

# **Community Empowerment**

**A Co-operative plan for  
Tower Hamlets Council**

**Jake Richards**



**co-operative  
party**



# The Tower Hamlets Co-operative Commission

**T**ower Hamlets is a diverse community with unique challenges and opportunities. It is a borough with significant inequalities in the standard of living, with some of the poorest neighbourhoods in the country living in the shadows of Canary Wharf and the City of London and luxury housing development. It is however a borough that has a strong history of solidarity and comes together when times are tough. During the pandemic we saw remarkable examples of that community spirit in action: neighbours assisting those in isolation, foodbanks providing meals to those financially devastated during the lockdowns, testing hubs supported by resident volunteers. As the country begins to rebuild, the time is right to reassess what Tower Hamlets Council does, and can do, to enable residents to prosper by working together.

Over the past few months, John Biggs Executive Mayor and Councillor Rachel Blake, Deputy Mayor co-chaired the Tower Hamlets Co-operative Commission. They have led this work with a group of dedicated commissioners, and expert witnesses, from the co-operative movement. The Commission has explored potential mechanisms by which Tower Hamlets Council can empower communities to address some of the thorniest, multi-faceted issues in local government. The focus has been on implementing co-operative principles in practice in the care sector, and energy, fuel and food poverty.

The Commission held a number of evidence sessions to hear from external experts and explore practical solutions from across the country. The aim was to learn about schemes and approaches that have worked elsewhere, and probe how they might, or indeed might not, work in Tower Hamlets. The Council is proud of the work it is already doing in these policy areas but is always eager to learn from other best practice and challenge itself to embrace innovative methods of achieving better outcomes for the community.

The Commission was made up of:

- John Biggs, Executive Mayor for Tower Hamlets
- Afsheen Rashid, Chief Executive of Repowering and Chair of Community Energy England.
- Kemi Akinola, CEO of Be Enriched and Brixton People's Kitchen, Labour & Co-operative Councillor in Wandsworth.

- Cllr Rachel Blake, Deputy Mayor for Tower Hamlets, Cabinet Member for Adults, Health and Wellbeing.
- Ria Benard, Secretary of the London Co-operative Party, previously a Speech & Language Therapist providing a service to schools across London.
- Unmesh Desai AM, Labour and Co-op London Assembly Member for City and East London, previously served as a Councillor in Newham.

The Commission also held an open consultation process, to give the opportunity for people from across the Borough, and beyond, to make submissions via a dedicated webpage: <https://party.coop/thcoop>

The Commission offers its heartfelt gratitude to all the contributors in the discussion and evidence-gathering exercise. The Commission has made several recommendations that the Council will now consider. The Commission hopes these recommendations will assist residents in Tower Hamlets building a better community for all in the coming months and years. ●







# Foreword

**Cllr Rachel Blake  
and Mayor John Biggs**



**T**ower Hamlets has a diverse and vibrant tradition of community co-operation which we are proud to support as local representatives.

Over the last six months we have been working with co-operators from across the movement to explore the practical steps that we can take locally to embed co-operative values and policies in our borough. Community co-operation is a way to share power and wealth for the benefit of the whole community and we have heard from leading experts in the sector about projects and approaches across the country which have established co-operation at the heart of communities – from community energy initiatives, to developing co-operative spaces to caring circles and co-operatives.

Every session has brought new insights into the power of co-operation and the benefits it can bring. It has been a really positive experience, sharing ideas and developing local solutions to long-standing problems and the challenges we face in the future.

We identified core challenges that we face locally, including the cost of living crisis with energy and food costs and the caring needs of our community. We have also heard about the way that community co-operation can provide a vital foundation for services. Every day we see the difference that community co-operation makes, and we see the potential that locally sharing power and wealth has. We are excited to bring these ideas forward and to work with local co-operators and the community sector to realise this potential.

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We would like to extend our thanks to all the staff at the Co-operative Party for their tireless support and energy in bringing this work forward, and all the contributors to this Commission for the expertise and valued perspectives: Afsheen Rashid – Repowering; Jo White – Co-operative Futures; Kemi Akinola – Be Enriched; Ria Bernard – London Co-operative Party; Unmesh Desai – London Assembly Member; and Jake Richards for drafting the final report.



# Why co-operative principles?

**C**o-operative principles provide the antidote to an increasingly centralised 'levelling-up agenda' pursued from Whitehall. At the heart of co-operative principles and understanding is an acceptance that government – central or local – cannot achieve its aims alone. Indeed, local government can only build better communities when working in partnership with, and empowering, individual residents, civil society, faith groups and the private sector.

This is at the heart of the Commission's recommendations: community empowerment. The Council's executive and financial powers aren't to be protected, but something which can and should be shared equitably. It is through the democratisation of council powers and processes, ensuring everyone has agency and voice, that we will all benefit.

The Commission found that community empowerment is not just a principled stance, but also what works. Imagine an energy system where households are not at the behest of global gas prices but part of a community system that generates clean energy, owned collectively for our collective benefit. Imagine a local food supply chain which is increasingly self-sufficient that feeds the whole community with healthy meals. Imagine a local economy where local people are in charge, rather than distant shareholders. Imagine a care system run by carers for those they care for, rather than profit-making, private equity funds. Imagine public services run so those that rely upon them don't just see why the decisions have been made, but have an active role in making them, ensuring they work for those they are designed to serve.

The principles at the heart of these policies are co-operative principles and these guided the Commission. ●



# Community co-operation

**C**ommunity co-operation was the overarching theme that informed the Commission's approach to specific policy challenges within the Borough. The Commission began by identifying principles for community co-operation:

- Community-led, place based approaches to ownership and economic development.
- Support for communities to help them to understand their co-operative options.
- Diversity of co-operative members and users.
- Partnership working and empowerment with the voluntary and community sectors.
- Support for the community sector to become more resilient and sustainable.
- Partnership arrangements across the co-operative sector.

The Commission heard evidence as to how to turn these principles into practical policies. The aim was to ensure co-operative principles were at the heart of the Council's decision-making process across the spectrum of the services provided.

The Commission noted that Tower Hamlets Council had a current voluntary and community sector strategy that set out a number of priorities:

- Raising the profile of the voluntary and community sector.
- Establishing a network of local voluntary and community services, operating on a 'sub-borough' basis.
- Development of a 'volunteering plan' to put sustainable volunteering at the centre of the Borough, building upon good practices developed during the pandemic and linking volunteers to opportunities across sectors.
- Improving access for community groups to public sector assets/buildings.

**During the pandemic, the borough saw the benefits of community co-operation in action.**

- Increasing opportunities for community and voluntary groups through commissioning and procurement.
- Establishing an external funding strategy, to promote and support bids for external funding for voluntary and community groups.
- Increasing the role for voluntary and community groups in council consultations, to raise the profile of residents' voices.
- Cross-sectoral working to promote equality principles in regard to delivery of services to Tower Hamlets residents, building upon work of the Council's BAME Commission and the work of Tower Hamlets Inter-Faith Forum.

The Commission also noted the extent of poverty in the Borough being a very specific, all-encompassing challenge for co-operative policies. On the eve of the pandemic, in a typical classroom of thirty children, seventeen were living below the poverty line. More than forty percent of older people were living in low-income households. High housing costs and insecure work in the gig economy have left many residents unable to afford even basic essentials.

During the pandemic, the Borough saw the benefits of community co-operation in action. Many organisations and local community and faith groups worked very effectively together to support residents during the lockdowns. In particular, the value of trust organisations such as schools, faith, community and the voluntary sector was evidenced during the pandemic, as well as the importance of mutual aid, and volunteering as residents came together to help each other. Further, community spaces and places which facilitated contact and enabled exercise were further appreciated.

## Recommendations

The Commission identified a number of issues with community co-operation. They sought to make recommendations of means by which the Council could remove barriers (including administrative, financial, cultural) to co-operation locally. This included an assessment as to the Council's role as an enabler of community co-operation, as well as its legislative functions pursuant to the Social Value Act. The Council had a responsibility as a corporate body but also to set a cultural shift to embed community co-operation

into all its operations and functions. Therefore, the recommendations aim to offer practical policies that can be implemented now, to encourage co-operation, but also broader recommendations to develop community co-operation in the longer-term across the Borough.

#### Recommendations:

- **Review the Council's procurement and performance frameworks** to ensure that they can facilitate co-operative solutions and bidders.
- **Work to create a Co-operative Development Agency** – A separate body that aims to develop enterprises, deliver training programmes, create community hubs, and promote healthy and happy lifestyles.
- **Pilot a 'Library of things'** – Library of Things is a social enterprise that is a volunteer-powered, grant-funded item lending library that has been operating elsewhere in London since 2014. The aim is to empower individuals to access items that may otherwise be unaffordable, reduce waste, and help neighbours share practical skills to boost enterprise.
- **Reassess means by which to administer community space** - There are valuable assets within our communities, working with the principles of community wealth building, the Council should consider the best way to manage access to working and convening space.
- **Commit to a sustainable co-operative sector** – the Council should look to establish a partnership approach with the co-operative sector, and that its policies, commissioning and funding, support rather than exclude the sector.
- **Social Value Framework** – the Commission found the Council's Social Value Framework would benefit from further promotion, to ensure all those in the Borough – across the voluntary and private sector - were able to take advantage of the opportunities it provides. It was also recommended that an ethnicity and equalities audit of the impact of the Social Value Framework, as part of a plan for further promotion, to ensure the benefits are reaching the whole community.
- **Delivery programme for community food growing** – The Commission recommended the development of a delivery programme for community food growing, to assist individuals within the community with the space and tools to grow their own food. ●

## Food Poverty

**The Commission noted the scale of food poverty across the Borough, evidenced by the increased use of foodbanks over the past decade. Pre-COVID, the Council supported four or five different food banks, today we support around 40 different food banks. Nearly one in three adults across London's City and East Constituency were 'food insecure' in 2019, with single parents, those in the lowest income quintile, unemployed, people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic Backgrounds, and disabled people most affected. This has been exacerbated by the pandemic.**

The Commission was well-aware of the work the Council had done in this area. As part of the Council's poverty review, food poverty was a prominent theme:

*"Residents told the review team how they had gone without food, had not been able to afford new uniforms for their children, lived in poor housing, and could not afford the devices their*

*children needed for online learning. They talked about their anxiety when they could not buy what their family needed, and shame when they had to use food banks or tell strangers about their circumstances to get help."*

Tower Hamlets Council's Tackling Poverty team, during the pandemic, established a food hub providing over 635 tonnes of food to 37 local organisations, including five schools. It also supported several food banks with help finding funding. The recent policy review found that, on evaluating the performance in this area during the pandemic, the performance was found to be 'satisfactory', but there were concerns about the quantity and quality of some of the food provided.

Whilst the Council has been supporting food banks, there is recognition for the need to link in-kind support for those who require food aid with longer term interventions such as access to information and advice. This informs the Council's support for the Tower Hamlets Food Partnership



(see below). The Commission sought to encourage these initiatives and this approach to food sustainability.

An example of a programme already in operation is 'Linkage Plus', which aims to tackle poverty as part of preventative support for older residents. Delivered by Toynbee Hall and other groups it involves a one-to-one assessment at the outset, and thereafter assists residents with all poverty-related issues, including access to food. This programme is an example of the Council's desire to work towards 'upstream solutions' to tackle the causes of poverty and reduce the need for food banks and to champion models of food provision that are sustainable, dignified, offer choice and provide pathways to other advice and support services.

One further example has been the First Love Foundation. The charity first began as a food bank, but quickly realised that distributing food parcels alone was bandaging over the deep-rooted problems of poverty, not solving them. They continued to offer emergency support, but then built a person-centric, rapid support service to clients to deal with the multi-faceted causes of poverty. The success of the charity's work has led to their involvement in the London Mayor's 'The London Food Strategy'.

The Mayor's free schools meal programme is already a major investment. This extends free school meals provision to 19,000 children in years three to six who would not otherwise be eligible. Effectively, this extends the universal programme to all primary pupils. This costs £3 million a year, and equates to an estimated costs of £450 per child for families.

The Council also runs the 'Food for Health Awards'<sup>1</sup> which aims to encourage food outlets to offer more healthy options.

The Council is also involved in the Tower Hamlets Food Partnership<sup>2</sup>. The partnership brings organisations and individuals together to shape a better food system for everyone in Tower Hamlets. It is cross-sectoral – including housing providers, food charities, small businesses, schools, social enterprises, community gardens, and the Council. It is led by WEN – the

Women's Environmental Network. The partnership aims to support community-led initiatives, to ensure 'communities are empowered to develop and share diverse food knowledge, resources and projects, and be part of a thriving local food economy'.

As prices increase, bills soar, taxes rise and the cost-of-living crisis bites, the numbers affected by food poverty are likely to increase significantly and many more people will struggle to afford food. Tackling hunger was a founding cause for the co-operative movement, and this endeavour remains as vital today as it did then. Tower Hamlets Council can, and should, also play an active role in campaigning for changes in policy

on a national level. The benefit system often penalises people unnecessarily, can leave them powerless and is an underlying problem fuelling the rise of food poverty. The Commission concluded that the Council's understandable focus on the powers it already had, it could not ignore the UK Government's failings on in-work poverty, cuts to services and failures in welfare reform.

- Community-led, place based approached to ownership and economic development.
- Support for communities to help them to understand their co-operative options.
- Diversity of co-operative members and users.
- Partnership working and empowerment with the voluntary and community sectors.
- Support the community sector to become more resilient and sustainable.

## Distributing food parcels alone was bandaging over the deep-rooted problems of poverty, not solving them.



1 [https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ign/business/health\\_and\\_safety/food/healthy\\_food\\_awards/healthy\\_food\\_awards.aspx](https://www.towerhamlets.gov.uk/ign/business/health_and_safety/food/healthy_food_awards/healthy_food_awards.aspx)

2 <https://www.wen.org.uk/2020/11/24/the-tower-hamlets-food-partnership-our-approach/>

- Partnership arrangements across the co-operative sector.

The Commission heard evidence as to how to turn these principles into practical policies. The aim was to ensure co-operative principles were at the heart of the Council's decision-making process across the spectrum of the services provided.

The Commission noted that Tower Hamlets Council had a current voluntary and community sector strategy that set out a number of priorities:

- Raising the profile of the voluntary and community sector.
- Establishing a network of local voluntary and community services, operating on a 'sub-borough' basis.
- Development of a 'volunteering plan' to put sustainable volunteering at the centre of the Borough, building upon good practices developed during the pandemic and linking

## Recommendations

The Commission noted the Co-operative Party's 'three step' approach to tackling food poverty, which includes:

- **Appoint a Food Justice Champion** - Every council should be clear about who has responsibility for tackling food insecurity, by appointing a Food Justice Champion. A cabinet member should be given responsibility for delivering food justice, including this food action plan, and action from the food partnership, as below. A clearly defined lead is well-placed to draw together the different work streams in a council and is easier for outside organisations to deal with than if responsibility is split between different or no portfolio holders.
- **Develop a food action plan to work on this issue co-operatively** - Every council should seek to develop a food action plan which identifies the gaps that exist and what needs to be done, and seeks to work with statutory bodies, co-operatives and the private and voluntary sectors to deliver it.

**Tackling hunger was a founding cause for the co-operative movement, and this endeavour remains as vital today as it did then**

- **Put the plan into action through a Food Partnership** - Food Partnerships – such as those set up by Feeding Britain or which work with Sustainable Food Places – bring people together to work cooperatively across all aspects of the food system to solve some of today's most pressing social, environmental and economic issues.

The Commission noted that Tower Hamlets has a Lead Member for Food Poverty, a Food Poverty Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and Food Partnership. The evidence the Commission received, including of the Council's own experience in these areas, on food and fuel poverty and their interface with the benefits system highlighted their inseparability, and that while each can be targeted separately there is a need for a holistic strategy of empowerment, inclusion and anti-poverty activity. And as a recognition of this the Commission sought to make recommendations that would develop the Council's food strategy from one of assistance to those in an emergency to a sustainable food system where emergencies can be avoided.

Further specific recommendations were:

- **Support a cash first approach** - The Council had undertaken admirable initiatives to mitigate the effects of the pandemic in relation to food poverty, but several of these were 'sticking-plaster' methods (donating food to food banks for example) rather than sustainable solutions. Of course, emergencies will often require the former approach, but the Commission recommended adopting a 'cash first approach' as a default, as maximising income has been found to be more effective in aiding lower-income residents facing food insecurity. This is a better means by which to confront the root causes of food poverty.
- **Transition food banks to a social supermarket/larder approach** – Similarly, as part of the 'cash first' the Commission recommended the Council work to assist in the transition to a co-operative social supermarkets, rather than emergency food banks, to develop sustainability and more permanent solutions so families are less reliant on the charity of others.
- **Programme development for food banks** - That to achieve the cash first approach and a transition to more partnership based approaches the Council looks to help food banks develop through programmed support. This would also support links to other council services, to provide a more holistic service.
- **Promotion of healthy food vouchers** – Obesity rates remain stubbornly high, and healthy living was considered by the Commission to be of critical importance.

- **Engage with Foodshare** – Foodshare is a programme run by the Co-op to prevent food waste by giving up products that are going out of date to local community groups at the end of each day. The Commission recommended that the Council engage with any similar schemes run by other supermarkets and work with market traders and

independent shops regarding their surpluses too.

- **Tower Hamlets Council should campaign for a right to food** – recognising the underlying causes of food poverty. ●

# Care sector

**O**ur social care was at a breaking point before the pandemic, but the Covid crisis has only exacerbated matters. The market incentivises a ‘race-to-the-bottom’ approach, leading to often appalling quality and workforce conditions, a lack of accountability and a de-personification of services. Whilst private companies profiteer, service-users, familial carers, and delivery staff pay the price. The sector is a travesty – with council budgets stretched, increasing demand, and large-scale of residential care companies backed by private equity with opaque ownership and decision-making making huge profits. These companies too often focus on the bottom line, with workers forced to make shorter visits.

While recognising the economic precariousness of the care sector, as often a low-margin business with poor working conditions and a high turnover of staff, the Commission noted the success of co-operative initiatives in this sector across the country. Councils have supported the start-up of co-operative and participatory models, to deliver services that put people before profit, and from Leading Lives in the South East, to Colne Valley Care, or Equal Care Co-op in West Yorkshire, these models are demonstrating in practice that there are alternatives to private, for-profit models. These existing social care co-operatives show that a co-operative approach can innovate, empower service users and care workers, re-move the profit incentive and leakage, and create a sector that reflects the needs, wants, demographics and challenges of those who rely on it and work in it. In Wales, the value of co-operative approaches has been recognised by the Government, who have created a duty on local authorities to promote co-operative organisations

**Existing social care co-operatives show that a co-operative approach can innovate**

to deliver care in their area, as part of the Social Services and Well-Being (Wales) Act in 2014.

The Commission also noted that the Council has signed-up to the Unison sponsored ‘Ethical Care Charter’, which sets baseline conditions for employees and services and can provide greater security for workers and those receiving care.

The Commission was aware of the extensive care needs in Tower Hamlets.

The population of Tower Hamlets in 2021 was estimated to be 325,000. The population is fast-growing, diverse and comparatively young. Before the pandemic, around 4,000 people required long term care, with around 500 requiring short term care. The budget for 2021-22 is £117 million.

The Tower Hamlets strategy has a number of core elements:

- Empower people to meet their own needs
- Enable people to meet their own aspirations
- Support that improves health, wellbeing and quality of life
- Co-produce services and care with people who use them
- Simplify the system, make it easier to understand and access
- Ensure the right support, in the right place, at the right time – as close to home as possible
- Be flexible and responsive to meet personal needs, wishes and outcomes
- Deliver value for money, making best use of resources across the system and spending within our means
- Develop self-supporting, thriving communities



## Recommendations

The Commission agreed with these core elements and made recommendations aimed at furthering these goals:

- **Ensure the Council's framework for care contracts enables co-operatives to join the framework** – The Council should be able to offer care contracts to co-operative platforms, that are owned by the people who give and receive support. These platforms, the Commission found, were more often better at paying carers a fair wage and providing more tailored care.
- **Invest in Direct Payment Support** – Community empowerment also includes personal empowerment. The Commission recommended investment in direct payments, to ensure service-users maintained maximum autonomy. The Commission was also interested in how models of support for those receiving Direct Payments could enhance empowerment and promulgate good practice.
- **Work with other boroughs** – the crisis in care is not unique to Tower Hamlets, and other boroughs in London are also keen to explore fair care and enabling care co-ops. We will explore working with other councils to enable care co-ops to ensure we are collaborating to solve the issue rather than competing.
- **Seek opportunities to work with community groups more generally to create more community-led social care co-operatives**, created by care givers, community leaders and service-users themselves. This will ensure co-operative principles are developed and embedded within the Borough's social care sector.
- **Assist and encourage carers** to work with their unions to develop co-operative staffing models, alongside other principles such as those in the Ethical Care Charter.
- As part of a prevention strategy, the Council should **encourage further intergenerational cohesion** by safeguarding and developing community spaces for locally-led initiatives, such as books clubs. As occurred during the pandemic, community shopping delivery operations for vulnerable neighbours should be supported. The Council should assess all methods by which it can help tackle social isolation.



# Fuel Poverty, Green Growth and Community Energy

**C**limate change is an existential threat that must be at the heart of all co-operative policy programmes. Communities across the world are already feeling the effects of climate change, especially those who have contributed least to global emissions and who are least equipped to dealing with its consequences.

The challenge is stark. Ice caps melt faster than we predicted causing sea levels to rise, and there are droughts in East Africa and heatwaves across Europe. Every year, more animals are added to the endangered species list as deforestation, pollution and global warming shrink habitats. At the same time, nine million tons of plastic enter oceans every year.

Co-operative principles can help underpin our response to this challenge. As the world is forced to transition to a greener economy and society, the transition need not be painful. Done right, decarbonisation can provide new opportunities for growth, tackling inequality and developing neighbourhoods and community togetherness.

Councils across the country have led the way. Like Tower Hamlets, Oxford have declared a climate emergency as a means of acknowledging the problem, making the issue a priority and raising awareness amongst the public. Oxford have now proposed a citizens' assembly to forge consensus on the strategy and using this collaborative approach to become a zero-carbon council with the aim of leading the city to decarbonisation.

Tower Hamlets has a net zero carbon ambition for the Council by 2025. This was announced in March 2019, and was said to be an ambitious target, requiring decisive action to reduce direct emissions by 75%. In November 2021, the Council as part of the Tower Hamlets

Partnership agreed plans to make the Borough net zero carbon by 2045. The Partnership is an 'alliance' of housing, education, health, the community and voluntary sector and business organisations in the Borough and by the Council.

At the same time, families are facing a cost-of-living crisis. Reliance on gas from Russia means prices are sky-rocketing. Many households will be unable to afford to heat their homes and smaller energy supplies are already going bust. Tower Hamlets has high rates of fuel poverty: it's estimated that well over one in ten households in Tower Hamlets will struggle in fuel poverty. This is before the planned National Insurance increase the Government is implementing this spring.

The Commission noted the examples of other Councils:

- Bristol Energy Efficiency Scheme insulated 10,000 homes across the city, with particular attention to the needs of the elderly, disabled and fuel poor.
- Kirklees Warm Zone, which offered every household in the area a chance to improve its energy efficiency, insulated over 51,000 homes and generated £80 million in economic benefits.
- Stroud District Council is piloting a low interest loans scheme offering households the chance to borrow up to £10,000 to make energy-saving improvements to their homes at interest rates that are significantly lower than commercial lenders.
- Cornwall Council is directing 10 per cent of savings from collective switching to fund fuel poverty work. More than 100,000 households have signed up to council-run collective switching schemes in the last year saving a massive £10 million on their gas and electricity bills

The Commission was aware of the work Tower Hamlets Council have already undertaken in this area. Tower Hamlets have previously instigated 'fuel poverty awareness' projects – with schemes offering home visits by experts to see how houses and flats can be insulated better, how to switch to cheaper fuel supplies and to give advice on debt to avoid fuel poverty.

The Tower Hamlets Energy Community Power aims to use collective buying power of residents to ensure that

**Climate change is an existential threat that must be at the heart of all co-operative policy programmes**



energy providers offer the best energy rates possible to those who are registered on the scheme and a scheme to assist low-income households replace their boilers.

The Commission received compelling evidence as to the benefit of further community energy projects. Currently, we are reliant on an energy system that is run by multinational corporations who are not responsible to communities but to shareholders who do not necessarily reside in the nation and sole aims are fiduciary. This means that a great chunk of the profits leaves the local area, where the bills are paid, and ultimately the UK. This approach is based on a dependency on fossil fuels and foreign investment. It is destabilising the climate, leading to higher energy prices and stifling potential prospects of employment and investment.

Community-owned renewable energy is generated by the community, for the community, in accordance with co-operative principles to ensure that communities realise the full financial, environmental and social benefits from energy generation and reduced energy consumption. The benefits are clear:

- Tackling fuel poverty
- Providing local jobs and training opportunities
- Fuelling economic growth
- Providing opportunities for responsible investment
- Promoting local leadership
- Increasing security of energy supplies
- Reducing carbon emissions
- Increased engagement with consumers

## Recommendations

- **Community Energy** - the Council should pilot up to ten community energy partnerships across the Borough. These pilots would look to learn the lessons from Aldgate Repowering, a community-owned solar project in the City of London. Working with local people and the Corporation, the community group install solar panels on rooftops across the area. The aim is to build groups working pursuant to co-operative principles. The Commission heard about examples from across London and the country, including, community energy funds to pay for insulation, decarbonisation funds (with the potential for grants from central government) and co-operative insulation works. Other examples include GreenSCIENS in Islington, which uses low carbon heat pumps to share waste heat from buildings to source other buildings in need of heat. These successful initiatives can be blueprints for successful pilots in Tower Hamlets.

**Currently, we are reliant on an energy system that is run by multinational corporations who are not responsible to communities**



- **District Heat Networks** – through the evidence gathering it became clear that district heat networks can create monopoly supplier relationships and sit outside regulation designed to protect consumers from excessive energy bills. There is also a lack of transparency about how the costs to customers are shared. The Council should campaign with residents for the further regulation of District Heat Networks. The Council should also consider how to involve the Heat Trust – an independent, non-profit consumer champion for heat networks – to ensure suppliers are held to account for residents. This could include a requirement for new build properties to sign up to the Heat Trust, or

equivalent. The Council should consider what town planning policies could be introduced to ensure fair and transparent energy use and billing

- **Support Apprentices onto our programmes** – the commission heard how community energy projects were supporting young people to get involved, and the council should look to ensure there is paid engagement or apprenticeships with young people when developing programmes, so that young people's time is valued. ●

## Conclusion

The Commission aimed to provide a variety of recommendations. Some are designed to offer tangible policy proposals that can be implemented forthwith. Others will require further consideration and consultation, but they will deliver a long-term focus on community empowerment and co-operative principles in the Borough.

This was a fairly brief piece of work, and it begs itself to be revisited and refreshed in the short and medium term to ensure lessons are learnt and where possible new areas explored.

Despite the stark challenges facing Tower Hamlets, the Commission is optimistic going forwards. With an agenda that aims to empower its residents, the Borough can use the talents, endeavour and innovative spirit of the whole community to build a better future.

The Commission commends these recommendations and report and looks forward to following developments of co-operative policies in Tower Hamlets. ●



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