



Our Tower Hamlets

A Plan for a More Cohesive Community 2020-25



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Forward

Tower Hamlets is one of the most culturally vibrant and diverse areas in the country. The borough is densely populated, with over 300,000 people living within eight square miles at the heart of London's East End.

The borough has for centuries welcomed and been home for many immigrants to Britain – including Huguenots, Jews, Bangladeshis, Somali community and more recently from different parts of Europe. Today, 69% of the population are from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) communities.

Tower Hamlets has a strong tradition of upholding community cohesion and resisting those who seek to divide. People from all backgrounds have stood side by side when minority communities have been targeted in the borough. The battle of Cable Street and the anti-racist campaigns of the 1980s are good examples, as well as, in recent years, people of different backgrounds standing against attempts to divide the community by far-right groups such as the English Defence League and Britain First. The community response to the pandemic has also shown the resilience and an incredibly positive coming together of local people to support each other through formal volunteering and mutual aid groups. Alongside this the Black Lives Matter movement has highlighted the need to do more work to address inequalities faced by our communities and its impact on cohesion and we will ensure as community leaders we lead by example to address these.

Tower Hamlets now attracts many more affluent residents to live and work in the borough. Deprivation and poverty are also widespread in the borough, however, providing a stark contrast to the wealth and prosperity that has grown around Canary Wharf and the City fringes.

The rate of change has become more rapid in the last decade and is projected to continue to do so over the next couple of decades. This includes an increasing population size, high proportions of the population moving in and out of borough, and rapid growth of new developments which will bring new people to our borough. This means that as has been the case throughout our history we need to harness their potential to contribute and put down roots in our community. While some of these changes can enrich our communities, they can also put pressure on local services and undermine community relations, with the potential to stoke prejudices and discrimination.

We want to continue to be a place where people feel they belong and where people feel they get on well together and have an equal voice. *Our Tower Hamlets: A plan for a more cohesive community* is a five-year plan which sets out our approach to do that by focusing on three key Priorities which will filter through our programmes and service delivery:

- Priority 1 – Connected People: People have strong and positive relationships with others from the same and different backgrounds
- Priority 2 – Involved and Empowered Community: People have a common vision and a greater sense of belonging in the community

- Priority 3 – Bridging the equalities gap: Similar life opportunities are available to all

We will continue to work with local partners to deliver projects that foster cohesion within the community including programmes such as Communities Driving Change; Tackling Poverty Fund, the No Place for Hate Campaign and others. But we are ambitious that we can do more.

In order to achieve a more cohesive society, we recognise that we must work closely with our partners and those who live, work or study in the borough must be involved in shaping our efforts to develop and build on this plan. This plan has provided, and will continue to foster, opportunities for such collaborative place shaping. We will ensure that our cohesion activities are guided by what local people tell us, as well as local data, intelligence and best practice.



John Biggs
Mayor of Tower Hamlets

Councillor Asma Begum
Deputy Mayor and Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Equalities



Background

What we mean by community cohesion

By 'community' we mean people from different backgrounds and interests who live, work or study in Tower Hamlets.

Tower Hamlets has adopted the definition of community cohesion linked to the Cantle and Denham reports¹. This definition is widely accepted and is embedded in both national and regional approaches to social integration.

It states that *a cohesive society is one in which:*

- *there is a common vision and sense of belonging by all communities;*
- *the diversity of people's backgrounds and circumstances is appreciated and valued;*
- *similar life opportunities are available to all; and*
- *Strong and positive relationships exist and continue to be developed in the workplace, in schools and in the wider community.*

National and regional context

Community cohesion is underpinned by the Equality Act 2010, which states that public authorities must have due regard to the need to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- **Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.**

The Council is required to set and publish one or more equality objectives that are specific and measurable which we should achieve to meet all or part of our duty. We do this by embedding equality objectives within our Strategic Plan, ensuring that community cohesion, as a vital component of the Act, is explicitly featured.

Community cohesion has become more of a priority nationally and regionally in recent years. The independent review into opportunity and integration conducted by Dame Louise Casey in 2016² led to the Government publishing 'Integrated Communities Strategy' Green Paper in March 2018³, and in response to the consultation, an Action Plan was launched in February 2019⁴. The national strategy identified the need to have measures for social integration and encompassed eight focus areas:

- Strengthening leadership
- Supporting new migrants and residents

¹ Ted Cantle (2001), *Community Cohesion: A Report of the Independent Review Team*

John Denham (2001), *Building Cohesive Communities: A Report of the Ministerial Group on Public Order and Community*

² Louise Casey (2016), *The Casey Review: a review into opportunity and integration*

³ Integrated Communities Strategy green paper, March 2018

⁴ Integrated Communities Action Plan, February 2019

- Education and young people
- Boosting English language
- Place and communities
- Increasing economic opportunity
- Rights and freedoms
- Measuring success

Also, in March 2018, the Mayor of London launched 'All of Us – The Mayor's strategy for social integration'. It takes a four-part approach:

- Promoting shared experiences
- Supporting Londoners to be active citizens
- Tackling barriers and inequalities
- Improving London's evidence base

In working towards a more unified approach to cohesion nationally, in June 2019 the Home Office launched its 'Indicators of Integration Framework'⁵. The Greater London Authority has also produced headline measures for social integration⁶. We have considered these measures in developing this plan.

Brexit has also emerged as a crucial factor in cohesion. It has highlighted community divisions, opinions on Brexit are widely seen as a reaction to widening economic inequalities⁷ and Brexit appears to be a major contributor to the perception of a permissive space within which hate crime has increased.⁸

Key facts: United Kingdom



56%

people believe that British cultural identity is under threat



44%

of British people report that none of the contacts they spend time with socially are of a different ethnic background to them



Less than 10%

of the closest contacts of those aged 55+ are under the age of 18

⁵ Home Office Indicators of Integration framework 2019 third edition, June 2019

⁶ GLA Social Integration Headline Measures (2019), taken from <https://data.london.gov.uk/dataset/social-integration-headline-measures>

⁷ The London School of Economics article: *Brexit, Inequality and Demographic Divide*, 2016

⁸ Tower Hamlets Brexit Commission report 2019

Key facts: London



9%

of Londoners report positive frequent contact in their wider social network with people from a different social class to themselves



27%

of Londoners are socially isolated, not having someone they can rely on a lot in an emergency



19,000

recorded hate crime in the capital in 2018

Local context

The Tower Hamlets Plan 2018-23 sets out the Tower Hamlets Partnership's five-year vision of tackling inequality by building a strong, inclusive and fair borough. The Cohesion Plan sits underneath the Tower Hamlets Plan and through it we aim to address cohesion more broadly. The Partnership recognises that strong and resilient communities are happier and healthier communities and that people benefit in terms of their health and wellbeing, from their connections with people around them and when people look out for each other. The Plan sees cohesion as acting like glue, that bonds society together and helps create strong and resilient communities. The Tower Hamlets Plan has committed to creating stronger, more resilient and safer communities by ensuring people:

- Feel safe and live in a cohesive community
- Are proud of and want to live, work, study and stay in the borough
- Live in a friendly and welcoming borough with strong community spirits

The Council contributes towards realising these commitments mainly through its focus on two outcomes within its Strategic Plan:

- **Inequality is reduced and people feel that they fairly share the benefits from growth (Outcome 4)**
- **People feel they are part of a cohesive and vibrant community (Outcome 8)**

The Tower Hamlets Local Plan is another key document to work with in those areas where cohesion is integral to it, for example, in relation to high density developments. This is supported by the Supplementary Planning Document for high density living which adds further detail on how to achieve balanced communities and improve overall quality of life for residents. It will also be crucial for cohesion to work hand in hand with the Council's approach to regeneration, agreed at Cabinet in January 2020, in particular, directly reflecting and influencing the delivery plan against the "Making communities safer and more cohesive" outcome and supporting any cohesion projects that come out of it.

As Tower Hamlets Homes is also a key part of our plan, we will work closely with their Community Investment Strategy and particularly the “building resilient and cohesive communities” priority within that.

We know through our residents’ survey (2019) that 78% of residents feel that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together. This compares favourably against the London average of 75 per cent (Survey of Londoners, 2019).

Our extensive engagement with residents, community groups, partner and other community stakeholders revealed that many people in Tower Hamlets feel that they are leading parallel lives - living alongside each other but not truly mixing, nor building strong and positive relationships. People reported that they often don’t mix across cultural lines due to anxieties about things that are unfamiliar. They feel safer to stay within the boundaries of what they know and are used to.

We learned that socio-economic disparities and lack of spaces where people from different backgrounds can get together or even cross paths regularly can be significant barriers to community cohesion in the borough. There is also a real challenge created by our transient community, with many areas affected by high levels of buy to let or sub-letting of social housing and short term letting such as Airbnb.

Participation and engagement

Tower Hamlets has low levels of voter registration compared to most other inner London Boroughs. In 2018 voter registration rate stood at 77% compared to the London average of 86%.⁹ This is likely to be linked with high levels of population churn.

The 2016 Office for National Statistics Taking Part Survey showed that at that time, Tower Hamlets had the third lowest volunteering rates for adults in London, with an average of 16% carrying out some form of volunteering in a year between the periods of 2013-14 to 2015-16. This was 10% lower than the London average for volunteering during the same period. More recently, the 2019 Tower Hamlets Annual Residents’ Survey showed that 21% of residents volunteered in the past 12 months compared to 28% of Londoners doing formal volunteering¹⁰ during the same period.

Brexit Commission

Some of the key findings of the Tower Hamlets Brexit Commission¹¹ which impact on community cohesion were that:

⁹ ‘New City Hall analysis shows private renters miss out at elections’, Greater London Authority, <https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/analysis-shows-renters-miss-out-at-elections>

¹⁰ Survey of Londoners, 2019

¹¹ The Tower Hamlets Brexit Commission was established by Mayor John Biggs in September 2018 to examine the likely impact of the UK’s departure from the European Union on our borough.

- Some non-UK EU citizens are yet to make the connection between Brexit and the need to secure their individual rights. This lack of awareness is compounded by a lack of assistance and advice available, from government, to non-UK EU citizens. This can lead to divides within a community based on status.
- There is a concern that changes to immigration, employment and settlement rights could lead to greater discrimination against EU residents. The 'leave' vote created the perception of a permissive space where hate crime, not only targeted at non-UK EU citizens, increased.

Key facts: Tower Hamlets



Population predicted to reach **400,000** by 2041



2nd

most densely populated authority in the country



16th

most diverse borough in the country



54%

of residents who have lived in the borough for less than five years are from White ethnic groups



44%

of residents were born outside of the United Kingdom



11th

highest population churn in the country



Largest Bangladeshi population in the country making up **32%** of the population



32.5%

of children live in families below the poverty line



4 in 10

households live below the poverty line



44%

of the borough's older residents, aged 60 and over, live in income deprived households

How the Plan has been developed

We have developed this Plan using feedback on cohesion that we have received from residents, community stakeholders and partners in the last 5 years including in interviews, surveys, events and discussions. We have also considered the Government and Mayor of London's social integration strategies. To complete this picture, we have also cross-referenced with our recent public consultation on a draft summary of this plan and data from existing sources including:

- Annual Residents Survey 2019
- Borough Profile 2018
- Survey of Londoners, 2019
- Population Estimates, Greater London Authority¹²
- British Integration Survey: The Challenge 2019
- 2011 Census results, Office for National Statistics

Public consultation

Public consultation on the draft summary of this plan helped inform the development of the cohesion plan. This consisted of two main forms 1) Online Survey and 2) Community research and face to face engagement.

The participatory appraisal method was used for the community research. Participatory appraisal is an empowering approach to engagement that seeks to build community knowledge and encourages grassroots action. The style of the research results in deep levels of insight.

People across a range of protected characteristics engaged with the consultation and we undertook targeted engagement with groups which included:

- Tower Hamlets Local Voices (a forum for disabled people)
- Tower Hamlets LGBT+ Community Forum

¹² Taken from London Datastore website: <https://data.london.gov.uk>

- Tower Hamlets Interfaith Forum (THIFF)
- Tower Hamlets Youth Council
- Tower Hamlets Parents and carers conference
- The Somali community at a community event in an Idea Store
- Queen Mary University students

In total 219 people participated in the consultation. Amongst them 191 participated in the community research and 28 people through the online consultation. This was considered alongside range of existing engagement data. There was a high level of participation from young people (16-24-year olds). 20 Youth Council members and 60 QMUL students participated in the community research. The main themes from the engagement fell within two overarching areas- *connectivity* and *inclusion*. Below are some of the key-headings with an explanation of how we are responding to the feedback.

Key messages (You Said)	What is being done as a result (We did)
<p>Maximise use of public and green spaces and remove barriers to access</p>	<p>One of the focus areas in priority 1 is 'open and shared spaces.</p> <p>Waiving street closure and other administrative charges when residents apply to close local streets for community events such as for street parties (Priority 1)</p>
<p>People want to connect with others A lot of participants spoke about wanting more opportunities to connect with other residents, particularly with groups they wouldn't ordinarily mix with.</p> <p>People do not always have confidence to take the first step to interact with a neighbour or someone from a different background. They feel safer to stay within the boundaries of what they know and are used to.</p>	<p>One of the three priorities is on connectedness which has many commitments that can help in developing connection.</p> <p>A neighbourliness campaign is already in the plan. Another commitment on the launching of the neighbourliness fund has been elaborated to include that the fund will encourage neighbourhood based social interaction projects to help remove barriers to interaction.</p>
<p>Connect more across cultural boundaries. This was particularly the case for Bengali and Somali residents who felt there was need for these two communities to come closer together.</p>	<p>We talk about bringing people from different backgrounds together. The nature of the programme will reflect the needs of particular communities in the area. Where there are tensions between communities in an area the development of the programme will reflect that.</p>
<p>Some participants felt that there is a difference in resources that are available for different groups in the community- this was particularly the case for some Somali residents and</p>	<p>The Somali Working Group is building on the work undertaken by the Somali Task Force to continue to address inequalities faced by the Somali community. The Council has also launched Granby</p>

<p>people from other cultures who felt the borough was weighted towards benefiting Bengali residents</p>	<p>Community Hall which is a community space available for Somali residents and community organisations.</p>
<p>Disability and LGBT+ to be more prominent in the plan</p>	<p>Disability and LGBT+ is now explicitly included in two of the commitments:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launching a new fund to enable community groups to hold events that celebrate particular parts of the community and its overall diversity e.g. disabled, LGBT+, faith communities and women. (priority 2) • Re-prioritising our diversity networks to empower the community to identify and tackle inequalities they share with others and to enable their voice to be heard in shaping the future of the borough. This includes provision for disabled, LGBT+ and faith communities. (priority 3)
<p>Perception of Gentrification</p>	<p>We have commitments that look at accessible and inclusive spaces for all in new developments and removing barriers to maximising use of community facilities (i.e. halls), open and green spaces in the Borough including through planning obligations for privately managed open space in new developments. This can help remove the perception of socio-economic inequality in developments.</p>
<p>Tackle socio-economic disparities</p>	<p>Commitment to directly tackles socio-economic disparities through design of spaces, employment for BAME women and tackling poverty.</p>
<p>Better use of existing community assets</p>	<p>A commitment to review our Community Hubs to improve access to them by a wider range of community groups and residents and to create opportunities for new connections. (priority 2)</p>
<p>Perception of crime and anti-social behaviour</p>	<p>Whilst we would defer to the Community Safety Plan to address these issues, we recognise that there is an impact on cohesion and there are also commitments with regards to tackling hate crime in the plan.</p>
<p>Young people better supported</p>	<p>Commitments are included in the plan with regards to young people in both priority 1 and 2. We have also recently launched 'Every Chance for Every Child', our strategy</p>

	<p>for children and families for the next five years.</p>
<p>More community events to bring different groups of people together.</p>	<p>This is included in different commitments within priority 1 and 2 of the plan such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting the Great Get Together campaign and encouraging local residents and groups to do events or street parties • Delivering activities within the Liveable Streets programme that bring people together who are from a particular neighbourhood but from different backgrounds. • Co-ordinate or deliver events and programmes that bring people together such as the Summer Events Programme and Community Safety Day.
<p>Language was a very big issue locally because of some of the following reasons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • this is a barrier to different groups coming together, creating division and exclusion. • Some felt their own communities should be making more effort to learn English and integrate with others. • Some felt marginalised in areas where many people speak languages that they don't understand and didn't like the fact that so many residents are able to live locally without learning English. <p>Others viewed language diversity more positively, as it enabled them to feel safe and welcome as newcomers to the borough because there were lots of people they could communicate with. This helped them to integrate quickly and feel part of a local community.</p>	<p>In priority 3 there is a commitment enabling take up of more Skills for Life training which includes ESOL provision and developing a new element of the programme to support participation in community life.</p> <p>We are using as an outcome measure</p>

Our vision

We will have a strong and cohesive borough, where different parts of the community are connected, and people of all backgrounds feel they belong; participate in community life; and have equal opportunities

Our priorities

Our Tower Hamlets is based on 3 key priorities, each with different areas of focus and commitments to achieve them.



The council as a facilitator of improved cohesion will enable work through existing networks and the priorities will be delivered both at a borough wide and at a neighbourhood level in order to maximise impact and best respond to the different profiles of cohesion in each part of the borough.

Priority 1: Connected people

Outcome: People have strong and positive relationships with others from the same and different backgrounds

Why is this outcome important?

We want to ensure that local people have more opportunities to connect and build relationships with people, not only from their own backgrounds but also from other backgrounds, especially those from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, and different age groups. Research shows that positive relationships and better understanding between local residents are likely to reduce community tensions and hate crime, to increase community resilience and to promote cohesion.¹³ Having diverse groups of friends can stimulate creativity, encourage greater open-mindedness, and help develop tolerance and more positive attitudes towards other groups.¹⁴

The spring 2019 School Census shows that around 30% of Tower Hamlets schools had 80% or more students from one ethnic background. This means fewer opportunities for pupils and their families to mix with people of different backgrounds. The oldest and youngest age groups have little close interaction with each other-nationally, less than 10% of the closest contacts of those aged 55+ are under the age of 18.¹⁵

Having positive interaction with neighbours is fundamental to developing cohesive neighbourhoods. Evidence from the Survey of Londoners suggests that those who interact with their neighbours are more likely to have positive views of social cohesion. 45% of Londoners borrow things and exchange favours with their Neighbours. 85% of those who borrow things and exchange favours with their neighbours agree that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together. This falls to 69% among those who do not borrow things or exchange favours¹⁶

Our community research in Tower Hamlets also shows that people do not always have the confidence to take the first step to interact with a neighbour or someone from a different background. They feel safer to stay within the boundaries of what they know and are used to; this results in parallel living.¹⁷

A lack of strong social connections can lead to social isolation and loneliness, with consequences for an individual's mental and physical health.¹⁸ Lacking social

¹³ Information from various sources including Ted Cantle's (2007) study on 'What works in Community Cohesion' conducted for Communities and Local Government, and the Commission for Integration and Cohesion

¹⁴ Professor Miles Hewstone outlined this in. 'Crossing divides, The benefits of having friends who aren't 'just like us' ' <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-43784802>

¹⁵ The British Integration Survey, The Challenge 2019

¹⁶ Survey of Londoners 2019

¹⁷ Cohesion plan consultation - Participatory Action Research conducted by the community researchers Nov-Dec 2019.

¹⁸ Campaign to End Loneliness (2019), Threat to health

connections is as damaging to our health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.¹⁹ Social networks and friendships not only have an impact on reducing the risk of mortality or developing certain diseases, but they also help individuals to recover when they do fall ill.²⁰

Research suggests that those who have little trust of others in their local area and those who feel that they belong less strongly to their neighborhood reported feeling lonely more often.²¹ Moreover, rates of chronic loneliness are higher in deprived inner-city boroughs²².

With the borough becoming denser because of population growth and the increase in new developments, it has become more important for people to have shared spaces to socialise and mix for relationships to flourish. We know that shared spaces and shared activities also help to create a sense of belonging and pride in living in the local area.²³

What actions will we take?

Our places and spaces

- Promoting and encouraging the use of Idea Stores as spaces where people from different backgrounds can get together.
- Waiving street closure charges when residents make a successful application to close local streets for community events such as for street parties
- Embedding cohesion principles in the regeneration delivery plan so the regeneration projects and programmes facilitate development of positive relationships between people of different backgrounds
- Help to ensure that the design of new high-density development in the borough contributes toward a high-quality of life. Encouraging mixed and balanced communities, providing opportunities for inclusive play and enabling people to be better supported in the different aspects of their everyday life
- Exploring ways to utilise the planning process to support cohesion between new and existing residents. Considering how the design of new developments and the use of s106 obligations or Local Infrastructure Fund might support delivery of the actions in this plan
- Developing an evidence base on cohesion and planning to inform the East of the Borough Area Action Plan, so that it can incorporate planning policies which promote community cohesion.

¹⁹ Julianne Holt-Lunstad, Timothy B. Smith, Mark Baker et al (2015) Loneliness and Social Isolation as Risk Factors for Mortality: A Meta-Analytic Review

²⁰ Marmot, 2010 quoted in the Campaign to End Loneliness (2019), Threat to health

²¹ The Community Life Survey 2016 to 2017

²² Loneliness and older people factsheet, Tower Hamlets Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2016

²³ Integrated Communities Strategy Green Paper, March 2018. Emphasis is also given to importance of spaces for residents to meet but also activities and management of those spaces in Tower Hamlets Council's Supplementary Planning Document for high density living.

- Delivering the Liveable Streets programme²⁴ in a way which brings people together who are from a particular neighbourhood but from different backgrounds.
- Reviewing our Community Hubs and other community buildings managed by the Council, to improve access to them by a wider range of community groups and residents and to create opportunities for new connections. Our aspiration is that these buildings can become a hive of community connectivity, managed by people from diverse backgrounds, used by diverse community groups and used to bring communities together.
- Exploring ways to remove barriers to using community facilities (e.g. halls), open and green spaces in the borough. This to include utilising planning obligations to extend access to privately managed open space in new developments and working with a range of partners involved with local spaces, such as housing associations.
- Working closely with the private sector and supporting "community cafes" to encourage diverse community use of local buildings
- Working with Housing Associations to link residents and Council services.

Children and young people

- Strengthening the connection of children and young people from demographically diverse backgrounds across different schools, so they can interact and build positive relationships. To include exploring ways that we can continue funding cohesion programmes in schools in Tower Hamlets and strengthen it by including more schools, and secondary schools.
- Addressing segregation and increasing the diversity of pupils within individual schools, through working with head teachers and school leaders, empowering parents around parental choice and exploring the way schools are promoted to people living within and outside their immediate vicinity.
- Working with a range of services to develop a Play Charter which emphasises the importance of inclusive play and promotes play across all cultures, ages and abilities
- Supporting the *Show Racism the Red Card* programme in schools to tackle racism in the community
- Encouraging schools to celebrate the historic contributions of a diverse range of people including migrants; participating in national commemorations such as LGBT+ and Black History months
- Continuing to promote inter-faith understanding in schools, engaging young people around faith and belief and with Tower Hamlets Interfaith Forum (THIFF). Linking THIFF to existing interfaith activities by young people
- Using sports as a vehicle to bring young people of different faiths and backgrounds together
- Embedding cohesion and intergenerational activity as a priority within the review of the youth service, ensuring that our youth clubs are places where a diverse mix of people come together

²⁴ The Liveable streets programme will improve the look and feel of public spaces in neighbourhoods across the borough and make it easier, safer, and more convenient to get around by foot, bike and public transport.

- Exposing young people to a wide range of local community voices, particularly through film and arts, and using this to generate discussion and increase understanding
- Taking youth clubs out into the community, in order to create greater connections between young people and the wider community and better understanding of and positivity towards young people
- Ensuring work to combat bullying addresses the kind of bullying that can happen between different parts of the community e.g. between Bengali and Somali children, or against LGBT+ young people; and seeks to bring those parts of the community together
- Ensuring play spaces and communal areas in residential buildings are not segregated and/or closed at expected open hours.

Case Study: The School Linking Programme

Tower Hamlets Schools Linking Programme began in Summer Term 2018, with the first full linking year being the academic year 2018/2019. A total of 16 classes in 13 schools across the borough participated in the programme, including links with special and mainstream schools. The aim was to support a process of recognising the value in difference and diverse ways of inhabiting our world, bringing children together to address the integration of different needs and abilities towards a more cohesive community.

The impact on teachers' and pupils' daily lives of the small changes brought about by the project cannot be under-estimated. The project has impacted on the values of the students, enabling them to value difference and perceive different needs kindly. It has also provided a framework that has facilitated spaces where all pupils including special needs pupils are included and has afforded opportunities for growth for all.

'They've all been very enthusiastic and really keen. They couldn't wait until next time they saw their friends. I think it is a very, very lovely experience for them.' (a teacher at a special needs school)

Community projects

- Developing programmes at Idea Stores which encourage people to share stories and histories in order to learn more about each other and encourage new conversations.
- Supporting initiatives such as Tower Hamlets Homes Community Food Gardens, which engage a diverse group, help people to meet neighbours and get more connected in their community and have wider benefits in areas such as health, physical activity, and biodiversity
- Reviewing the Community Cohesion Pilot Programme (CCPP) that took place in Mile End and Aldgate East and sharing learning with other projects delivered in the Borough

- Using Council procurement and grant giving to provide opportunities to bring partnerships and consortia together between local organisations and between local people.
- Encouraging and supporting all Local Community Fund (LCF) projects to continue to have cohesion at the heart of what they deliver through development support and monitoring of cohesion outcomes.
- Continue to have community cohesion as a key theme for the LBTH Small Grants Fund enabling local voluntary and community sector organisations to deliver projects that strengthen cohesion in the borough.
- Continue delivering a programme of events bringing parents and carers together to share their experiences and help each other, such as the Strengthening Families Strengthening Communities Parenting Programme to enable parents from different backgrounds to get together and take an active role in providing a safer environment for children and young people in their local area
- Working with partners to better harness the potential of sports and physical activity to build tolerance, bring people together, and tackle social issues
- Connecting people and institutions from different faiths through the Tower Hamlets Interfaith Forum (THIFF) and encouraging collaboration of people from different faiths to help tackle social issues such as homelessness, poverty, knife crime etc.
- Providing more opportunities for community connectedness through different arts such as through film, photography, theatre, dance projects.
- Creating awareness and connection with the rich history of the borough, and ensuring historic collections are safely preserved for the future.

Case Study: Community Cohesion Pilot Programme (CCPP)

The Community Cohesion Pilot Programme (CCPP) was funded through planning obligations and delivered by four providers in Aldgate East and Mile End, to mitigate the impact of development in these areas. The projects brought together people from different backgrounds, including people of different socio-economic, cultural backgrounds and age groups on a host of different activities and programmes. Participants engaged and had conversations with people they would not normally speak to, new relationships were built, and knowledge and skills were shared. The programme was co-designed with residents, stakeholders and businesses and localised working groups were established to scrutinise and support the development of the projects.

Nearly five thousand people participated in the programme. Some of the activities included co-producing artwork, installing mosaics in local communities, developing and screening a film on peoples experience of living in Aldgate East which created powerful discussions, and nature based programmes in 2 different parks.

Loneliness and social isolation

- Working with partners through the Loneliness Taskforce to tackle social isolation and loneliness
- Launching a new fund to enable local groups to deliver community led projects tackling loneliness and social isolation by encouraging neighbourhood based social interaction projects to help remove local barriers between people.
- Developing a neighbourliness campaign that encourages more acts of neighbourliness to increase the connections between neighbours and helps to overcome isolation.
- Provide opportunities for young people to interact with older people, particularly those at risk of loneliness, such as those in care homes and clients of the befriending service
- Training and equipping the Community Navigators in Idea Stores to support local people become more connected.
- Running the THRIVE programme, working with health partners and communities to tailor make approaches to mental health issues associated with loneliness and social isolation
- Provide opportunities for carers to participate in community life

What outcomes will be achieved by 2025?

- A stronger and more resilient community
- People have opportunities to mix with others from different backgrounds
- Greater understanding of people from other backgrounds
- Fewer people are lonely or isolated

Priority 2: Involved and empowered community

Outcome: People have a common vision and a greater sense of belonging in the community

Why is this outcome important?

We want to build a common vision and greater sense of belonging for everyone that is living in the area – this includes the established communities, and the more transient ones and those who are new to the area. We need to support people to play an active part in their communities and the decisions that affect them. We know that society grows and is more unified through political interaction and active citizenship – which includes social action, political participation, volunteering and shaping local services.

A sense of belonging to London and the local area is associated with higher personal well-being. 85% of Londoners with high personal well-being say they belong to London, against 75% of those with medium or low well-being. 78% of Londoners with high well-being report belonging to their local area, versus 65% of those with medium or low well-being.²⁵

The Tower Hamlets Annual Residents Survey 2019 shows that 16% of residents are volunteering in the borough. The power of volunteering is not only in developing the individual but also in developing communities. Volunteering has been shown to bring about a greater awareness in people of the issues faced by their community or society more generally, and to develop a greater sense of belonging. Volunteers report that volunteering enriches their sense of purpose in life and helps them learn valuable things about the world and about themselves. It can also help organisations appreciate the local community who they are working with. We also know that volunteering improves mental health including having favourable effects on depression, life satisfaction and wellbeing.²⁶

Electoral registration and voting are key indicators of democratic participation. Tower Hamlets has lower than average voter registration levels, ²⁷with 42% of people voting in the last local elections in 2018. Ensuring that local residents complete electoral registration and turnout to vote is essential to a vibrant local democracy.

Evidence suggests that when young people from different backgrounds get opportunities to mix and build positive relationships then they are more likely to volunteer locally and were more likely to vote. It was found that 72% of young people participating in the National Citizens Service (NCS) said that they were more likely to help out locally; and there was a 7-percentage point increase in the number of participants who said they were absolutely certain to vote. ²⁸

²⁵ Survey of Londoners 2019

²⁶ National Council for Voluntary Organisations – Systematic review of the evidence 2013

²⁷ GLA Analysis of UK Electoral Statistics, 2016 found this. Taken from p.22 of *The Mayors Strategy for Social Integration*

²⁸ Taken from [The Casey Review: a review into opportunity and integration](#), 2016

Celebrating diversity can also be a means to bring people together and help instil a sense of belonging in the community. A diverse community often attracts people from different backgrounds to join that community, especially when they feel their particular background is respected; therefore, celebrating diversity can have effects which are self-perpetuating.

What actions will we take?

Celebrating diversity

- Reviewing and reorganising our funding for events that celebrate particular parts of the community to create a Celebrating Diversity fund, enabling more community groups to hold events celebrating e.g. disabled, LGBT+, faith communities and women as well as overall diversity
- Continuing to support groups within the community to celebrate their common history
- Supporting, coordinating or delivering events and programmes that bring people together – including Council events such as the Summer Events Programme and other events run by the Arts and Events team, services (such as Community Safety Days) and events led by local people.
- Delivering a place campaign to encourage greater civic pride and cohesion in the Borough and promoting Tower Hamlets to the outside world as a place to live, work and do business.
- Promoting the diversity of the borough as part of a place campaign and continue promoting the positive contributions to society made by local women
- Continue to promote Tower Hamlets as a place and community cohesion through partnership working and campaigns such as #TowerHamletsTogether (as part of this share the inspiring stories of the community coming together to deal with the impact of COVID-19).
- Building on the success of the 2019 Youth Achievement Awards, using them as a platform for enabling adults in the community to have greater recognition of the contributions of young people to the community
- Promoting the Great Get Together campaign and encouraging local residents and groups to run events or street parties.
- Utilise new ways of working to commemorate our diverse communities in a safe and socially distanced manner

Strengthening leadership and bringing leaders together

- Working with key stakeholders including Head Teachers, governors, parents and faith leaders to come up with a unified approach to deliver Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) in schools
- Developing an Education Improvement Strategy which supports social cohesion in schools
- Developing a clear Localism Policy that sets out how we will encourage and empower the community to take the lead.
- Working with our partners and local businesses to deliver on our priorities to create a more cohesive borough, including building on the importance of the workplace as a place where different people can come together

- Influencing different funding sources to deliver activities to improve cohesion in the borough, such as considering how the design of new developments and the use of s106 obligations or LIF might support delivery of the actions in this plan, and trying to secure more sustainable funding to continue things that have an impact
- Utilising Council grants and procurement to ensure that the things we fund reach our diverse communities and contribute to community cohesion
- Utilise our assets and services in new socially distanced and safe ways to support the voluntary and community sector, build on the community cohesion brought about by the pandemic and mitigate the impact of the pandemic

Effective volunteering

- Encouraging volunteering in the Borough that creates civic pride and a sense of belonging.
- Build on volunteering during the pandemic, empowering people to be active in their local community, in order to address the impacts of Covid-19
- Extending the SEND Parent Ambassador programme to all schools. SEND Ambassadors are parents/carers of children with additional needs in Tower Hamlets who are enthusiastic to ensure that other parents/carers are informed consulted and participate.
- Building social capital by increasing volunteering through the accredited 'Volunteering in your Childs School programme' and Holiday Childcare Scheme.
- Encouraging council staff to volunteer in the community

Participation and social action

- Launching an interactive engagement programme to increase democratic participation of residents including registering to vote and voting.
- Improving the quality of engagement and consultation by the Council to enable a range of community voices to be heard including through embedding the use of our new consultation hub: Let's Talk Tower Hamlets, along with new consultation standards, to support greater resident participation in the development and cocreation of projects
- Provide support for communities to shape the future growth of their areas through neighbourhood plans
- Building on the Welcome Pack developed as part of the Welcome to Tower Hamlets programme to provide information that helps all local people, to access community resources and participate in community life.
- Creating an environment that empowers residents, businesses and local agencies to come together to participate in tackling issues and effecting change in their neighbourhood area e.g. through residents' associations, wider neighbourhood groups or on social media.
- Active involvement of young people in the transformation of the youth service including in the design of youth provision that is accessible to all and meets the needs of a wide range of young people
- Supporting and encouraging social action, including through programmes such as The Big Clean Up and the Public Health led Communities Driving Change programme

- Supporting initiatives that bring together those from higher and lower socio-economic groups to undertake activities in the community together, such as Good Gym.
- Increasing the opportunities for co-producing services with the community.
- Encouraging asset-based community development approaches to be used in local neighbourhoods.

Case Study: Communities Driving Change (CDC)

The Communities Driving Change (CDC) programme is funded by Tower Hamlets Public Health across four different localities in the borough. CDC is a community-led programme supporting residents to determine and lead on the change they want to see for improved health and wellbeing locally. Bromley by Bow Centre (BbBC) is one of the providers delivering in three small geographic areas in the North East Locality.

As part of the programme BbBC ran 100-day challenge events which hosted conversations connecting people around priorities and goal setting and planning local shared activities. The 'challenges' involved residents and local organisations and generated a range of actions. At the heart of the CDC programme are the groups and activities led by local residents, which has ranged from bee keeping sessions, to walking groups, to a women's health group, to Mandarin story telling for children. The programme has enabled local people to gain confidence, skills, get involved in decision making as well as building new connections.

What outcomes will be achieved by 2025?

- People participate actively in community life in ways that are positive for them
- Community assets grow across the borough (people, associations, institutions)
- Communities help shape their local area and services
- People have greater pride in their local area

Priority 3: Bridging the equalities gap

Outcome: Similar life opportunities are available to all

Why is this outcome important?

The Greater London Authority (GLA) Survey of Londoners found that 35% of Londoners felt they had been treated unfairly by others in the last 12 months because of one or several protected characteristics²⁹ or because of their social class. This emphasises the need to continue to work on supporting people from different equality groups including people from different socio-economic backgrounds.

Tower Hamlets has the second lowest levels of English language proficiency in England.³⁰ Lack of English proficiency is likely to impact on one's ability to mix with people of different backgrounds; develop networks; limit people's job opportunities and contribution to community life. It also can be a driver for loneliness and prevent people from seeking help.

Louise Casey in her *review into opportunity and integration*³¹ highlighted inequalities in economic activity amongst different groups. BAME employment is lower in comparison to white residents in Tower Hamlets. In common with most areas women have lower employment rates than men however the size of the gender gap in employment is a bit wider in Tower Hamlets than in London.³² Whilst the picture is complex in terms of the drivers of this, Our approach is to support women into employment while respecting their free choice not to do so, for example where they have caring or other responsibilities.

What actions will we take?

Understanding and addressing inequality

- Reorganising our diversity networks to empower the community to identify and tackle inequalities they share with others and to enable their voice to be heard in shaping the future of the borough. This includes provision for disabled, LGBT+ and faith communities.
- To explore how the digital exclusion and digital poverty of people in our community can be systematically addressed to ensure that everyone has access to digital tools to access the services they need as well as to keep in touch with friends and family. Specially addressing digital exclusion of the following community groups and protected characteristic: age; disability; those who don't speak English and low-income household

²⁹ The protected characteristics as defined by the Equality Act 2010 are as followed: Age, Disability, Sex, Gender reassignment, Marriage and civil partnership, religion or belief, race, sexual orientation, pregnancy and maternity

³⁰ English proficiency in Tower Hamlets: Census statistics about levels of proficiency in spoken English (April 2017) taken from https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/Documents/Borough_statistics/Diversity/Language_proficiency_in_Tower_Hamlets.pdf

³¹ Louise Casey (2016), *The Casey Review: a review into opportunity and integration*

³² Information taken from Tower Hamlets Borough Profile 2018

- Implementing the *Poverty Proofing the School Day* project in the borough which supports schools to create an equitable experience of the school day for all children in the school, regardless of their parental income.
- Working with our partners to enable more people to take up of *Skills for Life training* (which includes ESOL, English, Math's and IT), and developing a new element of the programme to support participation in community life.
- Supporting BAME groups and women enter into employment
- Work to tackle violence against women and girls by providing support and protection for victims, bringing offenders to justice and engaging with communities to raise awareness and challenge misogyny
- Explore and understand areas of inequalities faced by our BAME residents and deliver tangible and practical actions with partners to tackle these inequalities through a BAME Inequalities Commission
- Managing the impact that Brexit may have on exacerbating the differences and inequalities between communities and sparking community tension, including by promoting positive messages of cohesion and reassurance
- Ensuring that addressing the inequalities within our communities is at the heart of what we do, informing this through the Borough Profile and Borough Equality Analysis and embedding equalities into the Council's Strategic Plan
- Increasing understanding amongst our staff about our diverse communities, including promoting resident feedback and sharing research and analysis about the profile of our community so that we can better shape services to meet the needs of the community
- Improving the way that Council staff respond to our diverse communities and the inequalities people face by launching a new equality and diversity training offer
- Continuing to work with our partners to tackle hate crime through the No Place for Hate Campaign.
- Utilising our existing Tension Monitoring Group (TMG) to ensure we can swiftly react to prevent or minimise the impact of tensions arising in the community
- Encouraging Council staff, partners and schools to undertake unconscious bias training
- Develop a new Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) strategy that supports the recovery of the VCS from the pandemic and helps them to mobilise to provide services to the most in need

Case Study: No Place for Hate Campaign

Tower Hamlets No Place for Hate (NPFH) Campaign was established to create a safe and cohesive borough free from all forms of hate. The campaign comprises of the **NPFH Forum**, a highly visible brand and logo which appears across the borough in different forms, the **NPFH Personal and Organisation Pledge Project** which encourages individuals and organisations to take more responsibility and sign a pledge and the **NPFH Champions Project** that recruits local people to ensure messages are cascaded further into hard to reach groups and to capacity build communities to be more resilient.

As a result of the campaign, there has been increased confidence in reporting hate crimes; increased victim satisfaction; 138 Adult Champions recruited who have delivered approximately 1086 activities reaching in excess of 65,000 people, 4300 personal pledges & over 160 Organisational pledges signed. The campaign has brought together many different communities which would not otherwise converge, for example, a Unity March under the NPFH banner to ward off extremist groups such as the English Defence League, eventually helped reduce their divisive marches in Tower Hamlets. NPFH banners were held at the front of marches. This included negotiating with venues to refuse entry and venue hire to extremist groups. Tower Hamlets is a model of best practice and is a multiple national award winner for the NPFH campaign.

What outcomes will be achieved by 2025?

- New communities feel supported
- Less inequality in the borough
- People feel the diversity of the community is valued
- Women are visible in our community and in leadership roles
- The people of our borough are instrumental in tackling the inequalities they face

How we will know this is working

The table below shows what we will measure to ascertain whether our actions to strengthen cohesion in the borough are having the impact we want. These measures will be influenced by a wide range of factors, far wider than the actions we commit to in this plan. Part of our approach to cohesion is to work in individual neighbourhoods, and the impact of this will be measured locally. When all the measures below are taken together, they should give a strong indication of how cohesive the borough is.

Outcomes	Measure
People have strong and positive relationships with others from the same and different backgrounds	More residents feel people from different backgrounds get on well together in their local area
	More young people feel Tower Hamlets is a place where young people from different backgrounds get on well together
	People have friends /acquaintances from different backgrounds (by ethnicity, age, level of education, income, religious group)
	Fewer residents feeling lonely some of the time or all the time
People have a common vision and a greater sense of belonging in the community	More residents are satisfied with their local area / neighbourhood as a place to live
	More residents and staff undertake volunteering
	More people register to vote and use their vote
	More people feel the Council involves residents in making decisions
Similar life opportunities are available to all	More women and residents from BAME backgrounds are supported into sustainable employment
	Level of hate crime

	Adults from the most deprived postcodes complete training & skills programmes
	Percentage of learners who complete their ESOL programme and the percentage who achieve the outcomes of the programme.

How we will deliver this plan

We will develop a delivery plan which will detail how we will deliver the commitments in this plan. The Council will be the overall responsible lead although many actions will have partnership involvement. The plan will report to the Council's Corporate Equality Board (a strategic level group with responsibility and oversight of embedding equality practices throughout the Council). Through this Board, we will ensure the Plan continues to deliver effectively and in a way which is relevant to the changing picture in the borough.

How to get involved

Our Community Engagement Strategy sets out our vision for encouraging active participation of our residents, ensuring there are real opportunities for shaping the borough. We want communities to lead the way in making Tower Hamlets a great place to live and we want communities to have the power to influence the issues that affect them the most.

You can find the community engagement strategy [here](#)

Find out about the latest council news and events by visiting our website:

www.towerhamlets.gov.uk

Find out more about council community cohesion activities:

<https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/cohesion>

Check out our calendar of meetings to find out about upcoming council and committee meetings:

www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/meetings

We regularly consult our residents and local businesses about proposals that are likely to impact them:

www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/consultations