TOWER HAMLETS

Language in Tower Hamlets
Analysis of 2011 Census data

Summary of findings

This briefing presents key statistics about language from the 2011 Census. These data provide new intelligence about the different languages used by residents and levels of proficiency in spoken English.

Key findings:

- The Census records information about the <u>main language</u> used by residents – which is intended to capture a person's first or preferred language. In Tower Hamlets, English and Bengali are the two most commonly used languages: **two thirds (66 per cent) of residents use English as their main language and 18 per cent use Bengali** (which includes Sylheti and Chatgaya). *Note: all Census statistics about language relate to the population aged 3 and over.*

- The remaining 16 per cent of residents cite a wide variety of other European and international languages. After English and Bengali, the largest language groups in Tower Hamlets are: Chinese, French, Spanish, Italian and Somali – each used by between 1-2 per cent of the population. In total, **the Census identifies at least 90 different languages (or groups of languages) being used in the borough.**

- Tower Hamlets has a relatively high proportion of residents who use a main language other than English: 34 per cent compared with 22 per cent across London and 8 per cent nationally – **the third highest percentage in England**, after both Newham and Brent.

- As well as spoken languages, the Census provides data on use of Sign Language. In Tower Hamlets, **117 residents used sign language**, 91 of whom used British Sign Language.

- Recent research, by the GLA, has compared the degree of linguistic diversity across areas using the Simpsons Diversity Index - a measure which considers both the mix and size of language groups in different areas. **Tower Hamlets emerges as the 4th most linguistically diverse area in England and Wales** on this measure, after Newham, Brent and Ealing.

- Tower Hamlets remains unique with regard to its high proportion of Bengali speakers - 18 per cent compared with 3 per cent across Inner London and less than one per cent nationally. **Tower Hamlets has the largest number, and proportion of, Bengali speakers in England.**

- The proportion of residents who cite Bengali as their main language is lower than the proportion of the population that are ethnically Bangladeshi (18 vs. 32 per cent) - indicating that **many Bangladeshi residents use either English, or another (non-Bengali) language, as their main language.**

Summary of findings (continued)

- Within London, **Newham and Camden are the only other boroughs where, after English, Bengali is the most common language used.** In Newham, around 7 per cent of residents use Bengali and in Camden 3 per cent.

- Tower Hamlets ranks highly on the size of its **Chinese speaking population**. Considered together, residents using Chinese languages comprise 1.7 per cent of the borough's population – the third highest proportion in England, after Cambridge and Manchester (2.0 and 1.8 per cent respectively).

- The Census also collected data on levels of **proficiency in spoken English** among those whose main language was not English: the majority (77 per cent) said they could speak English *well* or *very well* and just under one quarter said they low or no proficiency in spoken English. So while Tower Hamlets has a relatively high proportion of residents using languages other than English, the proficiency data show that **the majority of this group are also fluent in English, highlighting the significant number of bi-lingual residents in the borough.**

- When expressed as a proportion of the whole population, **the percentage of the Tower Hamlets population who have poor (or no) fluency in spoken English is eight per cent** – around one in 12 residents – which is the second highest proportion nationally after Newham (9 per cent). This compares with 4 per cent across London and 2 per cent in England.

- The eight per cent of residents with poor proficiency in English comprise: 6.4 per cent who said they could not speak English well and 1.6 per cent who could not speak English at all. Compared with other areas, Tower Hamlets has the **highest proportion of residents who cannot speak English at all, though in terms of size, this group represents a small minority of the overall population** (1.6 per cent vs. 0.3 per cent nationally).

- The proportion of residents who report low levels of, or no, proficiency in spoken English ranges from 4 per cent in Bow East and Millwall wards **up to 11 per cent in the wards of Bethnal Green South, Bromley-by-Bow and Spitalfields & Banglatown.**

- The Census also provides some information about the mix of languages used within households. In Tower Hamlets: 62 per cent of households were English language households – those where all adults used English as their main language; 19 per cent were households where no one used English as their main language; and the remaining **19 per cent were mixed language households** – where some household members use English while others use another main language.

- This briefing has analysed the first set of 2011 Census results about language. More detail is expected in the coming months about the characteristics of people from different language groups

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Further information: This Briefing was produced by the Council's Corporate Research Unit. Research briefings provide timely and in-depth analysis of data about Tower Hamlets and are designed to improve the use and sharing of data. The team's recent research briefings can be accessed on the intranet:
http://towernet/Intranet/staff_services/business_planning/corporate_research_unit.aspx

1   About this briefing

This briefing presents 2011 Census data about language and explores what the new data reveal about the Tower Hamlets population.

The Census provides a wealth of data about the characteristics of the local population and the results are being released in stages during 2012-2013. The data in this briefing are based mainly on the second release of Census data (December 2012 and January 2013). The Corporate Research Unit has produced an initial summary report of these results for Tower Hamlets[1] - which is available on the LBTH intranet.

This briefing on language is one of a series of topic reports designed to provide more in depth analysis of the data. This briefing aims to present key statistics about language use and proficiency in the borough and covers the following areas:

- An introduction to the Census and the language questions;
- Use of English as a main language;
- Principal languages used in Tower Hamlets;
- Detailed profile of all language groups in Tower Hamlets;
- Most common languages used – Tower Hamlets compared to other areas;
- Linguistic diversity – how diverse is Tower Hamlets linguistically?
- Levels of proficiency in English;
- English proficiency by ward;
- Household data on language.

2   Background about the Census

The Census aims to provide a count of all people and households in the UK and is carried out every ten years by the Office for National Statistics (ONS). The 2011 Census took place in March 2011 and the questionnaire collected data on a range of topics including: demography, diversity, labour market circumstances, housing and health.

While the Census aims for complete coverage, in practice it achieved a response rate of 94 per cent across England and Wales and about 91 per cent per cent in Tower Hamlets[2]. To deal with non-response ONS imputes the missing values so the final data accurately reflect the size and composition of the population. Response rates in Tower Hamlets have improved dramatically since the previous Census in 2001 (up 15 percentage points from 76 per cent)[3], improving the reliability of the data.

One of the main strengths of the Census is that, unlike sample surveys, it can provide estimates for small groups within the population and for small areas within local authorities. This makes it particularly valuable for analysis of diversity topics like language and ethnicity. Furthermore, as it takes place at the same time, in the same way, across the entire country, it enables comprehensive benchmarking of key data.

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[1] LBTH, Research Briefing 2012-12, 2011 Census: Second Release - Headline Analysis

[2] ONS, Response rates in the 2011 Census

[3] Greater London Authority, 2011 Census quality assurance: London borough's response rates
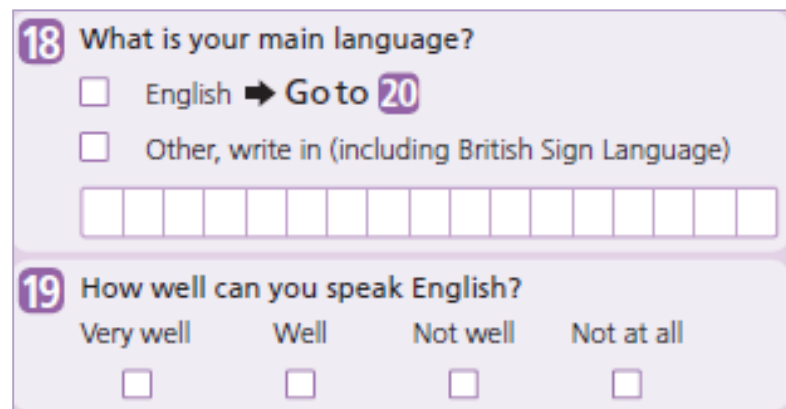
3   The Census language questions

The 2011 Census is the first ever Census to ask questions about language and the figures provide valuable intelligence about the language abilities of residents. The Census form collected information about two aspects of language:

- Main language used, and
- Level of proficiency in spoken English (among those whose main language was not English).

Figure 1 shows the two language questions that were put to residents. The first asked residents to state their '**main language**' - ONS has defined the concept of 'main language' as the language that is a person's first or preferred language.

Those residents whose main language was not English were asked a follow up question about how **proficient they were in spoken English.**

Figure 1 The language questions used on the 2011 Census form in England.

18 What is your main language?
☐   English ➡ Go to **20**
☐   Other, write in (including British Sign Language)

19 How well can you speak English?
Very well   Well   Not well   Not at all
☐   ☐   ☐   ☐

The Census tables about language relate to the population aged 3 and over, so they cover most of the child population and all of the adult population. This makes the data more comprehensive than previously used data sources which tended to provide coverage of particular age groups (eg the Schools Census which captured language profile of children).

The sections that follow analyse the language data that ONS has released to date. More detailed figures about the characteristics of the borough's different language groups are expected in the coming months.
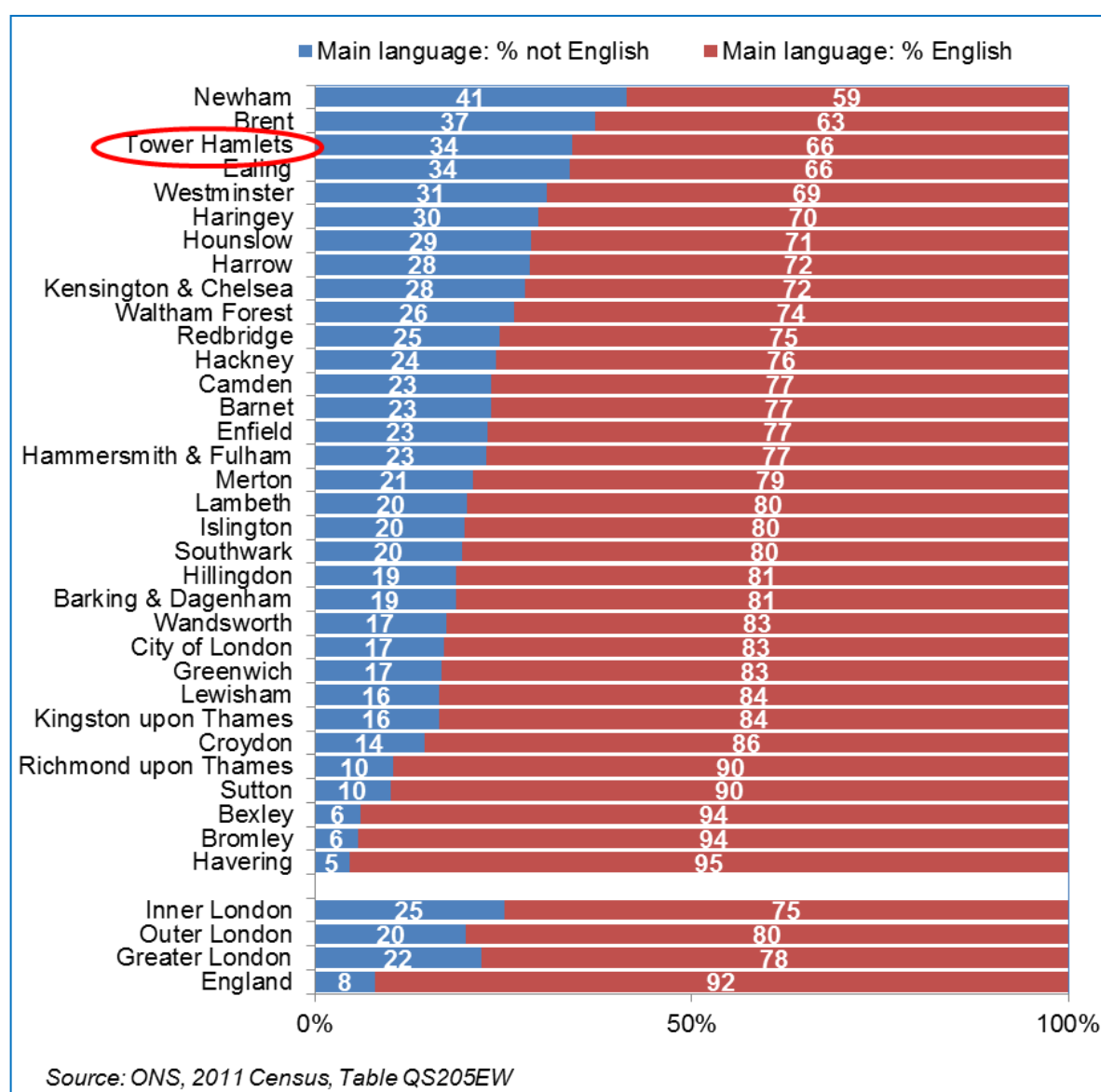
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4   Use of English as a main language – Boroughs compared

Almost two thirds (66 per cent) of Tower Hamlets residents (aged 3 and over)[4] said their main language was English.

Tower Hamlets has a high proportion of residents who use a main language other than English compared with other areas – 34 per cent compared with 22 per cent across London and 8 per cent nationally (Figure 2).

Within London, the percentage of residents whose main language is not English ranges from 5 per cent in Havering up to 41 per cent in Newham. At 34 per cent, Tower Hamlets has the third highest percentage in England (out of 326 local authorities), after both Newham and Brent.

Figure 2 Main language (English/not English) by London Borough, 2011

Source: ONS, 2011 Census, Table QS205EW

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[4] All census tables about language relate to the population aged 3 and over.
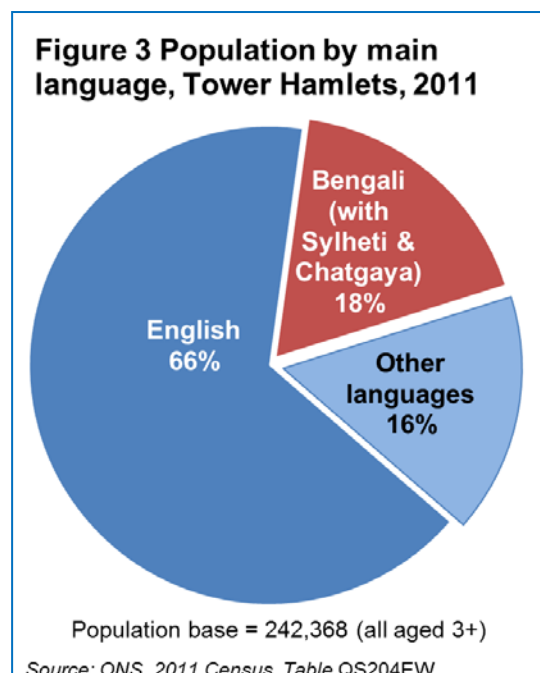
5   Principal languages used in Tower Hamlets

The Census provides very detailed information about the range of different languages used by residents.

The information released to date, provides statistics about the size of 92 different languages (and language groups[5]), and covers both large and small language groups in the borough.

In Tower Hamlets, residents were represented in 90 of the different language groups. However, as the ONS classification does not identify all languages separately, the total number of languages spoken in the borough is likely to be higher.

Figure 3 Population by main language, Tower Hamlets, 2011

Bengali (with Sylheti & Chatgaya) 18%

Other languages 16%

English 66%

Population base = 242,368 (all aged 3+)

Source: ONS, 2011 Census, Table QS204EW

The two most common languages in the borough are English and Bengali. Two thirds of residents (66 per cent) use English as their first language and 18 per cent of residents use Bengali as their main language (Figure 3). The figures for Bengali include those who use Sylheti and Chatgaya. The remaining 16 per cent of residents cite a wide variety of different European and other international languages.

6   The Bangladeshi population: Census diversity data compared

The proportion of residents who cite Bengali as their main language (18 per cent) is considerably lower than the overall size of the Bangladeshi population - that is - those whose ethnic group is Bangladeshi (32 per cent). This suggests that a significant proportion of the borough's Bangladeshi population use English (or possibly some other non-Bengali language) as their main language.

It is quite likely that the language profile of first and second generation Bangladeshi residents will differ. Indeed, the number of Bengali speakers is much closer to the number of Bangladeshi born residents than to the number who are ethnically Bangladeshi (Table 1). More detailed Census data is awaited which will help explore the relationships between language, age and country of birth further.

Table 1 The Bangladeshi population in Tower Hamlets, 2011 Census statistics compared		
	Number of residents	% population
Residents whose ethnic group is Bangladeshi (all ages)	81,377	32
Residents who were born in Bangladesh (all ages)	38,877	15
Residents whose main language is Bengali (aged 3+)	43,525	18
Source: 2011 Census (Tables QS204; KS201; QS203)		

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[5] While most categories are single languages, others are groupings (eg African - all other languages)

7   Detailed profile of all language groups in Tower Hamlets

Table 2 shows the most common languages used in Tower Hamlets – defined here as those used by at least 500 residents. These number 22 languages in all and speakers of these languages account for 97 per cent of the population. After English and Bengali, the top languages are: Chinese[6], French, Spanish, Italian and Somali – each accounting for between 1-2 per cent of the population. As well as spoken languages, the Census also provides figures on the number using Sign Language: this group numbered 117 residents, 91 of whom used British Sign Language.

Figure 4 shows all 90 language groups identified in the borough – large and small – organised by geographical area. It should be noted that geographical classifications are not always indicative of country of origin. Some languages have no single geographical base (eg Arabic) while other languages, notably French, Spanish and Portuguese, are both national and international languages. For example, French speakers may originate from parts of Africa or Canada as well as France.

The 16 per cent of residents who use a language other than English or Bengali comprise: 9 per cent who use EU languages; four per cent who use Asian languages (other than Bengali), and 2 per cent who use African languages. The most common African language used is Somali - used by 1 per cent of the population.

Table 2 Most common languages in Tower Hamlets, 2011		
	Number	% population
All residents (aged 3+):	**242,368**	**100.0**
Languages used by more than 500 residents:		
English	159,488	65.8
Bengali	43,525	18.0
Chinese languages	4,015	1.7
French	3,286	1.4
Spanish	2,928	1.2
Italian	2,684	1.1
Somali	2,465	1.0
Polish	2,287	0.9
Portuguese	2,033	0.8
German	1,757	0.7
Russian	1,467	0.6
Arabic	1,386	0.6
Turkish	1,069	0.4
Lithuanian	926	0.4
Greek	893	0.4
Urdu	670	0.3
Hungarian	637	0.3
Vietnamese	603	0.2
Swedish	597	0.2
Hindi	561	0.2
Bulgarian	515	0.2
Japanese	509	0.2
All other languages	*8,067*	*3.3*
Source: ONS, 2011 Census (Table QS204EW).		

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[6] The totals for Chinese include: Cantonese, Mandarin and a range of other Chinese languages.

Figure 4 Main language (full detail) of Tower Hamlets residents, geographic categories, 2011

All residents (aged 3+)	242,368
English	159,488
Other language	**82,880**

Other UK languages	**80**
Welsh	50
Gaelic (Irish)	14
Scots	7
Gaelic (Scottish)	4
Gaelic (Other)	2
Gypsy/Traveller languages	2
Manx Gaelic	1

EU languages (total)	**20,675**
French	3,286
Spanish	2,928
Italian	2,684
Polish	2,287
Portuguese	2,033
German	1,757
Lithuanian	926
Greek	893
Hungarian	637
Swedish	597
Bulgarian	515
Romanian	411
Dutch	373
Slovak	244
Danish	242
Latvian	191
Czech	190
Finnish	163
Maltese	102
Estonian	77
Slovenian	39
Any other EU language	100

Other Europe & Eurasia	**3,254**
Russian	1,467
Turkish	1,069
Northern European	248
Albanian	203
Serbian/Croatian/Bosnian	147
Ukrainian	89
Other Eastern European	20
Yiddish	11

South Asian Languages (total)			**46,134**
Bengali	43,525	Tamil	146
Urdu	670	Nepalese	80
Hindi	561	Telugu	52
Panjabi	261	Marathi	51
Gujarati	195	Sinhala	28
Malayalam	160	Pakistani Pahari	1
		All other South Asian languages	*404*

East Asia languages (total)			**6,254**
Chinese: Other	2,790	Korean	316
Chinese: Cantonese	721	Tagalog/Filipino	291
Vietnamese	603	Thai	214
Japanese	509	Malay	150
Chinese: Mandarin	504		
		All other East Asian languages	*156*

West/Central Asian languages (total)			**914**
Persian/Farsi	306	Pashto	74
Kurdish	160	Hebrew	65
		All other West/Central Asia languages	*309*

Arabic	**1,386**

African languages (total)			**3,848**
Somali	2,465	Yoruba	91
Amharic	210	Igbo	70
Akan	148	Shona	40
Tigrinya	145	Lingala	34
Afrikaans	124	Luganda	24
Swahili/Kiswahili	101	Krio	12
		West African language (other)	*93*
		Other Nigerian language	*111*
		African language (all other)	*180*

Other spoken languages (total)	**218**
Caribbean Creole (English-based)	6
Oceanic/Australian language	3
North/South American language	3
Caribbean Creole (all other)	3
All other spoken languages	203

Sign Language (total)	**117**
British sign language	91
Sign Language (all other)	20
Any Sign Communication System	6

Source: ONS, 2011 Census (QS204EW).

Notes: This geographic classification is based mainly on the ONS geographic classification used for table QS204EW. However, it is recognised that classifying languages by geographical area is simplistic, as some languages are both national and international languages (eg French, Spanish) and some have no single geographical base (eg Arabic).

8   Top 10 languages - areas compared

Figure 5 compares the most popular languages used in Tower Hamlets to those used regionally and nationally. In both London and England, Polish was the most popular language (after English), whereas in Tower Hamlets Polish ranks 7th.

After English, Bengali is the most popular language in Tower Hamlets, and this is also the case across Inner London. However, Tower Hamlets remains unique with regard to the high proportion of Bengali speakers in the borough – almost one in five residents (18 per cent) state their main language is Bengali compared with 3 per cent across Inner London and less than one per cent nationally. Tower Hamlets has the largest number, and proportion of, Bengali speakers in England.

Figure 5 Top 10 languages (other than English), Tower Hamlets, London & England, 2011

Size of language group expressed as a % of the area's total population

Tower Hamlets		Inner London		Outer London		Greater London		England	
	%		%		%		%		%
Language not English	34.2	Language not English	25.2	Language not English	20.1	Language not English	22.1	Language not English	8.0
Top 10		*Top 10*		*Top 10*		*Top 10*		*Top 10*	
Bengali	18.0	Bengali	2.8	Polish	2.1	Polish	1.9	Polish	1.0
Chinese*	1.7	French	1.8	Gujarati	1.8	Bengali	1.5	Panjabi	0.5
French	1.4	Polish	1.7	Panjabi	1.3	Gujarati	1.3	Urdu	0.5
Spanish	1.2	Spanish	1.6	Tamil	1.2	French	1.1	Bengali	0.4
Italian	1.1	Portuguese	1.4	Urdu	1.2	Urdu	1.0	Gujarati	0.4
Somali	1.0	Turkish	1.2	Arabic	0.8	Portuguese	0.9	Chinese*	0.4
Polish	0.9	Arabic	1.1	Turkish	0.7	Turkish	0.9	Arabic	0.3
Portuguese	0.8	Italian	1.1	Somali	0.6	Spanish	0.9	French	0.3
German	0.7	Chinese*	0.9	Portuguese	0.6	Arabic	0.9	Portuguese	0.3
Russian	0.6	Somali	0.8	Romanian	0.6	Tamil	0.9	Spanish	0.2

Source: ONS, 2011 Census (QS204EW).

* Chinese languages has been grouped together for this analysis. These include Cantonese, Mandarin and 'Other' Chinese languages.

Of the borough's top ten language groups, all – except for Polish – are larger in size (as a proportion of the population) compared with the London or national average. Table 3 shows how each population ranks in terms of size relative to the other local authorities in England and Wales.

Tower Hamlets ranks highly on the size of its Chinese speaking population. Considered together, residents using Chinese languages comprise 1.7 per cent of the Tower Hamlets population which is the third highest percentage in England, after Cambridge and Manchester (2.0 and 1.8 per cent respectively).

The borough is also ranked highly (ie in the top 10 areas nationally) for its relatively high proportion of Italian, Russian and German speakers. The borough also appears in the top 11-20 areas for its percentage of Spanish, French, Somali and Portuguese speakers.

Table 3 Most common languages, Tower Hamlets compared with London and England, 2011					
	Tower Hamlets	Tower Hamlets	London	England	*Tower Hamlets rank**
	Number		% of population		*(1 to 348)*
All residents (aged 3+)	242,368	100	100	100	
Main language: English	159,488	66	78	92	*346*
Main language: Not English	**82,880**	**34**	**22**	**8**	**3**
Top 10 languages (Tower Hamlets):					
Bengali	43,525	18.0	1.5	0.4	*1*
Chinese languages	4,015	1.7	0.7	0.4	*3*
French	3,286	1.4	1.1	0.3	*12*
Spanish	2,928	1.2	0.9	0.2	*11*
Italian	2,684	1.1	0.6	0.2	*8*
Somali	2,465	1.0	0.7	0.2	*12*
Polish	2,287	0.9	1.9	1.0	*111*
Portuguese	2,033	0.8	0.9	0.3	*19*
German	1,757	0.7	0.4	0.1	*10*
Russian	1,467	0.6	0.3	0.1	*5*
By geographic group:					
EU languages (exc. English)	20,675	9	8	3	
Asian languages	53,302	22	9	4	
Asian languages (exc. Bengali)	*9,777*	*4*	*8*	*3*	
African languages	3,848	2	2	0	
All other languages	5,055	2	3	1	

Source: ONS, 2011 Census (QS204EW).
* Rankings relate to the percentage of the population who belong to each language group. Rankings show Tower Hamlets' position relative to 348 local authority areas in England and Wales (1=highest and 348 = lowest percentage).

9   Most commonly used language (after English) - London Boroughs

Table 4 shows the most popular language - other than English - in each London borough. Tower Hamlets is the only borough where the size of its second largest language group (Bengali speakers) comprises more than 10 per cent of the population. At a borough level, Newham and Camden are the only other boroughs where Bengali is the most common language, after English. In Newham, around 7 per cent of residents use Bengali as their main language and in Camden 3 per cent use Bengali.

Polish was the top 'second' language for 7 different Boroughs – which were spread across different parts of South and West London. For a number of other languages there were more distinct geographical patterns. For example, across the 4 boroughs to the North of the City (Islington, Hackney, Haringey and Enfield), Turkish was the most common second language, while across the Southerly Outer London boroughs of Kingston, Sutton and Croydon – Tamil was ranked top.

Four Boroughs had a top 'second' language that was unique to them: Westminster (Arabic); Greenwich (Nepalese); Lambeth (Portuguese) and Southwark (Spanish).

Borough	Largest language group in borough (after English)	Population base (aged 3 and over)	
		Number using language	As % of population
Barking and Dagenham	Lithuanian	3,935	2.3
Barnet	Polish	7,930	2.3
Bexley	Panjabi	1,655	0.7
Brent	Gujarati	23,500	7.9
Bromley	Polish	1,597	0.5
Camden	Bengali	6,449	3.0
City of London	French	155	2.1
Croydon	Tamil	5,172	1.5
Ealing	Polish	20,463	6.3
Enfield	Turkish	18,378	6.2
Greenwich	Nepalese	5,058	2.1
Hackney	Turkish	10,551	4.5
Hammersmith & Fulham	French	5,406	3.1
Haringey	Turkish	11,994	4.9
Harrow	Gujarati	20,368	8.9
Havering	Lithuanian	980	0.4
Hillingdon	Panjabi	8,837	3.4
Hounslow	Panjabi	11,616	4.8
Islington	Turkish	4,194	2.1
Kensington & Chelsea	French	7,470	4.9
Kingston upon Thames	Tamil	2,626	1.7
Lambeth	Portuguese	9,897	3.4
Lewisham	Polish	4,088	1.6
Merton	Polish	6,604	3.5
Newham	Bengali	21,635	7.4
Redbridge	Urdu	10,093	3.8
Richmond upon Thames	Polish	1,712	1.0
Southwark	Spanish	6,429	2.3
Sutton	Tamil	2,715	1.5
Tower Hamlets	**Bengali**	**43,525**	**18.0**
Waltham Forest	Urdu	8,034	3.3
Wandsworth	Polish	6,191	2.1
Westminster	Arabic	11,971	5.7
Greater London	Polish	147,816	1.9
- Inner London	Bengali	87,423	2.8
- Outer London	Polish	96,817	2.1
England	Polish	529,173	1.0

Table 4 Most common language (after English), London Boroughs, 2011

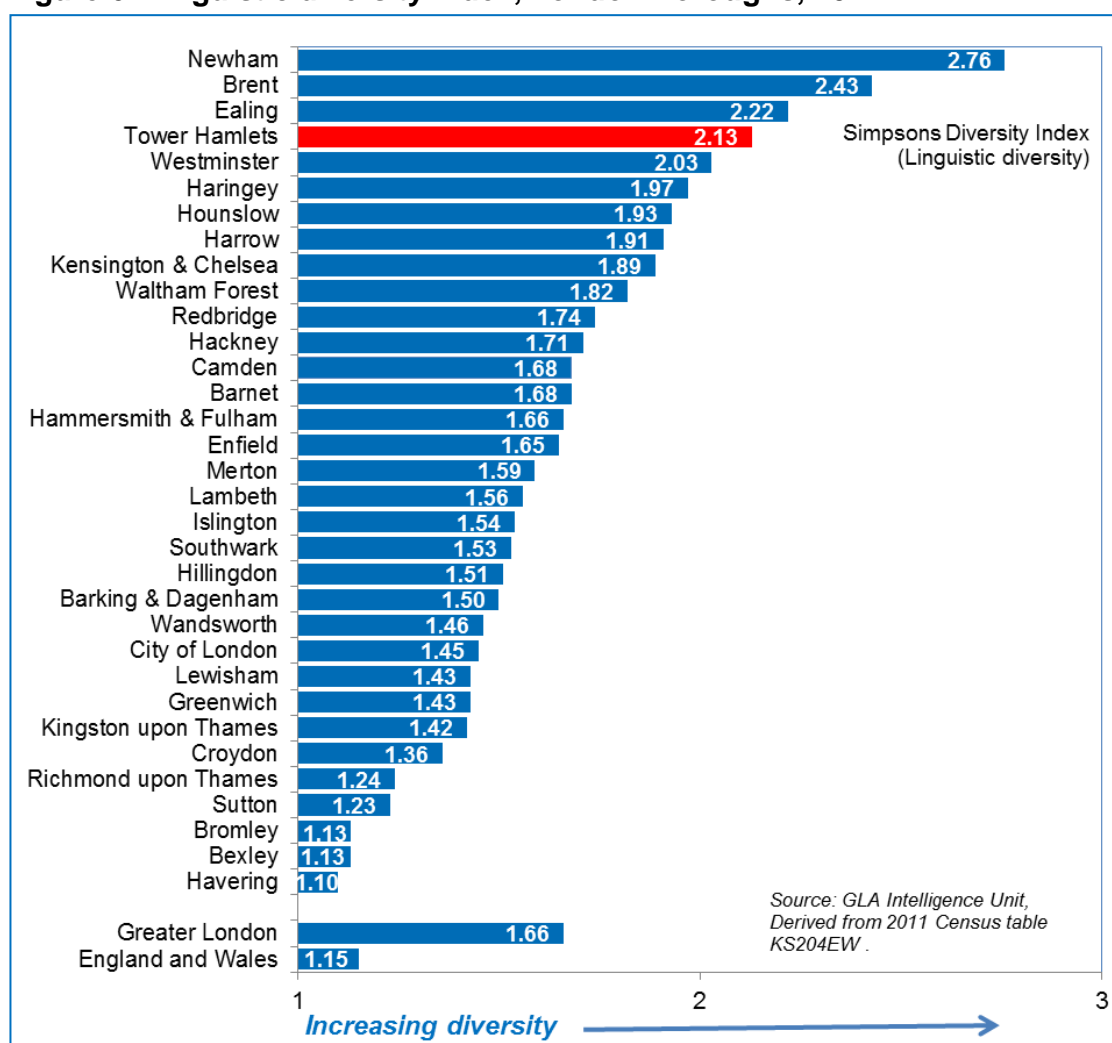*Source: ONS, 2011 Census (QS204EW).*

10 Linguistic diversity

The GLA's Intelligence Unit[7] has recently published analysis that measures how diverse boroughs are, linguistically speaking. To quantify **linguistic diversity**, the GLA applied the *Simpson's diversity index* methodology to the Census data on language. This index considers both the mix and size of different languages groups in the population and is a way to compare linguistic diversity across areas.

The index is based on the 21 most commonly spoken languages in England & Wales (including English) and a 22nd group of 'all other languages' in each area. The index can potentially range from 1 to 22 (least to most diverse). If an area had 22 equally sized language groups – the maximum diversity possible (theoretically) in an area – the value of the index would be 22. At the other end of the spectrum, a score of 1 would mean an area's entire population used the same language (no diversity).

In reality, because most areas have a large majority of English speakers, the value of the index remains near 1 for most areas. The national average (England and Wales) is 1.15, with values ranging from 1.02 to 2.76. In London, diversity levels are much higher and the average is 1.66 (ranging from 1.10 and 2.76).

Figure 6: Linguistic diversity index, London Boroughs, 2011

Source: GLA Intelligence Unit, Derived from 2011 Census table KS204EW .

Increasing diversity

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[7] Greater London Authority (Intelligence Unit), 2011 Census Snapshot: Main Language

The most diverse score nationally is 2.76 for Newham, followed by Brent (2.43) and Ealing (2.22). Tower Hamlets has a score of 2.13 – which makes it the 4th most diverse local authority, linguistically speaking, in both London and nationally (Figure 6). This reflects the fact it has a relatively high proportion of residents who have a main language other than English as well as the fact that a wide range of language groups are represented in the borough.

London Boroughs dominate the list of most diverse local authorities in England and Wales. The top nine most linguistically diverse local authorities in England & Wales are all London Boroughs and almost three quarters of the top 40 are located in the capital.

11 Proficiency in spoken English

As well as collecting data on the main language used by residents - the Census also asked a question on language proficiency. The question (*How well can you speak English?)* was only put to those residents who used a main language other than English. Residents were asked to rate their own abilities to speak English and the results identified four groups of residents, those who:

• can speak English very well
• can speak English well
• cannot speak English well
• cannot speak English at all

ONS carried out pre-testing[8] of the question to assess how respondents' self-assessment compared with an objective assessment (by an interviewer) of their language ability. The results suggested a tendency for people to underestimate their English proficiency at the 'very well / well end' of the spectrum (ie some who rated themselves as speaking English 'well' actually spoke English 'very well').

At the other end of the spectrum, the interviewer and respondent classifications were fairly consistent, so residents who people who rated their fluency as low or none were generally accurate.

While Tower Hamlets has a relatively high proportion of residents with a main language other than English – the proficiency data show that the majority of this group are fluent in English. Of all those residents whose main language was not English, more than three quarters said they could speak English well: 45 per cent said they could speak English *very well* and 31 per cent said they could speak English *well*.

Just under a quarter (23 per cent) indicated they had poor levels of fluency: 19 per cent said they could not speak English well and 5 per cent said they could not speak English at all (Table 5). When expressed a proportion of the entire borough population - the percentage of the Tower Hamlets population who have poor or no fluency in English is 8 per cent - around one in twelve residents. This compares with 4 per cent across London and 2 per cent in England (Figure 7).

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[8] ONS, Final recommended questions for the 2011 Census, Language, October 2009

Tower Hamlets, along with Brent, had the second highest proportion of residents with low levels of fluency in England – second only to Newham – where 9 per cent of residents said they could not speak English well or at all.
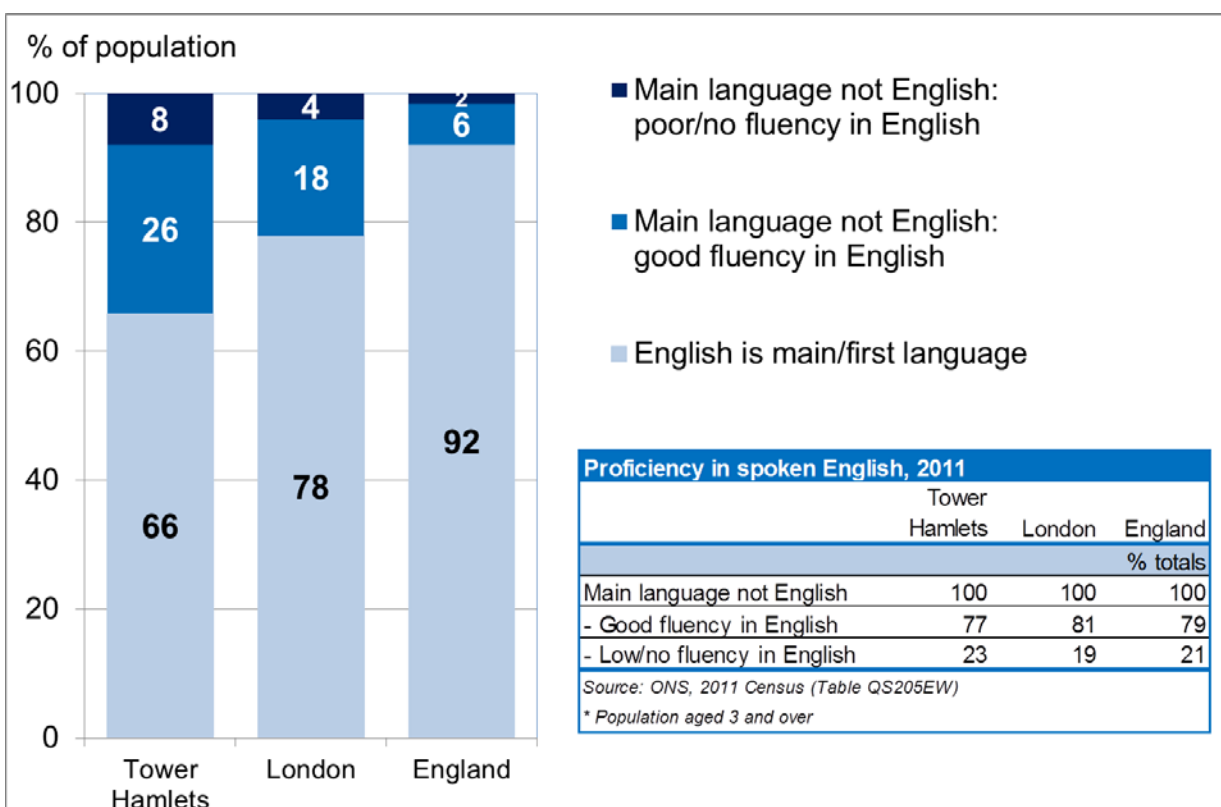
Compared with other areas, Tower Hamlets has the highest proportion of residents who cannot speak English at all (1.6 per cent vs. 0.3 per cent nationally), though in terms of size, this group represents a small minority of the overall population.

Table 5 Proficiency in English, Tower Hamlets , 2011		Percentage totals*	
	Number of residents	As % of population	As % of those whose main language was not English
All residents (aged 3+)	**242,368**	**100**	
Main language is English	159,488	65.8	
Main language not English	82,880	34.2	**100.0**
by level of English proficiency:			
Can speak English very well	37,641	15.5	45.4
Can speak English well	25,932	10.7	31.3
Cannot speak English well	15,529	6.4	18.7
Cannot speak English at all	3,778	1.6	4.6
Cannot speak English well / cannot speak English at all	*19,307*	*8.0*	*23.3*
*Source: ONS, 2011 Census (Table QS205EW). * Base - population aged 3 and over.*			

Figure 7 Proficiency in spoken English, Tower Hamlets, London & England, 2011

Proficiency in spoken English, 2011	Tower Hamlets	London	England
			% totals
Main language not English	100	100	100
- Good fluency in English	77	81	79
- Low/no fluency in English	23	19	21

Source: ONS, 2011 Census (Table QS205EW)
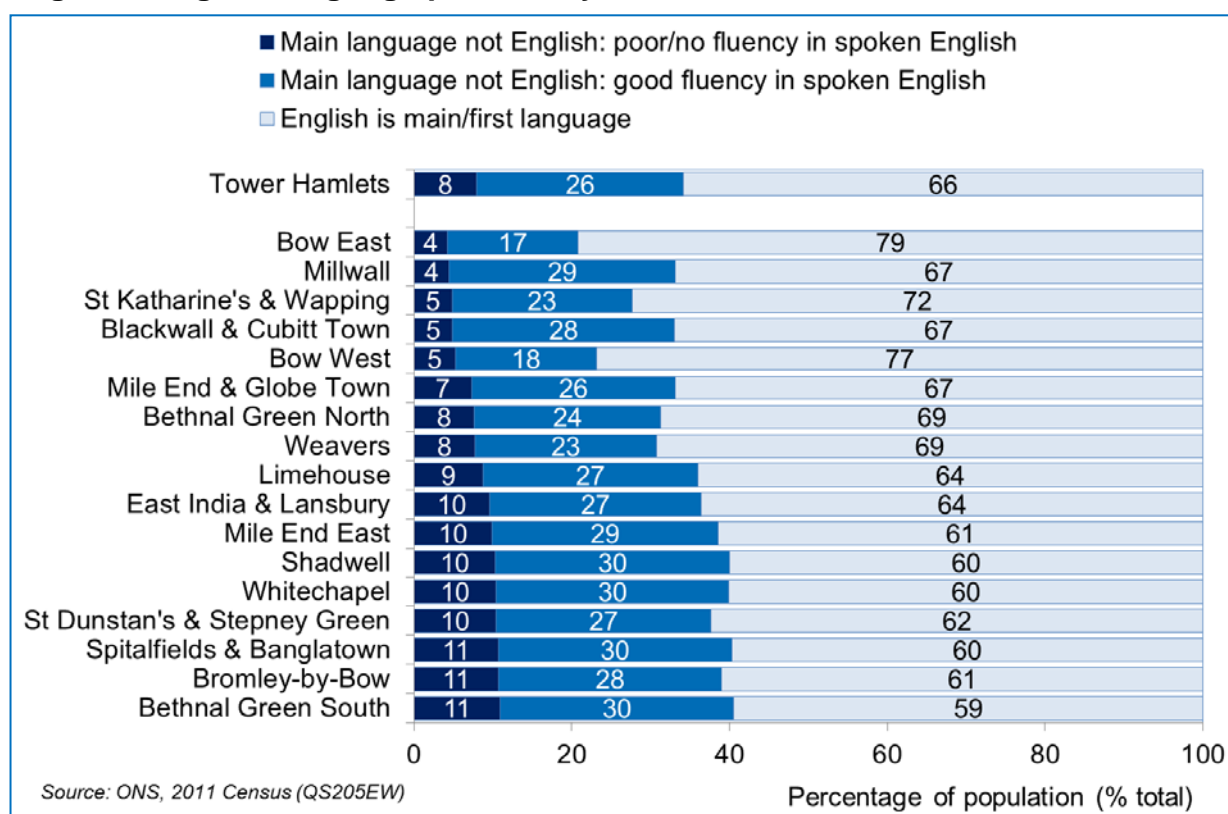** Population aged 3 and over*

12 English proficiency by ward

Figure 8 shows English language proficiency data for wards in Tower Hamlets. The proportion of residents who used a main language other than English ranged from 21 per cent in Bow East up to 41 per cent in Bethnal Green South. In all wards, the majority of residents who used a main language other than English, were also proficient in English.

The percentage of residents who report low or no proficiency in spoken English ranges from 4 per cent in Bow East and Millwall wards up to 11 per cent in the wards of Bethnal Green South, Bromley-by-Bow and Spitalfields & Banglatown.

Figure 8 English language proficiency, wards in Tower Hamlets, 2011

Source: ONS, 2011 Census (QS205EW)

Statistics on language proficiency provide important intelligence on the need for language support or training. Future Census data, expected in the coming months, will provide more detail on the characteristics of residents with low levels of fluency in English (eg age and gender).

13 Language within households

The Census results also allow analysis of the first languages used by members within households. The results show that, within some households, individual family members prefer to use different first languages (Table 6).

In Tower Hamlets, 62 per cent of households were English language households – that is households where all adults said their main language was English. In one in five (19 per cent) households no one used English as their main language. The remaining 19 per cent of households contained a mix of people – some of whom used English and some who used another language: 15 per cent had a mix of adults using and not using

English, and a further 4 per cent were households where no adults used English but at least one child had English as their main language.

Tower Hamlets has a low proportion of (wholly) English language households compared with both London and England (74 and 91 per cent). Conversely, it has a high proportion of households where no household members use English as their first language (19 per cent) relative to London and England (13 and 4 per cent).

Table 6 Languages within households, Tower Hamlets, London and England, 2011				
	Tower Hamlets	Tower Hamlets	Greater London	England
	Number		Percentage total	
All households	**101,257**	**100**	**100**	**100**
English language households	62,365	62	74	91
Mixed language households	19,226	19	13	5
- At least one but not all adults have English as main language	*15,440*	*15*	*10*	*4*
- No adults but at least one child aged 3-15 has English as language	*3,786*	*4*	*3*	*1*
Nobody in household has English as a main language	19,666	19	13	4
Source: 2011 Census, Table KS206				
Notes: English language households = households where all people aged 16 and over in household have English as main language. Mixed language households = households where some residents have English as main language and some don't.				

14 More information
This briefing was produced by the Council's Corporate Research Unit. This report is a summary of available Census data as at March 2013.

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The 2011 Census tables that underpin this report can be downloaded at www.nomisweb.co.uk.