



Healthy Neighbourhoods in Tower Hamlets

May 2023

healthwatch
Tower Hamlets

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Introduction

Healthwatch Tower Hamlets are your **local, independent health and social care champion**. We help local people to voice their **views and opinions** about the services they use.



We **listen** to people and **collect their feedback** on health and social care services.



We **report on key findings** and **make recommendations** for improvement.



We **present these reports** to those involved in the planning and commissioning of the health and social care services.

Project Background

Healthy Neighbourhoods are a new way of shaping how communities work. It means everyone should have easy access to things that support them to live a healthy and fulfilling life.

These services include things like:



Food shops, cafes, and restaurants



Gyms and leisure centres



Parks and green spaces



Schools and libraries



GPs, hospitals, and dentists



Theatres and other leisure activities

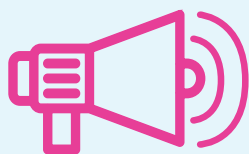
Planned in conjunction with Tower Hamlets Council, this project aimed to collect feedback from residents in Tower Hamlets to find out what services are important to them, and how well these services in different areas of the borough currently support local people.

The findings from the survey will be used to formulate a plan to support the development of local neighbourhoods to improve people's health and well-being.

Methodology

The feedback was collected through an online survey between October and December 2022. The survey was shared with local people through various community and voluntary organisations, Barts NHS Health Trust, and Tower Hamlets Council. In addition, the survey link was regularly posted on Healthwatch Tower Hamlets' social media channels and promoted at local events.

The Healthwatch team also conducted some street surveying in busy areas of the borough, such as the Whitechapel Market, and two focus groups that were hosted by Beyond Sight Loss – a community group of people with visual impairments – and the Tower Hamlets LGBT+ Forum.



361 people

shared their views with us.

Over 20 local organisations

helped us promote our project to people they work with.

Limitations

While we were able to reach out and receive a good response rate from LGBT+ residents and residents with disabilities, there was a low response rate from the following groups:

- Bangladeshi community
- Black African community
- Children and young people aged 24 and younger
- People living in Blackwall and Cubitt Town
- Homeless community

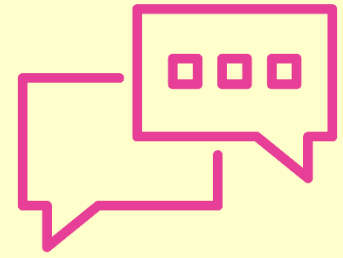
Although attempts were made to reach out to the above communities by attending events, handing out leaflets, and reaching out to organisations that work with these communities, we were unable to fully represent them on this occasion. We found that the Bangladeshi community was particularly hesitant to

take part in our survey due to a belief that it will not result in any changes in the borough.

Acknowledgements

Healthwatch Tower Hamlets wish to thank the following organisations who helped us reach a diverse range of people:

- All the community and voluntary organisations: Account3, Age UK East London, Apasen, Beyond Sight Loss, Bromley by Bow Centre, Carers Centre TH, Diabetes UK, East London Mosque, Limehouse Project, Real, Women’s Inclusive Team, LGBT+ Forum, Look Ahead Care and Support Housing, Tower Hamlets Living Streets, Tower Hamlets CVS, Isle of Dogs Bangladeshi Association, Inter Faith Forum, Idea Stores, Positive East, The Zacchaeus Project, Whitechapel Mission, and Mind TH.
- Barts Health NHS Trust
- Tower Hamlets Council
- Idea Stores
- Local health and social care services



We would like to extend a special thanks to **Beyond Sight Loss, The Tower Hamlets LGBT+ Forum, and the Isle of Dogs Bangladeshi Association** for inviting us to attend their meetings and to speak with their clients.

What we found

This section of the report presents the key findings from the survey and focus group responses alongside key statistics and quotes from residents.





General feelings of the borough

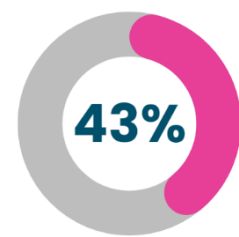
We asked residents to tell us how proud of their local area they are, how safe they feel, and how likely are they to continue to live in their neighbourhood for the next 2 years.

The feedback collected told us that most residents in Tower Hamlets feel *Somewhat* proud of their neighbourhood.

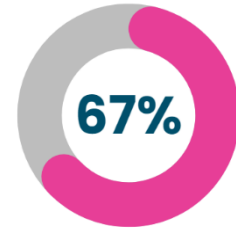
When comparing different demographics, residents from Bangladeshi backgrounds were most likely to feel *Extremely* proud of their local area, while LGBT+ people were most likely to feel *Not so proud*.

The majority of the people also told us that they are *Likely* to continue to live in their area for the next 2 years due to being settled down, having grown up in the area, or generally being happy living in their neighbourhood.

The main reasons for moving out included traffic and pollution, and the high levels of crime and anti-social behaviour.



43% of residents told us they feel **Somewhat proud** of their neighbourhoods.



67% of the respondents are likely to continue to live in Tower Hamlets for the next 2 years.

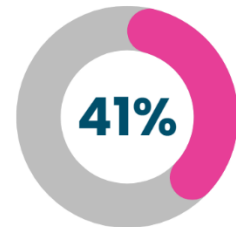
“I love my local area. I have been here since 2012. Friendly neighbours, good transport, green space.”

Female Resident, 55-64, White and Asian

Safety

While the majority of residents told us that they *feel safe* in their local area, more than a quarter said they *do not feel safe*. Many residents mentioned the high level of crime and anti-social behaviour as the main reason for feeling unsafe.

LGBT+ people and people from White other backgrounds were most likely to say they *do not feel safe*.



41% of residents said they feel safe while **27%** said they do not.

“As long as I stay where it's lit, I feel OK. Walking the dog at night feels less safe. I bought a rape alarm for the first time ever recently because of this.”

Female Resident, 35-44, Any other mixed background

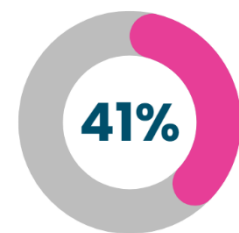


Changes to the borough

We asked residents what changes they would like to see in their area and how these would affect their overall health and well-being. The feedback highlighted three main themes for improvement.

Reduction in crime and anti-social behaviour

One of the key issues highlighted to us through the feedback was the high level of crime and anti-social behaviour in the borough. A large portion of the respondents said that they would like to see a reduction in crime and antisocial behaviour, specifically around drug dealing and substance abuse, speeding, and 'rat-running'. We were told this negatively impacts residents' overall health and well-being, in particular their feeling of safety and sleep, both of which also affect their mental health by causing anxiety and stress.



41% of residents told us they would like to see a reduction in crime and anti-social behaviour.

Residents also felt that there should be an increased police presence on the streets to help reduce the level of crime and anti-social behaviour.

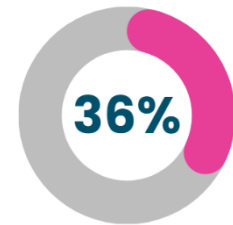
“It will lead to cleaner and safer environment for residents. Control of nighttime economy is important as the noise and risks of violence will help mental health of residents.”

Female Resident, 55–64, Asian or Asian British: Chinese

Cleaner Environment

Over a third of the residents who responded to our survey told us they would like to see an improvement in the general environment in Tower Hamlets. Respondents mentioned the need to improve the overall cleanliness in public spaces by stopping littering and graffitiing in public spaces, increasing the number of recycling facilities and improving the waste collection services and the maintenance of parks. They also would like to see more parks and the planting of trees and flowers.

Making these changes would improve the overall image of the borough and enable residents to have more positive thoughts about the area they live in. It would also help to reduce pollution levels and encourage people to use public spaces to better maintain their health and well-being.



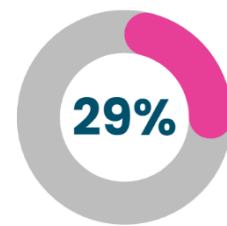
36% of residents told us they would like to see an improvement in the cleanliness and safety of the general environment.



“Plant more trees in the Bow area for beauty and soaking up the pollution.”
No demographic information submitted

Motorised traffic

People told us that motorised traffic is having a negative impact on residents' health and well-being through pollution and the inability to safely travel around the borough by cycling or walking. It was suggested that there should be more cycling and walking infrastructure put in place in the form of cycling lanes, bike storage spaces, and low-traffic neighbourhoods to encourage more people to cycle and walk. These changes would improve the general health and well-being of residents by reducing pollution levels as well as increasing exercise levels.



29% of residents told us they would like to see a reduction in motorised traffic.



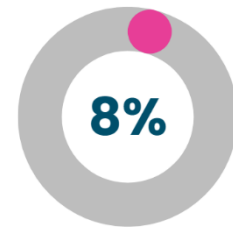
“My physical health would be improved by the effects of reduced toxic chemical and particulate matter in the air, and by taking more trips using active travel. My mental health would be improved by being able to go on small errands in my neighbourhood without fearing that I will be hit by a car.”

Male Resident, 35-44, White British

Comparing top priorities for different ethnic groups

To find out if there are any differences in priorities for different ethnic groups, we compared the feedback from the three ethnic groups we received the most responses from: **Asian or Asian British; Bangladeshi, White British, and White: Other White backgrounds.**

While the top priorities for improvements in the borough were largely the same when comparing different ethnicities, the feedback did tell us that a reduction in traffic and an increase in cycling and walking opportunities were more important to residents from White backgrounds whereas people of Bangladeshi ethnicity saw this as a less of a priority. Instead, they would like to see an improvement in services and activities for children and young people.



Only 8% of residents from Bangladeshi backgrounds told us they would like to see a reduction in traffic and more walking/cycling opportunities.



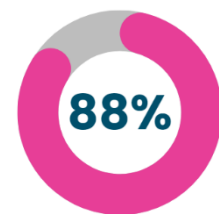


How well do current services support residents' needs

We asked residents to tell us what the most important services are to have close to home, and how well the different services support the local people's needs.

Most important services to have close to home

GP, Green space, Post Office, Community Pharmacy, Underground station, and Supermarket were rated as *the most important services* to have close to home. While 88% or more of the respondents had access to GP, Green space, Post Office, and Community Pharmacy, fewer people told us that they had an Underground station or a Supermarket near their home.



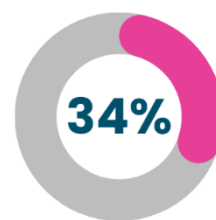
88% or more of residents had a GP, Green space, Post Office, and Community pharmacy near their home.

“More supermarket choice. Many of the supermarkets are very small, Waitrose at Wapping being the exception. A large full-service supermarket is needed near St George in the East/Shadwell/Wapping.”

Male Resident, 55-64, White British

Healthy Eating and Exercising

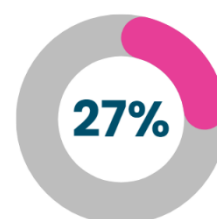
The survey respondents told us that having better access to healthy and affordable food such as fresh fruit and vegetables within their local area instead of the multitude of fast-food shops on the high streets would help them to eat better. In addition, residents told us that having access to affordable, local gyms and leisure centres, including free exercise equipment in local parks and access to local swimming pools, would encourage them to exercise more.



34% of residents would like to have **better** access to **healthy** and **affordable food**.

“More accessible, free to use equipment that are available in open parks, would help if they were covered. We live in a part of the world where rain is guaranteed. This would encourage more users.”

Male Resident, 45-54, Asian or Asian British: Bangladeshi



27% of residents would like to have **better** access to **better quality** and **affordable** **gyms** and **leisure centres**.

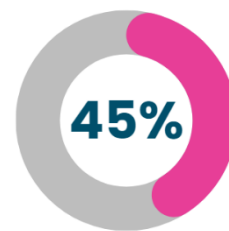
“More accessible prices for gyms and more shops in local area that do not sell processed food but instead healthy food.”

Female Resident, 16-24, Black or Black British: Somali

Health and social care services

Most residents said they would most like to improve *GP services* followed by *Dental services*.

Residents said that they would like to improve GP services due to difficulty booking an appointment, and Dental services because of difficulty finding an NHS dentist.



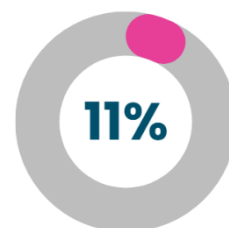
45% of residents would like to **improve GP services**.

“It's very difficult to get seen by a GP these days.” **Female Resident, 35-44, Black or Black British: Caribbean**

Community and voluntary organisations

Residents mentioned a wide range of different types of community organisations that they value in their local area, however, the most valued were the local community centres. The community centres mentioned included Bromley by Bow Centre, St. Paul's Way Community Centre, Island House Community Centre, The Brady Centre, and St. Hilda's East Community Centre.

Around 1 in 10 respondents told us they were not aware of any community organisations.



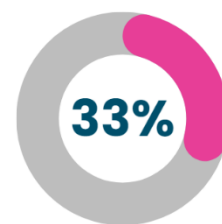
11% of residents were **not aware of any community and voluntary organisations**.



“I am unaware of what services are available. Maybe more of an online presence would help.” **Female Resident, 25-34, Asian or Asian British: Bangladeshi**

Educational and learning facilities

Third of the respondents said that the education and learning facilities in the borough *Fully* or *Mostly* meet their needs. They told us that while local libraries and Idea Stores are good learning resources, more affordable educational courses for adults would be appreciated.



33% of residents said educational services meet their needs.

“Access to adult education: prices for courses are way too high to afford.”

Male Resident, 55–64, White Irish

Play and Recreation

Half of the respondents told us they have good access to spaces with opportunities for play and recreation. People specifically commented on having access to a park within their local area. However, some noted that parks and other green spaces are not always well kept and anti-social behaviour occurs within parks which can make them unpleasant.

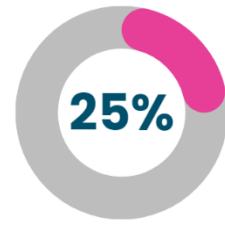
“Due to vandalism and high drugs related crime in the area it’s very difficult to find good spaces. The spaces that are there are always dirty, unsafe due to drug use, equipment is always broken or unkept to a good standard.” **No demographic information submitted**



50% of residents told us they had good access to spaces with opportunities for play and recreation.

Housing

A quarter of residents told us that housing in the borough currently does not meet their needs, and only slightly more people said that it does. Residents commented on a lack of affordable housing in the borough and the poor condition of social housing.

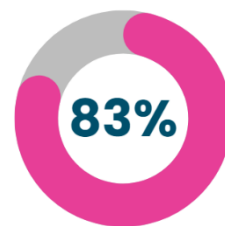


25% told us **housing in the borough does not meet their needs** whereas **26%** said that **it does**.

“Very small number of homes are available for rent from council/social housing. A lot of homes are old and in disrepair not very energy efficient, and a lot of overcrowding due to lack of homes available for families.” **No demographic data submitted**

Public transport

Most residents said that public transport either *Fully* or *Mostly* meets their needs with good access to bus, underground and other transport services. Some residents commented on infrequent or delayed bus services.

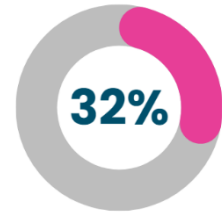


83% of residents said the **public transport services meet their needs**.

“The stairs at Wapping Station are difficult. The buses are much less frequent than they used to be. Services are infrequent in the evenings and on Sundays. More bus shelters needed especially with sides, so you are better protected from wind and rain.” **Female resident, 65-74, White British**

Spaces and opportunities to meet people

Just under a third of residents told us they did not have good access to spaces where they could meet people. People told us that while they have good access to green spaces, there is a need for more community events or centres, and affordable cafes and restaurants.



32% of residents told us they did not have good access to spaces to meet people.



“I live in the area, particularly due to its cultural diversity. Sometimes, however, this can make it harder to meet neighbours and form true communities due to how different cultures naturally spend their time. Each year we have a community ‘big lunch’ street party, and this is one of the few times everyone really gets to meet everyone else. More of these events would be great.” **Male resident, 55–64, White British**

Comparing differences in service needs by ethnic groups

To find out if there are any differences in the service needs of different ethnic groups, we compared the feedback from the three ethnic groups we received the most responses from: **Asian or Asian British; Bangladeshi, White British, and White: Other White backgrounds.** We have highlighted the differences below.



Most important services to have close to home

Asian or Asian British Bangladeshi: Rated having a bus station as the most important service to have close to home. Also rated having a place of worship close to home as important but less than 2 out of 3 people told us that they had one nearby.

Healthy Eating and Exercising

Asian or Asian British Bangladeshi: Would like to have access to healthy eating programmes.

White: British and **White: Other White backgrounds:** Both groups would like to have access to more cycling and walking opportunities.

Play and Recreation

Asian or Asian British Bangladeshi: Most likely to say they do not have access to spaces with opportunities for play and recreation with the main reason being the lack of parks and green spaces in their local area.

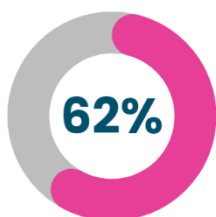
Public Transport

Asian or Asian British Bangladeshi: Most likely to say that public transport only *Somewhat* meets their needs. It seems people from Bangladeshi backgrounds are more likely to use bus services that can be infrequent and delayed.

Housing

Asian or Asian British Bangladeshi: Most likely to comment on the poor condition of housing.

White: British and **White: Other White backgrounds:** Most likely to comment on a lack of affordable housing.



62% of residents from **Bangladeshi** background told us they had a **place of worship** near home, but this was rated as one of the **most important** services to have close to home.



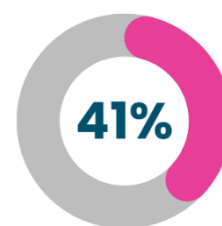
Inclusivity

The feedback also highlighted issues around the needs of different minority communities within the borough, which we have highlighted in this section of the report.

LGBT+

LGBT+ respondents highlighted the need for more inclusivity and the integration of different communities within Tower Hamlets. The comments around this theme mostly related to suggestions on more LGBT+ spaces, events, and services. One respondent commented on a lack of visibility of the LGBT+ community in the local newspaper.

Residents told us that making the borough more inclusive would increase their feeling of safety and make accessing different services easier due to not being afraid.



41% of **LGBT+** residents told us they **do not feel safe** in their **local area** compared to **23%** of **Heterosexual** people.

“I have lived here a long time and as a gay male, I have never felt a sense of belonging/community. More integration/education and training especially around tolerance of others.” **Male resident, 45-54, White British**

LGBT+ Organisations

LGBT+ respondents told us that they value local organisations such as Elop, Positive East, and Glass House, but based on the feedback, it seems there is a lack of LGBT+ services in Tower Hamlets. Some respondents mentioned not using any community organisations because they were not aware of services that cater to LGBT+ community.

“Sadly I can't say I value any community organisations in this neighbourhood. Many are focused on religion and exclude other minorities.” **Male resident, 35-44, Prefer not to say**



Priorities for people with disabilities

Residents with disabilities told us that they would like to have better access to local grocery stores with a good variety of food, and that it is important to have GP services near home.

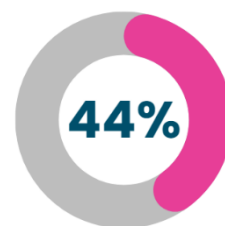
For residents with disabilities, increasing the number of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods was also seen as important, as this would make walking or moving around their neighbourhood safer. In addition, for people with visual impairments, we were told that it is important to keep pavements clear of things such as dog waste and discarded hire bikes.

“No dog fouling as we cannot see it!” **Female resident, 65-74, Asian or Asian British: Bangladeshi**

Play and Recreation

Disabled residents are less likely to think that they have good access to spaces for play and recreation compared to residents with no disabilities.

Respondents mentioned a lack of seating in public places, feeling too anxious to go outside due to a lack of mental health support, and the need for better access to spaces for those with visual impairments.



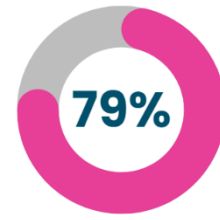
44% of residents with disabilities said they have good access to spaces for play and recreation compared to **58%** of people with no disabilities.

“Small park nearby but not many benches to sit down.”
Female resident, 55-64, Black or Black British: Caribbean

Public transport

The proportion of people with disabilities who told us that public transport meets their needs was smaller compared to the proportion of people with no disabilities. Residents told us that there is a need to make it more accessible for people with disabilities by introducing step-free access at stations for example.

“It is not badly connected (especially for mobile people) and even for me, if they do not also cut the one bus route that still goes all the way into town for theatre, cinema, meeting with friends for a meal that still exists – as I cannot deal with the steps at the tube stations, and I am not the only one.” **Resident, 55–64, Any other white background**



79% of residents with disabilities said public transport meets their needs compared to 89% of residents with no disabilities.



For the full report, please go to
www.healthwatchtowerhamlets.co.uk



Recommendations

Based on the resident feedback, we have made a series of recommendations which will be presented in this section of the report.

Crime and anti-social behaviour

1. **Increased police presence** in areas where crime and anti-social behaviour, including substance abuse and nuisance noise, generally take place.
2. **Public consultation with local communities regarding general traffic calming measures** to prevent speeding and rat-running.
3. **Raising awareness of the potential consequences of speeding** with a focus on young people.

General Environment

4. **A review of the current park maintenance routine and processes** to identify areas for improvement.
5. **Linking with existing local volunteer groups to help with the maintenance of parks** in the form of gardening, litter picking, and planting trees and flowers.
6. **Introduce more recycling facilities across the borough.**
7. **A review of the current waste collection and street cleaning services** to determine areas of improvement to keep public spaces and pavements clean.

Traffic

8. **Create more bike storage spaces** to encourage more active travel and focus on areas near flats and buildings where residents may not otherwise have enough space to store their bikes.

Access to services

9. **Introduction of fresh food shops that sell 'wonky' vegetables and fruit** that are more affordable compared to ones sold in supermarkets.
10. **Introduction of a community healthy eating programme** that involves education and advice on healthy eating, how to cook low-cost nutritious meals, how to avoid waste, and can be tailored to meet the needs of people from different backgrounds and with different dietary requirements.
11. **Creating more services and activities for young people** to attend or participate in to address one of the top priorities for the respondents from the Bangladeshi community. These activities and services can also act as a preventative measure against crime and anti-social behaviour.

Access to services (cont.)

12. **Arrange a Landscape Architect to conduct a review of all parks** to see what can be done to improve open spaces for people's well-being. This could include things like identifying parks that currently have no free gym equipment and developing a plan to install more equipment
13. **Arrange more free exercise and other well-being activities in local parks and community centres** taking into consideration different cultural needs, exercise levels, abilities, and interests to make them more inclusive and accessible.
14. **Explore ways that the great work of the local community and voluntary organisations can be celebrated and promoted more widely** to the public to increase the awareness of these organisations.
15. **Review the current offer of adult education courses** to identify any gaps and to create more affordable courses.

Inclusivity

16. **Creating a variety of LGBT+ focused spaces** that allow LGBT+ people to meet and spend time in an inclusive and safe environment, and promoting these through local newspapers, social media channels, and partner organisations.
17. **Raising awareness of LGBT+ communities and their experiences within Tower Hamlets** through local newspapers, social media channels, and partner organisations to encourage more inclusivity and subsequently create a safer borough for LGBT+ people.
18. **Create more accessible spaces for disabled people to socialise and take part in exercise and leisure activities** taking into consideration different abilities and interests, and promote these through local newspapers, social media channels, and partner organisations.




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