



Review of Falls Prevention and Support Services in Tower Hamlets

Patient Experience Team

FOREWORD

Falls remain a significant challenge for older people, particularly those living with dementia. The impact of a fall often extends beyond physical injury, leading to reduced confidence, loss of independence, a decline in overall quality of life, and increased mortality. Falls can also negatively affect functional ability, resulting in higher rates of hospital admission and increased healthcare costs. Consequently, they place significant burdens on individuals, their families and carers, and health and social care services.

According to data from London Ambulance Service (2022), an average of 4,500 people aged over 65 are taken to hospital each month following a fall. This highlights the demand on services and the need for collaborative working, effective prevention strategies and timely support to help reduce the incidence of falls and improve outcomes for older people.

This whole systems review conducted by the Patient Experience Team, at Tower Hamlets GP Care Group, reflects powerfully on the voices of our residents and service users. Their stories reveal feelings of vulnerability when going out, using public transport and being labelled as an older person. Their experiences highlight the importance of falls prevention and the actions required to support older people to remain safe, independent, and active within their communities.

The review also gathered insights from service providers. They highlighted challenges relating to capacity and demand, thus emphasising the need for a proactive, collaborative approach to help reduce avoidable harm and enhance the wellbeing of some of the most vulnerable members of our population.

I would like to thank the Patient Experience Team for their dedication in bringing to light the wide-ranging issues related to falls and for ensuring that the voices of the communities we serve are heard. I would also like to extend my gratitude to our residents, service users, and partners for sharing their experiences and insights. Their contributions have greatly enhanced the quality and impact of this review.



Zainab Arian
Chief Executive Officer
Tower Hamlets GP Care Group

Quotes from residents, service users and service providers

“Streets are dark in places, and it can be hard to see the pavement. Some bits are sticking up ... that’s why I slipped and tripped and fell ... the paving and roads aren’t even, and you have some high ones you have to step down from.”

Tower Hamlets resident

“I just wanted to hide myself. I felt a bit embarrassed and a bit down because I was with my grandkids, and I was supposed to look after them and I fell.”

Patient

“Everybody learns something. Number one, you get the exercise, but you also get companionship... it’s become like a little family.”

Community Centre Activities Lead

“Some GPs genuinely care but some have so little time and it’s not their fault.”

Patient

“Mum’s medication was reviewed, and they removed her ramipril med and then she was referred to the falls clinic, but she didn’t go as they realised it was the ramipril and then after that was stopped, she hasn’t had any falls.”

Daughter of service user

Key findings

Psychological and social factors

Some participants experienced anxiety and loss of confidence following a fall which increased their fear of falling again. Other older people were reluctant to seek support due to concerns about being perceived as frail or vulnerable. Some participants, particularly women, viewed assistive mobility aids as unattractive and negatively associated with ageing and dependency.

Investment in community and voluntary sector

The reduced availability of free exercise programmes, particularly since the pandemic, has affected many people's ability to maintain core strength and balance. The high cost of gym memberships or exercise classes were also identified as barriers. However, voluntary organisations were recognised as playing an important role in supporting people, including those particularly at risk of falls by offering free health-related activities and opportunities for social interaction. Reliance on these organisations has led to calls for increased investment.

Data sharing

Limited data availability and coding of falls incidents were identified as significant barriers to understanding the nature and scale of falls in the borough thus impacting effective service planning, design and implementation of falls prevention strategies aimed at reducing risks and improving patient care.

Barriers to accessing support

Participants reported inconsistencies in GP falls assessments, with time pressures and service demands identified as limiting factors. The falls and frailty clinic was highly valued for providing comprehensive assessments following referral and for working collaboratively with multidisciplinary teams to improve patient outcomes and reduce risks of further falls. However, increasing demand and limited service capacity contributed to longer waiting times and reduced opportunities to intervene early. Since the review was completed, ELFT in partnership with the GP Care Group, has developed a frailty outreach approach which involves primary care networks assessing patients, developing care plans and referring them to community classes delivered by Linkage Plus.

In-patient ward safety

Reduced supervision of inpatients was identified as a factor contributing to an increased risk of falls on older peoples' mental health hospital wards. To mitigate this risk, ELFT introduced a zonal approach on a ward based in Newham and recruited biomedical students as volunteers to provide support to patients. This helped minimise risks of falls which led to a suggestion that other elderly care wards such as at those at the Royal London Hospital, consider piloting a similar approach.

Contributors to falls

Health conditions such as stroke, dementia, frailty and balance problems increased risk of falling. Medications, such as those used to manage blood pressure, were also identified as causing dizziness and increasing fall risk. In addition, the cost of living and poor nutrition negatively impacted on physical health and frailty.

Risks in outdoor environments

Concerns were raised about the risk of falls and injuries outside the home, with hazards including cyclists, badly parked e-bikes and electric scooters and difficulties getting on and off buses. Additional concerns related to poor street lighting and damaged pavements. Since conducting this review, Tower Hamlets Council has rolled out an online portal for residents to report issues related to street safety.

Clarity and accessibility of information

A lack of awareness of support services available in the borough was identified as barriers to seeking help, particularly for carers. Providing falls prevention training and producing resources in different languages and formats would enable better access to services.

Quotes from residents,
service users and
service providers

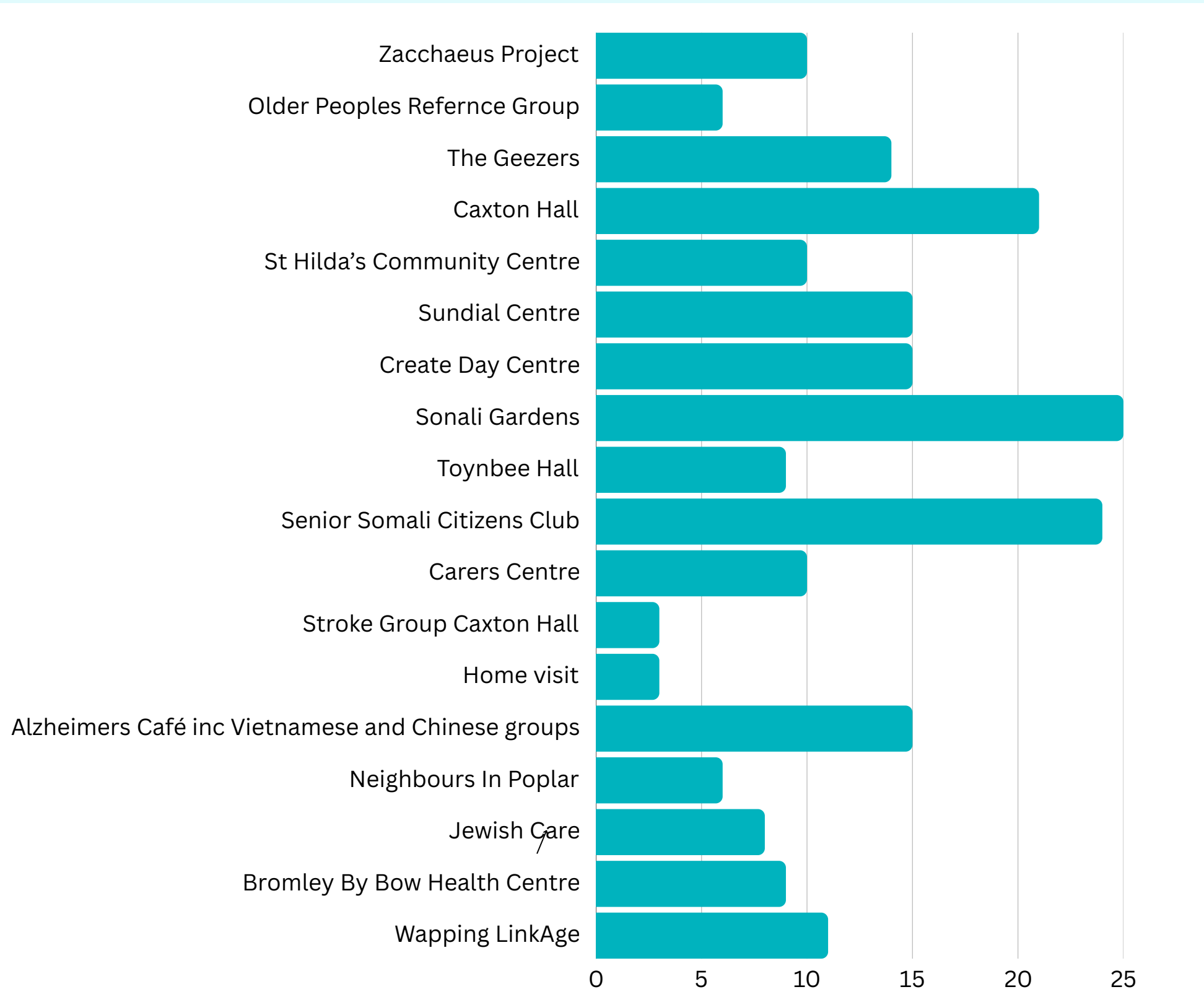
“I don’t think there’s enough awareness out there, who do you go to, I mean apart from the GP?”
Carer

“Sometimes it’s about persuading people not to take their tablets anymore, as...we have to stress... that was the right decision when it was originally prescribed, and this is now, and you may get dizzy and fall over if we don’t adjust it.”
Senior clinician at Falls and Frailty Clinic

“The rehab journey continues, and we emphasise ‘don’t stop because we stopped’ but we recognise this can be a challenge from a motivational point of view.”
Community Stroke Team

“The next thing you know, you’re on the floor and then it’s the domino effect, you’ve only got to injure yourself and that’s when it starts to happen. You start going downhill...I think cyclists and scooter riders should abide by the same rules as drivers.”
Tower Hamlets resident

ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITY: GROUP
ATTENDANCE, VISITS AND PEOPLE REACHED



The team engaged with 385 participants including residents, service users, carers, frontline staff, senior managers, clinicians and those working in the voluntary sector.

Recommendations

- Agree a standardised way of recording and coding falls data to enable cross organisational learning and in-depth analysis of falls to support the development of effective falls prevention strategies.
- Findings from the review are shared with Tower Hamlets Together partners to support collaborative working, inform service improvements and strengthen the delivery of integrated neighbourhood teams work through neighbourhood steering groups and the executive committee. Since completion of the review, the GP Care Group and THT partners are working collaboratively to develop a community-based frailty and falls model focused on prevention and reducing hospital admissions.
- Promote opportunities for social interaction and shared learning for those at risk of falls to reduce isolation and improve awareness of falls prevention. This could include investing in the voluntary and community sector to ensure sustainability of health promotion and activity programmes.
- Pilot observational zones on elderly inpatient wards 14E and 14F at the Royal London Hospital and develop a volunteer support programme for medical students to support and engage with patients as part of falls prevention strategy.
- Develop a clear falls pathway and accessible resources to improve awareness of available support services. Produce a pathway flowchart along with information in community languages and accessible formats such as audio and video to increase awareness and help address literacy and language barriers. Since this review was completed, ELFT has implemented a falls pathway across community health services and social care in Tower Hamlets which includes clear referral routes and direct access to consultants if required.
- Health professionals to review language used when discussing falls with patients by adopting a patient-centred and non-ageist approach.
- Improve access to reporting environmental hazards in the borough to enable residents to report incidents and near misses related to street lighting, pavements, highways and transport. This could be through introducing a telephone helpline. Since completing this review, Tower Hamlets Council has developed an online portal to report street problems.

Methodology

The team engaged with 385 participants to gather feedback on their experiences and perspective of falls over a period of 15 months between November 2024 to February 2025. Feedback was collected through conducting in-person discovery interviews in the comfort of participants' homes and familiar community settings. The team also visited 20 organisations including community groups and hospital settings to facilitate discussions. In addition, telephone interviews were carried out to ensure participants had a variety of options to share their stories.

Representations included a range of underrepresented communities including Somali, Jewish, Chinese, Vietnamese, Bengali, LGBTQ+ and disabled participants. This inclusive approach helped the team to gain deeper understanding of peoples' experiences and perspectives related to falls.



Participants from the programme

Acknowledgments

We would like to sincerely thank the residents, service users, carers and partners who contributed to this review. Without their invaluable insight and support, we could not have achieved this outcome.

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