

## LBTH Report to MHCLG Ministerial Team

### Exec Summary: Improvement journey so far

We are 6 months into the statutory support package to support the Council's continuous improvement journey. The key areas of improvement are focussed on five Best Value themes: Leadership, Governance, Culture, Partnerships and Continuous Improvement.

The Council welcomes the Envoys first report, published on the 9<sup>th</sup> of July, alongside the Minister's response and the acknowledgement the Envoys and Minister make of the progress made in the first phase of the intervention.

In the first six months of intervention, between January and June 2025, we have successfully delivered:

- a first draft of the Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP), Political Mentoring and Cultural Change programmes turning the Ministerial Directions into a deliverable map for the organisation
- reconfigured the Transformation and Assurance Board (TAB)
- appointed an Improvement Lead (Strategic Director for Change and Improvement) and are implementing the findings of a review of our corporate centre to ensure that we have the capability and capacity in place to drive the necessary change.

We are committed to working with the highly skilled and experienced Ministerial Envoys to get increasing support across the council for the improvement process, so we can make lasting and meaningful changes. Although we've made good and acknowledged progress so far, there's still more to do to reach our bigger goals.

The Envoys report was submitted to MHCLG in May and we have worked closely together to mitigate the issues raised. We will keep working together to remove obstacles, deliver against the requirements in the Ministerial Directions and make the most of the Government's support.

By the time the Envoys next report in October, we are working to mobilise and embed delivery against the Continuous Improvement Plan across the council, ensuring we have a common vision for what good looks like, evidence of robust delivery discipline and shared expectations around the evidence needed to demonstrate when our aims are met across all improvement themes.

With the engagement and support of the whole organisation, the Executive Mayor, the Ministerial Envoys and Transformation and Assurance Board we aim to be able to deliver the best for our residents and conclude the intervention swiftly through achieving sustainable and embedded change.

### Our borough

Tower Hamlets is a borough of contrasts, a place of global significance, diversity, history and ambition. We are home to Canary Wharf, a key driver of the national

economy, and we have one of the youngest, fastest-growing, and most diverse populations in the country. Yet, we are also on the frontline of the housing crisis, our residents are affected by the rising cost of living, and there are deep-rooted inequalities that persist.

Tower Hamlets is a borough that builds homes and is working tirelessly to increase social and affordable housebuilding, yet over 26,000 people remain on our housing waiting list, with the majority living in overcrowded conditions. We strive to deliver social mobility, have outstanding Children's Services and our schools rank among the best nationally, yet over half of our children grow up in poverty, and over half are overweight or obese by age 11. We generate the third-highest economic output in the UK hosting nearly 300,000 jobs, but too many of our young people still face barriers to education, training, and good-quality employment.

These contrasts define Tower Hamlets as a place of ambition. We know our communities, we understand our challenges, we are financially sound, and we are determined to drive change. We are proud of our history, our people, and our place in a global city — and we are committed to ensuring that everyone who calls Tower Hamlets home shares in the opportunities it offers. That is why, as a council, we are leading the way in trailblazing policies and service delivery, to address these inequalities and ensure that Tower Hamlets residents can get the best opportunities and support possible.

## Maintaining Resident impact and purpose

Resident insight is at the heart of everything we do, obtaining representative feedback and data from our residents on what is important helps us to understand what our residents think about our services and supports our journey of continuous improvement.

Between March and May 2025, an external research contractor conducted fieldwork for our Annual Residents Survey. In total 1,120 in person interviews were completed. The methodology prioritised ensuring that the data is fully representative of the borough.

The 2025 results show that 68% of residents are satisfied with the way Tower Hamlets Council runs things, an increase of 7-percentage points since 2024, this is a notable positive shift in public sentiment against the backdrop of a challenging economic context and is significantly higher than the latest LGA benchmark figure.

Agreement with key statements about the Council improved across almost all areas between 2024 and 2025, for example there has been sustained improvement in the number of residents who believe the Council acts on their concerns, who perceive the Council as open and transparent and who think the Council provides good value for money.

Areas for improvement include Customer Services where resident perceptions have improved since last year but our ambition is high. Tower Hamlets, is committed to transparency and responding to resident's concerns. Unusually for the sector we publish our Annual Resident Survey results in full.

	<b>ARS 2023</b>	<b>ARS 2024</b>	<b>ARS 2025</b>	<b>LGA 2024</b>
Satisfied with local area as a place to live	78%	84%	83%	74%
People from different backgrounds get along well	87%	90%	91%	81%
Satisfied with how the Council runs things	63%	61%	68%	56%
Agree that the Council provides value for money	45%	51%	54%	36%
Agree that the Council acts on residents' concerns	48%	59%	64%	53%
Trust in the Council	65%	66%	69%	50%
Satisfaction with Idea Stores/ Libraries	54%	81%	83%	53%
Satisfaction with Street Cleaning	-	63%	72%	57%

### Intervention: Building common purpose

Tower Hamlets is committed to building strong, trusting and impactful relationships with Government, partners and residents through the statutory support package and in the long-term. As a progressive borough, we welcome policy pilots and innovation working with central government to deliver for our residents and communities. We believe that an effective working relationship between central government and LBTH could have a transformative impact, helping to tackle poverty and exclusion that has prevailed in this part of east London for over a century.

We think there are particular opportunities in these areas:

- We are a Council that builds houses and enables housebuilding, our Local Plan is being developed to maximise the number of social and affordable homes and will exceed our local housing need.
- We support inclusive growth and our 'outstanding' Children's Services and high performing schools are focused on supporting educational attainment for all, removing barriers to opportunity (e.g. by creating new youth clubs and the

Education Maintenance Allowance) and tackling poverty (e.g. through providing free school meals and uniforms).

- Real focus, innovation and demonstrable track record in successful, early, long-term prevention, particularly for children and families

Our strong service delivery is underpinned by our sound finances with a balanced 4-year MTFS, robust financial management and determined work on improving our financial resilience.

## **Reflections from TAB Leads on the first phase of the Statutory Support Package**

*The Council have made a good start to their journey of improvement, responding positively and proactively to the challenge set by Government to establish the plans, governance, capability and capacity and common purpose to deliver change.*

*We are happy to see the Council and Envoys working on the basis of increasing trust and investing time in establishing the right relationships and support to drive the work we will need to do together.*

*We have enjoyed getting to know the Council's senior leadership team, officers working on improvement and the elected members on TAB and have been impressed by their dedication, positivity and purpose. We have quickly established deep and active relationships with the Mayor and Chief Executive, we are able to challenge and our advice is taken seriously, we have the relationships access and support we need to work with the Council to make a difference.*

*Jon Lloyd started as Strategic Director for Change and Improvement in early July and we are pleased that the Council have made such an excellent appointment to the pivotal Improvement Lead post required by the directions and look forward to working closely with Jon and his team.*

*The Improvement Plan sets out the landscape clearly and will effectively convene the organisation around delivering change. The Continuous Improvement Plan gives us all – LBTH employees, members and TAB – a common purpose for the improvement journey and a roadmap to help us move forward quickly. This is fundamental to staying focussed and mobilising the organisation for change.*

*We enjoyed attending the Leadership Conference, which focused on what the Council hopes to achieve through delivering its improvement journey. This was attended by the 700 most senior leaders in the organisation, we participated in a panel with the Lead Envoy to reflect on working with LBTH so far, how LBTH can make the most of this opportunity and to answer questions about what good looks like. The event received positive feedback, with 61% of attendees reporting they agreed or strongly agreed that the leadership conference improved their understanding of our Continuous Improvement journey.*

*What we would like to see through this next phase of work is*

- *For the Strategic Vision work in development to be embedded and drive the next iteration of the improvement plan and for there to be a confident and streamlined articulation of the organisation the council wants to be and drivers for change*
- *Following on from a facilitated TAB session in early July around what good looks like, for the Council to set out how it plans to embed and measure progress and to set out a shared roadmap to set expectations around what needs to be in place before the intervention ends*

- *For there to be fair and proportionate benchmarking, drawing on best practice from comparable councils*
- *To help the Council shape an effective programme of work to support culture and political behaviour change as evidence base develops through an all-employee survey and diagnostic work on member experience*
- *Now that we have the foundations in place, for TAB to focus on the things that matter and become a real accelerant for change*

*Now we have a common understanding of the core aims, principles and programmes that underpin the improvement journey, we are keen to deepen our collaboration with the Council to accelerate change.*

Carolyn Downes (Governance Lead); Sir Steve Bullock (Leadership Lead); Professor Shafi Ahmed (Community Lead) and Jenny Rowlands (Culture and Partnerships Lead)

## Leadership

The Ministerial Envoys have been clear that addressing issues in the political culture of the Council is their top priority and concern and the main potential barrier they see to the improvement journey.

The [Political Mentoring Programme](#) agreed by TAB on the 14<sup>th</sup> April aims to: improving the quality of political understanding, capacity, and debate and how politicians interact with each other and officers.

To achieve this members need to take responsibility for

- a. behaviours and culture and
- b. changing them

We are working with the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny to co-design a member compact with our elected members focused on the behaviours and values we want to see and how we change the patterns of behaviour we see.

This will involve:

- Deep diagnostic work, gathering insights through surveys, interviews and focus groups with Councillors and officers.
- Whole cohort member buy in will be established through a series of participatory workshops where members interact with real experiences, apply insights through scenarios and deliberation, and co-produce outputs for testing and adoption.
- These anonymised insights will be used to develop a prototype compact in September to guide member induction development and ensure that new councillors are brought into the Council with a clear sense of how we do business at LBTH.

This will allow us to ground the programme in lived experience and ensure councillors are supported to engage meaningfully while achieving progress at pace.

The member compact will inform the design of the next phase of the member development and mentoring programme. Prior to the intervention starting, we launched a member mentoring programme and a group mentoring programme, with external providers including the LGA. This includes enhanced, bespoke, universal mentoring and coaching programme and individual training budget and rebrand of mentoring programme. Both the member and group mentoring programmes are now up and running. Our member development programme is the most generous and comprehensive in London, we have recently achieved the LGA's Member Development Charter Mark in recognition of the high-quality offer.

## Culture

Our top priority is ensuring that the cultural change programme is driven by employee experience and rooted in robust and representative data. We will conduct an externally conducted all employee survey in October and are focused on ensuring that the question design is right and that we work with staff networks and managers to increase the response rate and make the survey as inclusive of harder to reach frontline staff as possible.

CMT will own and drive a cultural change action plan in response to the employee survey. The Leadership Conference, all Staff Conference with over 3000 attendees for the 3<sup>rd</sup> year running, test and learn sessions focused on our improvement journey and other two-way engagement opportunities such as Q and A sessions with the Mayor and senior leaders; Chief Executive roadshows, CMT Live, tea and chat sessions with Chief Executive in September will be used to prepare for the change work required.

The Corporate Management Team comprises high calibre, experienced, public-sector experts and has been in place over a year bringing stability at the most senior level of the Council. As a result, trust has increased between members and officers and the two-council culture has reduced significantly, we've also seen steady improvement in service delivery.

We have established an Internal Assurance Board and are working with programme Sponsors and SROs to ensure that the senior leadership team have an effective interface with the improvement journey. Over the next phase we will focus on galvanising top 3 tiers of the organisation and key teams to be part of the improvement journey e.g. through a focused Senior Leadership Team session in September on 'what good looks like' and embedding a high accountability, high support approach with SROs.

## Partnerships and Community Engagement

We are committed to delivering our existing co-designed partnership improvement programme and are working with TAB to challenge, test and extend this existing work.

Our top priority for the next phase of work is developing a new long-term strategic partnership vision co-designed with partners, residents and communities, that sets

out our shared vision and ambitions for the borough. This vision will anchor the next iteration of the Continuous Improvement Plan and support prioritisation and a shared programme of work with our key strategic partners.

We have progressed a programme of partnership development work rooted in a collaborative partnership review including board alignment and significant investment in resetting relationships with key partners.

Since the Corporate Peer Challenge, we have been developing a body of work to ensure we have common understanding and expectations around our work with the VCS and Civil Society, including a new VCS Strategy and co-designed Compact. This work will complete in the Autumn and landing it well to reset our VCS relationships is an early delivery priority in the CIP.

In addition to the TAB Leads required by the Ministerial Directions, we have appointed Professor Shafi Ahmed as Community Lead, to ensure that our evidence base is inclusive and resident voice is at the heart of our improvement journey. Professor Ahmed is a leading surgeon and futurist working at the local hospital, he grew up in Whitechapel and has strong volunteering and civil society links locally and internationally.

## Governance

The TAB Governance Lead and Envoy have worked with the Council to identify the following priorities, many of which build on existing programmes of improvement work e.g. the Scrutiny Committee reviewed the first year of delivery of the Scrutiny Improvement Plan in February 2025.

- Where are decisions made
- The way meetings are conducted
- Speed of decision making and whether further delegations are needed
- How members conduct themselves in meetings (linked to political mentoring programme)
- Member/ Officer relationships including issues around trust
- Clear direction for future of Mayor's office, including structure, functions and ways of working (reduced in size from 36 to 9 officers)
- Transparency and effective communication of decisions
- Risk management
- Scrutiny Improvement
- Key decision process and compliance

This will be augmented by an externally conducted stocktake that the Good Governance Institute which recently completed.

Since **reconfiguring the Transformation and Assurance Board (TAB)**, it has held three formal meetings and two facilitated sessions focused on roles and responsibilities and how we evidence success. Early sessions of the Transformation and Assurance Board (TAB) have focused on understanding the improvement landscape at Tower Hamlets, agreeing the Continuous Improvement Plan and

defining common goals around member interface and involvement with the Council's improvement journey.

A permanent Monitoring Officer was appointed in April 2025. There is a body of complex improvement work needed to realise the ambition of the CIP and we have put additional capacity in place through establishing a Governance Hub to support the Monitoring Officer.

### What will we do next?

Over the next 6 months we will focus on:

- As the Envoys have set out we are moving from planning to delivery mode, we are working to ensure that our plans are implemented and we have clear, resident-focused ways to measure and evidence improvement that are agreed with the Envoys and TAB
- Ensuring that there is wholesale political and employee buy-in and involvement in the Council's improvement journey and that improvement work is prioritised by all
- Deepening collaborative work with TAB across the improvement programmes and ensuring that we make best use of the expert support Government have provided
- Embedding improvement work into business as usual council practices, systematically capturing early insight into what works, where challenges remain and how we can address these quickly
- Continuing to develop the capability and capacity to drive change
- Building on early work to develop TAB into a highly effective assurance board