



Tower Hamlets Environment and Community Safety Scrutiny Report

Challenge Session on Supporting Markets and Traders

April 2024



Chair's Foreword

I am pleased to present this report which explores how the Council can enhance its support for street markets and traders in Tower Hamlets. As a business owner in the borough, I recognise the crucial role that local businesses and markets play in fostering a powerful sense of community and contributing to the local economy.

Tower Hamlets is known for its diverse markets which reflect the vibrant cultural fabric of this borough and serve different people in different ways. Whitechapel, Watney Market, Roman Road, and Bethnal Green Market play a key role in serving local immigrant communities, offering affordable goods, and lending a helping hand to residents through the current cost of living crisis. Columbia Road attracts visitors from across the region and beyond to its weekly flower market. Crisp Street is deeply connected to the rich history of the East End. Brick Lane and Petticoat Lane Food Court reflect the changing and dynamic fusion of communities in the new East End, catering to the surrounding workforce, tourists, and younger demographics.

Traders have made it clear to me how important the provision of storage spaces, toilets, free WiFi and enhanced public realm facilities for customers are to support them. We must continue to prioritise the support and protection of our existing street markets and spaces for traders. Opportunities to improve the infrastructure of these essential spaces should actively be sought to ensure they can continue to serve our local communities and businesses while evolving alongside the ongoing redevelopment of the borough for future generations to inherit.

It is also important that entrepreneurs, start-ups, and small businesses view market trading as a viable career. Markets can act as incubation spaces for new ideas and small-to-medium enterprises. Both nationally and locally, there is an ageing trader population and a reduction in the number of traders. We must continue to promote the benefits and entrepreneurial skills associated with being a trader. This will support us to keep our markets sustainable and ensure that they continue to evolve with changing demographics.

Although there is a lot of positive activity at our markets, this report makes practical recommendations for the council aimed at improving the supportive ecosystem for street markets and traders, whilst attracting and retaining traders. The recommendations focus on upgrading the provision of trader facilities, addressing anti-social behaviour and waste at markets to improve the market scene, working with schools and young adults to bring exposure to a career in trading, publishing a trader's handbook, and improving communication between the portfolio areas responsible for markets to ensure stronger leadership and oversight.

I would like to thank all of the council officers, traders, and external key witnesses who gave their valuable time and effort to support this challenge session. I am also grateful to Scrutiny members for their input and shared passion.

Councillor Abdul Malik
Scrutiny Lead for Environment and Community Safety



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Summary of Recommendations

Market Infrastructure and Trader Facilities

Recommendation 1

That the Street Trading and Markets Service produces a report for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee covering the status of all Street Markets, including land ownership updates and infrastructure gaps, along with corresponding work plans, to enable Scrutiny to track progress.

Recommendation 2

That the Council allocates resources and works with landowners to prioritise the provision of toilets, storage spaces, and free Wi-Fi in Street Markets, ensuring traders are supported and enhancing the functionality and maintenance of these vital community spaces.

Anti-Social Behaviour and Crime: Deterrence and Reporting

Recommendation 3

That the Council's Community Safety Service works with the Street Trading and Markets Service to enhance crime deterrence in Street Markets. This includes increasing the presence of THEOs on Markets, equipping traders with radios to better exchange intelligence, and establishing a Police Partnership Taskforce based at the Town Hall for rapid response to crime incidents in Whitechapel Market.

Recommendation 4

That the Council's Community Safety Service and Street Trading and Markets Service consistently document incidents of ASB and crime in Street Markets, whilst also enhancing the public's ability to report crimes in Street Markets by strategically placing public signage and integrating QR codes for streamlined reporting.

Waste Management and Enforcement

Recommendation 5

That the Council strengthens waste management on Street Markets by ensuring the separation of Commercial and Market Waste and integrating a unified enforcement approach as part of the ongoing review of THEOs to address dumping practices in Markets.

Attracting Younger Traders and Retaining Current Traders

Recommendation 6

That the Council's Careers Service and Street Trading and Markets Service work in partnership with local schools and young adults to organise pop-up events and training sessions to attract young people to the entrepreneurial opportunities available in market trading.

Recommendation 7

That the Street Trading and Markets Service produces and distributes a Traders Handbook aimed at supporting existing traders and retaining new ones.

Improving Communication between Portfolio Areas

Recommendation 8

That the Cabinet Leads for the Jobs, Skills, and Growth Portfolio and the Environment and Climate Emergency Portfolio implement an effective and

ongoing communication mechanism, to enhance coordination and address market challenges more holistically. This should incorporate an effective feedback loop involving officers and traders.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This paper submits the report and recommendations of the scrutiny challenge session on support provided to Markets and Traders in Tower Hamlets for consideration and agreement by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Support small businesses, start-ups, and markets including Whitechapel Market, Petticoat Lane Market, Bethnal Green Market, Roman Road Market, Columbia Road Market, Watney Market, Chrisp Street Market, Brick Lane Market, and put traders at the heart of their management.

- 1.2 Street Markets serve as focal points of attraction in the community, drawing people into town centres and driving footfall to support surrounding businesses. They serve diverse communities, facilitate cultural exchange, and offer a range of commodities at good value. However, as public spaces, the success of our Street Markets is largely contingent upon the upkeep of infrastructure, trader facilities, waste management, and community safety. It is through this lens that the subject of Street Markets intersects with some of the broader issues that sit under the Environment and Community Safety portfolio.

- 1.3 Nationally the Market industry faces significant challenges due to changes in purchasing habits and an ageing population. Fewer Markets across the country are operating with a financial surplus and there has been a reduction in the number of traders overall. To ensure the ongoing sustainability of our markets for both traders and customers, this challenge session is underpinned by three core questions:

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| 1 | What recent improvements have been made to Markets in the borough? |
| 2 | What support mechanisms can the Council employ to ensure that Traders are thriving and at the heart of their management? |
| 3 | How can the Council attract new and exciting entrepreneurs, start-ups, and small businesses to trade in our Markets? |
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Approach

- 1.4 The Challenge Session was chaired by Councillor Abdul Malik, Scrutiny Lead for Environment and Community Safety.

Before the challenge session, three scrutiny site visits to select markets were undertaken, as agreed by the Scrutiny Lead and the Street Trading and Markets Team to gather evidence. These included:

1.5 Whitechapel Market– 22nd February 2024

The Scrutiny Lead engaged with the representatives from the Whitechapel Traders Association to gather intelligence on examples of good practice in Markets, and areas for improvement. The recent emergence and growth of food stalls in Whitechapel was viewed as a positive change due to their popularity among

customers, and it was felt that a greater variety of food stall offers, including vegetarian and healthy eating offers would further enhance the Market offer, particularly to the large workforce that surrounds the Market.

Traders identified anti-social behaviour and theft as one of the key issues facing the Market. They highlighted that pickpockets regularly focus their criminal activity in the Markets and disproportionately target women and children. Traders also felt that in recent times, the market has shifted to catering towards a single community and advocated for greater diversity among the traders to appeal to different demographics who frequent the markets, such as the surrounding workforce and students. Whilst they maintained the importance of catering to regulars who rely on the Markets for affordable goods, traders also underscored the importance of bringing the innovation of younger traders into the markets to offer different merchandising techniques and a wider range of commodities to customers.

1.6 Petticoat Lane Food Court – 28th February 2024

The second evidence-gathering session was conducted at Petticoat Lane Food Court. The Scrutiny Lead was impressed with the wide variety of cuisines on offer and the bustling queues. The specialist food court mostly serves office workers, predominantly in their 20-30s. It operates at full occupancy throughout its five-day trading week, with a long waiting list for available pitches. Food traders are also using recyclable and compostable packaging to reduce the presence of single-use plastics. The Scrutiny Lead was informed about the potential development of an app which could help expedite the long queues at the food court.

However, access to facilities at Petticoat Lane Food Court should be improved. There are currently no toilet facilities available to traders and the Council has no oversight over storage facilities as they are not owned by the Council. Additionally, bike theft was cited as another concern in the area. The general merchandise stalls also include commodities which may not appeal to the demographic groups which visit the Market. Commodities which have the potential to better suit needs include crafts, souvenirs, electrical, and cosmetics.

1.7 Ridley Road Market – 29th February 2024

The conclusive phase of evidence gathering was conducted at Ridley Road Market to review practices in a neighbouring borough. A tour of the Market was led by Daniel O’Sullivan, Markets Manager at Hackney, and Board Member on the Mayor of London’s Markets Board.

Scrutiny members were impressed by the high quality of merchandising observed at Ridley Road, especially noting the presentation of fruit and vegetable stalls. Improvements in merchandising have been driven by the council’s ‘Trading Places’ training package, developed through collaboration with experts in various fields such as the Institute of Independent Retailers, NMTF, NABMA, and Barclays. Leveraging corporate social responsibility, they offered courses that covered aspects of merchandising. For fruit and vegetable traders, education included techniques like colour blocking, while fashion traders learned how to create bundled outfit deals. Additionally, they engage prospective traders in discussions about their merchandising plans, focusing on aesthetics and their potential impact on the Market scene.

At Ridley Road, accessible public conveniences are available to both customers and traders. There are plans to also introduce an indoor commercial space with toilets

exclusively for traders. Scrutiny noted that traders benefit from discounted parking rates nearby, with one permit allocated per trader, reducing vehicle journeys. The Market Service allocates space in its office for Police Officers and Parking Enforcement Officers to work out of, ensuring a continuous presence of law enforcement which supports the reduction of criminal activity in the Market and improves response times. To address illegal dumping, coloured bags with barcodes are distributed to businesses, allowing the council to identify businesses that dump. The Market has also transitioned away from single-use plastics by purchasing biodegradable bags in bulk, sold to association leads or senior traders.

Scrutiny members concluded the visit by reviewing the Traders Handbook, which contained essential information on legislation and best practice tips to support traders

1.8 Challenge Session on Supporting Markets and Traders – 6th March 2024

The Scrutiny Lead for Environment and Community Safety and members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee gathered evidence from the Council and external key witnesses. They subsequently developed recommendations.

Members in attendance

Councillor Abdul Malik	Scrutiny Lead for Environment and Community Safety
Councillor Musthak Ahmed	Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Councillor Ahmodur Khan	Chair of the Health and Adults Scrutiny Sub-Committee
Councillor Abdul Mannan	Chair of the Housing and Regeneration Scrutiny Sub-Committee
Councillor Sabina Khan	Overview and Scrutiny Committee Member
Councillor Asma Islam	Overview and Scrutiny Committee Member
Halima Islam	Co-Opted Member (Overview and Scrutiny Committee)
Dr. Philip Rice	Co-Opted Member (Children and Education Scrutiny Sub-Committee)
Councillor Kabir Hussain	Cabinet Member for Environment and the Climate Emergency
Councillor Abdul Wahid	Cabinet Member for Jobs, Skills, and Growth

Officers in attendance

Simon Baxter	Corporate Director, Communities
Michael Darby	Head of Parking, Mobility, and Market Services
Damian Patchell	Street Trading and Markets Manager
Naomi Agyekum	Business Development Officer
Jenny Fisher	Policy Analyst
Daniel Kerr	Strategy and Policy Lead

Anna Murphy	Senior Strategy and Policy Officer
Zaid Islam	Strategy and Policy Officer

External key witnesses in attendance

David Preston	Chief Executive, National Association for British Market Authorities (NABMA)
Nick Kasic	Chair of the London Street Traders Benchmarking Group (LSTBG) and Market Manager at RBKC
Sunil Khosla	Chairman of the Whitechapel Traders Association (WTA)

2. National Context

- 2.1 In December 2022, the National Association for British Market Authorities (NABMA) published the findings of its most recent comprehensive national survey of UK Markets¹, encompassing insights from 241 markets. While street markets, which are solely managed by the Council made up 14% of the types of markets surveyed, the findings highlighted significant challenges affecting the entire market industry:
- 2.2 **Falling stock occupancy** – The percentage of stalls rented out to traders fell from an average of 77% in 2018 to 72% in 2022. This decline coincides with many markets across the country reducing their overall capacity over this period too, highlighting a reduction in the overall number of traders active in markets.
- 2.3 **Reduction in the number of traders on markets** – In 2009, the estimated number of market traders was 46,000. However, by 2018, this figure declined to approximately 32,000. According to the 2022 occupancy data, it is estimated that there has been a further decrease, potentially bringing the number of traders down to as low as 17,000. The survey highlighted a growing number of market traders standing at market events, rather than at traditional markets, and traders more likely to work only on a part-time basis. These trends raise concerns about the retention of traders. The survey also revealed that 73% of NABMA members had no formal consultation method with their traders, highlighting that effective communication channels between traders and Local Authorities is another area of concern.
- 2.4 **Ageing trader population** – Concerningly, the age profile of traders remains high. The survey revealed that only 8% of traders are under 40. A previous survey in 2017/18 highlighted that 70% of traders were aged 50 or over, highlighting a continuation of the trend. Attracting new and younger traders to markets presents a key industry challenge and poses a threat to the future sustainability of markets, potentially limiting the representation of diverse demographic groups and commodities.
- 2.5 **Fewer markets operating with a financial surplus** – The financial sustainability of market operations is another key concern encountered by Local Authorities in the UK. The survey found that only 40% of markets were operating with an annual surplus, 6% lower than in 2018. NABMA highlighted that 84% of markets are operated by Local Authorities, but less than half of these are profitable, with markets

¹ [NABMA-Survey-2022.pdf](#)

in deficit having risen by 6%. Issues with local Finance Settlements and S114 notices further compound financial strains on Local Authorities, showcasing the vulnerability of markets as discretionary services, prone to potential budget cuts.

- 2.6 Despite these challenges, markets possess significant historical and ongoing importance for local communities as spaces for social interaction, cultural heritage, and identity expression.

“What is important now is the recognition of markets as a community asset, and how they can influence and help local and national issues. They can help create shopper and place loyalty, local pride, and well-being, and what we’re finding now is that markets are much more than retail...

...markets are filling the gaps in local service delivery up and down the country. Markets are the home to NHS Services, Safer Community Teams, Cooking Schools, Information Support and Start-up businesses”. – David Preston, CEO of NABMA (LBTH Challenge Session)

Markets First Campaign

- 2.7 In response to these findings, NABMA launched the National ‘Markets First Campaign’², outlining five key priorities to be addressed over two years, through engagement with its members, government, traders, and the media. This includes attracting and retaining new traders through the promotion of market trading and start-up business opportunities. It also aims to tackle economic challenges facing markets, particularly those related to VAT and Business Rates, where Local Authorities are unable to grant themselves dispensation due to provisions in the Finance Act. Business Rates relief has not been extended to Local Authority operated markets, resulting in a significant financial burden of approximately £23 million nationally.
- 2.8 Furthermore, the campaign aims to showcase the wider value of markets by working with government and high-street partners to profile the benefits of markets and secure project funding. The fourth priority includes approaching markets management more professional through the delivery of extensive training and professional development programmes and qualifications. Lastly, the campaign focuses on improving relationships with traders, emphasising the need for effective communication and consultation between traders and operators to foster trader retention and attraction.

3. Local Context

- 3.1 Tower Hamlets Council is responsible for ten street Markets across the Borough and all footways licensing for businesses.
- 3.2 The Markets in Tower Hamlets are managed under the London Local Authorities Act 1990 (LLAA) and operate a ring-fenced account. The LLAA limits what the Council can charge, and only costs associated with the market operation can be charged back as part of the trader’s license fee. This includes the management of street trading operations, enforcement, street cleaning around trading, waste collection and disposal, and administration.

² [Markets-First-2023.pdf \(nabma.com\)](https://www.nabma.com/Markets-First-2023.pdf)

- 3.3 Street Markets locations include - Bethnal Green, Brick Lane, Columbia Road, Crisp Street, Petticoat Lane, Scatler Street, Roman Road, Roman Road Square, Watney Street, and Whitechapel Road.
- 3.4 The Council also has markets outside of the LLA to allow third-party operators to run markets, for example through the Arts, Parks, and Events Service, such as Victoria Park Market. Operators of these Markets are allowed to have a more flexible approach to their management. They do not fall under the scope of this challenge session.
- 3.5 The borough has always been home to a rich array of markets, each with its unique character and offer to the public. Markets like Whitechapel, Roman Road, Bethnal Green, and Watney Market have historically catered towards the borough's diverse immigrant communities. Columbia Road is famously recognised for its weekly flower market, whilst Brick Lane Market and Petticoat Lane Food Court reflect the dynamic and evolving spirit of the new East End.
- 3.6 With recent developments such as the opening of Crossrail/Elizabeth Line in 2022, the successful relocation of the Town Hall to the former Royal London Hospital building in early 2023 and plans to develop a new life science campus at Barts NHS and Queen Mary University, the Whitechapel Road Improvement Plan has commenced delivering improvements to Whitechapel Market, which sits in the heart of such transformation.
- 3.7 Despite it being a few years since the public consultation in 2021 which informed the Council's first Markets Improvement Plan in 2022³, this scrutiny challenge session revealed that many of the priorities identified then, particularly around business support and enterprise, commodities, enforcement, and operation persist today. However, it also highlights the need for a refreshed Markets Strategy to ensure that these priorities are actively pursued under a renewed vision for Markets in a post-pandemic world.
- 3.8 The Mayor of London produced a report entitled 'Understanding London's Markets'⁴ in 2017 which outlined opportunities for markets to thrive. Many of the recommendations on how markets can adapt and respond to regional challenges remain relevant today and provide a useful framework through which current market initiatives and strategies can be enhanced to meet the evolving needs of communities.

4. Recent Market Improvements in Tower Hamlets

- 4.1 Through the evidence-gathering process, scrutiny noted a series of recent market improvements. These include:
- 4.2 **Pilot of social media** – Through an assisted employment scheme, the council employed an apprentice to work with the market service for three months to set up social media accounts for the markets, primarily on Instagram and Facebook. This temporary investment led to increased exposure for the street markets across London.
- 4.3 **Delivered training course on market trading** – In October 2023, the Market Service hosted Rebel Business School to deliver a free five-day training course on market trading. The course focused on giving participants the knowledge and skills necessary

³ [democracy.towerhamlets.gov.uk/documents/s199317/LBTH Markets Improvement Plan 2022-2027.pdf](https://democracy.towerhamlets.gov.uk/documents/s199317/LBTH%20Markets%20Improvement%20Plan%202022-2027.pdf)

⁴ gla.markets_report_short_web.pdf (london.gov.uk)

to launch and expand a business in the borough. As an incentive, upon completion of the course, participants were offered an opportunity to participate in a Christmas Market, a free market license and discounted rates for pitches. The course attracted over 50 participants a day and within 6 weeks of completion, 12 individuals began trading. Additionally, the training instilled confidence and skills in an additional 30 participants, who expressed an interest in pursuing careers as a market trader.

- 4.4 **Improved waste management at Whitechapel** – The Markets Service has started an improvement in the way that waste is managed and collected at Whitechapel. Operatives on the street are overseeing the disposal of waste from market traders into bins, though the separation of commercial, market, and residential waste remains a concern.
- 4.5 **Introduction of pilot stall at Whitechapel** – In Summer 2023, a pilot stall was introduced and tested by traders in Whitechapel, but feedback from traders indicated that it was ‘too tall and too small’. A new version is currently being designed, using learning from the pilot phase to inform the revised design. The Market Service plans to convene an awayday with traders to assess the suitability of the revised stall.
- 4.6 **New trader policy at Whitechapel** – The Markets Service introduced a new trader policy in Whitechapel to restrict the duplication of commodities sold. This policy was developed in response to feedback from a public consultation on markets in 2021, which showed that the products on offer were a key factor preventing respondents from shopping at markets in the borough.
- 4.7 **Consulted on changes at Markets** – The Market Service consulted on changes to Whitechapel pitch sizes which will recognise the larger pitch size to the red lines, and at Columbia Road for the designation of an additional parked street to continue with the revised and improved layout that was rolled out through Covid.
- 4.8 **Creation of reusable food containers** – Reusable food containers have been created for Petticoat Lane Food Court, although its rollout is pending. However, following from legislation in October 2023, which prohibited businesses from providing certain single-use plastic items, all food traders have transitioned to recyclable or compostable packaging, eliminating plastic containers and cutlery. Despite this, plans to roll out reusable food containers persist to continue promoting sustainable practices.
- 4.9 **Award for Petticoat Lane Food Court** – Petticoat Lane Food Court won the Best Small Speciality Market Award at the Great British Market Awards 2024. The success of Petticoat, from its humble beginnings to winning the award, highlights the great potential of food stalls in Tower Hamlets; there should be encouragement and support for the expansion of exciting food offers across the borough.

Case Study for Success: “Petticoat Food Court is a specialist food market that started in 2018 with just 3 traders. Now it has 20 traders on its 5 days a week of trading with 100% occupancy and a long waiting list. It is described as a go-to place to visit that has changed the dynamics of the area, saved the long-established local market and offers affordable prices, friendly traders, meticulous management and quality food. The street markets are full of office workers, locals, and visitors experiencing food from around the world. The operator has worked with the local BID to run place promotions and events to boost dwell time. The market is also attractive to younger food traders who use social media to show live food preparation, cooking, and serving, with one trader having over 24,000 followers on TikTok.”

-NABMA

- 4.10 Whilst scrutiny acknowledges these improvements, evidence gathered from the site visits and external witnesses still highlights that there are a series of challenges facing Street Markets. These include challenges around trader facilities, antisocial behaviour, waste management, and an ageing trader population. It is recognised that Markets Service operates within a ring-fenced account, and long-term investment and phased programs will need to be recognised to pursue improvements and activities that sit outside of the market's core operation. This will better enable the service to build upon some of the improvements covered in this section.
- 4.11 The following section covers the key findings and recommendations of scrutiny in response to the challenge session. In addition to creating an action plan response to the recommendations, scrutiny advises the Council to develop a renewed long-term vision and strategy for markets in Tower Hamlets.

5. Key Findings and Recommendations

Theme 1: Market Infrastructure and Trader Facilities

R1 That the Street Trading and Markets Service produce a report for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee covering the status of all Street Markets, including land ownership updates and infrastructure gaps, along with corresponding work plans, to enable Scrutiny to track progress.

- 5.1 Tower Hamlets has experienced significant levels of regeneration in recent years, particularly driven by the significant need for housing. Consequently, the Council has lost pockets of land that was used by the traders to third parties like Housing Associations.
- 5.2 Following changes in land ownership, Scrutiny seeks further clarity on the status of all Street Markets. This report should provide updates on land ownership and outline what infrastructure improvements are needed at each Street Market, along with any work plans to address them. This would support Scrutiny to monitor progress and have stronger oversight over how Street Markets can be improved to benefit the community. This report should clarify where the Council has direct authority to deliver improvements, whilst identifying the stakeholders and landowners the Council must collaborate with to ensure infrastructure improvements are implemented and spaces for traders are protected. It would also be useful to include any identified future development proposals in the vicinity of markets that can be used to seek out opportunities for improvements, as per the Local Plan policy. The Committee would like to review this as part of their work programme next year.

Theme 1: Market Infrastructure and Trader Facilities

R2 That the Council allocates resources and works with landowners to prioritise the provision of toilets, storage spaces, and free Wi-Fi in street markets, ensuring traders are supported and enhancing the functionality and maintenance of these vital community spaces.

- 5.3 There is a clear need for improved trader facilities like access to toilets, improved storage space, and free Wi-Fi in Street Markets. This would support the sustainability of Street Markets as they contribute to the welfare and operational efficiency of traders.

- 5.4 The Chairman of the WTA highlighted the absence of accessible toilet facilities for traders within Whitechapel Market. This causes a real inconvenience to traders and their support networks, and exacerbates safety concerns, as traders are often forced to leave their stalls to attend to their basic needs, increasing the likelihood of theft. Another example raised by Scrutiny was the absence of accessible toilet facilities in Chrisp Street Market and Petticoat Lane, which too is affecting the welfare of traders and raises concerns around the overall provision of toilet facilities in the borough.
- 5.5 Scrutiny recommends that facilities be identified for toilets in surrounding infrastructure adjacent to the existing Street Markets. The Street Trading and Markets Service should be supported by Asset Management to review potential arrangements that could be established to provide further access to toilet facilities. There should also be continuous engagement with other landowners and landlords to explore opportunities for bringing or returning additional toilet facilities for trader use, such as the facilities at Chrisp Street. The traders should also continue to liaise with adjacent businesses to acquire trader passes for toilet access.
- 5.6 Access to storage was raised as another key concern for traders. For example, at Whitechapel Market, traders are currently using private storage and are required to push their trolleys across the main road. As the current facility has no ramp, trolleys must physically be pushed in. The storage is also located near a school, creating further health and safety concerns. It was also noted that the Asset Management team manages storage around Roman Road and Watney, and they are underutilised as they have been poorly maintained. This not only undermines traders' confidence in the market environment but also results in increased vehicle journeys, increased operational costs and environmental impact. The inaccessibility of local storage also serves as a barrier to entry for new traders.
- 5.7 Scrutiny noted that due to the high volume of development in Tower Hamlets across the years, the Council has lost lots of little pockets of land that had been used for traders' storage. The Council should support traders by bringing storage the Council already owns back into optimal use, by, for example, working with Asset Management to improve the condition of storage facilities. Additionally, the Council should be engaging with local landlords to secure additional storage spaces tailored to traders' needs. Policy TC4 Markets, in the Council's new Draft Planning Policy Framework⁵ aims to support and protect existing Markets, whilst pursuing opportunities for adjacent development proposals in the vicinity of Markets to provide spaces that support traders, such as storage and toilets. This policy should be used to secure additional storage units, for example through S106 agreements.
- 5.8 Lastly, Market facilities should be further upgraded by providing free WiFi access to support businesses. The ability to take card payments is important to traders and it would provide convenience for shoppers. Members also felt it could be used to increase footfall by assisting customers to purchase tickets online for parking in locations adjacent to the Street Markets. In line with data protection legislation, organisations may collect and process the online browsing habits, activities, and behaviours of those who consent to the terms and conditions of the free WiFi, which could provide some useful information on the preferences and interests of those who visit our markets.
- 5.9 As the Street Trading and Markets Service is a ringfenced service, any improvement works, or additional provision would need to be linked to a phased programme and wider sources of funding.

⁵ [democracy.towerhamlets.gov.uk/documents/s225344/Appendix.1 Tower Hamlets Regulation 18 Draft New Local Plan.pdf](https://democracy.towerhamlets.gov.uk/documents/s225344/Appendix.1TowerHamletsRegulation18DraftNewLocalPlan.pdf)

Theme 2: Anti-Social Behaviour and Crime: Deterrence and Reporting

R3 That the Council's Community Safety Service works with the Street Trading and Markets Service to enhance crime deterrence in Street Markets. This includes increasing the presence of THEOs on Markets, equipping traders with radios to better exchange intelligence, and establishing a Police Partnership Taskforce based at the Town Hall for rapid response to crime incidents in Whitechapel Market.

- 5.10 Traders identified anti-social behaviour as a significant concern in Street Markets, particularly in Whitechapel Market, attributed to its dense layout and heavy footfall. Traders from the WTA raised concerns over criminal activities in the Market, including drug dealing, public urination, defecation, and vomiting on pitches. Scrutiny further noted the disproportionate targeting of women and children by pickpockets, creating an intimidating atmosphere for them. Traders shared their intelligence on the methods employed by pickpockets, such as disguising themselves by wearing Hijabs to blend into the crowd, thereby making it significantly harder for traders to apprehend them. The Chair of the LSTBG highlighted that Markets across London frequently encounter the same group of pickpocket gangs, who regularly use the trains to coordinate their activities. These findings are concerning, highlighting the pressing need for interventions to ensure a safer shopping experience for all visitors.
- 5.11 Traders also reported inadequate Police response times, highlighting that by the time the Police arrive, criminals have often dispersed. Scrutiny would like to see a more permanent presence of THEOs in Street Markets, particularly Whitechapel Market. It was noted that the Council are recruiting 76 new THEOs. In light of this increased resource, Scrutiny recommends establishing a Police Partnership Taskforce based at the Town Hall to provide rapid responses to criminal activity in Whitechapel Market and deter criminals by creating the presence of heavy enforcement activity. In the site visit to Ridley Road, Scrutiny members saw the impact this could have - Hackney's Market Service have allocated vacant space in their office for Met Police Officers and Parking Enforcement Officers to work from. Frontline Market officers also wear similar uniforms to create further suspicion and doubt among criminals. The volume of uniformed officers entering and leaving the building has had success in deterring and displacing crime from the Market.
- 5.12 Scrutiny would also like to see improved intelligence sharing between THEOs, traders, and retailers to facilitate a collective response to crime and anti-social behaviour. The Chairman of the WTA raised concerns over the gap in communication between traders and THEOs, emphasising that THEOs are currently not patrolling at times when criminal activity is most prevalent. He proposed a more effective use of THEOs time, suggesting that THEOs should actively engage traders to exchange intelligence and identify peak times for patrolling. By identifying peak times of criminal activity, resources can be strategically allocated to times and hotspots where they are most needed, maximising impact in deterring crime.
- 5.13 To facilitate better intelligence exchange, Scrutiny recommends that the Council pilot the distribution of a handful of radios to senior traders and association leads who can identify regular criminals, establishing a direct link between them, the THEOs services, and CCTV operators. The select few traders who are loaned radios would require training and support to ensure they can effectively balance reporting any crimes with managing their trade duties. Done correctly, this can offer an additional layer of surveillance, empowering traders to report incidents that may not be immediately

visible to CCTV cameras or patrolling THEOs. Traders being equipped with radios has the potential to act as a psychological deterrent to criminals, showcasing that the Council is sharing responsibility with traders to maintain safety and security, particularly for women and children. Scrutiny noted that the Street Trading and Market Service attempted to get resources for in the past and recommends revisiting this initiative in collaboration with the Community Safety Service.

- 5.14 During the challenge session, Scrutiny noted that traders and retailers in RBKC exchange intelligence on a WhatsApp group chat. Traders and retailers on the High Street in Tower Hamlets should also be empowered to better exchange information on criminal activity.

Theme 2: Anti-Social Behaviour and Crime: Deterrence and Reporting

R4 That the Council's Community Safety Service and Street Trading and Markets Service consistently document incidents of ASB and crime in Street Markets, whilst also enhancing the public's ability to report crimes in Street Markets by strategically placing public signage and integrating QR codes for streamlined reporting.

- 5.15 Whilst the incidence of theft and anti-social behaviour in Street Markets is a source of concern for traders and customers alike, scrutiny was informed by traders and the Chairman of the WTA that a significant amount of crime goes unreported by customers. This may be attributed to language barriers or a lack of awareness regarding the process of reporting a crime. Consequently, data may not accurately reflect the true prevalence and patterns of crime in Street Markets, making it significantly harder to present the issue effectively to the police and demand additional resources to address crime.
- 5.16 Scrutiny underscores the need for establishing a streamlined mechanism for traders and the public to communicate crimes to the Council to ensure resources are allocated where crime is the greatest. In the challenge session, it was highlighted that the Markets Service in RBKC streamlines crime reporting by providing QR codes to traders and the public due to the importance of ensuring incidents are logged online. Scrutiny recommends that a similar approach should be employed in Tower Hamlets to support reporting. The Council should also provide support to traders in signposting members of the public to report crimes. Scrutiny also noted a potential idea for the Council to develop a smartphone app aimed at enhancing reporting for safer communities. They hope that they can revisit progress on this in the future.
- 5.17 Additionally, enforcement officers should be regularly documenting information and actions they have taken in response to incidents, such as issuing a fixed penalty notice. This would allow the council to build data on the prevalence of crime across all Street Markets. During the site visit to Ridley Road, Scrutiny members learnt that enforcement officers in Hackney regularly completed ASB forms to log incidents and regularly reviewed this at Task Scheme meetings with the Police and other enforcement agencies, resulting in the deployment of additional Police resources to combat crime hotspots and displace it out of the Markets.
- 5.18 Increased reporting mechanisms should be complemented by strategically placing public signage in Street Markets and laminated posters in stalls, to act as a psychological deterrent for criminals and shoplifter gangs, whilst also promoting increased vigilance and collective responsibility among the public and traders. Across all Markets, Street Trading and Markets Service should consult traders to determine ideal locations for public signage.

Theme 3: Waste Management and Enforcement

R5 That the Council's Communities Directorate strengthens waste management on Street Markets by ensuring the separation of Commercial and Market Waste and integrating a unified enforcement approach as part of the ongoing review of THEOs to address dumping practices in Markets.

- 5.19 Scrutiny members and traders raised concerns about waste collection in Street Markets. Numerous residents and visitors frequent our iconic Street Markets daily, and it's crucial that they are clean and well-maintained to reflect positively on the borough's image and to ensure a pleasant experience for all.
- 5.20 Scrutiny raised concerns about the health and safety hazards posed to the public by uncollected waste on markets, such as those passing through on bicycles in Whitechapel, particularly during windy conditions. The Chairman of the WTA raised traders' concerns around the separation of commercial, Market, and Residential waste. Traders want more transparency regarding the use of their license fees to ensure the effective collection and disposal of waste.
- 5.21 Scrutiny was informed that a commercial waste vehicle would be introduced to exclusively collect commercial waste. This is designed to ensure the separation of commercial and market waste. Residential waste is collected at night separately. Waste enforcement on Street Markets was identified as an area which needed improvement. Scrutiny recommends stronger and more efficient enforcement and monitoring measures for businesses that are incorrectly disposing of their waste. As part of the ongoing review of THEOs in Housing, Safer Communities, and the Public Realm, Scrutiny recommends the introduction of one streamlined course for strengthened enforcement to address incorrect dumping practices - particularly in hotspots like Markets which are situated within residential and commercial settings. This would ensure that resources are used effectively to better manage and separate waste.
- 5.22 During the site visit to Ridley Road Market, Scrutiny members noted a waste management practice employed by Hackney Council. As well as using CCTV cameras around known dumping hotspots, they address the issue of commercial waste being dumped into Markets by providing bags fitted with barcodes to businesses. These bags are a different colour to the ones used for Market waste. These bags are scanned upon distribution to businesses so that if they are dumped onto Markets, the Council can directly establish which businesses have dumped the waste and either encourage them to remove it or issue a fixed penalty notice. It would be helpful to explore the feasibility of this.
- 5.23 The Council must offer ongoing guidance and education to traders on effective waste management and sustainability practices. Traders keeping waste costs minimal enables the Council to make savings and charge lower fees or reinvest into other areas of need. Guidance and support around the management of Waste should be included in the creation of a Traders Handbook or Welcome Pack (See Recommendation 7).

Theme 4: Attracting Younger Traders and Retaining Current Traders

R6 That the Council's Careers Service and Street Trading and Markets Service work in partnership with local schools and young adults to organise pop-up events and training sessions to attract young people to the entrepreneurial opportunities available in market trading.

- 5.24 According to the Street Trading and Markets Service, the majority of traders in the borough are in their late 40s to early 50s, indicating an underrepresentation of young traders. This trend aligns with national trends, as indicated by NABMA's 2022 survey which reported that only 8% of traders were under the age of 40. As the youngest borough by median age in England and Wales, the ageing trader population raises concerns about the long-term sustainability of our Markets and its ability to attract a diverse range of demographic groups in the borough.
- 5.25 Attracting younger people into Market Trading would necessitate additional funding support for training initiatives, given that this activity sits outside of the core operational activities of markets, but it has potential for a return on investment through potential improvements within the market scene. One of the key challenges identified by scrutiny was that markets in the borough were generally not changing with demographics. The Chairman of the WTA, who has been trading on the market since 1988 highlighted the notable shift in market dynamics, claiming that in recent years, there has been a noticeable transition towards catering predominantly towards a single community. This has resulted in a duplication of goods, and customers not often getting the variety they need. Bringing younger traders into the market scene has the potential to diversify the range of commodities available and introduce more innovative merchandising techniques to reinvigorate the Market scene. The Markets Manger in KBKC observed that existing traders in their markets often learn from the methods employed by younger traders, especially in skills such as marketing and merchandising. This dynamic has the potential to address the common reluctance among traders to engage in formal training programmes.
- 5.26 Younger traders may also be more inclined to promote their offer on social media – something that scrutiny noted existing traders in the borough were not sufficiently using, or regularly supported to do so by the council, in contrast to traders in neighbouring boroughs. An example of the power social media has on footfall is evident in 'Tikka Express in Petticoat Lane Food Court. The account, managed by a younger trader who regularly livestreams food preparation has over 24,000 followers on TikTok. The Scrutiny Lead saw firsthand the popularity and buzz surrounding the stall during a visit to the food court and attracting more younger traders has the potential to bring in individuals who are willing to market themselves in less traditional ways.
- 5.27 The Council's Careers Service and Street Trading and Market Service should work in partnership with local schools and colleges to attract young people to the entrepreneurial opportunities available in market trading through pop-ups and training opportunities. Not enough young people view trading as a career and as part of this engagement, there needs to be a focus on what a market trader can be and what it can offer to young people –
- “Markets are the original business incubators; as accessible open workspace, they offer a unique, low-risk opportunity for people to test business ideas and learn new skills. For many people, they provide the initial step into employment and open up routes to different types of work”.*⁶
- 5.28 Scrutiny heard from the Chair of the LSTBG on RBKC's approach to attracting younger traders. They run the 'New Youthquake Markets' which is promoted on Instagram. It encourages 18-30-year-olds to engage in interactive training sessions and use the public market for networking and promoting their work. As an incentive, a discounted rate of £15 a day is offered for a pitch, with further reductions available for those with

⁶ Understanding London's Markets Report, Greater London Authority

care experience. In comparison, a normal fee for Saturday is £47. This initiative has given many young people the skills and confidence to begin trading at other markets and builds upon the success of the National Market Traders Federation's 'Young Trader Markets' which is aimed at supporting young entrepreneurs in the markets industry.

- 5.29 In the site visit to Ridley Road, Members learnt about the Trading Places programme delivered by Hackney Council. It is a training package put together by working with experts in different fields, like Barclays, and using their Corporate Social Responsibility to deliver courses on trading. They deliver a Trading Places light version with young people who have shown entrepreneurial skills and have a teenage market process where they can sign up for a license, produce their products, and retail them in Markets. Many of the programmes' alumni have gone on to win highly commendable awards, for example at the NMTF National Young Traders Award.
- 5.30 However, infrastructure improvements will also need to be made to attract younger people into the trade. Market Managers noted that that younger traders place greater importance on a strong infrastructure offer for trading on markets, highlighting the need to drive continual improvements to infrastructure for the next generation of traders to inherit.

Theme 4: Attracting Younger Traders and Retaining Current Traders

R7 That the Street Trading and Markets Service produce and distributes a Traders Handbook aimed at supporting existing traders and retaining new ones.

- 5.31 The 2022 National Survey of Markets highlighted a reduction in the number of traders on markets and a growing transient trader population, many of whom work part-time. New traders may experience a difficult time navigating some of the complex challenges associated with trading, particularly when operating alongside more established and experienced traders. Providing a trader handbook or welcome pack that outlines the Council's Street Trading and Market Service, the support available to traders, best practice trading guidelines, and clarifies expectations of traders to ensure they are not in breach of regulations would support newer traders to settle into the Market and make the most of their pitch. The diverse background of our trader population highlights the importance of ensuring accessibility in terms of language for any information materials.
- 5.32 Hackney Markets 'Market and Street Trading Handbook', available to traders in both digital and print format is an example of good practice. Following the site visit to Ridley Road Market, scrutiny members recommended that a similar offer should be provided to traders in Tower Hamlets.

Theme 5: Improving Communication between Portfolio Areas

R8 That the Cabinet Leads for the Jobs, Skills, and Growth Portfolio and the Environment and Climate Emergency Portfolio implement an effective and ongoing communication mechanism, to enhance coordination and address market challenges more holistically. This should incorporate an effective feedback loop involving officers and traders.

- 5.33 NABMA emphasised the fundamental importance of elected members to Markets, particularly the role they play in empowering and making sure markets are at the heart of service delivery, regeneration, investment, and local strategies.

- 5.34 The Lead Members for Job, Skills, and Growth and Environment and Climate Emergency have an area of responsibility for Markets in Tower Hamlets within their respective portfolios. Having considered the views of both Lead Members, scrutiny found that one of the key issues is the gap in communication between both portfolio areas due to the crossover in responsibilities.
- 5.35 Scrutiny recommends the implementation of an effective and ongoing communication mechanism between both Lead Members to facilitate consistent exchange of information and collaboration on market-related issues. This would support the Cabinet Leads to improve coordination and ensure a more holistic approach to decision-making, budget, and planning preparation, and the implementation and monitoring of all economic and public realm activities in relation to Markets. Having also gathered evidence on concerns around anti-social behaviour and crime in Markets, it would also be useful to ensure that the Cabinet Lead for Safer Communities is also engaged where necessary as part of a more uniform approach to driving improvements in Markets.
- 5.36 An effective communication mechanism between both Lead Members should also incorporate a feedback loop that would ensure that intelligence and input from officers and traders who are on the frontline navigating Market challenges are integrated into decision-making processes.