

# Adult Social Care: How are we doing?

**The “Local Account” - Adult Social Care  
in Tower Hamlets 2021**



## Foreword

### Mayor and Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing

We want to start this local account by saying thank you to social care staff, service users and carers for help and support over an unprecedented year. If you are reading this as an adult with support needs or their loved one, thank you for the action you have taken to keep yourself and others safe through an incredibly stressful period.



If you are reading this as a care worker, social worker or other member of staff working in social care through the Covid-19 pandemic; thank you for your commitment and care over the last year. The adult social care sector often does not get the recognition it deserves, yet it has been a critical part of the Covid-19 response, protecting and supporting people who were often at the highest risk of serious illness from Covid-19.

This local account describes adult social care in Tower Hamlets over the last year, with a focus on the Covid-19 pandemic. The achievements are many and varied, including the provision of more than a million pieces of PPE, providing care to 2,310 people in their homes, and working with NHS colleagues to vaccinate social care users and staff as soon as they were eligible.

The challenges faced by everyone in the last year have been considerable. In particular, care homes have been hit hard by the pandemic, and those in Tower Hamlets as elsewhere have sadly suffered a number of outbreaks and deaths. In addition to Covid-19-related challenges, social care continues to face significant financial pressures and some difficult decisions have been made in the last year in relation to charging for social care and day centres.

For the coming year, we want to take what we have learned from the pandemic so far to retain what worked well. We want to support staff, service users and carers to recover from what has been a very difficult period. The pandemic has shone a light on existing inequalities, and we are committed to tackling this across the health and care system. Finally, we want to create a new vision for adult social care that brings this together and is financially sustainable, providing good quality support that empowers people to achieve their goals and be as independent as possible.

**John Biggs**, Mayor of Tower Hamlets

**Councillor Rachel Blake**, Cabinet Member for Adults Health and Wellbeing

## Overview of adult social care in 2020-21

### People



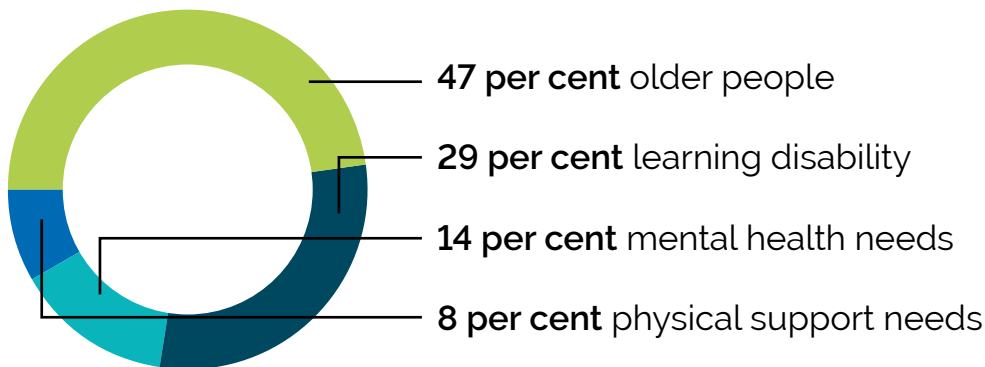
The Tower Hamlets population in 2019 was estimated to be **325,000**. The population is fast-growing, diverse and comparatively young.



Throughout 2020-21, **3,974** people with support needs received long-term care from the council, while **440** people received short-term support.



Social care spend in 2020-21 can be broken down as follows:



### Support



Our budget is **£117 million** for 2021-22. We spent **£118 million** in 2020-21.

Support provided over 2020-21 can be broken down as follows:

Care homes – 693 people - **£45.1 million**

Homecare – 2,310 people - **£25 million**

Direct payments – 686 people - **£10.8 million**

Day care – 640 people - **£4.7 million**



The remainder was spent on staffing costs and a wide variety of preventative support options to keep people as independent and well as possible.

## Supporting people in care homes through the pandemic

Care homes across the UK have been hit hard by Covid-19. The small number of care homes in Tower Hamlets (five for older people) have suffered a number of outbreaks and sadly over 2020, care homes reported 38 deaths related to Covid-19. The pandemic has affected everyone working and living in care homes and their families, and the reverberations will be felt into the future.

A range of work and support has been put in place to protect and support those in care homes. This includes:

- To date, care homes have only accepted referrals from people who have tested negative for Covid-19. Temporary and alternative support is provided to people who test positive until they have recovered. Those in care homes then regularly take Covid-19 tests.
- 'Wraparound' care for care homes from a range of dedicated health and social care professionals has been in place for over a year. This has included infection control training to staff, expert advice and access to specialist infection nurses.
- We have supported care homes with their visiting policies, carefully balancing the need to protect people from Covid-19 with the importance of residents having contact with their loved ones. We also helped care homes access digital technology (e.g. tablets) to help with this.
- More recently, we have supported staff and service users to be vaccinated against Covid-19. For example, one care home had 100 per cent of their staff and residents vaccinated by 25 February 2021.

Staff, service users and their loved ones have told us how challenging the last year has been in every way, and we are committed to supporting people to recover from the effects of pandemic going forward.

There are 10 care homes registered with the Care Quality Commission (CQC), offering places for up to 352 people in Tower Hamlets.



## Supporting people to return home from hospital

The pressure on hospitals over the last year has had a big impact on social care. The focus has been on getting people with support needs who are ready to leave hospital to do so quickly and safely, relieving pressure on the NHS to stop the system becoming 'overwhelmed'.

To do this, two main actions were taken:

- We worked with NHS colleagues to set up two 'Integrated Discharge Hubs' in March 2020 in the Royal London Hospital and Mile End Hospital. These 'hubs' were made up of health professionals and social workers and aimed to discharge people safely from hospital within one day of them being medically fit to do so.
- We carried out a 'discharge-to-assess' model, whereby people were discharged from hospital with a care package that was then refined and reviewed when they were at home in a better environment.

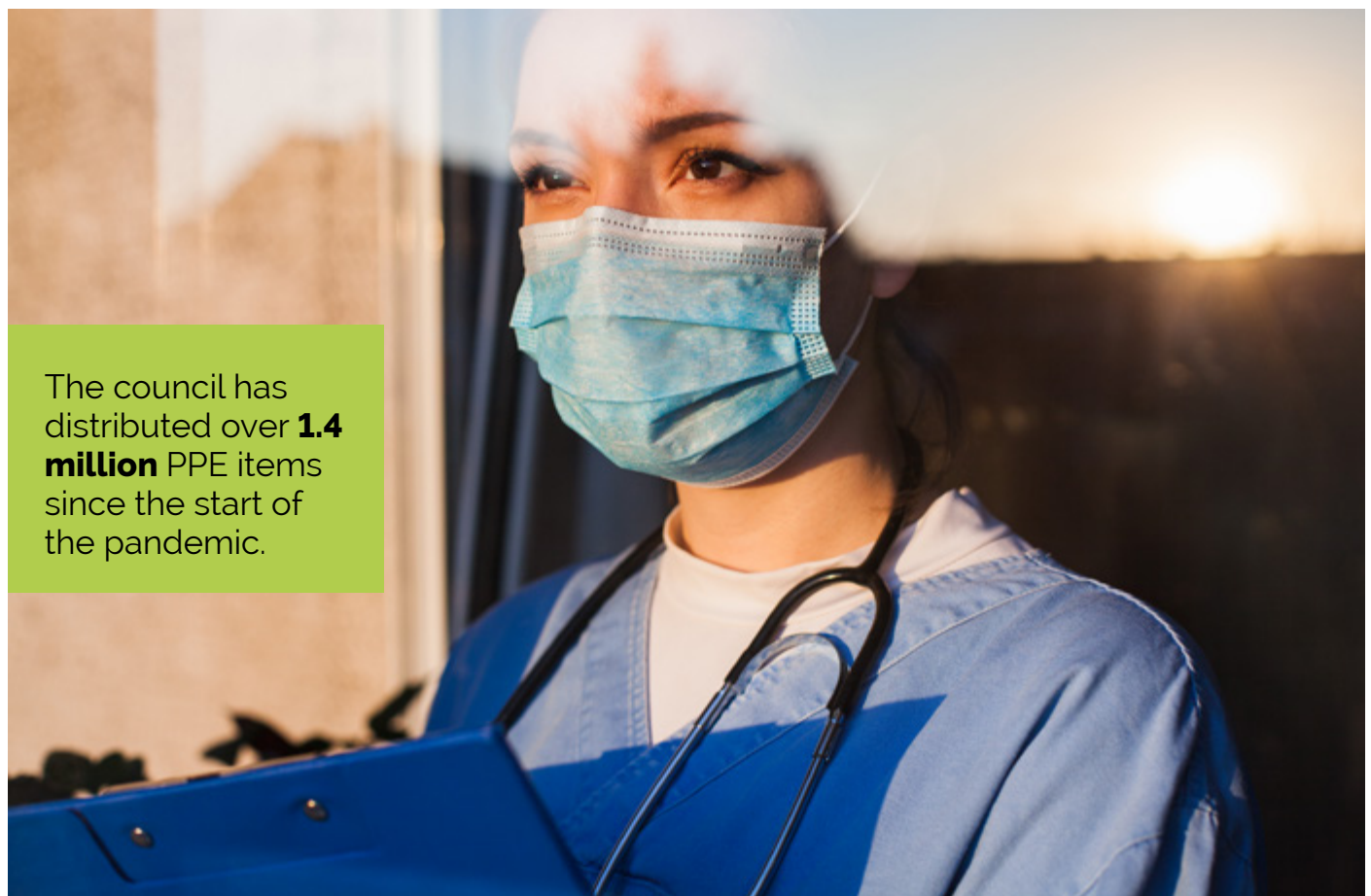
*"[The social worker's] compassion during these difficult times reinforced my faith in those working in social care, and the pivotal role you play. He showed the upmost empathy throughout and kept me fully informed at every step."*



## Supporting adult social care users through the pandemic

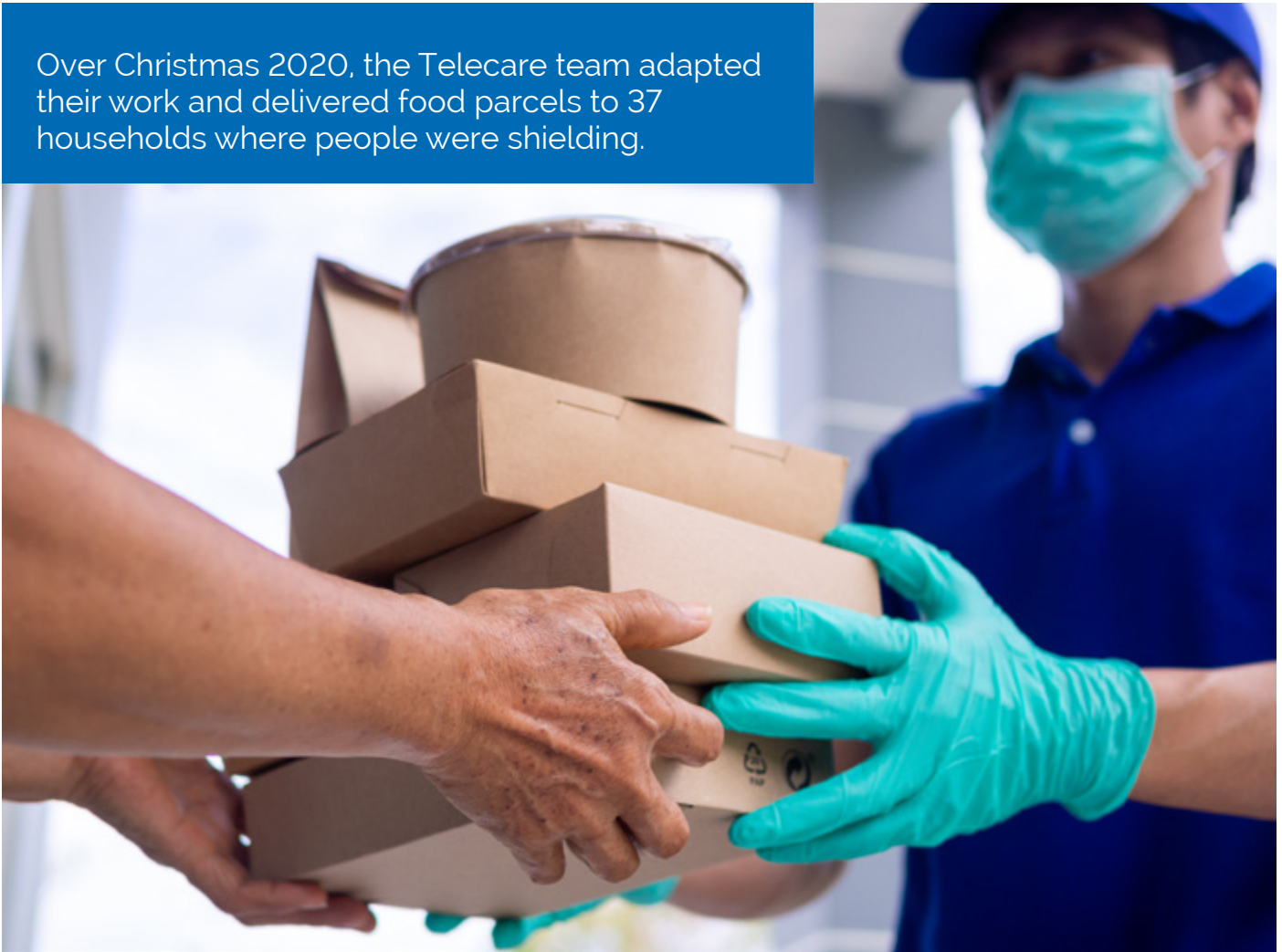
Our main focus over the last year has been to support people through an extremely challenging period, doing all we can to minimise the risk of Covid-19. To do this, we:

- Supported care workers to get PPE, providing this directly when needed
- Supported social care users who needed to self-isolate or shield with food and necessities
- Gave people who organise their own care and support with a direct payment more flexibility, temporarily relaxing the rules on employing close family members and paying an additional 10 per cent 'contingency' payment to use in the event of staff sickness or absence
- Encouraged and supported staff and service users to be vaccinated as soon as they were eligible.



The council has distributed over **1.4 million** PPE items since the start of the pandemic.

Over Christmas 2020, the Telecare team adapted their work and delivered food parcels to 37 households where people were shielding.



A key concern when the pandemic started was that adult social care might be overwhelmed if many more people needed support at the same time more staff were off sick. As a result, in March 2020 the government gave councils temporary emergency powers called 'Care Act Easements'. If enacted, these powers would release councils from some legal duties, likely resulting in some people temporarily having their care stopped unless that care was absolutely critical. Care Act easements were not put in place in Tower Hamlets, and a lot of work went into minimising the risk of needing them, including carrying out a recruitment campaign to recruit more care workers and putting more social workers in teams where the demand was highest.

Feedback from service users and carers on their experience of care has generally been positive over the last year, but we know that this is not everyone's experience. Groups like Healthwatch Tower Hamlets have told us that the feedback they received was less positive in 2020 compared to 2019. Furthermore, one of the consequences of the pandemic is that waiting lists for social care assessments and reviews have built up. Over the coming year, we will continue to focus on improving the quality of care while reducing the waiting list.


## Supporting carers

A 'carer' is anyone who looks after a family member, partner or friend who needs help because of their illness, frailty, disability, a mental health problem or an addiction and cannot cope without their support.

Many carers are likely to have felt increased worry and stress as a result of the pandemic and as a result of their loved ones being home more often. To support carers, we have:

- Continued to offer 'carer relief' home-based respite through the pandemic
- Offered the 'Carers Emergency Service' to provide urgent support to carers where needed
- Offered a 'top-up' carer relief service in situations where there was an urgent need arising from the pandemic for things like food shopping or medicine collection
- Since December 2020, we have changed our Charging Policy so that respite and carer relief is now free and not subject to a means-tested charge.

We have worked closely with the Carers Centre through the pandemic, who have supported carers via phone and digital outreach and have encouraged and supported carers to be vaccinated as soon as they were eligible.

A photograph showing a woman with dark hair sitting in a wheelchair, wearing a light-colored coat and a white scarf. She is being embraced from behind by a young girl with long blonde hair, who is also wearing a white scarf and a dark jacket. They are outdoors on a paved path with grass and trees in the background. The woman in the wheelchair is smiling and looking towards the girl.

*"You managed to get respite and the Covid test etc in place for mum at an incredible response rate. I really appreciate all the help, advice and support you've provided in the recent weeks. It's been super hard but you've honestly made such a difference!"*  
– carer, 2020



## Supporting social care staff

Social care staff have been on the frontline of the pandemic, providing care to people who were often at a higher risk of Covid-19 and supporting them through an extremely challenging period. To recognise, protect and support staff through this period we have:

- Provided access to counselling and a range of materials to help staff with their mental health and wellbeing
- Ensured care workers are paid their usual wages if they are off sick or have to self-isolate
- Provided PPE and training on infection control
- Supported staff to access testing and vaccinations
- Worked closely with staff and the organisations we fund when planning any changes and deciding how best to respond to the pandemic.

*“...She’s such a wonderful person. As soon as she comes in she cheers me up. She was singing this morning as well.”* – service user, Healthwatch Tower Hamlets report, 2020

Over the last year we have changed how we recruit new social workers and other practitioners. Job interviews now have a bigger focus on values, as well as people’s skills, knowledge and experience.

In a survey completed by 337 adult social care users in spring 2020, **93 per cent** of respondents said care and support services help them have a better quality of life – compared to **94 per cent** the year before.



## Working differently

Social distancing restrictions over the last year have meant that support has had to be provided in a different way. For Social Workers and other practitioners, this has meant meeting people over the phone or virtually when it was safe and appropriate to do so, rather than meeting face-to-face. For day centres and support, this has meant the centres having to temporarily close. Instead, support has been provided in a different way: 'Safe and well checks' have been routinely carried out (typically over the phone), home visits take place where needed, and services are increasingly using digital technology to provide support and activities to people.

While some changes have been challenging, others have worked well, and we will look at how we can keep offering support in this way as social distancing restrictions continue to ease.

*"[The day centre] team are doing a good job of managing the difficulties while supporting my mother and staying in line with government guidelines."*

– carer, 2020

Throughout the last year we have also focused on how social workers and other practitioners work with service users to carry out assessments and reviews. We want the focus to be on the strengths people have as well as the things they need help with.

*"The staff are supportive and challenge us to help ourselves and meet our goals. The staff give us motivation."*

– service user, 2020



## Working with the NHS

One of the things we are proudest of over the last year is how effectively health and social care has worked together to respond to the pandemic, planning and taking action together quickly and flexibly.

The partnership of health and social care organisations is called 'Tower Hamlets Together', and work over the last year has included:

- Providing 'wraparound' and enhanced support to care homes
- Providing targeted healthcare and support to rough sleepers who were housed when the UK went into lockdown in 2020
- Carrying out a large-scale vaccination programme, encouraging those who may be hesitant to take up the offer through clear information and advice
- Prioritising anti-racism and taking action aimed at reducing racial inequality highlighted by the Covid-19 pandemic
- Continuing to pool our resources to tackle common problems and work towards common goals
- Working to tackle the wider impacts of the pandemic, including on people's mental health and feelings of social isolation.

During lockdown, a mental health hub and extra mental crisis helplines were set up to support anyone experiencing a mental health crisis.



## Listening and working with social care users and carers

We have worked hard to hear the views and experiences of users and carers over a challenging period. This includes through:

- Carrying out consultations on proposed changes, through questionnaires and meetings (when safe to do so).
- Hearing from and working with those with 'lived experience' of social care. We have worked with Healthwatch, Toynbee Hall and others to focused on topics that include health and wellbeing, homecare and day support.
- Last year, in partnership with the NHS, a new Empowering Voices service was set up. This focuses on empowering individuals with a learning disability so that their views are heard and influence changes within health and social care.



## Finance challenges

Tower Hamlets Council has had to save £200m since 2010 due to government austerity and increasing demand, with a further estimated £30m savings needed over the next three years. Distinct pressures are faced by adult social care, as older people are living longer with multiple health conditions and an increasing number of younger adults with complex conditions need support as they enter adulthood, adding to the additional support needs that may arise as a result of the pandemic.

While new funding has been made available to councils, we still need to deliver savings to remain within a balanced budget.

Financial pressures have led to some difficult decisions in the last year, including:

- A decision to change how we carry out a means-tested charge for adult social care. The maximum someone can pay towards their care has been raised from £250 per week to £1000 per week (if they can afford it, based on a means-test). We have reduced a 'Standard Utilities Allowance' from £15 to £5 per week, which is an amount that is disregarded from the means-test.
- A decision to close three day centres in 2021: Pritchard's Road service for adults with a mental health issue, Physical Disability Day Opportunities for adults with a physical disability and Riverside Day Service for older people.

Both decisions were made following extensive consultation, and both decisions have included a degree of reinvestment aimed at better supporting service users and carers:

- As mentioned earlier, we are now providing respite and carer relief free of charge to further support carers.
- We are reinvesting £452,000 back into day services and are supporting service users from the three closed centres to access alternatives. This year we will be opening a 'community support hub', designed as a flexible base for people to access the huge and vibrant range of activities that are available to people living in Tower Hamlets, while providing a safe and inclusive space and incorporating the things that service users have told us are important to them.

We have supported all current day support service users into new support and established new routes into our day support options which include a specialist dementia day centre, mental health recovery support, older peoples day support and learning disability day support.

## Anti-racism and work to tackle inequality

The last 12 months has shone a light on the inequalities and discrimination facing people of Black and Asian minority ethnic backgrounds, following evidence highlighting the disproportionate impact Covid-19 has had on BAME communities and the Black Lives Matter movement.

There are specific issues for the health and care system to consider. For example, a Healthwatch Tower Hamlets report in 2020 found that 'BAME people and people with complex conditions gave less positive feedback on health and social care services' compared to White British respondents.



We have prioritised work to tackle racism and inequality over the last year. This has included:

- Running reflective 'listening circles' during 'Learning Wednesdays' sessions for staff on anti-racism
- Asking social care training providers and educators to demonstrate how they are addressing anti-racism through their training
- Work with health partners through Tower Hamlets Together to tackle inequalities across the system, addressing the recommendation made by Public Health England in summer 2020 and the recommendations made in the Tower Hamlets Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Inequalities Commission in early 2021
- The Health and Wellbeing Board are leading the delivery of recommendations from the Tower Hamlets BAME Inequalities Commission.

This work is part of our wider commitment to tackle inequality in all its forms, including the inequality that can be faced by adults with a learning disability, physical disability or mental health issue who need social care.

## **Mental health support**

Mental health services responded quickly to the pandemic. A lot of mental health support provided to by the community mental health teams to people experiencing mental ill health moved online, and face-to-face contact continued where needed. We moved more staff into the Emergency Duty team at the start of lockdown, helping address an increase in demand for emergency support.

Our mental health services have started to see further increases in referrals as we move out of lockdown, reflecting the wider impacts of the pandemic. We are continuing to work to support people though this. We are also bringing in more resources to deal with an increase in demand and to address waiting lists that built up over the last year.

## **Learning disability support**

Like our mental health services, the Community Learning Disability Service is an integrated service between the Council and the NHS. The service moved quickly to respond to the pandemic, supporting adults with a learning disability through a very challenging period. People with a learning disability are up to 6 times more likely to die from Covid-19 than the general population, increasing the health inequalities already experienced by this group.

Over the pandemic, we moved more staff into our Duty team to respond to an increase in demand for support. We have continued to see people through virtual means or have visited people at home where needed. We have also organised more support to people at home, as services such as day centres and respite centres closed for the duration of lockdown. We recognise the huge amount of support family and carers have provided during this difficult time. These services are now starting to reopen. More recently we have supported those with a learning disability to be vaccinated against Covid-19, running specific clinics with this in mind.

## Summary of our performance over the last year

The table below describes our performance over last year compared to the year before. This – along with feedback and input from people who receive social care – is one of the ways to understand what we are doing well and where we need to improve.

Performance	2019-20 result in Tower Hamlets	2020-21 result in Tower Hamlets
The proportion of people who use services who receive self-directed support	93%	96.2%
The proportion of carers who receive self-directed support	100%	100%
The proportion of people who use services who receive direct payments	20.6%	22.4%
The proportion of carers who receive direct payments	100%	100%
The proportion of adults with a learning disability in paid employment	9.2%	5.7%
The proportion of adults with a learning disability who live in their own home or with their family	81.9%	84%
Long-term support needs of those aged 18-64 met by admission to a care home, per 100,000 population	13.4	8.6
Long-term support needs of those aged 65 or over met by admission to a care home, per 100,000 population	460.2	330.8
The proportion of those aged 65 or over who were still at home 91 days after discharge from hospital into reablement/rehabilitation services	67.6%	69.6%



## **Our priorities for the coming year**

Going forward, we will build on what worked well during the pandemic and continue to do everything we can to stop the spread of infection, support people with their physical and mental health, and empower people to be as independent as possible. We want to build on what we do well, and will work to address our challenges - including the issues and concerns raised by adult social care users and carers.


Overall, our priorities for adult social care are:

1. Continue to lead the social care response to the Covid-19 pandemic and support the delivery of an effective vaccination programme.
2. Take action to address the wider impact of the pandemic on mental health and healthy lifestyles, specifically looking to mitigate the disproportionate impact on particular groups. This includes a focus on anti-racist practice and actions to address health and social care inequalities.
3. Develop a clear vision and strategy for adult social care going forward, ensuring we provide the right care at the right time that supports people to be as independent as possible.
4. Address the financial pressures faced by adult social care to ensure our care and support system is sustainable going forward.
5. Redesign, relaunch and implement a number of adult social care support services including day support, homecare and information and advice provision.
6. Continue to integrate health and care so that residents get a better, more joined up experience, retaining and developing innovations that have emerged during the Covid-19 pandemic.
7. Support adults to meet outcomes important to them, promoting individual wellbeing and maximising individual strengths, including those in peoples support networks and our vibrant community.

## More information and useful contacts

This document gives you information on what has been happening in adult social care over the last year. We are keen to hear what you think, so please get in touch using the contact details below.

### **'Tower Hamlets Connect - for adult social care enquiries**


 0300 303 6070

 [enquiry@towerhamletsconnect.org](mailto:enquiry@towerhamletsconnect.org)

### **Mental Health Crisis Line – East London NHS Foundation Trust**


 020 7771 5807

### **Carer help and information – Tower Hamlets Carers Centre**

 020 7790 1765


 [enquiries@ccth.org.uk](mailto:enquiries@ccth.org.uk)

### **Social care complaints – Council complaints team**

 0800 145 5343

 [complaints@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:complaints@towerhamlets.gov.uk)

### **Health and care feedback – Healthwatch Tower Hamlets**

 0800 145 5343

 [info@healthwatch@towerhamlets.co.uk](mailto:info@healthwatch@towerhamlets.co.uk)

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