalising and integrating the homeless and rough sleepers discharge pathway.

### **Care Worker Recruitment**

- 1.21 Although the care sector in Tower Hamlets has remained resilient throughout the pandemic and has not faced significant capacity issues, the partnership helped prepare local providers for a projected surge in demand by developing a multi-channel recruitment campaign to attract new and returning recruits to care work.
- 1.22 To date the council has received over 170 enquiries and made over 60 onwards referrals to providers. The campaign will continue for the time being as the partnership recognises the medium- and long-term benefits of securing additional capacity for the sector, especially as contingency for a possible second peak of the virus.

### **Care Homes and Care Providers**

- 1.23 Care homes have been on the frontline of managing the pandemic, with the specific vulnerabilities of elderly residents to COVID-19 representing a specific challenge in terms of infection control and management. In addition, there has been an understandable level of anxiety within the workforce about the risks of the virus to the people they care for, themselves and their families.
- 1.24 The council has worked in partnership with local NHS healthcare providers to ensure that our care homes have a “wrap around” offer of support from all relevant primary and community healthcare professionals. Staff from Integrated Commissioning and Public Health have been supporting care homes to prevent transmission of the virus and where people do become infected, to manage the situation effectively.
- 1.25 Clinical support has been put in place to ensure services have access to support for infection control, appropriate use of PPE, and access to primary care and community nurses. An operational plan for care homes summarising how care homes are responding to COVID-19, what support is in place, and arrangements across the system has been drawn up whilst a weekly, virtual forum has been set up where issues can be discussed and explored.
- 1.26 The council has also worked closely with homecare providers, creating additional capacity totalling approximately 3800 extra care hours per week to help manage any increased demand as a result of the pandemic. Our partners in East London Foundation Trust have also responded to concerns and queries around PPE by delivering several formal and informal training sessions, as well as ensuring that providers have a steady supply of PPE through the mutual aid scheme

### **Homelessness & rough sleepers**

- 1.27 On 27 March, the Government issued a directive to local authorities to house all rough sleepers, meaning the council has been required to house all genuinely street homeless people or those at real risk of rough sleeping regardless of whether individuals have a

'priority need for accommodation', local connection to the borough or 'recourse to public funds'.

- 1.28 These individuals have been provided with accommodation by the council through hotels and additional hostel capacity being funded to ensure the homeless and rough sleepers have shelter where they can self-isolate. As of 6 May:
- 124 rough sleepers have been found a place to stay by the council
  - 16 known to remain rough sleeping – for various reasons
  - 350 rough sleepers from across London have been housed by the GLA in hostels in Tower Hamlets
- 1.29 A protocol for managing any potential outbreaks in hostels accommodation has been approved for use and support is being offered to existing hostels and additional hotel sites to implement this. Additional support services through primary care, community nurses and substance misuse services has been put in place, and additional capacity to meet demand is being sought. Supply has been identified at one hotel in-borough for individuals needing to self-isolate with en-suite provision and with onsite provision of meals. This is our main site for hospital discharge cases. The discharge pathway is currently working well, and the numbers of homeless people/rough sleepers being discharged through it are low and expected to remain low

### **Medicines**

- 1.30 Additional clinical prescribing resource for substance misuse clients has been sourced through Reset. Strikingly, the number of new referrals to Reset in April 2020 was 201, compared to 207 for April-June 2019/20. An end of life medicines pathway has been agreed and a shielding medicines pathway has also been agreed. Issues with the supply of some controlled drugs have been resolved.

### **Maintaining and adapting essential services**

- 1.31 Improved Access to Psychological Therapies services have been adapted to help address psychological health concerns caused/aggravated by COVID-19. An East London NHS Foundation Trust operated mental health crisis hub is currently operating well. An additional 24/7 mental health crisis phone line has been opened and higher call volumes are being recorded. These measures ensured that people whose primary concern was a mental health issue and did not need physical health care, could be supported appropriately.
- 1.32 Mapping has been undertaken across partners to show where services are changing due to COVID-19 and to ensure there are no adverse impacts across the system. Adult social care has prioritised urgent responses and safeguarding cases.

### **Care Act Easements**

- 1.33 As a result of the 2020 Coronavirus Act, local authorities now have the ability to put Care Act 'easements' in place. These are emergency and temporary measures in relation to adult social care.
- 1.34 Putting 'easements' in place mean that a local authority would not need to assess or determine a person's eligibility for care under the 2014 Care Act, but would need to meet a person's care and support needs if they were considered necessary for the purpose of avoiding a breach of the adult's human rights (this is called a 'stage 3' easement); and/or that a local authority would move to prioritise the whole system of care and support, allocating resources from some services not under pressure to support those that are (this is called a 'stage 4' easement). A local authority should only put easements in place when – as stated in national guidance - 'the workforce is significantly depleted, or demand on



social care increased, to an extent that it is no longer reasonably practicable for it to comply with its Care Act duties (as they stand prior to amendment by the Coronavirus Act) and where to continue to try to do so is likely to result in urgent or acute needs not being met, potentially risking life’.

- 1.35 We have not put easements in place and our current assessment at the time of writing is that the risk of having to do so is very low. The approach we have taken to date is to respond to the pandemic within the flexibilities of the 2014 Care Act, including the prioritisation of urgent adult social care assessments. However, work has been carried out through a Bronze Care Act Easement group so that we are prepared and have a clear approach if this situation was ever to change. To this end, information about our planning and potential future usage of Care Act easements has been developed and has been sent out to providers, the Carer Centre, Healthwatch Tower Hamlets, information and advice providers, our local user-led organisations and to groups representing people with lived experience of social care.



### **Shielding the Vulnerable**

- 1.36 The Government has instructed around 2.5 million people in the UK who are considered to be extremely medically vulnerable to COVID-19 to ‘shield’ - stay at home and stringently isolate – for three months in order to reduce their risks of infection. This group is defined by a certain medical condition and the Government has placed a duty on local authorities to assist people who are shielding to access food, medicines, or social support.
- 1.37 The number of Tower Hamlets residents who are ‘shielding’ is dynamic as new lists are regularly provided to the council by NHS England and local health services, however at the time of writing there were more than 8,500 residents in our borough considered to be extremely clinically vulnerable. The council has worked closely with NHS England and the GP Care Group to contact the extremely vulnerable individuals, flagging individuals in the database used by social care so that social care staff are aware of which people should be Shielding and can prepare accordingly when providing direct care. Local care homes have also been contacted about shielding individuals in their care.
- 1.38 The council and partners have undertaken a substantial call-out operation to contact these individuals and assess their needs and has involved over 150 staff from across the council, East London Foundation Trust, GP Care Group and the Clinical Commissioning Group.

These organisations have worked together to put in place support pathways to meet everything from urgent food needs to ongoing care navigation support.

- 1.39 So far over 4,420 residents (as of 22 May) have been contacted, which has resulted in over 750 individuals being delivered urgent food parcels, 180 provided with immediate financial advice, as well as over 500 referrals for ongoing social and practical support from LBTH's community navigators, social prescribers in primary care, and ELFT's care navigators. This will have a tangible impact on the health and wellbeing of our most vulnerable residents during the pandemic.

### **Children's Silver Group**

#### **Children's Social Care**

- 1.40 Staffing in the Multi-agency safeguarding hub and assessment and intervention teams has remained strong and work done at an early stage to split the service and reduce the risk of any possible infection has worked well. The assessment and intervention team are still seeing 75% of families face to face in order to complete section 47 safeguarding investigations, as well ensuring that they can complete assessments with a visit to the home and have contact with the young person. It is anticipated that there will be a significant increase in child protection referrals when schools return, and this could also impact on placements.
- 1.41 We have maintained contact with Children In Need/Children on a Child Protection Plan via telephone and video calls as well as face to face visits for our most vulnerable young people. Through-out the current emergency we have also maintained close contact with all of our Looked-after young people. We have increased phone and social media contact with care leavers to help address issues they have raised such as struggling with a lack of routine and maintaining a healthy diet. Some young people were also prioritised by the Through Care Team for face to face visits and all care leavers have been receiving regular food parcels.
- 1.42 We have maintained regular contact with our foster carers to ensure that they receive sufficient support in managing to look after our young people placed with them. Pathways mapping has been carried out with health colleagues to determine actions required if a Foster Carer becomes unwell with COVID-19.

### **Schools**

- 1.43 Schools closed on 20 March following the government announcement. In Tower Hamlets, as of 4 May, 77 schools were open with an average of 200 children accessing places who are both key workers and vulnerable children. For schools who were unable to remain open owing to staff self-isolating, alternative provision was provided at a neighboring school, or a Hub school such as Manorfield and Blue Gates Field. Many of those schools chose to remain open over Easter, including Bank Holidays, thereby allowing critical worker parents to go to work and leave their children in a safe, fun environment.



- 1.44 We have been developing guidance for schools on a number of issues including around social distancing and encouraging attendance of vulnerable children. We currently have around 12% of vulnerable children in school, slightly above the national average and are working with schools to get a better picture of which pupils should be attending and reasons why if not. Work will also be carried out to develop messaging to help respond to the concerns of parents around the risk of infection. We have also been working with schools to identify staff who require COVID-19 tests.

### **Responding to Domestic Abuse**

- 1.45 One of the main concerns identified at the outset of the 'lockdown' was the potential for a sharp increase in the levels of domestic abuse (DA) and the charity Refuge has reported a 25% increase in calls to their national advice hotline. At a local level, the anticipated surge in referrals and incidents has taken longer to emerge than originally expected, but an increase in demand is now being seen. Over the course of the last month, the level of demand and notification has increased for both community safety and for children's social care and the council is now seeing referral rates that are at least in line with what would be expected at this point of the year, and against some measures, the demand is now beginning to exceed what would normally be expected.
- 1.46 This pattern is not isolated to Tower Hamlets, with other councils and local police colleagues confirming that the slower than expected emergence of this pressure was being experienced across the London region.
- 1.47 Throughout 'lockdown' the council has continued to proactively promote campaign messages through the creation of a dedicated violence against women and girls (VAWG) COVID-19 webpage and the VAWG service directory has been updated to ensure that victims and professionals are aware that help is still available - "youarenotalone" messaging. The VAWG Team has also implemented a Virtual Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) process which is critical to protecting high risk victims of DA and so far, two virtual MARACs have taken place.



- 1.48 Tower Hamlets VAWG service provides an internal dedicated VAWG duty phone line for professionals. This continues to operate well and has had an increase in contact since lockdown from social care professionals. Our VAWG specialist training is all now undertaken remotely and webinars are in place to deliver this.
- 1.49 It is widely anticipated that the return of children to schools will result in a further wave of referrals with a DA component. Experience from previous school summer holiday period (which also coincides with the seasonal rise in DA incidents) results in a spike in demand.
- 1.50 With regards to other crime and ASB in Tower Hamlets since the pandemic started, the following data provides an overview. This is a comparison of police recorded crime for the periods 5 January 2020 to 5 April 2020 compared to same period in 2019, and 31 March 2020 to 13 April 2020 compared to the same period in 2019.

- Burglary down 7% (down 30% in last two weeks)
- Robbery down 5% (down 66% in last two weeks)
- Violence with Injury (Non-Domestic Abuse) has remained the same (down 46% in last two weeks)
- Anti-Social Behaviour reports to the police up 2% (up 152% in last two weeks).
- ASB requests to the Council have increased 3% Q4 19/20 compared to Q4 18/19.
- Reports of noise nuisance to both the Council and Tower Hamlets Homes have increased by 34% for the period February to April 2020 compared to last year.
- Reports to the Environmental Services noise nuisance team have increased by 18% for the period February to April 2020 compared to last year.



## Parks

- 1.51 A joint decision was made with the Police to close Victoria Park on 25 March as a significant number of visitors were failing to observe social distancing advice. New control measures and reduced opening hours were implemented and Victoria Park was reopened on 11 April, with regular patrols by the parks teams, volunteer park wardens, Tower Hamlets Enforcement Officers (THEOs) and the police. The reopening of the park has been welcomed by residents and allows people to undertake exercise and contributes to maintaining the wellbeing of local people.

## **Community Mobilisation Silver Group**

### **Customer Contact**

- 1.52 The council set up a dedicated COVID-19 Helpline (0207 364 3030), a web based COVID-19 self-isolation support request form and the [COVID-19@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:COVID-19@towerhamlets.gov.uk) email. The Helpline focusses on supporting residents that are Shielding and as at 22 May, 7,325 calls have been logged of which nearly 33% were from extremely vulnerable residents. All other residents who are not classed as being at the highest risk of severe illness from coronavirus, or who are not extremely vulnerable are routed into support via the online form on the council's website. The email provides a central address to receive offers of support, requests and queries from residents and business.

### **Self-Isolation Referral Support**

- 1.53 As of 22 May, we have received 3,786 self-isolation support referrals in the LBTH Self-Isolation inbox. These are people who are self-isolating who need some kind of information, advice or support. The vast majority have come from the online form completed by either the resident or customer services on their behalf. Referrals are made to the appropriate support pathways to meet their need(s), such as food provision, financial support and advice or ongoing care needs.

### **Volunteering Hub**

- 1.54 The COVID-19 Volunteering Hub has been commissioned by the council and set up and run by Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets (VCTH), in liaison with a link officer at the Council. As of 22 May, VCTH has registered 2,083 residents to volunteer, with a total of 2,011 volunteers matched to roles. Roles for partner organisations include fundraisers/bid-writers, telephone survey volunteers, hot food delivery drivers and telephone befrienders for vulnerable adults. The 805 volunteers recruited to roles for the council have included shoppers for vulnerable residents (collecting pre-paid shopping), food sorters and packers, assistant park rangers and toy bag collectors for the children and families support team.

### **Voluntary and Community Sector**

- 1.55 In total, as of 22 May, 74 VCS organisations are listed as offering support services on the council's website by the following categories:
- Social support Services – 25
  - Health and wellbeing – 11
  - Advice and information – 39
  - Education and entertainment resources – 7
  - Food – 7
  - Volunteering – 1
- 1.56 The Mayor has agreed to grant rent relief to community-based organisations that lease premises from the council for the period 1 April to 30 June 2020. This amounts to £98,210 in financial support. During the same period, he has guaranteed continued funding for VCS organisations that the council funds including Local Community Fund (LCF), Small Grants and commissioning – £675k for LCF alone in this period.
- 1.57 Community Navigators and Social Prescribers have referred 332 residents to telephone befriending services provided by VCS organisations via the social support pathway.

### **Food Provision**

- 1.58 As of 22 May, we have delivered food parcels to 3,949 households in the borough, supporting 11,220 residents. Of these 3,228 residents were in households where at least one person was shielding. We have been actively supporting local food providers including schools, food banks and hot meal providers to meet increased demand for food due the crisis. We matched food providers with corporate donations and food supplies, as well as



providing support with storage and logistics. We have supported the Bow Food Bank and First Love Foundation funding £7,384 through our innovation funding which enabled each organisation to access nearly £11k funding each through our crowd funding platform.

- 1.59 We are engaged with 23 VCS food providers including four schools and offered capacity support with funding and access to supplies, so they can meet demand and increase their capacity and offer.
- 1.60 We formed a partnership with A Plate for London, a new social enterprise, to provide free hot meals to families in need over the Easter school holidays. In total, there was 12,000 free hot meals handed out across nine locations in the borough to families with children in need. The partnership has also provided employment to 12 chefs who have been affected by the closure of restaurants during the coronavirus lockdown.



### **Voluntary Community Sector NCC Food Hub**

- 1.61 In partnership with the New City College (NCC), we have set up a VCS food hub, which gets deliveries of surplus food from Felix Project, City Harvest and Fairshare, a minimum of three times a week. The hub commenced operations on 4 May and with two vans, we successfully distributed in excess of 1,000kgs of food to 15 local VCS food providers. We also distributed more than 100 ready meals including to the Salvation Army and we are seeking to increase this to 500 going forward and subject to availability. We delivered smoothies to staff at Royal London, two hostels and homeless people in hotels in Tower Hamlets. The service is staffed by five council officers and four volunteers, which was adequate for the level of work and it allows safe physical distancing arrangements.

## Faith

- 1.62 The Interfaith Forum and its members have been actively supporting several workstreams including community mobilisation and excess death work stream. Local faith organisations have been running food hubs providing food to vulnerable residents, supporting with shopping and medications. Faith groups have also been key to supporting residents with bereavements including with funeral arrangements. The council has worked with faith organisations to provide information on celebrating major religious festivals such as Easter and Ramadan in a safe manner which adheres to government guidelines. Messages for faith communities around prayers and funerals is ongoing, and the work crosses over with the excess deaths workstream. Information on hospital chaplaincy, death and funeral guidance, focussing on the Tower Hamlets context, posted to the Tower Hamlets website and included in resident's newsletter. Published Inter faith/community message of reassurance concerning these issues agreed with partners.

## Hardship & Financial Support

- 1.63 We have referred 333 residents for debt support through the self-isolation email. Table 1 below illustrates the impact of COVID-19 and easing of the eligibility criteria on the Resident Support Scheme. It shows the average daily spend (broken down by fuel and food) in each of the last two weeks, compared to average daily spend for a standard month in 2019. Between 25 March and 22 May, the Resident Support Scheme awarded a cumulative total of £61,402 to COVID-19 related application to 603 applicants

| Fund Name   | Fuel  | Food   | Total Daily Spend |
|---|-------|--------|-------------------|
| Average daily spend in week up to 8 May           | £606  | £1,505 | £2,111            |
| Average daily spend in week up to 1 May           | £576  | £1,385 | £1,961            |
| Average daily spend in typical month before COVID | £5.50 | £24    | £29.50            |

**Table 1 Average daily RSS spend**

## Communications Silver Group

- 1.64 During the pandemic, our communications work has helped to support the organisation and our services as they have changed, along with ramping up the frequency of our channels to provide vital information to residents, partners, stakeholders and members.

## Partnership

- 1.65 A communication partnership group has been formed and meets weekly bringing together Bart's Health, Clinical Commissioning Group, GP Care Group, East London Foundation Trust, Canary Wharf Group, East London Business Association, Interfaith Forum, Tower Hamlets Homes, Poplar Harca and Swan. The group coordinates borough communications, such as around Ramadan and domestic abuse, using multiple channels to reach our residents.
- 1.66 We also sit on the weekly London Councils communications call, sharing materials and best practice with other local authorities.

## #TowerhamletsTogether

- 1.67 We launched #TowerHamletsTogether on social media, which aims to promote the good work taking place across the borough involving council services, partners, residents, community groups and volunteers.

- This involves user generated content as staff, partners, residents have been sharing photos and videos of their work using the hashtag.
- To support this campaign, digital billboards and bus shelters using our new council branding have carried a thank you to all those keeping Tower Hamlets safe, healthy and supported. We negotiated this space free of charge but would usually be worth more than £500,000.

## Tower Hamlets Council website

- 1.68 A separate area on the website was created featuring helpful links, signposting, borough and partner information and support. We continue to feature useful resources for all ages – including education, entertainment, exercise and worship – as well as provide accurate information on sensitive subjects such as deaths, burials and bereavement services.
- 1.69 We have also made hundreds of updates to service webpages, as well as creating forms for residents to apply for business support, tax relief and other measures to support people through the crisis. To date we have 269,783 views of coronavirus related content. Overall, there has been around a 22% increase in visit to the Tower Hamlets Council website compared to the same period last year.

## Intranet and Yammer

- 1.70 We have dedicated our top three news stories on the intranet homepage to coronavirus updates as well as making daily updates. We have also created an intranet page for staff, which includes support and advice for managers and key information. We have also launched a virtual room in Yammer called The Staff Room to encourage informal chat and comradery among our staff when the majority are working from home.

## E-newsletters

- 1.71 For the first three weeks of the crisis, we issued separate daily newsletters to the public, staff and members. We are now sending three public newsletters a week, a BAME newsletter and two members bulletins and two town newsletters. The recent internal staff survey told us that the majority of staff (81%) agreed that they are kept up to date and well informed.

**A message from the Mayor of Tower Hamlets**

As we approach another weekend where we will all be spending more time at home than we would ideally like, I wanted to thank those of you who have been doing what is necessary to help stop the spread of this virus.

Last night, the government confirmed the existing social distancing measures will remain in place for at least the next three weeks. I know this is hard but I urge you to please continue to **stay at home**. In doing so you **protect the NHS**, which helps to **save lives**.

**If you do leave your home, it should only be for one of these reasons and should be for as little time as possible:**

- **to shop for basic essentials** – only when you really need to.
- **to do one form of exercise a day** – such as a run, walk or cycle, alone or with other people you live with.
- **for any medical need** – for example, to visit a pharmacy or deliver essential supplies to a vulnerable person.
- **to travel to and from work** – but only where this is absolutely necessary.

Many of you will know people who have received food deliveries from the council this week – delivered by staff and volunteers. Some of you may even have received them yourselves. I recently visited our **Emergency Food Distribution Centre** where the boxes are made up and I was really impressed by the dedication and determination of everybody working together to protect our most vulnerable residents. When we clap for our carers and key workers next Thursday, let's give them all a round of applause too.

For those people that are not at a higher level of risk, occasional trips to the shops for essential supplies are still necessary. In the bigger supermarkets, there are queuing systems in place to help people stay a safe distance apart. Unfortunately, this week we have seen examples of long queues forming to get into local smaller shops where people were far too close together. On Thursday, the crowds outside shops in Shadwell were a particular concern.

**Stay updated with local coronavirus information:**  
[www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/coronavirus](http://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/coronavirus)

- Stay home
- Protect the NHS
- Save lives

**Stay healthy and active in lockdown**

We've put together a great list of ways to stay active, creative and connected while staying safe and healthy at home.

You can stay in shape with online [exercise sessions for all ages and abilities](#) as well as take the opportunity to learn a new skill or keep in touch with friends and family.

[There's plenty to enjoy online](#) with special shows from museums and theatres, or you could virtually visit a zoo or learn a new language, recipe or skill.

Today is International Dance Day, which is a timely reminder that getting your groove on in your living room with [free and energetic dance classes](#) is a fantastic way to stay fit and active.

The English National Ballet also has [free ballet sessions](#) for anyone who fancies trying out a pirouette.

[Browse activities >](#)



- 1.72 To date, we have sent three Managers' briefings, 32 Members' Bulletins, 18 towerhamlets now coronavirus specials, eight weekly th now newsletters featuring service spotlights and thank yous, and 37 public newsletters. We have also supported council services to issue a further 27 newsletter updates to help residents at this time. We have so far welcomed 26,166 new public e-newsletter subscribers.

### **Social media**

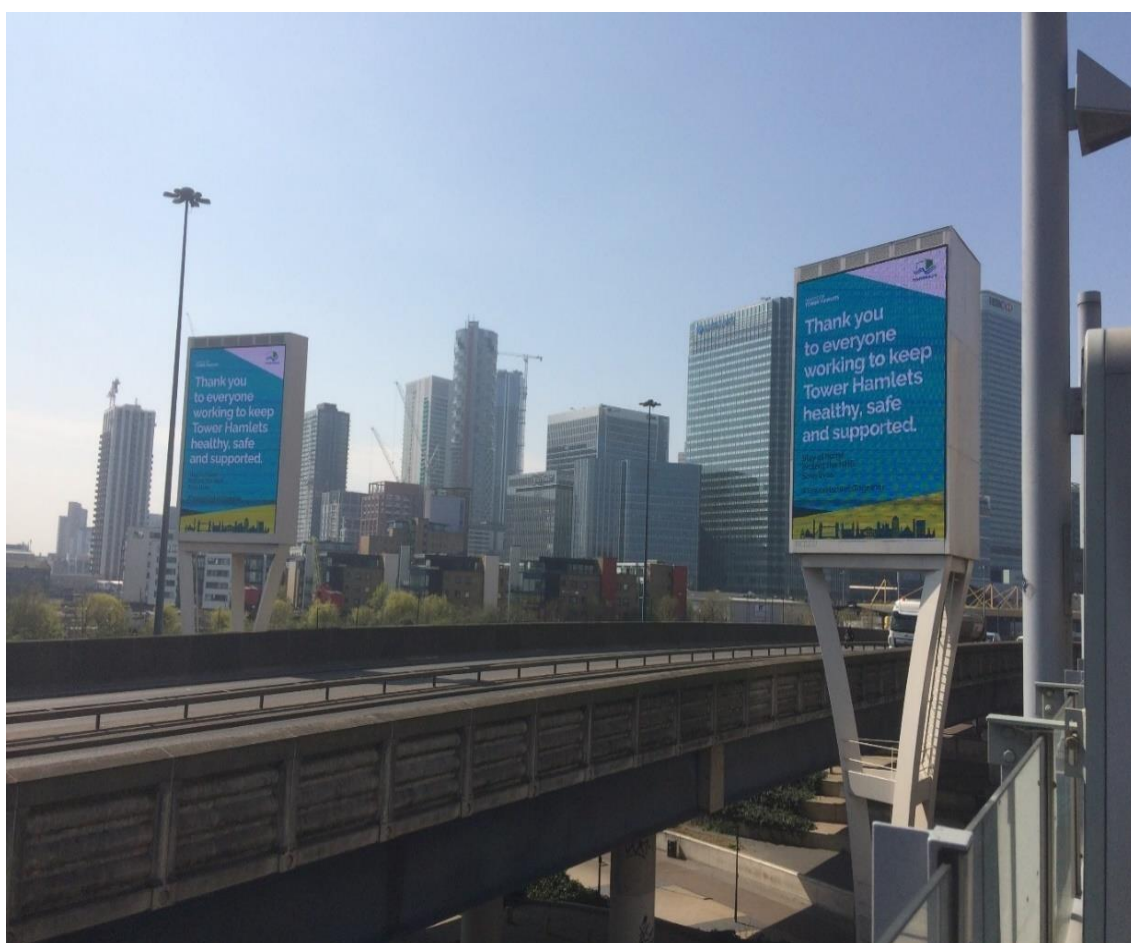
- 1.73 We have noted a significant increase in engagement from residents on social media, particularly with people staying at home, on our website and through reading and signing up for our newsletters. In the first month alone, we responded to over 10,000 social media queries, which has required an increase to two officers to monitor this volume, including responding to messages on the closure of Victoria Park.

### **Leaflet and texts**

- 1.74 Quite early on the crisis, a stay at home leaflet was created and delivered to just under 136,000 households in the borough which included council phone numbers for those in need. We have also sent over 2,000 texts to residents who are considered extremely vulnerable by the NHS so we can support them with 'shielding'. A special Covid edition of our East End is also planned for June.

### **Banners and signage**

- 1.75 We have created social distancing banners and signage across parks, with an added focus on hotspots such as Victoria Park and shopping areas in Shadwell. Some posters and fliers have been translated into Bengali to reach specific communities.



### **Excess Deaths Silver Group**

- 1.76 The multi-agency Group has been working to support essential service delivery in the death management process, during the COVID-19 pandemic. One of its priorities has been to ensure deaths are handled with care, respect and dignity, adhering to health and safety requirements.
- 1.77 The Group reviews capacity issues, challenges and pressure points across key service providers. This includes the Mortuary Service, Coroner's Service, Funeral Directors, Registrars, GPs, body transportation arrangements. It engages and prioritises public health messaging and external communications. It reports into the London Resilience Forum's working groups, including the Mortality Management Group (MMG), supporting new measures introduced for death management during the pandemic. This included the Pandemic Multi-Agency Response Team (PMART) process for COVID-19 deaths in the community and introducing regional mortuaries (PMART was formally stood down on 15 May).
- 1.78 Through its weekly meetings, delivery of its action plan and management of risks, the Group has been able to review and support delivery of several outputs, some of which include:
- Resolving workforce capacity issues to ensure staff health and wellbeing is supported and staffing is relatively on balance to meet current demands. This includes introducing new ways of working and adapting services (including identifying an opportunity to share good practice, Coroner's Service)
  - Expanding funeral facilities and burial capacity, introducing Saff burials as an option, and monitoring a spike in Parish Funeral requests
  - Introducing changes to the death registration process (online, certificates issued seven days a week and same day appointments offered)
  - Efficient management of body release and sufficient capacity at local public mortuary. This also includes oversight of training for Environmental Health Officers to undertake body release at the mortuary
  - Monitoring death management capacity locally, regionally and Pan London
  - Supporting compliance with Government, Public Health England, and LRF guidance concerning funerals and handling of the deceased, this includes PPE provision for Funeral Directors (including through the LA's mutual aid scheme for urgent needs access), social distancing, adherence to funeral standards, safe, sensitive and innovative (including webcasting) funeral services, the presence of a celebrant
  - Delivery of joint faith messaging with the interfaith forum, and council communications and FAQs on death management, financial assistance and bereavement support available.

### **Registration Service**

- 1.79 Legislation to register deaths was temporarily changed in England and Wales with the introduction of the Coronavirus Act 2020. The new legislation allows the Registration Service to continue registering deaths without the need for face to face contact. It is now possible for information for a death and/or stillbirth registration to be given by telephone by a qualified informant. In Tower Hamlets, this is now done via our new on-line booking system which allows customers to book their appointment 24/7 and order and pay for the death certificates.
- 1.80 From the 1 January 2020 to 8 May 2020, a total of 587 deaths of Tower Hamlets residents were registered, according to the latest provisional data published by the Office for National Statistics. 172 of these deaths were Covid-19 related.





### Waste Services

- 1.81 At the beginning of the pandemic period in late March-early April, the number of available staff was reduced by 20-40% compared to normal due to sickness, isolation measures and increased childcare responsibilities. The service focused on continued delivery of essential services (household residual waste and food waste collection and disposal). Given updated national guidance on priority waste services and social distancing there was a further impact on resources, met through use of additional temporary agency staff. Some services (e.g. recycling collection) were reduced and others (e.g. bulky waste collection, garden waste collections, reuse and recycling centre) were suspended, following the government guidelines. Such changes to the service have been communicated with the residents via our communications channels. From the beginning of May, we have been able to provide a full residual waste, recycling and organic waste collection service. Planning has been carried out to re-start bulky waste collections and to re-open the re-use and recycle centre as early as possible in May.
- 1.82 The service moved back to council delivery since 29 March. An industrial dispute by Veolia staff took place from 9 March till 15 March. However, issues had been resolved by the time the lockdown started. Delays in the service provision caused by the strike have also been resolved.

### Leadership

- 1.83 Where COVID-19 has necessitated executive decisions being taken outside of Cabinet meetings the Mayor has sought to ensure maximum transparency by publishing Individual Mayoral Decision (IMD) reports in advance of signing to allow for scrutiny. The Mayor has also emailed all councillors to seek representations ahead of the decision being considered and webcast IMD signings to allow him to provide responses to points raised.
- 1.84 The Mayor chairs fortnightly tele-conversations with the Partnership Executive Group (PEG) which brings senior leaders across Tower Hamlets together to understand and discuss a place-based response to the pandemic. He has held themed tele-conferences with faith leaders, voluntary and community sector, housing, businesses and young people.

- 1.85 The Mayor visited Tower Hamlets College and our food distribution hubs as well as Neighbours in Poplar and other community groups to provide support through visits and engagement. Mayor recorded videos of some visits for social media. Cabinet members have also been visiting emergency food hubs regularly.
- 1.86 Regular updates are provided via social media, with the Mayor having foreword on two of the three regular emails that comms send out each week. The Mayor and Cabinet have produced regular videos providing information on topics such as housing support, business support, support for domestic violence and following public health guidance. Over 20 videos produced since COVID-19 pandemic to get information out through Facebook, Twitter and WhatsApp.
- 1.87 Videos with partners including both local MPs (13,000 views) and East London Mosque about Ramadan (over 2,000 views) have been produced. Targeted videos have also been produced i.e. guidance on Victoria Park rules and a social distancing video – which was in both English and Bangladeshi.
- 1.88 The Mayor has written to the government to lobby on several policy areas from raising the issue of shops hiking their prices, support for both small businesses and the self-employed and the limited impact of the Local Housing Allowance changes in inner London. He campaigned for the expansion of Free School Meal voucher scheme to budget supermarkets and called for government to take urgent action to understand why BAME residents are disproportionately impacted on by Coronavirus.
- 1.89 CLT Gold have provided executive oversight and decision making of the council's response to COVID-19. They also provide strategic oversight of the risks and issues registers and are ensuring business continuity. They are meeting daily. A weekly Gold Dashboard, available at Appendix 3, is produced for CLT Gold. This provides an overview of the council's response, capacity and service demand in a range of areas and enables CLT Gold to have oversight of the latest situation on a regular basis. CLT Members act as conduit for partnership working and lead on these discussions with local, regional and national partners. CLT Members have also visited food hubs, new laptop distribution area for staff, registrar's office, PPE distribution location amongst others. CLT also have provided personalised messages to all staff through the TH Now (staff newsletter) providing updates and acknowledgements of staff providing excellent service. CLT have ultimately led on providing assurance to staff, members and stakeholders about ensuring on-going delivery of critical council services and redeploying resources to support this work.



## **Governance Arrangements**

- 1.90 The Governance Directorate undertook various steps to ensure it continued to serve Councillors, MPs and its community in ensuring good governance was not hindered. This included agreeing a new process for how democracy would continue under the pandemic and how the council could make use of emergency governance arrangements and more generally the procedures that would be followed.
- 1.91 The following was implemented:
- Individual Mayoral Decisions (IMD) would be taken outside of the Cabinet process with reports published on the website and the decision-making webcast.
  - Correspondence circulate to all Councilors advising them before and after decisions were taken
  - Implementation of Overview and scrutiny call-in procedures and question to Mayor.
  - IMDs had regard to the publication requirements under the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 and have cogent reasons to take decisions on grounds of urgency and in accordance with the general exceptions and special urgency provisions.
  - In respect of other decision making, powers for the Chief Executive and General Purposes Committee were noted and would be used if required.
- 1.92 The council implemented remote member-level meetings without the need for participants to be physically present. This introduced new IT systems with support from ICT and suppliers to test and roll-out 'virtual meeting' options. Two 'virtual' Licensing Sub-Committee was held successfully on 28 April and 5 May. It is expected that these meeting options will be rolled out to all Committee meeting types over the next few months. Audit Committee and Strategic Development Committee are to meet in the next couple of weeks followed by Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny Committee.



- 1.93 The team have also implemented new support arrangements and tools for Members including:
- Daily Member Briefings on the pandemic alongside weekly Member Bulletins on other matters
  - Updating the Members Hub with pandemic information
  - Worked to pause physical Member surgery arrangements
  - Preparing to roll out new laptops to all Members giving them access to additional software and systems
  - Exploring options for new Member Development tools
  - Paused the work of the Speaker

## ICT

- 1.94 ICT services have undertaken urgent deployment of laptops to support working from home, bringing the total to 1533 so far this year and increasing at around 150 per week. They have also reconfigured around 200 phones to allow call centre staff to work from home. CLT Gold and BECC have been migrated to Teams and enabled a virtual BECC. The Helping Hands application has been implemented to coordinate support with our most vulnerable citizens. Ensuring all staff can work virtually has been a key focus of the service and is continuing with the migration of staff to laptop and new technology.

## Staff Absence

- 1.95 Since the start of the pandemic, sickness absence has been monitored daily allowing us to capture and report on the impact the virus is having on staffing levels and plan accordingly to limit any negative effects on service provision. Sickness absence levels reached a peak in early April and have now dropped and stabilised. On 7 May there were 155 (129.5 FTE) days of sickness absence, a slight decrease from 163 the previous Thursday. Of the 155 (129.5 FTE) days of sickness absence, 66 (53.8 FTE) or 42.6% (41.5% FTE) were related to COVID-19.

### In this issue

- Will Tuckley - Chief Executive
- Staff networks and COVID-19
- Health and Safety – COVID-19
- Council wide staff survey – checking in with you at this time
- Domestic abuse – support is available
- New BECC structure
- Redeployment - support our community
- Ramadan
- Wellbeing Wednesday: Be kind to yourself
- Let us have your stories
- Compliment a colleague
- Smarter Working IT Update

BECC

### New BECC structure

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented the Borough Emergency Control Centre (BECC) with various challenges to how it works, this has led to three key changes...

[Read more »](#)

Like (0)

Redeployment - support our community

We have been asking staff to come forward through redeployment to support our Food Hub Centres and Victoria Park. We still need more staff to come forward...

[Read more »](#)

Like (0)

## **Staff Support**

- 1.96 A range of support and information has been made available for staff with regular updates including personal message from Corporate Directors, messages of thank you from Mayor, as well as the latest information about staying connected provided via TH Now (Staff newsletter) and on the staff intranet pages.
- 1.97 The dedicated Coronavirus (COVID-19) intranet page provides the latest staff updates as well as working from home and IT guidance, advice for managers, wellbeing and health links, FAQs, HR Policy, staff volunteering, PPE and other key information. In addition, 'The Staff Room' has been created on Yammer – a virtual staff room to get tips and keep up to date with colleagues.

## **Bereavement**

- 1.98 During the global coronavirus pandemic, we are aware that some staff may have experienced bereavement in their families or social networks, which makes an already tough time incredibly hard. In addition, supporting someone who has suffered a bereavement, may also have an impact on mental and emotional wellbeing. The council has pulled together a range of resources that might help.
- 1.99 The council has updated our Death in Service Guidance considering COVID-19. The guidance provides a clear approach for the general steps that should be taken, and the roles and responsibilities of the council as part of this.

## **Redeployment**

- 1.100 The council has set up a redeployment system. As of 4 May, 65 staff members have come forward for the food distribution and 22 staff have been redeployed to support management of parks including Victoria Park.

## **Support to local businesses**

- 1.101 A range of support is being provided to local businesses. All businesses eligible for Business Rates Relief have been notified and refunds continue to be administered. As of 14 May, £97,781,665 in relief has been given to 3,187 businesses. In addition, £63,000,000 in Business Grants has been awarded to 4,245 businesses and we are awaiting information from other businesses to process their payment.
- 1.102 On 27 April, the Government announced 100% guaranteed Bounce Back Loans, it is anticipated that businesses who did not meet the criteria for the initial Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme could apply for this bounce back loan. Furthermore, on 7 May, top-up grants funding was announced to support businesses who have been ineligible to access other COVID-19 grant schemes. Details of the criteria are still to be confirmed.
- 1.103 The council is supporting markets and our high streets and town centres by waiving pitch fees, initially from 23 March until 30 April, now ongoing, this is reviewed on a regular basis. We have also suspended charges for Non-Trading, Commercial Waste customers.
- 1.104 Information relating to government / local council support initiatives is kept updated on the council's website alongside other useful resources. We continue to support businesses via the TH Enterprise – [thenterprise@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:thenterprise@towerhamlets.gov.uk) and Business Support - [business.support@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:business.support@towerhamlets.gov.uk) mailboxes, and 0207 364 4458 voicemail helpline. Currently we are responding to all email enquiries the same day and have handled more than 220 enquires and signed up over 135 businesses to receive our COVID-19 updates. Businesses continue to complete our COVID-19 Business Continuity survey; to date we have received 346 completed surveys.



### Support to council suppliers

- 1.102 During the current period, several Adult Social Care providers are being paid on upfront block arrangements, based on commissioned services rather than actual delivery, to allow earlier payment to help their cash flow and to take account of extra service delivery due to the pandemic.
- 1.103 Smaller suppliers were paid earlier in the month of April for approved payments, rather than waiting until payment became due in line with payment terms, to support cash flow of the suppliers.

### Debt recovery and welfare advice

- 1.104 The council has introduced a revised process to assist all Business Rate, Council Tax, Adult Social Care, Commercial Rent and other council customers. In all cases, the legislative enforcement processes have been suspended until the end of June.
- 1.105 We adopted a Local Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTR) under which the level of awards is based on a resident's income and their full council tax liability. Consequently, any decrease in a recipient's income, will result in an increase in their CTR entitlement. This has proved to be of crucial benefit to residents who have experienced a loss of income during the current pandemic as the council has experienced a significant increase in new CTR claims and residents reporting changes to their circumstances.
- 1.106 During the period 29 March to 10 May the number of households getting CTR rose 29,268 to 31,343, which means an increase of 2,075 households. The council also processed an average of 4,600 changes of circumstances per week during this period, ensuring that CTR awards for existing recipients are adjusted to take into account any changes to the household income.
- 1.107 For individual debtors Local Taxation and Sundry Debtors, we will signpost all cases to the council's debt advice partners who provide this advice free of charge. Many of the customers who will be experiencing financial hardship with the council, due to the impacts of COVID-19, will also have similar issues with utilities, rent / mortgage payments, credit card debts, etc. and the agencies will provide an overall debt advice service. Table 2 details how many clients have been supported with welfare advice and the resulting income.

| Organisation                  | No. clients supported | Income gained for clients from mid-March to 15 May |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------|--|
| St Hilda's East               | 76                    | £25,281  |
| Bromley by Bow Advice Service | 247                   | £100,117   |
| Account3                      | 140                   | £17,392  |
| Limehouse Project             | 90                    | £40,107  |
| St Peters                     | 68                    | £79,251  |
| W CAB                         | 1,986                 | £1,108,215   |
| Legal Advice Centre           | 851                   | £145,556   |
| Island Advice Centre          | 416                   | £148,990   |
| Toynbee Hall                  | 59                    | Unable to provide financial outcomes at this stage |
| Deaf Plus                     | 20                    | Not secured any new money                          |
| <b>Total</b>                  | <b>3,953</b>          | <b>£1,664,909</b>                                  |

### Advice Support

- 1.108 Most of the council's Council Taxpayers are already set up on the extended 12 monthly scheme. These will remain in place but if taxpayers contact the council to defer payments

pending the Government's 80% funding schemes for employees or self-employed or have applied for support under the council's Council Tax Reduction scheme, this will be fully supported. Business Rates are on a 10 monthly instalment scheme and this can be extended to 12 monthly instalment plans if requested. Revised plans can also be agreed for other invoices which cover instalments for a short period or for specific cases.

- 1.109 For commercial rent there are a number of options which include a rent-free period for a short term, initially for three months and rent deferment schemes. No action is being taken against any Council Business Tenant until further notice.
- 1.110 The Council has suspended all recovery and enforcement action as long as it is deemed necessary. From May, SMS, email and hard copy notices will continue to be sent out, but will be reworded to advise customers of their account balances, and to include information on how they can get help, what reliefs, discounts, grants, and reductions are available to them, and how to claim them.
- 1.111 No notices will be sent to council tax payers until the Hardship Fund has been allocated. Testing is currently underway with new bills being sent out in Mid-May. All notices will include links to the council's webpages on Business Support and what is available through the CTR scheme. In all cases the Council will not be looking to use external enforcement agents to pursue any debt.

### **Finance**

- 1.112 The Government have announced a broad range of measures to directly support individuals and businesses with the widely recognised financial impact of the pandemic. This has included emergency funding, grant arrangements and business rates relief.
- 1.113 The council's financial situation such as budget pressures, financial support and debt recovery, as well as its financial support to others, is rapidly evolving. For full details and the latest overview, please check the Council's financial response to the Corona virus (COVID-19) report listed in the background documents to this report.

### **Next Steps**

- 1.114 We are working 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
- 1.115 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

1.116 There is a separate report in the Cabinet agenda which provides further details on the council's recovery plan.