



TOWER HAMLETS

Covid-19 Response Annual Report 2020-21

June 2021



Our response to coronavirus...



3,009

volunteers recruited through Covid-19 hub



6,000

food parcels directly delivered



£227m+

in grants and rate relief for businesses



Over **75,944**

children received support with food



21,920

residents supported through council's Covid-19 helpline



2,084

self-isolation grants paid totalling **£187,000**



35,837

books and resources sent to children and schools to support learning



Over **650 tonnes** of food distributed



422

Covid-19 champions recruited



£98,210

in rent relief for community organisations



Over **10,000**

laptops handed out to support remote learning



Over **19,000**

clinically extremely vulnerable residents supported



Over **1.4m**

items of PPE distributed



Over **13,000**

callers helped to book a vaccine



260

people given emergency accommodation when the pandemic hit



£769,000

paid through council resident support scheme



June 2021
(March 2020 - March 2021)



Background and summary



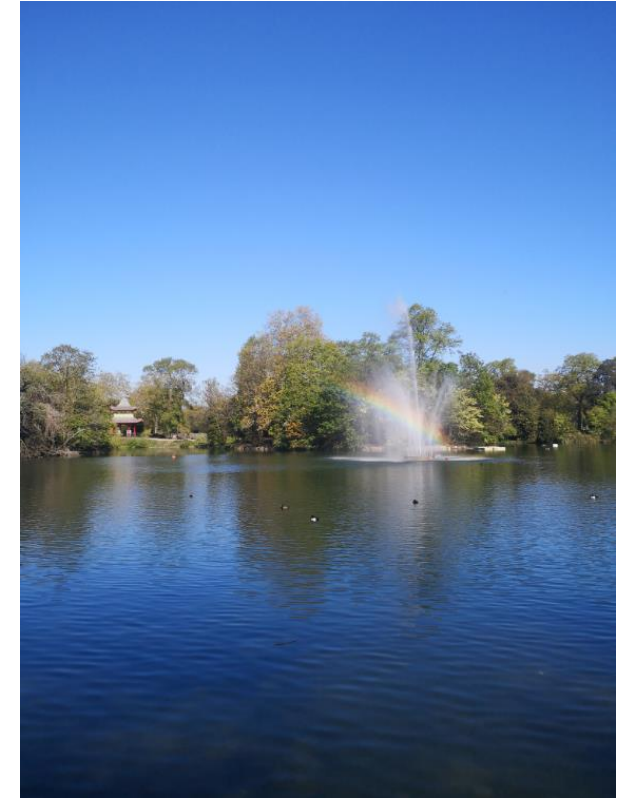
Over an unprecedented year, Tower Hamlets Council has worked hard to prevent and limit the spread of Covid-19 whilst tackling the wider impact the pandemic has had on residents and businesses.

This presentation gives an overview of our response to the Covid-19 pandemic over the last year. Overall, we have worked with partners and with residents to:

- Prevent and limit the spread of Covid-19.
- Support the most vulnerable through the pandemic.
- Support children and families through lockdown and school closure.
- Support businesses & residents through economic hardship.
- Help make Tower Hamlets as safe a place as possible
- Work closely with communities.

Going forward, we are committed to:

- Continuing our response to Covid-19
- Supporting our communities to recover from the pandemic
- Retaining what worked well during the last year.



Preventing and protecting residents from Covid-19



Over the past year, we have worked with partners and with residents to put major interventions in place to prevent and limit the spread of Covid-19 and support the health and care system to remain resilient.

- **PPE:** The council set up a new PPE hub, distributing more than 1.4 million PPE items by April 2021. Recipients include care homes, home care providers, shielding residents, funeral services & staff.
- **Testing:** A network of symptomatic and asymptomatic testing sites across the borough was set up in 2020 & we continue to be manage these. We also support schools and other settings to deliver regular rapid testing to their pupils & staff. More recently, we coordinated surge testing when 'variants of concern' were identified in the borough.
- **Local contact tracing:** All Covid-19 positive cases now come to our local team to trace first. Residents are contacted and offered self-isolation support. The team has received around 6000 referrals so far, successfully contacting over 90% of individuals.
- **Outbreak control:** Expert public health support to prevent & manage outbreaks in settings including care homes, hostels and schools; & responding to identified clusters in the community.
- **Vaccines:** We worked with health partners to promote vaccines to staff and residents, rolling out vaccinations clinics in settings including East London Muslim Centre and Granby Hall. We set up & continue to run a vaccine helpline, taking over 13,000 calls on this by 2 June 2021. 146,099 residents had been vaccinated with their first dose as of 14 June 2021.
- **Targeting work:** We target interventions where they were most needed, focusing on settings such as care homes, and on communities or areas with lower take-up of test or vaccines offers. This has contributed - for example - to the disparity between ethnic groups in vaccine take-up reducing over time.



Supporting vulnerable residents through Covid-19



We have worked hard over 2020-21 to help those who needed support as a result of the pandemic.

- **Care homes:** A range of work has been carried out to protect and support those in care homes. We supported care homes to only accept referrals from people who have tested negative for Covid-19. We provide wraparound care to care homes, and have facilitated the use of PPE, tests and vaccines.
- **Adult social care:** We worked with health partners to get people home quickly and safely from hospital, helping relieve pressure on the NHS. Interventions were put place to avoid adult social care being 'overwhelmed': We carried out a care worker recruitment campaign and moved Social Workers to teams where demand was highest.
- **Supporting those sleeping rough or homeless:** We ensured that all those sleeping rough were offered safe accommodation at the onset of the pandemic. Around 260 people were given emergency accommodation through the 'Everyone In' scheme. Since then, we have helped around 180 of this group with a positive move-on from emergency accommodation, assisting many into a secure a home in the medium term.
- **Support to hostels:** We put protocols in place for managing any potential Covid-19 outbreaks in hostels and emergency hotel accommodation. We provided wraparound care with health partners to support the health and wellbeing of hostel residents. More recently we supported rough sleepers to get the Covid-19 vaccine.
- **Support with mental health:** Recognising the impact of the pandemic on mental health, we worked with health partners to provide and promote a mental health hub and extra mental crisis helplines. These were set up over lockdown to support anyone experiencing a mental health crisis.



Supporting vulnerable residents through Covid-19

- **Helpline:** We set up a dedicated webpage and telephone helpline for residents in relation to Covid-19, taking calls from residents who needed help in relation to shielding, help in relation to getting food or essential supplies, help in relation to financial hardship and - more recently - vaccine bookings. Since March 2020 over 21,900 calls have been received.
- **Shielding residents:** We contacted over 15,000 residents who were 'clinically extremely vulnerable' to Covid-19 and advised to 'shield' over the pandemic, delivering food packages and offering support.
- **Food hub:** We set up an emergency food hub as a result of this, delivering food parcels to 15,265 vulnerable residents. As of June 2021, we have delivered over 650 tonnes of food from the hub to 24 organisations and supported food banks to get additional funding through our crowd funding platform.
- **Tackling financial hardship:** We have paid over £187,000 to vulnerable residents who have had to self-isolate due to Covid-19, reaching more than 2,084 residents on low incomes. We have also paid over £769,000 in crisis grants through our resident support scheme.
- **Financial advice:** Our Local Community Fund Social Welfare Advice provision supported nearly 20,000 new clients. 4,129 residents got help to increase their income.



Supporting children and families through Covid-19



Our response to Covid-19 in relation to children and families has been focused on infection control, but also on mitigating the social, economic and educational impacts of lockdown on children and families.

- **Support to schools:** We have provided intensive expert public health advice to schools on preventing and managing Covid-19 outbreaks and have facilitated the use of routine Covid-19 testing. We have also supported schools with their community leadership role through the pandemic and supported schools with delivering remote learning.
- **Supporting learning:** Our school library service sent 35,837 books and other resources to children and schools to support learning.
- **Support for socially vulnerable children:** We worked with schools and health partners to make sure vulnerable children were contacted when schools were closed, encouraging eligible children to go to school. School attendance was higher in Tower Hamlets than the England average for the autumn 2020 term.
- **Every Child Online:** We launched a campaign to tackle the 'digital divide' highlighted over lockdown. So far, we have distributed 10,156 laptops from the Department of Education and have received donations of over £179,000, including our own donation of 280 laptops. We have donated a further 250 laptops and pledged £50,000 towards fundraising for a further 10,000 devices.
- **Children living in shielded households:** Over 500 activity packs were put together and distributed to children living with someone 'clinically extremely vulnerable' to Covid-19. Every family with a clinically extremely vulnerable child was contacted directly and offered support.
- **Food for families:** We worked with all our schools to ensure that families in need continued to receive support with food for their children in school holidays or when not in school. In addition, we ran holiday hunger schemes to children and families: Over 75,944 free hot meals were provided during the Easter, Summer and half term holidays.



Supporting business & the economy through Covid-19



The economy has been hit hard by lockdown over the last year, and a range of work has been carried out to mitigate the impact of this on local employers and employees.

- **Small business grants:** We managed and distributed over £200m in grants and reliefs to over 5,000 local businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors - those hardest hit by lockdown.
- **Business rate discount:** We managed the government's 100% business rate discount for over 3,000 local businesses.
- **Rent relief:** A three-month rent relief worth £98,210 was granted to support local community-based organisations who lease council premises.
- **Advice and support:** We provided advice and support to a range of businesses. 33 businesses got support to develop a home delivery or online trading service. Our Business Pivot Project helped 50 local enterprises produce plans to successfully adapt their business model.
- **'Pay It Forward London':** We have supported businesses to sign up to this fundraising campaign for small businesses facing hardship as a result of Covid-19. A total of £342,000 has been raised for 120 Tower Hamlets businesses so far.
- **Supporting the voluntary and community sector:** We have provided over £4.3 million in grants and contracts to community organisations in the borough to help them reshape their provision and adapt to the demands of the pandemic.



Supporting people to be safe through Covid-19

To make Tower Hamlets a safe place during the pandemic, we carried we engaged with businesses and residents and took enforcement action when needed.

- **Communication and engagement:** We carried out a huge range of communication activity: This includes signs and posters across the borough, proactive social media, leaflets and newsletters, webinars and meetings, and information in community languages.
- **Parks and open spaces:** We have kept over 120 parks open and safe through the pandemic, patrolling over 100 sites weekly.
- **Covid-19 regulations:** We worked with police to engage, explain, encourage & enforce regulations. We advised businesses on safe trading practices, carried out 'Days of Action' in challenging areas, observed more than 4,000 commercial premises and issued written warnings where needed. 27 Fixed Penalty Notices have been given out since October 2020.
- **Tackling domestic abuse:** Lockdown is generally understood to have had a negative impact on domestic abuse, and locally demand for support has increased. We continually promote support so people know where to go for help, and in January we launched a new Solace Advocacy and Support Service.
- **Tackling ASB:** Lockdown brought an increase in ASB complaints. To help tackle this, we set up a new ASB and Drugs Suppression Unit. We renewed the borough-wide responsible drinking Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) until October 2023 and introduced a new PSPO tackling antisocial behaviour linked to nitrous oxide use.



Working with communities to tackle Covid-19



Our work with communities has been integral in limiting the spread of Covid-19.

- **Volunteers:** Seeing the groundswell of community support and mutual aid groups that sprang up when the pandemic started, we set up a Covid-19 volunteer hub. Run by Volunteer Centre Tower Hamlets, the hub has recruited 3,009 volunteers supporting over 100 organisations to provide support - ranging from food delivery to vaccine centre marshals.
- **Covid ambassadors:** We have recruited a group of 19 Covid ambassadors who go out and about in the borough, handing out masks, sharing information and giving advice in different languages.
- **Covid champions:** We have set up and support a network of Covid champions to support Tower Hamlets residents to stay up-to-date with the latest advice about Covid-19. 422 Covid champions have been recruited to date.
- **Vaccination Roadshows:** We continue to hold a series of roadshows across the borough, engaging with residents in areas where there is low take-up of the vaccine.
- **Inclusive engagement and communication:** Throughout the pandemic, our priority has been to ensure that everyone in Tower Hamlets has the best and up-to-date information and advice in relation to Covid-19.



Governance and next steps



- **Outbreak control plan:** This sets out how we will work with our partners to prevent and manage Covid-19 outbreaks in the borough, and how we will tackle inequalities in relation to the pandemic.
- **Governance:** The pandemic has been managed locally using a gold, silver and bronze command structure; and has been overseen at a strategic and partnership level by the Tower Hamlets Health Protection Board. The diagram below sets out the structure as of March 2021.
- **Planning, doing, monitoring:** We have continually gathered evidence and insights to understand Covid-19 locally; taking action as a result.
- **Future plans:** Going forward, we are committed to:
 - ✓ Continuing our response to Covid-19
 - ✓ Supporting our communities to recover from the pandemic - including through our Covid Recovery Fund & a project to recognise those who contributed to the pandemic response over the last year.
 - ✓ Retaining what worked well over the last year, learning from new ways of working.

