


<p>Non-Executive Report of the:</p> <p><b>Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b></p> <p>21<sup>st</sup> February 2022</p>	 <p><b>TOWER HAMLETS</b></p>
<p><b>Report of:</b> Sharon Godman, Director for Strategy, Improvement and Transformation</p>	<p><b>Classification:</b> Unrestricted</p>
<p><b>Action Plan Updates in response to Overview and Scrutiny Committee's 'Review of London Borough of Tower Hamlets' Response to COVID-19'</b></p>	

### Reason for Urgency

The report missed the statutory deadline as some of the content of the report was still outstanding and needed to be included to complete the report. The report cannot wait until the next scheduled meeting of the Committee as it already has a full agenda.

<b>Originating Officer(s)</b>	Afazul Hoque, Head of Corporate Strategy and Communities
<b>Wards affected</b>	(All Wards);

### Executive Summary

This report details the progress of the Executive's action plan response to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's (OSC) recommendations following a review of the council's response to Covid-19 pandemic.

### Recommendations:

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is recommended to:

1. Review and note the progress of the LBTH response to Covid-19 Action Plan Updates.

### 1. REASONS FOR THE DECISIONS

- 1.1 The attached report is the Executive's updated action plan response to the recommendations arising from OSC's review of the Council's response to the COVID-19 Pandemic to September 2020.

## 2. **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS**

- 2.1 To take no action, or not to agree the action plan updates is not recommended as the report outlines work undertaken by Councillors, officers and external partners to identify areas of improvement and the Council's response which provides updates on the original actions it will take to respond to these scrutiny recommendations

## 3. **DETAILS OF THE REPORT**

- 3.1 OSC sought to offer an alternate view of the Council's response to the pandemic and reflect local feedback on the plans in place to support residents. OSC also focussed on capturing the borough's response in order to understand any learning from the first wave and potential approach to address any subsequent waves.
- 3.2 After OSC's initial meeting in May 2020 to consider the Council's response to the pandemic and feed into the Council's recover plans, the OSC and its Sub-Committees held a number of meetings (June/ July 2020) to listen to community insight and consider short and long-term challenges for the Council.
- 3.3 In response to the pandemic, OSC made 18 recommendations for the Council and its partners to consider and reflect on how the Council might improve its pandemic plan and be better placed to respond to a pandemic re-occurrence. The recommendations on the Council's response to COVID-19 covers three areas: strategic and cross-cutting (7); health and wellbeing (8) and children and young people (3).
- 3.4 The Council provided an initial response to Overview and Scrutiny Committee's 'Review of London Borough of Tower Hamlets' Response to COVID-19 that went to Cabinet<sup>1</sup> on 24<sup>th</sup> March 2021. The updated action plan response provided by the Council is appended to this report (Appendix 1).

### **Progress**

- 3.5 The updated action plan includes a RAG indicator status highlighting the OSC recommendations that have been met or delivered and others which are on track. There are no red status actions indicated in the action plan.

Recommendations	RAG Status
1, 2,3, 4, 5a,5b, 5d, 6, 7,8,9,10,11,12,13c, 14,15,17	Completed Action
5c, 13a, 13b, 13d, 16, 18a, 18b	On target but with minor issues

<sup>1</sup> [Cabinet Papers - Action Plan in response to Overview and Scrutiny Committee's 'Review of London Borough of Tower Hamlets' Response to COVID-19'](#)

- 3.6 An extensive COVID-19 impact assessment was undertaken to understand long term trends and individual reports sets out future challenges and opportunities in the longer-term. The Council also undertook a mid-pandemic survey in 2021 to explore residents' views about the council, services and the local area. The survey helped to understand how the pandemic has affected our communities and plan for the recovery together
- 3.7 A new digital inclusion strategy and action plan was agreed at Cabinet in November 2021. The Council has worked to improve access to internet and digital resources for residents including programmes to improve digital skills for older residents and BAME communities, providing devices and good quality broadband connections, allocation of laptops and broadband access to vulnerable and disadvantaged children. The new strategy and action plan consolidated the actions taken to date under a more coordinated approach and will facilitate greater partnership-working across the borough.
- 3.8 The Council supported the Voluntary and Community Sector via the COVID Community Fund to help organisations to repurpose and adapt its activities including to support volunteering and a range of events to improve community cohesion.
- 3.9 The Targeted Community Testing programme designed to increase take up of asymptomatic testing included an extensive network of 'community collect' sites to distribute home test kits that has helped to bolster maximum flexibility to meet resident need.
- 3.10 The Tower Hamlets Growth & Economic Development Partnership facilitated regular scenario planning, risk mitigation measures and acted to support or develop new initiatives to help the local economy including CCF freelancer Support Programme (financial support for freelance businesses), Free Legal & Financial Advice surgeries from the universities, Working with New City College to help prepare young LBTH residents for placements under the Kickstart scheme.
- 3.11 The Council delivered over 1800 tonnes of food to 60 organisations, equivalent to 45,000 weeks of food for a small family but only 1/3 of the cost of buying from a supermarket.
- 3.12 The Tower Hamlets Funding Forum provided significant funding for local VCS and developed a joint funding protocol, that will be used as a basis to promote the development of joint funding opportunities with the VCS throughout Council, business and partner systems.
- 3.13 The Mayor's Covid fund has been used to Increase 'doubled' support for domestic violence victims and includes DA caseworkers specialising in mental health and Somali Communities.

### **Ongoing Work**

- 3.14 The Council established its Commercialisation Board in late 2019 and identified 35 potential opportunities for commercial activity but the work was paused to focus on the pandemic. To ensure that opportunities were being

capitalised the Council commissioned external help to develop commercial awareness across the council, undertake a review of the 35 opportunities and develop a business cases for most promising opportunities including venues and events, mini golf and advertising which is expected to generate £650-£675k in revenue per year.

### **Challenge**

- 3.15 The Council is currently accommodating rough sleepers with limited or no recourse to public funds via the DLUHC's RSI-4, Winter Pressures fund, and Protect and Vaccinate fund. Public Health are also providing some top up funding to ensure that all NRPF rough sleepers have access to safe accommodation during periods of severe weather. All of these funding streams conclude on 31 March 2022.
- 3.16 The Council is working with DLUHC to co-produce a 3-year RSI bid that incorporates a limited number of fully funded supported bedspaces at Luke House and specialist employment support through Providence Row Charity's Dellow Centre for those with limited or no recourse.

## **4. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 A number of positive impacts have been or are continuing to be delivered as a result of undertaking actions in response to OSC's recommendations:

On digital inclusion, the work to improve access to internet and digital resources for residents alongside programmes to improve digital skills for older residents and BAME communities, providing devices and good quality broadband connections; allocation of laptops and broadband access to vulnerable and disadvantaged children.

Local implementation of the NHS test and trace programme making specific references and focus on addressing BAME communities who were most vulnerable and at risk to COVID-19.

Actions to protect vulnerable residents included dedicated contact centre for referral pathways; food delivery focus is on supporting people to access supermarket delivery slots, with the Council supported a volunteer click and collect service and essential medications delivery

Since the Bronze the Bronze Group (Pandemic Response) for children and young peoples' mental health there has been further investment from the partnership for CYP Crisis and Eating Disorder Mental Health Services, as well as Healios and Kooth who specialise in digital access to services.

## **5. OTHER STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 This section of the report is used to highlight further specific statutory implications that are either not covered in the main body of the report or are required to be highlighted to ensure decision makers give them proper consideration. Examples of other implications may be:
- Best Value Implications,

- Consultations,
- Environmental (including air quality),
- Risk Management,
- Crime Reduction,
- Safeguarding.
- Data Protection / Privacy Impact Assessment.

5.2 [Report authors should identify any other specific issues relevant to consideration of this report. Including, but not limited to, the issues noted above. This section of the report can also be used to re-emphasise particular issues that Members must have considered before taking the decision (for example issues that may come up if an objection was taken to court). Note – Paragraph 5.1 MUST NOT be deleted.]

## **6. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCE OFFICER**

6.1 The Council's 2022-25 Medium Term Financial Strategy includes a growth proposal for the Council to fund 1.5 years of a Digital Inclusion Ambassador at a cost of £70k in 2022-23 (growth reference GRO / CHE 001 / 22-23).

6.2 There are no other significant direct financial implications arising from this noting report.

## **7. COMMENTS OF LEGAL SERVICES**

7.1 Section 2B of the National Health Service Act 2006 requires each local authority to take such steps as it considers appropriate for improving the health of the people in its area. The steps which may be taken include providing services or facilities for the prevention, diagnosis or treatment of illness. In addition, the general power of competence set out in section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 permits local authorities to do anything which individuals generally may do.

7.2 The matters set out in this report comply with the above legislation.

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## **Linked Reports, Appendices and Background Documents**

### **Linked Report**

- NONE.

### **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – LBTH Response to COVID-19 Action Plan Update

### **Local Government Act, 1972 Section 100D (As amended)**

### **List of "Background Papers" used in the preparation of this report**

List any background documents not already in the public domain including officer contact information.

- These must be sent to Democratic Services with the report
- State NONE if none.

**Officer contact details for documents:**

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