

London Borough of Tower Hamlets Community Facilities Design Guide VCS Meeting

10 SEPTEMBER 2025

Scope

- A design guide is required to set out the **minimum standards and requirements** that developers must meet when delivering community facilities to ensure that they **meet the diverse and functional needs of the local communities** in Tower Hamlets.
- This design guide must **set expectations around the management** of facilities.
- This design guidance must be drafted **in consideration of** both the existing **Local Plan and draft Local Plan policies**. Adjustments to the guidance document will be made to reflect any necessary changes once the new Local Plan is adopted.
- A Design Guidance for Community Facilities should set out the principles and standards for delivering **functional, accessible and sustainable community spaces that meet the needs of the local communities**. This must include considerations regarding the **site, design and management** of the facility.

Research

Site visits

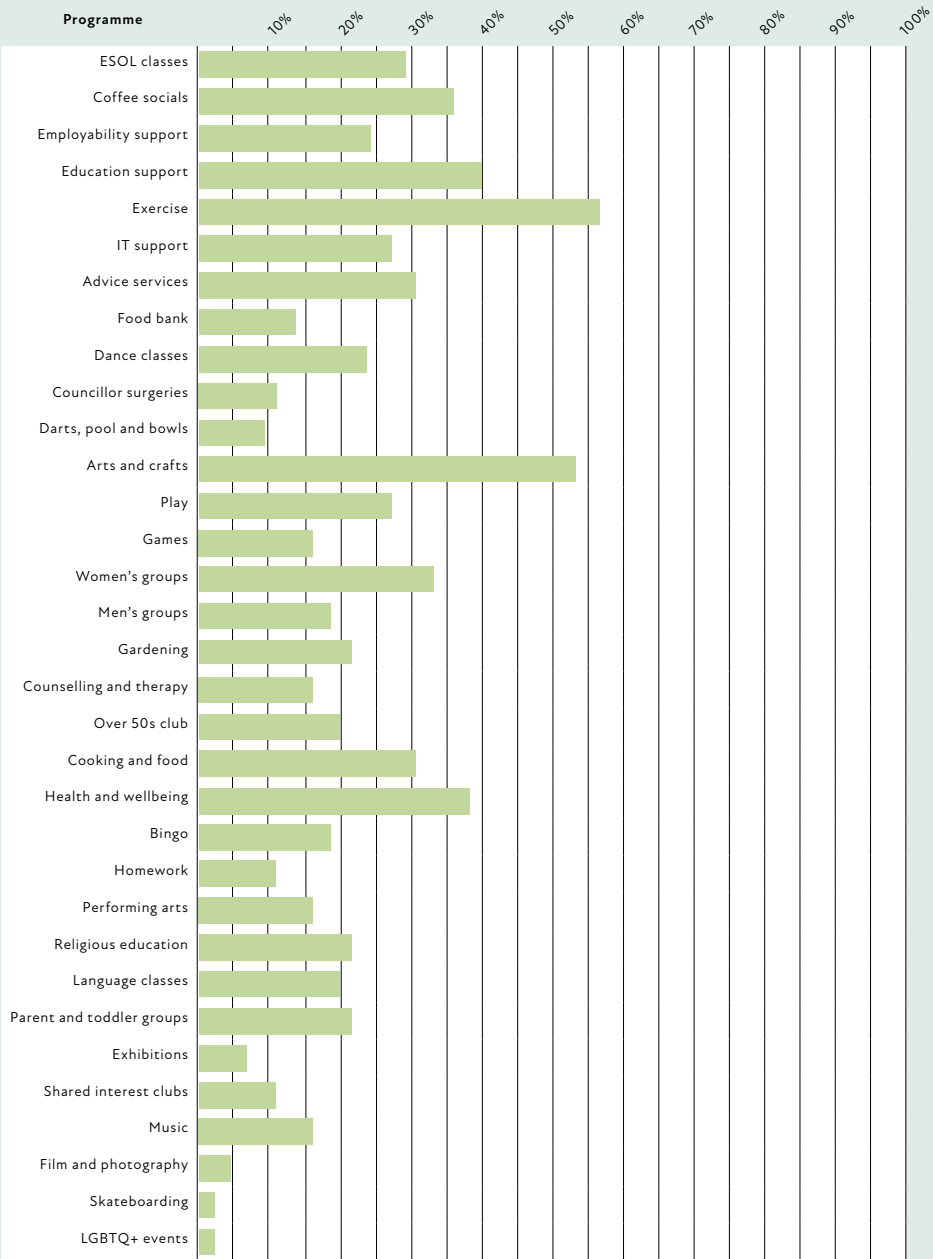


The Feldy



The Ocean's Estate

Study of existing facilities

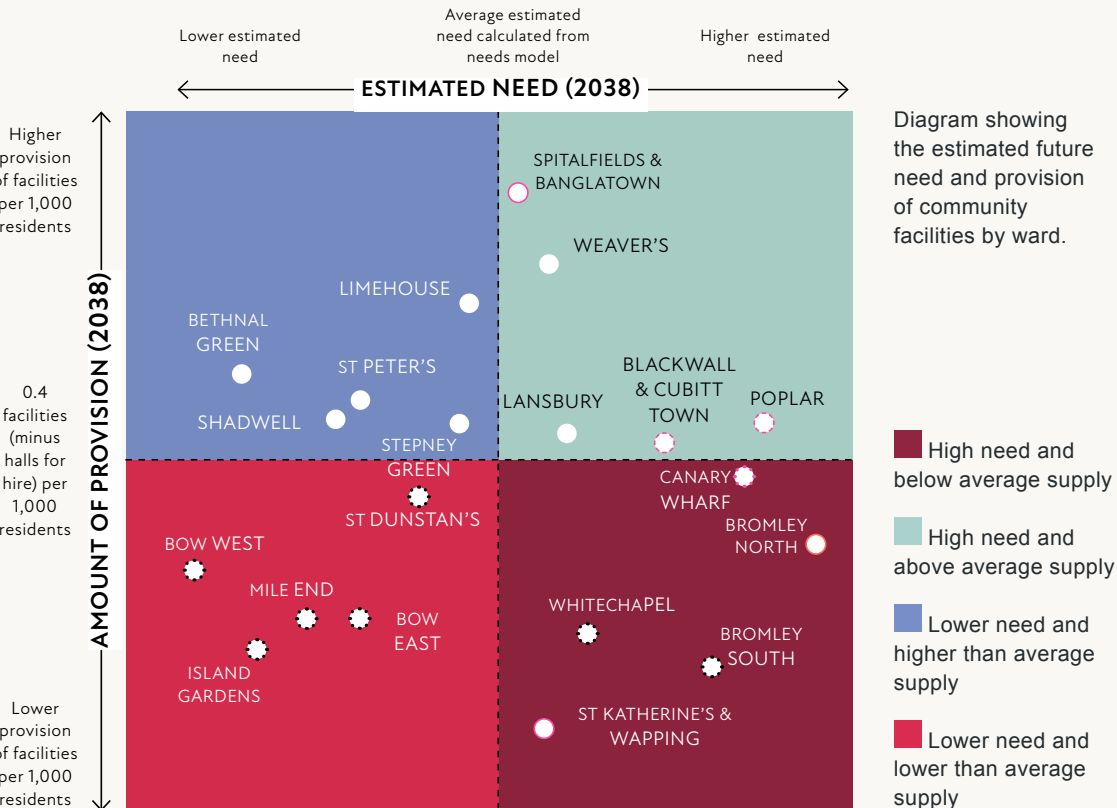
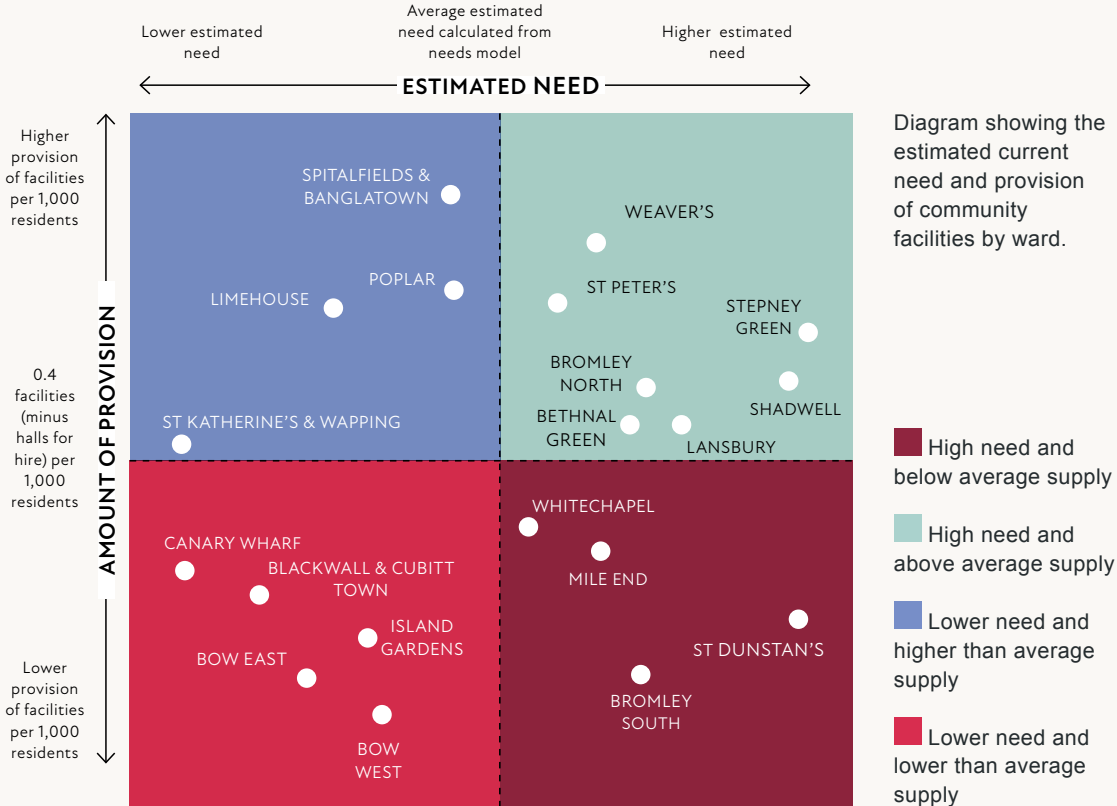
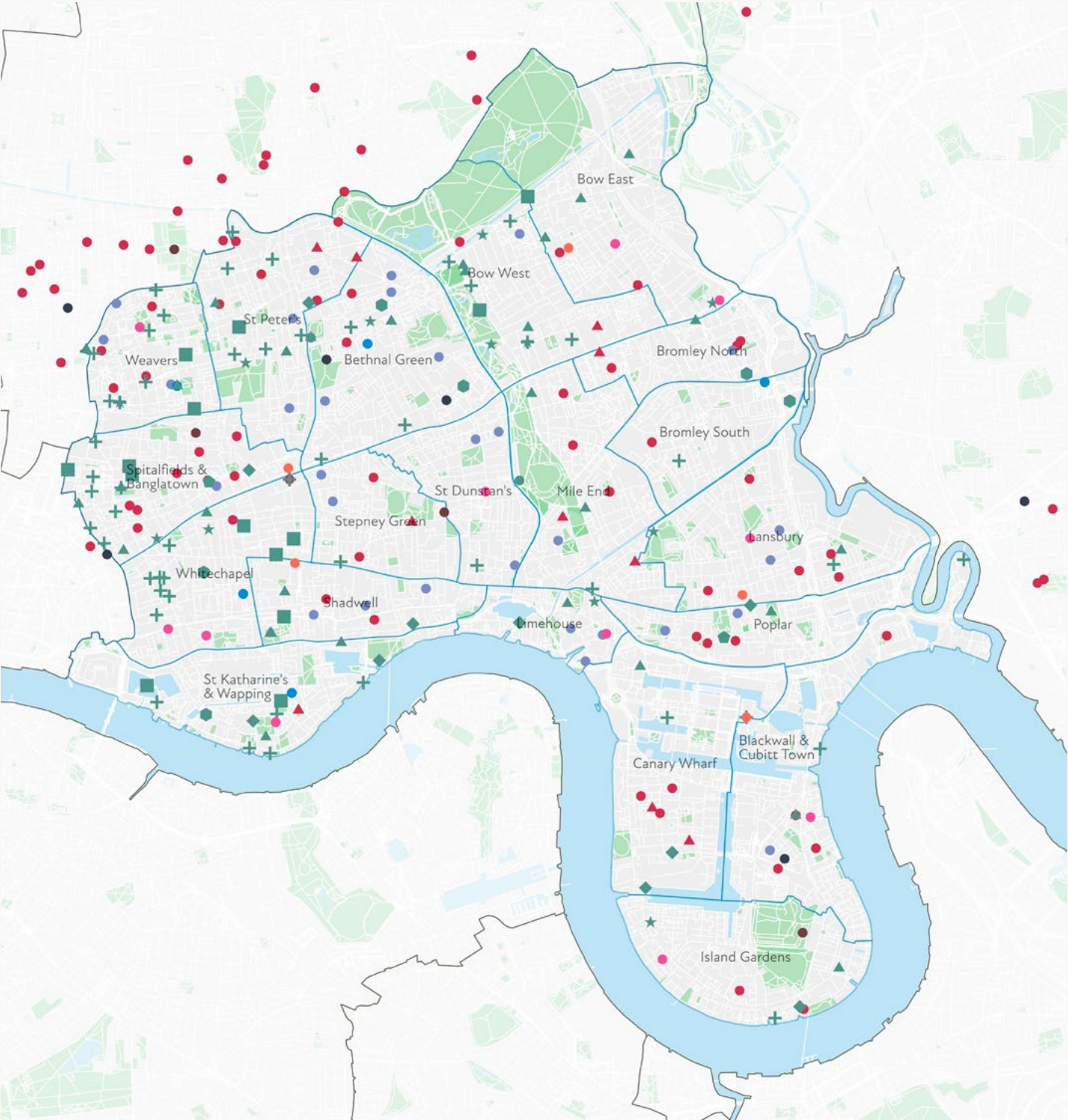


Prevalence of various programmes in LBTH community centres

Stakeholder engagement

- Babu Bhattacharjee - Poplar Harca
- Daniel Rose - Poplar Harca
- Rujina Ali - Poplar Harca
- Allan Anderson - East End Community Foundation
- Brenda Daley - Ocean's Estate TRA
- Emma Warden - Canary Wharf Group
- LBTH Facilities Management

Previous work



Report content

1. Introduction

- 1.1 What is a community facility
- 1.2 Purpose and scope of this guide
- 1.3 Current and future facility needs
- 1.4 Planning policies

2. Recommendations on process

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Model process
- 2.3 Programming a community facility

3. Recommendations on design

- 3.1 Introduction
- 3.2 Scale considerations
- 3.3 Site location
- 3.4 Co-location
- 3.5 Public realm consideration
- 3.6 Outdoor spaces
- 3.7 Rooftop spaces
- 3.8 Façades
- 3.9 Layout
- 3.10 Fit-out considerations
- 3.11 Environmental considerations
- 3.12 Accessibility and inclusion
- 3.13 Design checklist

4. Case studies

5. Management

- 5.1 Introduction
- 5.2 Rent, costs and service charges
- 5.3 Operators and occupiers
- 5.4 Food safety
- 5.5 Rooms for hire
- 5.6 Health and safety
- 5.7 Fire safety
- 5.8 Management checklist

6. Resources

Appendix

Overarching principles

1. Community facilities should be designed collaboratively

4. Applicants should avoid delivering a ‘white box’ space and instead design the facility for specific potential uses and audiences.

7. Community facilities should have active frontages and visible and inviting entrances.

2. New community facilities should be designed with a strong understanding of local context, community needs and aspirations

5. Community facilities should be of an appropriate scale in relation to the size of development. They should be located on ground floors, along public routes and thoroughfares and be highly visible to activate the surrounding public realm.

8. The internal layout should support the flexible use of the facility.

3. The design of the facility should deliver a highly accessible and flexible spaces that are welcoming, legible as a public and civic building and remove barriers to the use of the space by a wide range of people.

6. All new community facilities should explore the potential to provide outdoor spaces, either at ground floor, podium level or on roof terraces.

9. Management and operational considerations should inform the design of community facilities

Scale considerations

SMALL SCALE FACILITY

Provides at least one hall or flexible space with an area of less than 75m²

MINIMUM PROVISION

- Entrance/ Foyer
- Flexible hall (less than 75m²)
- Storage
- Toilets
- Ancillary spaces

RECOMMENDED PROVISION

- Office for staff
- Kitchen



MEDIUM SCALE FACILITY

EXPECTED SCALE TO BE PROVIDED

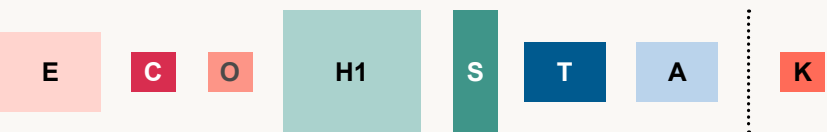
Provides at least one hall or flexible space with an area of 75m² to 135m²

MINIMUM PROVISION

- Entrance/ Foyer
- Community cafe
- Office for staff
- Flexible hall (75m² to 135m²)
- Storage
- Toilet / Changing Places
- Ancillary spaces

RECOMMENDED PROVISION

- Kitchen



LARGE SCALE FACILITY

Provides a large hall area of more than 135m²
Provides at least two halls or flexible spaces

MINIMUM PROVISION

- Entrance/ Foyer
- Community cafe
- Office for staff
- Large flexible hall (more than 135m²)
- Small flexible hall / meeting room
- Storage
- Kitchen
- Toilet / Changing Places
- Ancillary spaces



(*) Always make sure the operators has capacity and experience to manage the facility

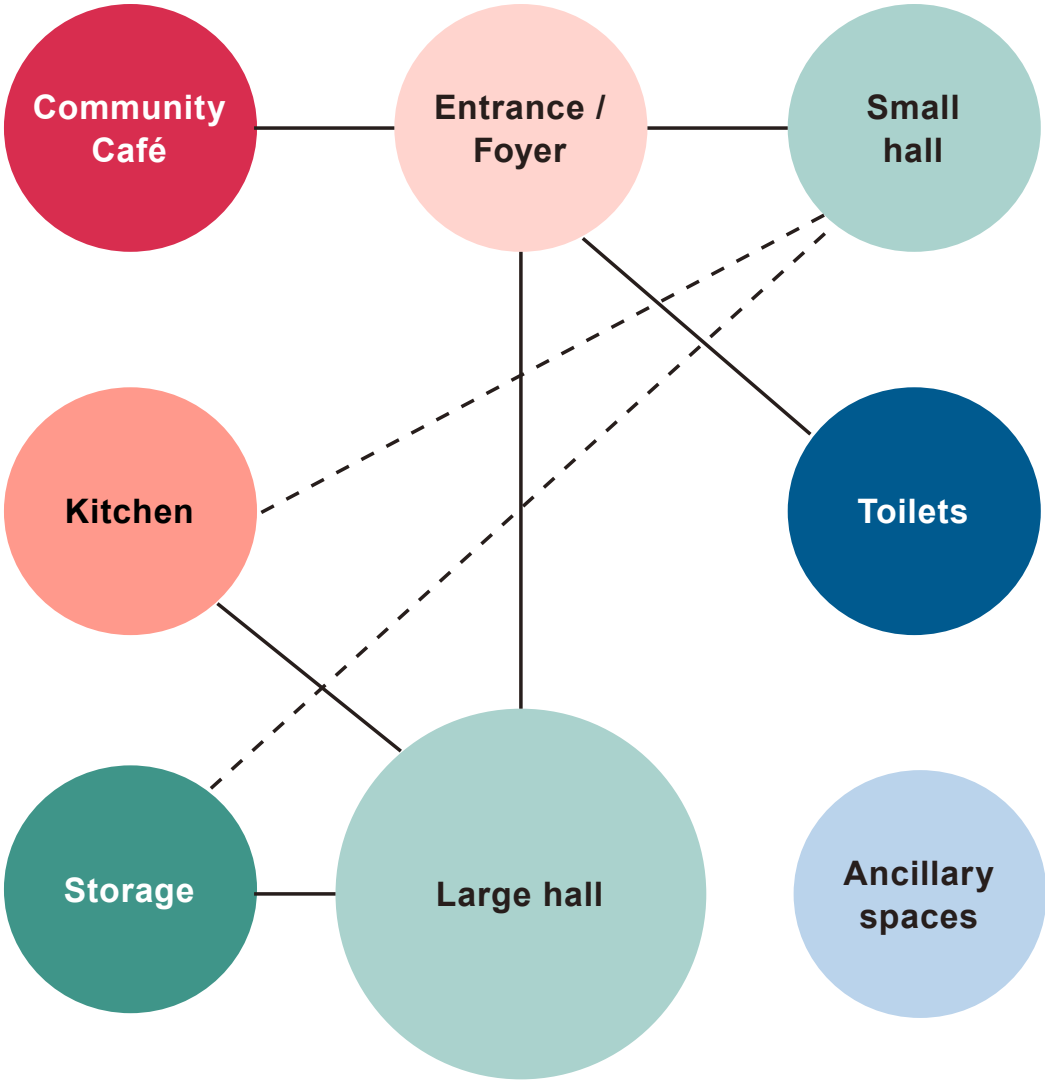
Adjacencies

- The bubble diagram illustrates the recommended connections or adjacencies between the different spaces of a community facility and the

Key

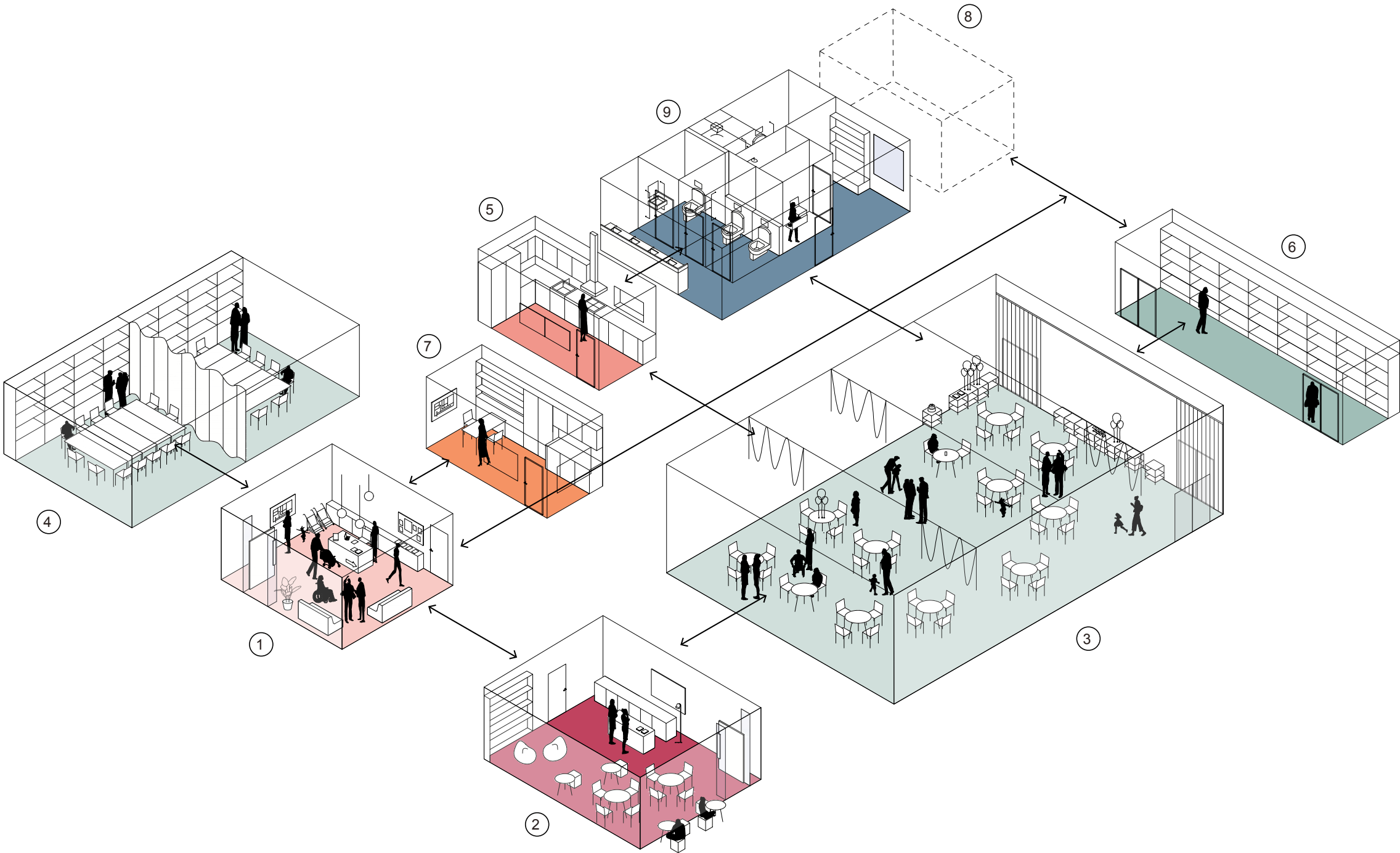
Direct connection preferred

Direct connection may be beneficial but not strictly required



Spatial layout

- Spaces**
- ① Entrance / Foyer
 - ② Community café
 - ③ Multipurpose Hall
 - ④ Secondary hall(s)
 - ⑤ Kitchen
 - ⑥ Storage
 - ⑦ Office for staff
 - ⑧ Ancillary rooms
 - ⑨ Toilet facilities / Changing Places / Baby changing



Sample design pages

1. ENTRANCE / FOYER

A well-designed entrance space—such as a foyer or reception area—serves as a welcoming feature that invites visitors in.

It is recommended that the space contains at a minimum an accessible plan of the venue with information about the different spaces and emergency exits, and a community board to pin up activities and useful information. Consider leaving space for a place to display flyers, information notices and other material for people to pick up.

Additionally, the entrance space can provide: a window looking outside providing views outdoors and natural light (ideally towards the street); a place to store push carts or a buggy parking area; a place to sit; a coat hanger or lockers for visitors that do not obstruct the entrance (potentially located further inside in larger facilities); and a reception desk that is visible as you enter. The front desk for staff is useful to welcome visitors and provide support or guidance with activities and directions (not suitable for small facilities with staff space limitations).

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2. CAFÉ

A café or community café can help activate the entrance of a facility, serving as an informal meeting point, workspace or waiting area. To ensure the space is welcoming and inclusive, it should be affordable and accessible for wheelchair users and provide space for pushchairs. Proximity to restrooms (WCs) further enhances convenience and accessibility.

The café should be visible from the street and connected to an open space. Informal seating with tables, chairs, Wi-Fi access, and power outlets can support those wishing to work or socialise. It should include games, books and other activities to encourage dwell time and remain open for people to use and spend time in freely.

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4. SMALL HALLS/ MEETING ROOMS

Secondary halls can be useful to accommodate activities for smaller groups of people. One-to-one meetings, advice sessions, or meetings can be held at these type of spaces.

Having at least one secondary hall can provide a better flexibility when programming activities in the facility.

Spaces that can be sub-divided into smaller rooms can also be considered. However, it is worth noting that the sound absorption of movable panels or curtains is not as effective as a fixed wall. Therefore, considerations about sound between the spaces should be taken into account when programming.

- Medium to small sized rooms (
- Furniture like folding tables and chairs, are suitable for holding meetings or classes and can be put away for baby and carer activities and small yoga classes.
- Storage capacity for large furniture and props

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5. STORAGE

A generous space to store equipment of all sizes is crucial to support a varied programme. Many of the people that run or organise activities leave equipment in the facility permanently and storage space is therefore the limiting factor for the diversity and range of the programme. Collapsible tables and chairs, badminton nets, yoga or judo mats are typical things that need to be stored in community centres to support the efficient day-to-day use of the space.

Keep in mind that storage space will be used by different people running or participating in the activities. Designers should consider including:

- Large built-in storage that can be adjusted with shelves or vertical dividers
- Doors that can open easily and are wide enough to allow bulky items to be stored
- Adding boxes/ crates with labels can help keep smaller things in order

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6. KITCHEN

A kitchen space should include appliances for people to use when they hire the halls.

This includes:

- A fridge with shelves to store large quantities of food for weddings, birthday parties.
- An oven or microwave to warm up food
- Counter space to prepare food
- Plugs near the counter for small appliances such as a kettle, coffee maker, blender, etc.
- A small pantry with basic items and storage space for plates, cutlery, etc.
- Good mechanical ventilation
- Adequate space for waste and recycling
- Generous storage space

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Publica

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5.2 RENT, COSTS AND SERVICE CHARGES

Where a community facility is provided within a larger building, or where the facility is designed to be let to multiple separate operators (such as separate café and community hall operator), designers should ensure that these spaces are separately metered for utilities to ensure charges can be calculated separately and fairly.

The Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Premises Policy and Procedures (2021) sets out the base rent for buildings and spaces that are included in the Tower Hamlets Community Premises Portfolio. These may include buildings passed to the council through s106 agreements where the primary use of the space is for non-commercial community activities. The standardised ‘community rent’ set by LBTH is currently £14 per year per square foot. Organisations that can prove that they provide a community benefit are eligible for a rent discount of up to 80% on their short term (3-5 year) lease. This excludes daycares and facilities used solely as places of worship as well as occupiers with leases shorter than three years or longer than five or who receive funding to cover their rental costs.

New community facilities in larger developments may be leased directly to operators for a nominal peppercorn rent (usually £1 a year), rather than passed over to the council. When tendering for an operator, the owners of new community facilities should consider ways to remove costs and barriers for community groups and non-profits to take on the management of the facility. This could include removing service charges, supporting with fit-out costs or providing guidance and one-to-one support for meeting health and safety standards or producing a risk assessment.

5.3 OPERATORS AND OCCUPIERS

Owners and operators of new community facilities should consider identifying an anchor tenant or an organisation that will use the space more regularly to manage practical day-to-day considerations such as waste, cleaning and maintenance. Having a lead tenant or single point of contact between the owner/operator and tenants can support tenants to work more closely together and contribute to the successful sharing of the space.

Where the head lease will be taken on by Tower Hamlets consider including one of the council’s directly delivered services, such as adult education or youth services, as a tenant to support with the coordination with LBTH Facilities Management. Existing buildings with this arrangement in the borough tend to be easier to manage than other types of leasing agreements.

Designing or planning for one programme may inadvertently rule out other types of activities in the space. Likewise, some activities may have very specific spatial requirements (such as food programmes requiring refrigeration space for the storage of food or teaching kitchens for cooking classes). It is important to consider what types of occupiers, tenants and uses the facility will host at the planning and design stage. Where a space has been designed with a specific use in mind, the owner of the site should find an appropriate operator with experience of delivering a similar use.

5.4 FOOD STANDARDS

The selling, storage or supplying of food in a community facility will require the facility to be registered with the local authority at least 28 days before operation. The operator of the food business has overall responsibility for ensuring the food served to customers is safe to eat. Small food businesses will need a food hygiene certificate. However, you do not need a food hygiene certificate to make and sell food for charity events in a hall for hire, such as a bake sale.

It is a legal requirement to keep a record of what food products you have bought, who you bought them from, the quantity, the date and allergen information. Usually, the easiest way to do this is to keep all your invoices and receipts.

5.5 ROOMS FOR HIRE

An operator should set out a clear hiring policy for the rooms for hire in the facility. This should include the times at which the hall is available to hire, the costs per hour, any discounts that may apply to charity organisations or local residents and responsibilities for cleaning, health and safety, fire evacuation, food preparation and access to the space after hours.

5.6 HEALTH AND SAFETY

The operator of a community facility is legally required to take reasonable measures to ensure that the space is safe for people using it. They will have health and safety duties, such as conducting weekly fire alarm tests and evidencing compliance with health and safety legislation. Where Tower Hamlets Facilities Management take on the head lease or manage the building, they will organise evacuation plans and drills and ensure appropriate risk assessments and plans are in place. If the operator of the facility employs staff on-site, they will also be subject to additional health and safety legislation, including adopting a formal health and safety policy if five or more people are employed. These policies should be shared with people hiring the facility.

Building operators should keep and maintain an accident log. They are responsible for checking drinking water. Cleaning products and other chemicals should be safely stored away from public access.

5.7 FIRE SAFETY

Community facility operators will be responsible for writing and reviewing a fire risk assessment and ensuring that evacuation routes, exits and fire equipment are marked and maintained. Operators should ensure electric appliances and gas boilers are checked regularly, fire alarms are tested weekly and annual fire drills take place. Employees and hirers of the space should be trained and provided with information about what to do in case of a fire. Evacuation plans should be clearly and prominently displayed.

Discussion

- What challenges do you face in the day-to-day management and running of your premises?
- Are there elements of the design of your building that make it easier for you to operate or provide your services? Alternatively, are there elements of your building that make it more difficult to deliver your programme?
- What are the factors that contribute to the development of successful new community facilities?
- What are the risks when developing a new community facility? How can these risks be mitigated?
- What are the best practices examples of well-designed and managed community facilities?

Thank you