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Introduction

Our Children and Families Strategy sets out the strategic direction for Tower Hamlets which we believe will deliver the best outcomes for the children, young people and families who live here. It builds on the Tower Hamlets Plan’s five-year vision of tackling inequality by building a strong, inclusive and fair borough to deliver a better deal for children and young people.

To deliver a better deal, we need to understand what our local population needs and we can’t meet those needs unless health services, the Local Authority, schools, the police, the voluntary sector and other agencies work together. The Children and Families Partnership is the structure we have for working together and each of our organisations is committed to delivering the support needed to drive forward positive outcomes for local children, young people and families.

Our priorities for change over the next five years will be planned and delivered through this Strategy. The Strategy will also direct partnership work for children, young people and families across the borough, including within the decisions taken by the Health and Wellbeing Board, the Community Safety Partnership and the Tower Hamlets Partnership, the multi-agency partnerships working in the best interests of the borough and local residents.

We arrived at our strategic direction through discussion with professionals and the local community, from nursery school pupils up to those leaving the care system to understand where we as a local area need to do better. We have also looked at the local Joint Strategic Needs Assessments which are completed or in development in relation to Special Educational Needs and disabilities (SEND), Adolescence, Youth Violence and Mental Wellbeing. We have also reviewed data which tells us who is doing well and who would benefit from targeted support. Using all of the insight we collected the Partnership came together to identify the strategic actions which need to happen so that local children and families are supported to live the best lives possible.

This Strategy is the conclusion of all of those conversations, and marks the start of delivering a fresh direction for children, young people and families.

We are proud to share this vision with you.
Our borough: summary demographics and need

- There are 75,455 0-19 year olds in Tower Hamlets.
- 31% of children live in families below the poverty line which is the highest rate in the country.
- Around 8% of the school population was born outside the UK, and around a third of these pupils were born in Bangladesh, with a growing proportion from EU member states. 75% of Tower Hamlets primary school pupils speak a first language which is not English, compared to 54% in Inner London and 21% nationally.
- Tower Hamlets has the 3rd highest economic output of any local authority area in the UK, next to Westminster and the City of London. Jobs growth is likely to be in the professional sectors, indicating an increased demand for highly qualified workers. More of our young people are in education, training or employment; but certain groups of residents continue to face a higher risk of including:
  - Black and minority ethnic residents
  - Those with no qualifications
  - Disabled residents
- There is a higher rate (17%) of under-25s in the borough with special educational needs compared to the England average of 14%.
- There were 113 young people in drug and alcohol treatment and 259 clients starting treatment living with children under the age of 18 in 2017/18.
- 42% of children in year 6 were overweight (including those who are clinically obese) in 2018, compared with 38% in London and 32% nationally.
- Only 47% of 2 year olds who are eligible for funded early education are accessing some support, compared to 60% in Inner London and 72% nationally. However this has increased by 8% points from the previous year.
- There are 1,020 Children in Need, 304 Children subject to a Child Protection Plan (44 per 10,000 population compared to 43 nationally) and 335 children who are Looked After in Tower Hamlets (49 per 10,000 population compared to 62 nationally).
- There are higher rates of children aged 10-16 who are in the youth justice system in Tower Hamlets. 9 per 1000 10-16 year olds were in the youth justice system (2016/17) compared to in London (6 per 1000) and England (5 per 1000).
- Our Specialist Domestic Abuse Courts have seen an 11 per cent increase in conviction rates, and have a victim satisfaction rate of 90%.
What do local children and families think?

We began to develop our understanding of what our community needs by using the messages they shared to develop the Tower Hamlets Plan, beginning in Summer 2017.

- Community engagement by Collaborate – Summer 2017
- The Tower Hamlets Partnership Summit – January 2018
- The Tower Hamlets Partnership online survey - March 2018

There are two regular surveys of local students and parents, whose results were shared in Summer 2018 which validated the messages from the Tower Hamlets Plan:

- Pupil Attitude Survey 2017
- Parent Carer Survey – Summer 2018

To develop a clear set of priorities for this Strategy, we took the earlier engagement and used it to shape specific engagement with children, young people, parents, carers and local professionals

- Children’s Services Survey – Summer 2018
- Children and Young People’s Summit – November 2018
- Nursery and primary school engagement – December 2018 - February 2019
- Young People’s Question Time – March 2019

These are the messages we received:

Ensuring children and young people are safe in their community

- 73% secondary pupils know how to report online bullying. But only 40% would report it.
- We need increased engagement around violence against women and girls.
- 17% of parents do not feel confident monitoring social media/internet use.
- Young people can find it hard to trust adults enough to confide in them.
- New technologies mean young people can no longer ‘close the door’ to violence in their neighbourhoods.
- “Should focus on ASB, drugs, knife sweeps. People don’t like being nervous when they are out”
- 6% of secondary school pupils have tried drugs, mostly solvents and cannabis
- 57 young people responded to the question ‘do knife arches in schools have a role to play in making young people feel safer?’ 41 young people said it did not.

34% of parents and carers have not had enough information to help them plan their child’s future.

- 47% of all pupils aspire to be in ‘top professional job’, this is especially the case for Bangladeshi primary pupils but least likely for White primary pupils.
- Exams & school work are a common worry among 53% primary pupils and 42% secondary pupils.
- Young people worry over employment and money, and would like more support around these issues.
- Young people are not achieving their aspirations because of a focus on academic outcomes; a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach and a lack of parental support.
- We are missing opportunities to connect local people to economic opportunity because local growth is not ‘inclusive’, especially for young people.
- The aspirations of and offer to young people needs improving. There needs to be more opportunities taken up post-GCSE.
- We need more opportunities for work experience and careers advice (tailored to individuals).
64% of parents worry about their child’s health and wellbeing often

- We need an increase in children’s levels of self-confidence that allows them to build healthy relationships and achieve emotional and economic wellbeing.
- Only 24% primary pupils and 11% secondary pupils report eating recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables.
- Young people identified their health – including mental health, as the most important thing they feel local leaders in Tower Hamlets should focus on.
- PSHE support and lessons should be given by specialists covering cyber bullying, self-harm, eating disorders, self-esteem and managing stress.
- Some parents and carers specifically cited support for special educational need and disability as the most important thing to focus on.

Provision and facilities

- More provision is needed to support parents with disabled children and thresholds for access should be reviewed.
- More spaces and affordable activities are needed.
- 50% say more information about where they can go with their family would improve family life.
- Many young people identified youth services, sports facilities and a diverse community as the best things on offer in the borough.
Our charter

We want to ensure that there is every chance for every child to be happy, heathy, safe and successful.

In order to do that, we commit to a number of fundamental principles:

- **Working restoratively with children, young people and families** so that together we build relationships between professionals and families, prevent harm and resolve conflict where it arises.

- **Developing and championing engagement with children and young people** so we can empower children and young people in our borough to shape services and the future of our borough.

- **Committing to a relentless focus on achieving better outcomes** for children, young people and families, which is respectful of and responsive to different needs.

- **Ensuring that all children, young people and families are supported to access the right help at the right time** so problems do not escalate.

- **Ensuring a strong offer of services for all families in the borough**, supplemented by access to an enhanced range of services, intervention and support for those that need it.

- **Sharing data in a safe but timely way** to enable better service planning and interventions to take place.

- **Sharing positive stories of children and young people in Tower Hamlets** and their achievements to challenge negative perceptions and so they feel they are a valued part of our community.

- **Ensuring every child and young person will have a trustworthy and trusted adult to confide in** - be it parent, teacher, teaching assistant, youth worker or social worker – who can support them with their needs, especially if they are concerned about their safety or wellbeing.

- **Ensuring every child should have access to a safe space** - either at home, in a school, youth hub, leisure centre or Idea Store.

Our principles and the actions related to our priorities will form the basis of a local multi-agency campaign over the life of the Strategy which will see us put children and young people at the heart of everything we do in Tower Hamlets.
Our priorities for children and families

Our Strategy has developed its priorities in a way that local children, young people and families recognise so that there is every chance for every child in Tower Hamlets to thrive. The Strategy has three main priorities which will drive our work and focus for children, young people and families in Tower Hamlets:

Priority 1: Aspiration to action

Priority 2: Healthy Families

Priority 3: Safe and secure
Priority 1: Aspiration to action

What outcome do we want to achieve through this priority?

Children and young people have the skills to prepare for their future.

Why is this priority important?

We are committed to ensuring that every child and young person has the chance to access information and develop the skills they will need to prepare for their future. It is essential that they have good, quality education as a foundation, high quality guidance and support is available when it is needed and that opportunities to explore different options, expand horizons and learn new skills are available as children and young people progress through their lives. This includes ensuring that children and young people have secure foundations to take advantage of these opportunities.

Despite Tower Hamlets historically exceeding the national average in terms of educational attainment at the secondary level, this is not translating into excellent progress or sustained employment outcomes for our young people.

In order for aspirations to be realised and translated into good employment outcomes the support that is offered needs to be tailored to the individual. By taking account of their interests and being informed by what we know about the future job market, we can help young people develop the skills and abilities that employers are looking for.

Children and young people have told us that they highly value all opportunities to plan for their future and find out more about the options open to them but quality and accessibility can be variable. The views and expectations of parents and carers are also important to young people and whilst this is usually a positive motivation it can sometimes create additional pressures.

What will our focus be?

Our focus will be on ensuring opportunities to enhance the employability of local children and young people are well known and shared across the borough, this includes looking at opportunities for soft skills and non-traditional pathways into the world of work.

The Children and Families Partnership will show leadership through its own organisations with commitments to take on apprentices and ensuring there are work experience opportunities available. We will also use our influence to encourage other organisations across the borough – and the city where possible – to do the same.

The attainment of White British boys on free school meals and Black Caribbean boys lag far behind all other groups at GCSE. Average attainment 8 score for all pupils in Tower Hamlets is 47 (45 nationally), 28 for White British on Free School Meals; Black Caribbean 36 not on Free School Meals.

‘It’s hard to get public sector work experience, especially in the NHS’ – Young person
What actions will we take?

- We will develop a cultural and enrichment offer which supports children and young people to experience diverse career opportunities so that they feel less intimidated in unfamiliar spaces.
- We will deliver an education and awareness programme to promote science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics (STEAM) through play and early education providers.
- We will work with partners to understand the main professional and vocational career progression routes which our GSCE offer supports, including information on the value and benefits of various options.
- We will offer work experience placements to local children and young people, including for care leavers and those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) from within our own organisations.
- We will develop ways to work with parents, carers and trusted adults (including for those who are less engaged) to encourage them to support children and young people to access opportunities.
- We will develop an agreed approach and set of messages for children, young people and families about preparing for the future informed by messages from local businesses.
- We will develop a web-based single point of access to inform young people and families about careers, skills and enrichment opportunities in the borough.
- We will engage with parents and carers about the range of career possibilities available for young people in open settings for young people, such as careers fairs.

What other work is contributing to our priority?

The focus of the Partnership will need to compliment and align with the good work going on in individual schools and other agencies, but also ensure that it sensibly links in with the local strategic direction for economic development.

We will work closely with the Growth and Economic Development Partnership to help deliver employability opportunities for local young people, this is reflected in the Growth and Economic Development Plan 2018 – 2023, particularly within priority one ‘preparing our young people for success’. Our focus will also reflected through the work of our 14-25 Partnership and the new Learning and Achievement Strategy for 14-25 year olds.

A pilot is being developed by the council with Swanlea School which aims to improve careers education for Years 7-9. It will ensure young people feel confident and motivated to try their best in school - in the knowledge that they have many career paths open to them. If successful the approach could be rolled out across the borough.

What outcomes will be achieved by 2024?

- Children and young people can access relevant, tailored support to prepare for the future
- Children and young people take advantage of the opportunities available to them
- Young people are empowered by the support they get from parents to pursue their aspirations

How will we know if this is working?

- Increase the percentage of secondary pupils who have enough information and support to help plan their future.
- Increase the proportion of young people engaged with Young WorkPath from groups at high risk of not being in education, employment or training.
- Increase the proportion of parents who are open to non-academic career routes for their children.
Priority 2: Healthy families

What outcome do we want to achieve through this priority?

Families have good health, wellbeing and healthy relationships.

Why is this priority important?

We want to ensure our children have every chance to lead healthy lives, have a sense of wellbeing and form healthy, fulfilling relationships. Being healthy is not limited to physical health—mental health and resilience can influence our physical health, as well as our capability to lead a healthy lifestyle. Around 30% of people with any long-term physical health condition, including obesity and asthma, also have a mental health problem, which can exacerbate some long term conditions. Mental health is also closely associated with domestic abuse and substance misuse, with each one a risk factor for the other two.

Many children and young people are building resilience after experiencing loss, or dealing with poverty. Secondary school pupils report feeling stressed and pressured with exams and thinking about the future. What is clear is that having someone to talk to, and feeling heard is fundamental to young people in helping them cope with the demands of the modern world.

11% of people aged 5-16 years old in Tower Hamlets were estimated to have mental health disorders in 2015. This is higher than in London as a whole.

‘PSHE at school is patchy and drops off completely in 6th form’ – Young person

Healthy, strong relationships with family, friends and professionals can help our children and young people to feel happier and more secure, as well as build a sense of belonging and self-worth. We want to help our communities to encourage their children and young people to share their feelings and know they are understood.

Children who have been neglected or exposed to adverse childhood experiences are more likely to experience mental health problems including depression, post-traumatic stress, and attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder. These factors also increase the risk of poor overall health. Therefore, we are committed to ensuring that children, young people and families have access to high quality services and support during the 1,001 critical days between conception, a child’s second birthday, and beyond.

What will our focus be?

The first 1,001 days of a child’s life are crucial for healthy mental and physical development, so we will support a system wide approach to improving outcomes for children in the early years with a focus on speech, language and communication skills. We will support our children, young people and families to make informed choices about what good health entails early on, directing them towards the right support at the right time. We will work to remove the stigma around mental health, encouraging children, young people and their families to talk to each other and share their needs.

This priority sits within both the health and children’s arenas. With the Partnership setting the strategic direction for children and families overall, we will work with the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Tower Hamlets Together sub-group, Born Well Growing Well to make this priority a success. Additionally, we will add value where a wider partnership response—which involves services like housing, schools or probation—is needed, reflecting the broader health and wellbeing concerns which children and families have told us are important to them.
What actions will we take?

- We will engage with children, young people and partners about the local personal, social and health education curriculum to support schools to develop a rich co-produced offer.
- We will campaign with community leaders and schools to encourage parents and other trusted adults to discuss wellbeing, emotional health and resilience with children and young people.
- We will promote a Play Charter which encourages individuals and organisations to advocate for quality play space, physical activity and play in the borough.
- We will improve the accessibility of information for children and young people with SEND, to ensure it accurately reflects the services each member organisation of this partnership offers.
- We will provide basic training on the early help offer to all local authority officers, NHS staff and other partners who may not be the ‘usual suspects’, such as local shops and businesses so we can help families access the right support at the right time.
- We will clarify the routes and pathways between mental health, domestic abuse and substance misuse services for professionals and families.

What other work is contributing to our priority?

There is so much valuable and exciting work happening across the borough which supports the health and wellbeing of local families. Born Well Growing Well are working through programmes and improvements including:

- Increased mental health access and extending the offer for mild, moderate and severe needs.
- Improving levels of healthy weight and dental health in children and young people.
- A Child Obesity Plan is also in development.

Air quality and its impact of children and families is of concern given the built up nature of the local environment. The local air quality action plan will be exploring the installation of Green Infrastructure, such as green walls or living roofs at schools and residential developments in polluted areas. Whilst the works within our local parks and open spaces, such as our new outdoor gyms, provide an environment which is supportive of healthier lifestyles.

What outcomes will be achieved by 2024?

- Children, young people and families are confident communicating how they feel
- Children, young people and families demonstrate healthy behaviours
- Children, young people and families access the wide range of care, play and support options available to them

How will we know if this is working?

- Increase in the percentage of children achieving at least the expected level in all early learning goals in the early years; and the communication and language goals in particular.
- Increase in the proportion of school pupils who have someone to talk to when they are worried.
- Increase in the proportion of children and young people accessing timely CAMHS support
- Decrease in the proportion of children in reception class who are obese or overweight.
- Children and families are continuing to access play sessions at children’s centres and stay & play sessions in parks & open spaces

Tower Hamlets is a trailblazing site for a national project to improve the mental health of children and young people. The pilot will fund dedicated school Mental Health Support Teams (MHSTs), training to establish senior mental health leads and reduced waiting times for accessing Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) treatment.
Priority 3: Safe and secure

What outcome do we want to achieve through this priority?

Children and young people feel and are safe where they live, work, play and study.

Why is this priority important?

All children and young people have a right to feel safe and secure. Through our focus groups, we learnt that younger children have concerns about fire and strangers. However, not one child mentioned online danger, which head teachers told us was of utmost concern to them and parents.

We know from the most recent Pupil Attitude Survey that 30% of primary school children and 25% of secondary school children had experienced bullying. Schools work hard to make a difference on this issue and have strategies to address bullying. But we must continue to be attentive because we know that children who are bullied will on average have poorer school attendance which in turn impacts on their attainment and wellbeing.

92% primary pupils felt safe in school and 84% of secondary pupils also felt safe.

Although many local children and young people have reported that they do feel safe in the community, a significant number feel unsafe or uncomfortable walking to and from school. This perceived risk is supported by local statistics which indicate children and young people are more likely to be involved in violent incidents during this time. Secondary school pupils report feeling safe in the area where they live, however this drops significantly when asked about going outside of that area.

For our most vulnerable children and young people, safety is not always a given and this Partnership will work together to safeguard those at risk of exploitation and harm. All children said they felt safest when with their parents or teachers, meaning we can support those who keep children safe by ensuring they are informed and equipped to deal with the most sensitive subjects, such as adverse childhood experiences and include:

Exploitation | Serious youth violence | Domestic abuse | Substance misuse | Neglect | Violence against women and girls (VAWG) | Missing from home and education

What will our focus be?

As well as being safe, young people should feel safe in their community. We will ensure that there is a much stronger voice for young people in relation to development of youth services and in response to community safety issues.

Our focus going forward will be on building resilience within families and the wider community to ensure that children are safe and secure. As a Partnership we will focus on reducing the exposure to and perpetuation of violence by children and young people, very much in conjunction with the Community Safety Partnership.
What actions will we take?

- We will redesign our youth offer so that it includes more outreach and detached youth work to complement the offer in youth hubs.
- We will set up Safety one-stop shops in Idea Stores so families can get advice and support with safety concerns face-to-face, particularly where English is an additional language.
- We will improve opportunities for children and families to participate in community safety walkabouts so they can reclaim their local communities and feel invested in their neighbourhoods.
- We will develop, promote and deliver a comprehensive training offer for parents and professionals that includes priorities around stranger danger, fire and road safety, e-safety, safeguarding, adverse childhood experiences and a public health approach to violence.
- We will ensure personal, social health education is consistently good quality across the borough, including discussions around bullying, hate crimes, gangs and serious youth violence, VAWG, the impact of exploitation and the use of substances to facilitate it.
- Work with the council and education providers to develop an approach to managing behaviour and the use of exclusions which takes into account the context and experiences of young people.
- We will work with the Community Safety Partnership to provide a platform for young people to share their views and question senior leaders on areas of concern through Young People’s Question Time.

What other work is contributing to our priority?

The safety and security of local children and young people is a priority for all of our partners. It can be seen in the work of the Metropolitan Police when responding to incidents of domestic abuse in the home and violence on our streets, in social care when responding to neglect and exploitation, for our local schools in tackling bullying and cyber-safety.

Many other areas of this work which require a strategic focus for the whole population will be led by the Community Safety Partnership, such as our overall approach to serious violence, substance misuse and domestic abuse. It would be wrong for this Strategy to undermine or disrupt such work; instead we will compliment good practice at a partnership level where there is a specific focus on children and young people. The Community Safety Partnership is currently developing a strategy for tackling Violence, Vulnerability and Exploitation among young people which this Partnership will help to deliver.

What outcomes will be achieved by 2024?

- Children, young people and families support one another in challenging unsafe behaviours
- Children and young people understand how to keep themselves safe
- Children, young people and families feel safe in their local area

How will we know if this is working?

- Increase in the proportion of secondary school pupils who would feel comfortable reporting online bullying and hate crime
- Decrease in the rate of children subject to child protection plans
- Decrease in the number of serious youth violence offences
- Increase in the proportion of primary and secondary pupils who felt safe in the area where they live
- Increase in the proportion of parents and carers who felt safe in their local area.
Making it happen

In the same way that the Tower Hamlets Strategic Partnership priority on children is monitored by that group, but delivered by the Children and Families Partnership; only by linking in with strategic decision making across partnerships and agencies, we will be able to provide the added value needed to deliver on this ambitious strategy. Alongside recognising the links to the partnerships listed below, important links are maintained on the Children and Families Partnership through its membership, many of whom sit on other partnership groups. This is the strategic system that will deliver on our priority outcomes.