



## Tower Hamlets State of the Borough 2023

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## 1. Key points

This report was prepared in March 2023 to support development of a new Tower Hamlets Partnership Plan. It uses data from the 2021 census and other official statistics to describe some of the key features of Tower Hamlets and the borough's population, and some of the most important changes the borough's population have experienced in recent years.

Some of the most notable features of the borough's population are -

- Fastest growing population in England (22 per cent rise between 2011 and 2021)
- Most densely populated area in England (15,695 residents per square kilometre)
- Youngest median age of any area (30 years)
- Disproportionately comprised of working age adults (71% of all residents were aged 20-64)
- Ethnically diverse with the largest Bangladeshi population in the country (107,333 residents, 34.6% of the population).
- A relatively large proportion of residents identify their sexual orientation as Lesbian Gay, Bisexual or other (7.2%) compared to England and Wales as a whole (3.1%) and about one per cent of residents have a different gender identity to their sex registered at birth.
- 70% of dwellings are rented, split roughly equally between social renters and private renters, with significant levels of overcrowding
- Lessening deprivation but highly deprived populations of older people and children, with significant need for support services
- Healthy life expectancy at birth increased by 11 percentage points for males and 2 percentage points for females between 2011-13 and 2018-2020, although this data pre-dates the pandemic
- A larger economy than the cities of Birmingham, Manchester or Leeds, with more jobs (291,000) than working age residents
- But unemployment is higher than the national average for residents (4.6% compared to a national average 3.7%) and many lack the skills to succeed. Women in particular are much less likely to be employed (59.7% compared with 72% in Great Britain). While half of adult residents are highly qualified, 16% have no qualifications at all.

## 2. Overview

Tower Hamlets is a genuinely unique place. The population is the fastest growing in the country. This, combined with high population turnover, gives the area a constant sense of renewal. But it is also an area of considerable history and of settled communities with established roots.

The area is diverse and it is young, with the youngest median age of any area in England and Wales. It is a place people come to for many different reasons, but one of the key reasons is its huge economy and the employment opportunities that this brings. The area is home to Canary Wharf which along with the City of London is pivotal to London's status as a global financial centre. Other large industries include education (attracting a large student population to institutions including Queen Mary University of London) and health, while the constant development of the borough delivers a significant number of construction jobs. The area is named for its most famous and iconic building, the Tower of London, providing a measure of the history that has occurred here. A place of immigration for centuries, Tower Hamlets spent much of the twentieth century being battered and bruised by the ravages of war, population decline and the impact of deindustrialization before emerging as a place of economic renewal, albeit an area with considerable inequalities of opportunity. Some of our residents will have lived through it all, but many more are newer arrivals.

Such has been the level of development and growth that Tower Hamlets has become the most densely populated area in the country. There is a sense of hustle and bustle to much of the borough with busy high streets and markets and a teeming flow of commuters into Canary Wharf and the City fringe. For those seeking it, a degree of tranquility can be found alongside the borough's waterways including the Thames and the Limehouse Cut or in some of the popular parks, such as the historic and award-winning Victoria Park.

Another unique feature of Tower Hamlets is its Bangladeshi community, by far the largest in the country. Around this community we have seen dedicated voluntary organisations, charities, shops, restaurants, services, cultural events and much more abound. The Bangladeshi population partly accounts for the borough having the largest Muslim population (by percentage) in the country, with the East London Mosque on Whitechapel Road providing an opportunity for many to come and worship.

Many others have made the borough their home, with large communities from both eastern and western Europe as well as China and Africa, including a significant community from Somalia. All of this has contributed to the mix of cultures and created a shared history enjoyed by residents today.

A relatively high proportion of residents identify with a religion, with Tower Hamlets having the largest proportion of Muslim residents in England and Wales, while the proportion of Christian residents is the smallest nationally.

The proportion of older people is the smallest in the country and is characterized by high levels of need, with many older people requiring help with certain tasks or experiencing difficulty getting around.

Inequalities persist and addressing them are among the highest priorities for public services. Children and older people in particular are far more likely to be living in poverty in Tower Hamlets than those living elsewhere in the country. The Covid-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis have impacted disproportionately on our most vulnerable residents.

Despite the current challenges, outcomes for most have improved over the longer term; a large proportion of children from Tower Hamlets schools are going into higher education; there are better health outcomes; more people in employment, and higher incomes.

### **3. A very densely populated area where most people live in flats and pay rent**

With a population of 310,300 as at the 2021 Census, Tower Hamlets has been the fastest growing area in the country over the past decade, with the population increasing 22% since 2011. Tower Hamlets is 19.8 square kilometres in size. As of 2021, there were 15,695 residents per square kilometre, making Tower Hamlets by some distance the most densely populated area in the UK.

#### ***Picture 1 – Density in Tower Hamlets per football pitch sized area of land***



(Graphic taken from the Office for National Statistics website)

In addition, many people come to Tower Hamlets for work and for leisure, with the number of jobs in the borough exceeding the number of working age adults who live here.

Tower Hamlets housing stock is predominantly a mixture of surviving Victorian/Edwardian buildings, mid-twentieth century housing estates and modern apartment buildings, many of which have been built in the last 30 years.

Often all these examples of housing stock can be found near one another, but the mixture of stock also varies across the borough. Parts of Bow, Mile End and Bethnal Green retain a greater amount of older housing, although across the borough the amount of Victorian housing is small by the standards of other inner London boroughs.

In comparison, the areas along the Thames feature modern apartment buildings alongside some historic industrial buildings, many of which have been repurposed for housing. The Isle of Dogs has developed upwards with many tall residential buildings as well as office buildings. Increasingly, the city fringe area in the west of the borough is also experiencing more high-rise residential development. This move toward higher density continues. The New London Architecture's Tall Buildings Survey for 2022 reports that there are 95 tall buildings (20 storeys and higher) in the Tower Hamlets pipeline, the most of any London borough, comprising about a sixth of all tall buildings in the London pipeline.

There are a considerable number of social housing estates of varying sizes, and these are spread throughout the borough. In 2021, 34% of all housing stock in the borough was either Council housing or provided by a registered social landlord. This was the fourth highest proportion in London. Conversely the private rental sector was estimated to make up 36% of housing stock (2020), the fifth highest rate in London, whereas the proportion of owner occupied properties for the same year was 30% - the second lowest proportion in London after Hackney.

In relative terms, very few households in Tower Hamlets occupy a self-contained house with most residents living in flats or apartments. In 2021, just 12% of Tower Hamlets households lived in a whole house or bungalow compared with an England average of 77.4%. In Tower Hamlets, 87.8% of households live in some kind of flat or apartment compared with 22.2% in England.

With space at such a premium, it is unsurprising that overcrowding is an issue for many households. In 2021, 15.8% of households had at least one fewer bedrooms than they needed. This was significantly higher than both London (11.1%) and England (4.3%).

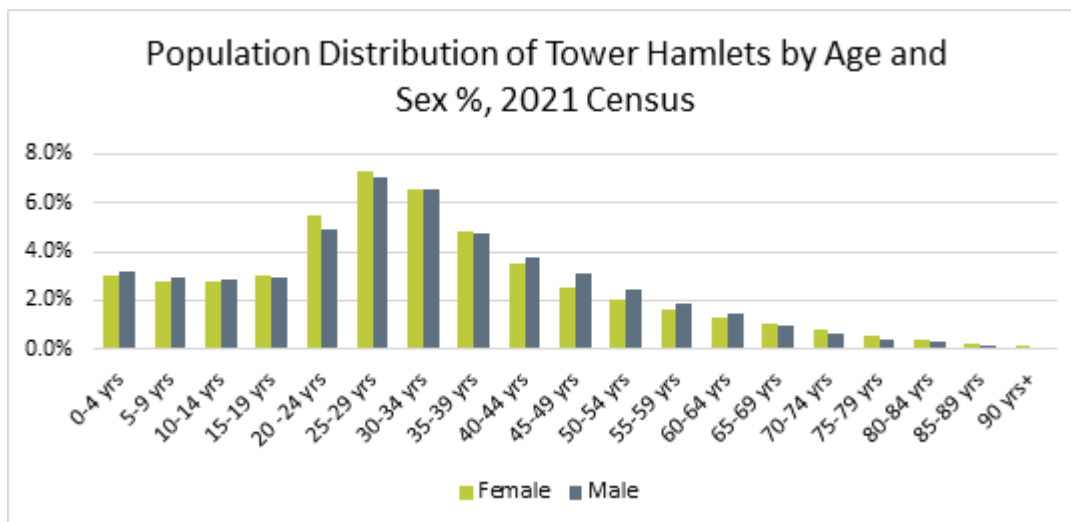
#### **4. A diverse and constantly changing population with a particularly large proportion of younger adults**

The importance of Tower Hamlets as a place to work is underlined by the type of people that choose to live here. Much of the population are aged between 20 and 44 years old, reflecting the attraction that the borough holds for people who

are seeking different kinds of employment opportunities. The median age of 30 years makes Tower Hamlets the youngest borough by median age in England and Wales. There is a very high level of population turnover with 227 persons per 1000 moving in or out of the borough in the most recent year (2019-20) – this was the 12th highest turnover rate in England.

Although the borough is often correctly described as ‘young’, the child population is not particularly high compared to London or England. It is the combination of many young adults and a small number of older people that sets Tower Hamlets apart from other areas. The proportion of children in the borough fell slightly between 2011 and 2021, as did the proportion of older people. However, both grew in absolute terms as a result of the rapidly rising borough population.

**Chart 1 – Population by age and sex, 2021**



Tower Hamlets is unusual in having slightly more males and females within the population (50.2% of residents are male) and this is probably related, at least in part, to the age structure and the specific economic opportunities that attract residents to come and live in the borough.

In common with much of London, most residents from Tower Hamlets are not from a White British ethnic background and the 2021 census reveals that almost half (47%) are born outside of the UK. Beyond this, Tower Hamlets has a very distinctive ethnic mix due to its longstanding and very large Bangladeshi population (34.6% in 2021). Tower Hamlets has by far the largest proportion of Bangladeshi residents in the UK with one in six people of Bangladeshi origin in England and Wales living in the borough. The 2021 census has revealed that 43,561 Tower Hamlets residents were born in Bangladesh making it by far the largest country of birth of residents behind the UK.

The borough also has significant Black African populations, with a particularly notable Somali population. 5% of the population is now from a Black African

background and these populations have grown rapidly in recent years. Among this population, the number of residents from Somali and Somalilander communities totals 6180 residents– 2% of the borough's population.

Between the turn of the century and the UK's exit from the European Union, there was a high level of immigration from Europe into the borough. The new arrivals comprised of many different communities and nationalities. The accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the EU in 2007 hastened this migration, creating significant populations from those countries. The 2021 census reveals an almost fivefold increase in the number of Romanian born residents compared with the 2011 census.

There has also been significant immigration from western Europe. The 2021 census revealed that Tower Hamlets has the highest number of Italian born residents anywhere in England (more than 10,000), with the significant Italian-born Bangladeshi community almost certainly a major contributing reason for this.

In addition, there are smaller and longstanding populations of Black Caribbean, Indian and Pakistani residents and one of the largest Chinese populations in the country.

**Table 1 - Ethnic Groups in Tower Hamlets, 2021 and 2011**

<b>Ethnic Group</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2021%</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2011%</b>
White British	71177	22.9%	79231	31.2%
White Irish	3567	1.1%	3863	1.5%
White Gypsy Traveller	110	0.04%	175	0.07%
White Roma	2225	0.7%	N/A	N/A
White Other	45187	14.6%	31550	12.4%
Asian Bangladeshi	107333	34.6%	81377	32.0%
Asian Chinese	10279	3.3%	8109	3.2%
Asian Indian	10135	3.3%	6,787	2.7%
Asian Pakistani	3341	1.1%	2,442	1.0%
Asian Other	6768	2.2%	5786	2.3%
Black African	15373	5.0%	9495	3.7%
Black Caribbean	4930	1.6%	5341	2.1%
Black Other	2390	0.8%	3793	1.5%
Mixed White and Asian	4374	1.4%	2961	1.1%
Mixed White and Black African	2236	0.7%	1509	0.6%
Mixed White and Black Caribbean	3593	1.2%	2837	1.1%
Mixed Other	5206	1.7%	3053	1.2%
Other Arab	3588	1.2%	2573	1.0%
Other ethnic group	8494	2.7%	3214	1.3%

Unlike some London boroughs where minority communities tend to be concentrated in specific localities, most ethnic minority communities in Tower Hamlets can be found throughout the borough. For example, Brick Lane is world famous for its Bangladeshi population and its many restaurants (the wider area is also known as Banglatown), but parts of Bethnal Green, Whitechapel, Stepney, Bromley-By-Bow, Mile End, Shadwell and Poplar have similar or larger Bangladeshi populations. In 2021, thirteen of Tower Hamlets' twenty wards comprised at least 30% Bangladeshi residents and these were spread from the east to the west of the borough.

The only community that was relatively concentrated in a specific part of the borough was the Chinese community where around 42% of all Chinese residents can be found in the three wards that make up the Isle of Dogs (Canary Wharf, Island Gardens, Blackwall and Cubitt Town) in 2021. There was also a substantial Chinese community in Whitechapel.

The diverse backgrounds of Tower Hamlets are reflected in the number of faiths followed by residents. Tower Hamlets has the largest Muslim population in the country (39.9% of residents) while it has the smallest proportion of Christians in the country (22.3% of residents). A significant and growing proportion of residents have no religion (26.6%)

The new census data on sexual orientation tells us that 7.2% of residents over 16 identified with an LGB+ orientation. Of these 4% identified as gay or lesbian, 2.5% identified as bisexual and 0.7% identified as having another (non-heterosexual) sexual orientation. Based on this, Tower Hamlets had the ninth highest proportion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Other sexual orientation residents in England and Wales with more than 18,000 residents identifying their sexual orientation as not heterosexual. A total of 1% (2,643) of residents over 16 identified their gender as being different from their sex registered at birth, which included residents identifying as trans men, trans women, non-binary and other gender identities.

## **5. An area with many different people living different lifestyles and having different needs**

Around 32% of Tower Hamlets households were people living alone in 2021. This is slightly higher than the London average of 29% and higher than the England average of 30%. While most will be choosing to live alone, it is important to consider how the impacts on mental health, particularly in the context of the Covid 19 pandemic.

Just over a quarter of households (27%) have dependent children, which compares to 31% in London. Families with dependent children are amongst those that engage with some public services the most – for example, health, education and parks and cultural services.



About 17% of households are married or cohabiting couples with no children. These are often amongst the residents that engage with local services the least, although some older couples will have health or care needs.

Lone parent households make up 10.7% of households in Tower Hamlets, which is lower than the London average of 13.3% of households. Cost of living pressures can be particularly acute for lone parent families, often living on a single source of income, and many experience financial difficulty.

In 2021, 33,067 residents aged 16+ were full time students which was 13.1% of adult residents. By the nature of their courses of study, students are often transient and may have different expectations of the area in which they live.

## **6. A burgeoning economy, driving growth across the region**

The sheer size and scale of the Tower Hamlets economy is difficult to overstate. Tower Hamlets had 291,000 employee jobs in 2021. To put this in context, the neighbouring borough of Newham which has a larger resident population, had 127,000 employee jobs and another neighbouring borough, Hackney, had 145,000 employee jobs.

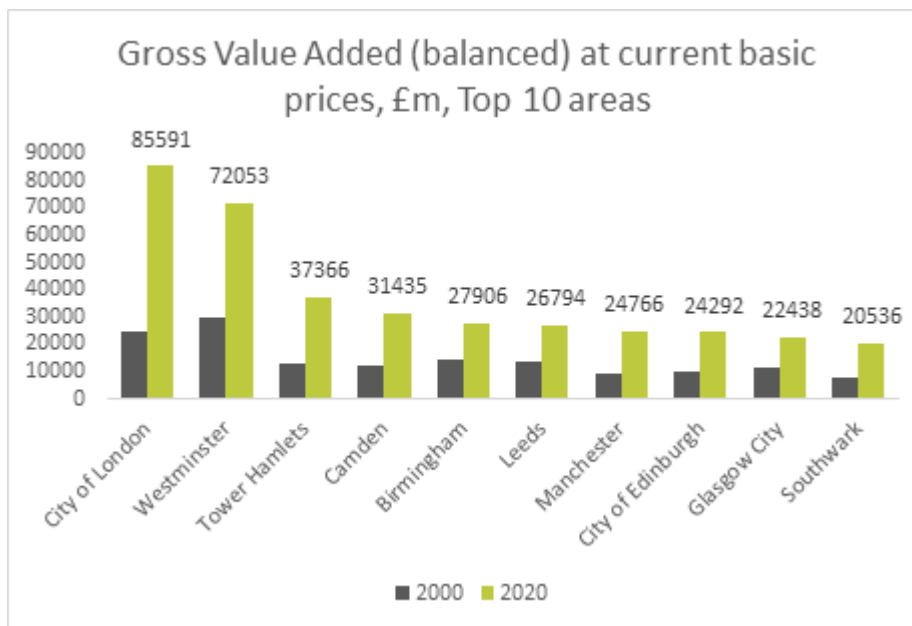
Tower Hamlets has a far higher number of jobs than the total number of economically active adults (182,500) making Tower Hamlets a significant net importer of workers. These employees worked for businesses of all sizes, including 115 large businesses (250+ employees) and almost 15,000 micro businesses (0-9 employees).

The number of jobs available in 2021 was a slight decline on the peak of 304,000 jobs in 2019, perhaps reflecting the impact of geopolitical events including the Covid 19 pandemic and Brexit.

Of these jobs, almost a quarter (23.7%) were in the finance and insurance industry and a further 16.8% were in professional, technical and scientific industries. 7.6% of employee jobs were in human health and social work activities and 6.2% of employees worked in education.

One measure of the size of an economy is Gross Value Added (GVA). In 2020, Tower Hamlets produced £37.4bn GVA. This was the third highest local authority in the UK behind the City of London and Westminster and was higher than all the major regional cities. It was more than three times higher than the borough's GVA in 2000. Tower Hamlets has also grown more quickly than other areas – GVA was less than that of Birmingham and Leeds in 2000 but was higher by 2020.

**Chart 2 - Gross Value Added, 2020**

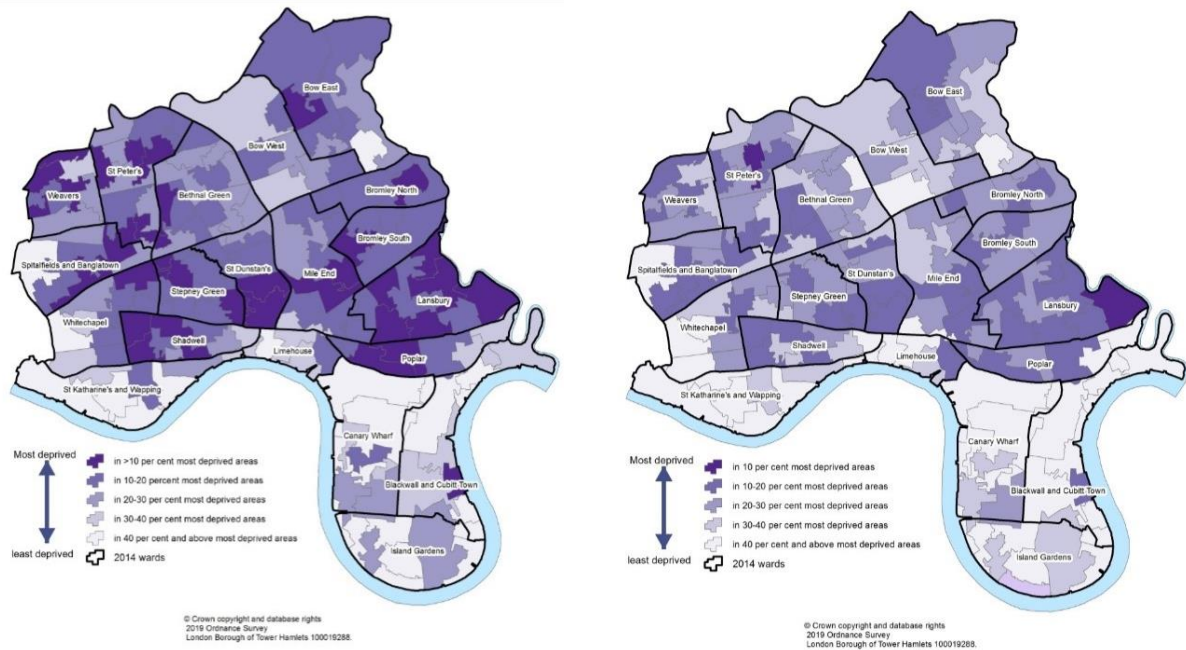


## 7. Improved outcomes for some of the most vulnerable, but further to go and some big challenges ahead

Throughout its history, the east end of London has been notorious for its poverty and attendant challenges such as crime. The many colourful stories (some fictitious, some based on real events) add to Tower Hamlets' rich cultural history and help attract visitors to destinations such as the Tower of London and Whitechapel. However, they have perhaps contributed to a caricature of the borough that does not reflect modern reality. This said, the area has experienced great hardship and difficulty over its past and to some extent these challenges persist, albeit they present differently in the twenty first century.

In 2019, Tower Hamlets ranked as the 50<sup>th</sup> most deprived local authority district (rank of score) in England (of 317). Deprivation in Tower Hamlets (measured through a combined set of health, education, crime, housing, environmental, employment and income measures), while still high, has been improving relative to the rest of the country in recent years.

**Picture 2 - Indices of Multiple Deprivation, most and least deprived small areas in Tower Hamlets**  
**2015** **2019**



Note: As of 2022, two ward names used in this map have now changed. St Peters ward is now Bethnal Green West and Bethnal Green is now Bethnal Green East.

As these maps illustrate, deprivation relative to other parts of England has decreased throughout the borough. Whilst significant parts of the borough ranked within the most deprived tenth of households in 2015 there were only two areas remaining in this group by 2019.

The specific reasons for this change in relative deprivation are difficult to precisely trace from the data but we have seen rising wages and rising levels of employment in the borough which will have helped many residents improve their circumstances. The employment rate has fluctuated over the years and was impacted by the pandemic and other factors, but the broad trend for working aged people has been upwards – rising from 53% in 2004 to 72.8% in 2022. Women, disabled residents and residents from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds are less likely than average to be in work. In 2022, 59.7% of women were in employment and 62.5% of ethnic minority residents were in employment. 4.6% of residents were unemployed compared with a national average of 3.7%.

Amongst those who are working, we have also seen a significant rise in wages at all levels. Median gross weekly wages for full time working residents in 2021 were just under £800. This was significantly higher than both London and Great Britain and represented a rise of 25% since 2011. Wages also rose for those in the lowest earning quartile – from £459 to £582 – a rise of 27%. However, this does

not account for inflation and in particular inflation in housing costs. It also fails to recognize the large number of under-employed residents – in 2021, there were 54,000 part time employee jobs in the borough.

Another likely reason for the relative decline in deprivation is the inward migration of highly skilled professional people into the borough and the outward migration of low- and medium-income residents who can no longer afford housing costs in the area (particularly those living in the private rental sector and the children of long-term residents who are seeking to establish themselves and buy a home). The rapidly rising population potentially obscures some of the ingrained poverty that some residents in Tower Hamlets continue to experience.

Income data collated by the company CACI provides information about overall household income, including earnings from employment and other household income such as welfare payments. This demonstrates that even the least well – off quarter of households have improved their incomes relative to income levels in the country with lower quartile incomes in Tower Hamlets rising by 31% between 2010 and 2022 compared with 27% for Great Britain. Unfortunately, this does not necessarily mean that these lower income households will *feel* better off or find life to be more affordable than it did several years ago. The Annual Residents Survey in 2021 highlighted lack of affordable housing as a concern for 36% of respondents and rising prices/interest rates as a concern for 11% of respondents. The significant price inflation that 2022 has seen will undoubtedly have heightened those concerns for many more.

**Table 2 – CACI Lower Quartile Income**

CACI Lower Quartile Household Income Data 2010 - 2022					
	<b>2010</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>% rise 2010 - 2022</b>
Great Britain	£16,925	£17,036	£17,749	£21,560	27%
Tower Hamlets	£17,631	£17,911	£18,326	£23,021	31%

One other potential reason for the lessening deprivation is the impact of direct intervention amongst the poorest households, leading to measurable improvements in a variety of areas such as housing conditions and health outcomes. Tower Hamlets Homes has regenerated much of its own Council housing stock and other housing associations have also invested in social housing in the borough. The local NHS bodies have also invested heavily in both infrastructure and services. This included a complete rebuild of the Royal London Hospital with the current building opening in stages between 2012 and 2016.

Tower Hamlets is a central London inner city borough with all the issues that such areas experience, including crime. As a result, crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour are all issues that our residents highlight as key concerns. The

crime rate for total notifiable offences was 106.9 per 1,000 residents, higher than most London Boroughs but below other central London boroughs such as Hackney, Islington, Camden and Westminster. Relative to London, Tower Hamlets had high rates of sexual crimes and stalking and harassment crimes. Drug offences fell between 2021 and 2022 but were still among the highest in the country.

The last Annual Residents Survey (2021) showed that the single biggest concern of residents was crime and anti-social behaviour with 47% of residents citing this concern. Over a quarter of respondents (26%) said they feel unsafe after dark and 31% disagreed with the statement that 'police and public services are successfully dealing with safety issues'.

Anti-social behaviour is a particular issue. The Mayor's Office for Crime and Policing dashboard records that there have been almost 15,000 reported ASB Calls in the past year equating to a rate of 45.3 per 1,000 residents. This was the second highest rate in London after Westminster. Reports of harassment were also higher than most other areas. Reports of burglary, assault, robbery and criminal damage were relatively consistent with neighbouring inner east and southeast London boroughs, and in some cases below other areas.

## **8. Good schools and better prospects for young people, but not all adults have the skills and opportunities they need to succeed**

Local schools are successful and highly regarded with 97% being rated as good or better by Ofsted. In 2020/2021, schools in Tower Hamlets achieved results that were above the England average on both average attainment 8 for GCSE and the proportion of children who achieve strong and standard passes in Maths and English. There are variations across different ethnic groups with children from Asian/Asian British backgrounds achieving better results on average than children from White, Mixed and Black backgrounds. Children from Chinese backgrounds do particularly well.

Children whose first language is not English (about two thirds of the cohort) achieve better results than children whose first language is English. Children who are eligible for free school meals perform less well than other children, but the difference is relatively small compared with other areas. The long-term impacts of the Covid 19 pandemic and the disruption this caused to the education of many children will not be fully understood for some time, with the impact on children from income deprived backgrounds and children with special educational needs being a particular concern.

A large proportion of young people go on to higher education. In 2020/21, 70.9% of 18-year-olds sustained a level 4 or higher destination (such as degrees, higher apprenticeships and national higher diplomas). This was higher than the rate for England of 66%.

However, some young people are falling through the cracks with survey data from the annual population survey from the last five years suggesting that between 3,000 and 6,000 18–24-year-olds may be unemployed at any one time. Some young people are particularly vulnerable, making them more likely to experience adverse outcomes. For example, the borough had 332 children who were being looked after as at March 2022.

Whilst speaking a first language other than English does not seem to be a major barrier for most young people making their way through the education system, it can be much more challenging for adults moving to the borough and seeking work if their proficiency in English is not good. In the 2021 census, 5.2% of residents aged 3 and over reported not being able to speak English well and 1.0% reported not being able to speak English at all. This may, for example, be one reason why only 36.3% of Pakistani/Bangladeshi females aged 16-64 were in employment in the year to March 2022 compared with an overall employment rate of 71.4% and an employment rate for all females of 59.2%.

Many adults are unskilled or under skilled. The ONS annual population survey estimates that in 2021, 6.5% of working age adults had no qualifications (higher than the London average of 5.5%) and more than a third of working age adults were not educated to NVQ3 level (equivalent to A-Levels or a BTEC level 3).

## **9. Improving health outcomes but increasing need, especially amongst older people. Persistent health and care challenges even before the pandemic**

Health and social care services have always been extremely important to residents, but a global pandemic has brought them to even greater media and public attention at a time when delivery has been its most challenging.

Under the Indices of Multiple Deprivation Health Domain, Tower Hamlets ranked 98<sup>th</sup> of 317 in 2019 having been 56<sup>th</sup> in 2015, illustrating that health outcomes had been improving overall relative to other parts of England prior to the pandemic.

In 2018-20, healthy life expectancy at birth was 65 years for males and 58 years for females. This represented a significant increase for males since 2011-13 when healthy life expectancy was 54 years but only a very small increase for females when healthy life expectancy was 56 years. This data dates to well before the pandemic, of which the full impact on life expectancy and healthy life expectancy is unlikely to be known for many years.

Rates of disability within the borough vary significantly depending on age with roughly one in eight people having a disability. Children are much less likely to have a disability while disability is much more common among older people.

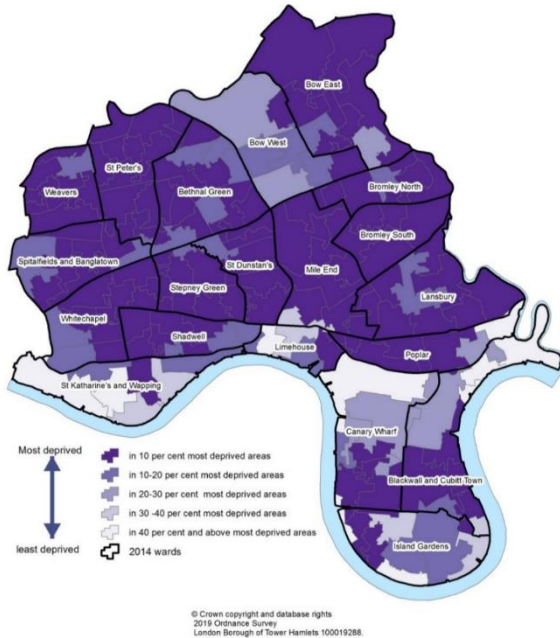
**Table 3 – Disability by Age, 2021**

<b>Disability by age, 2021 census</b>	<b>%</b>
0-15 years	5.2%
16-24 years	9.2%
25-34 years	7.6%
35-49 years	13.0%
50-64 years	28.4%
65+	44.3%
All Ages	12.9%

There are more and more pressures on health and social care services. Working age adult care needs are rising. PANSI (Projecting Adult Needs and Service Information) projects that the number of working age adults with severe or moderate learning disabilities will rise from 1300 in 2020 to 1600 in 2040 while the number of people with autistic spectrum disorders will rise from 2500 to 3000 in the same period. They project that the number of working age people with two or more mental disorders will rise from under 17,000 to over 20,000. The number of working age people with impaired mobility is expected to rise from 9000 to 12,500.

The group in Tower Hamlets with the highest level of health and care need is older people. Tower Hamlets has a relatively small population of older people, but it is by some distance the most deprived group of older people in the country with 44% living in income deprivation. with clear implications for health outcomes and care needs.

**Picture 3 - Income Deprivation Affecting Older People, 2019**



According to POPPI (Projecting Older People Population Information System), the number of older people requiring assistance with at least one domestic task will more than double between 2020 and 2040 from less than 6,000 to over 12,000. The number of older people with dementia is also expected to more than double from 1,360 to 2,840. The number of people unable to manage at least one mobility activity on their own will likewise also double from 3,700 to 7,700.

**May 2023**

**Corporate Strategy and Improvement Team**