Summary

This report provides Assembly with an update on the Council’s new Community Solutions service. It summarises key changes and achievements since launching in October 2017 and sets out the main priorities for the service in this, and forthcoming years.

Recommendation(s)

The Assembly is recommended to:

(i) Note key progress and achievements of Community Solutions to date; and

(ii) Note the main service priorities for Community Solutions in the current financial year.

Reason(s)

Community Solutions aims to help people to help themselves. The service plays a vital role in bringing the borough vision of no one left behind to life. It directly contributes to the council’s four priorities of “Encouraging civic pride”, “Enabling social responsibility”, “Growing Together” and “Well run organisation”.

1. Introduction and Background

1.1 Community Solutions has been designed to tackle root causes of individuals’, family or households’ problems and to help people to help themselves. The service plays a vital role in bringing the borough vision of no one left behind to life. It comprises of multi-disciplinary and multi-agency teams that collaborate closely with partners in the voluntary and statutory sectors to deliver early intervention and preventative support for our residents. Community Solutions helps tackle the wicked and
complex challenges facing the borough, such as our high rates of domestic violence, homelessness and unemployment.

1.2 The new service, launched in October 2017 after a period of Council wide co-design, is at the forefront of council activity to enable and deliver social responsibility - evidence of our new approach to work differently with residents and empowering them to change their lives. The service acts as the front door for all people-based services, identifying the root cause of a person’s or family’s problems and helping to resolve those problems before they escalate.

1.3 Since its launch in October 2017, a permanent Director has been appointed in Mark Fowler, and a service wide restructure has been completed to reflect the new Target Operating Model from April 2018.

1.4 Community Solutions aims to:

- **Foster resilience and independence**: a new relationship with residents based upon helping them to help themselves
- **Resolve early**: targeted support to address the root cause of issues early and prevent expensive intervention
- **Reduce demand**: realising savings through reduction in need for more costly and intensive interventions
- **Generate savings**: £5m predicted savings by 2020/21

2. **Context – why Community Solutions**

2.1 Community Solutions was designed and created to tackle the combination of social and financial challenges facing the council. Data about our population showed that socio-economic and health and wellbeing outcomes are behind London and UK averages. When we compare outcomes for our population against those of other London Boroughs, we mostly sit at the bottom of the league tables.
2.2 This is unacceptable. Current services were not designed to address these challenges. As part of the council’s overall programme of transformation and change, Community Solutions was borne of a radical reimagining of what services needed to look like to better support residents.

2.3 At the heart of our new approach is a shift from a paternalistic emphasis on ‘meeting needs’, to a single service that is designed from first principles to support individuals, families and communities grow their own capabilities: to learn, to work, to live healthily and to connect to one another. Our principles, summarised below, continue to inform all we do.

2.4 Further factors driving the creation of Community Solutions included:

- Services were previously characterised by a high dependence on the council and a limited and fragmented approach to prevention. This meant increasing demand pressures on more specialist and acute services, such as social care and housing.
- A culture of silo working prevailed. Services were too often provided in isolation meaning opportunities to address the wider challenges in people’s lives were missed.

- The availability of data and insight about service demand – how and why residents required support was limited. As a result, services were unable to accurately model how best to deploy resources now and in the future. The ability to bring key data and information about people together to provide staff with a ‘single view’ was also limited and impacting the ability of staff to respond early and appropriately.

- As a new kind of council, our intention is to be bold, risk based, forward thinking, responsive, and informed by data. We want to understand what lies behind demand for our most expensive services so that we can better anticipate the needs of those individuals and families who are most at risk. In doing so, we can better support them at an early stage so that they overcome or avoid issues that might otherwise tip them into crisis and dependency. Working in this way, we want to protect services that safeguard and support the most vulnerable.

- Services were provided through 15+ locations in the borough. This meant the design and utilisation of buildings was not being maximised to provide residents with a universal information, advice and signposting offer.

- Existing service models were not set up to respond innovatively to key agenda’s, such as the provision of employment and skills in the borough, the Homelessness Reduction Act nor to opportunities such as the opening of a dedicated Youth Zone. These required strategic review to shape future strategy.

3. **Key changes**

3.1 Community Solutions launched as a new service in October 2017. It brought together teams and functions from across the council, creating a single service structure. The diagram below summarises the service functions and scope of the new service.

### Services / Functions
- Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MAfSH)
- Adult Social Care – Initial Contact Team
- Children’s Early Help & Troubled Families
- Children’s Centres, Youth Services & Centre’s
- Libraries
- Community Safety & ASB
- No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF)
- Housing Options & Choices
- Homelessness & Temporary Accommodation
- Employment, Skills & Jobs
- Healthy Lifestyles / Public Health
- Welfare Reform
- Adult College
- Relationships with other services, key partners, VCS

### Priority themes
- Preventing homelessness
- Promoting economic well-being
- Building resilience & independence
- Maintaining good health & well-being
- Keeping families together
- Creating safe communities
3.2 In effect, we’ve moved all customer facing services into the service - including Children’s Centres, the Adult College, Libraries, Housing Advice, Homelessness Prevention, supporting for people with No Resource to Public Funds or safeguarding concerns, Youth provision, targeted Early Intervention, Hostels to name but a few.

3.3 Key features underpinning the service are:

- Acts as the front door for all people-based services
- Everything currently considered ‘targeted’ across the Council’s teams will be brought together. These include the following types of need – worklessness, adult skills, deprivation, debt and money problems, (low level) mental health issues, anti-social behaviour, domestic violence, homelessness and family support
- Structured to encourage self-help and where necessary provide residents with the most appropriate support based upon their circumstance
- Focus on supporting residents to become more self-sufficient and resilient
- Tackle the multiple needs of households holistically and at an earlier stage, building upon the success of the existing Troubled Families initiative
- Comprise multi-disciplinary and multi-agency teams that will collaborate closely with the voluntary and community sector and other strategic partners to deliver early intervention and preventative support

3.4 A widespread restructure of the entire service and workforce has been undertaken with a focus on increases front line delivery to residents and less management layers. As a result, ComSol has saved £1.6m through the restructure and increased front line officers by 60 FTE (58% increase).

Community Solutions structure
4. Achievements so far

4.1 Key achievements to date are summarised in the sections that follow. These present only a snapshot among many highlights.

4.2 Homelessness Reduction Act (HRA) and Universal Credit - successful preparation, launch and ongoing provision of support to residents to meet the demands of new legislation from March/April 2018. We ensured a smooth implementation with no decline in service quality or availability against a challenging backdrop of whole service restructuring, implementing a new IT system and the expected rise in applications for housing driven by the HRA. The customer experience for people presenting at John Smith House is also improving and we are dealing with more issues at the earliest contact. The conversation with customers moving from ‘are you eligible’ to ‘how can we assist you’, which is a cultural shift for both customers and staff. Resources are accordingly more focused on delivering outcomes, increasing independence and individual resilience, rather than (as formerly) evaluating applications for assistance

Early trends show:

- There have been no significant increases in footfall or homeless applications;

- We are seeing 30% of our customers pre-56 days, when they are not ‘threatened with homelessness’ but still have a housing need. This enables us to undertake significantly more prevention work which is positive;

- Only approximately 1 in 7 of our interactions are progressing to a homeless application, pre-HRA this was around 50%;

- There is significantly more work required at the ‘prevention’ stage- the average assessment is now 2 hours from 1 hour.

This is having an impact on key measures of success including:

- **Households in temporary accommodation** – we are placing fewer people in temporary accommodation as a result of our stronger and earlier prevention activity. In 2017/18, there were 406 (average of 34 a month) new placements in Temporary Accommodation. This was substantially fewer than in 2016/17 (530) and 2015/16 (902).

- Current average per month for the 2018/19 first quarter is 12 per month so on track for future reductions. This is despite the rising numbers of homelessness applications - The figure at the end of the last financial year was 1082 (average of 90 per month). Current trends show an increase in applications (average of 159 per month).
There has been a significant decrease in the total number of TA, from 1812 in July down to 1783 in August. This is as a result of efforts across the year to move people either into more suitable accommodation or to exit coming together so we are able to discharge properties back to landlords.

**Case J**

**Presenting issue:**
- Rough sleeper set up camp at Chase Farm. Tent, generator, cooker and horse. Reluctant to engage and unwilling to give up horse. Did not want to go to a hostel due to fear of drink and drugs and potential for influence.

**Action taken:**
- Broad approach to exploring prevention options with J. YMCA considered. J previously left with arrears some years ago. Situation with horse discussed and negotiation on selling the horse and equipment. Negotiated with YMCA to take another application.
- Before ComSol, advice on private sector accommodation would have been given and J treated as non-priority.

**Outcomes:**
- J moved in to YMCA. Arrears of £200 paid. Solution with regards to horse.

4.3 **Homes and Money Hub (HAM Hub)** – launched a partnership team that brings together expertise across ComSol, Job Centre Plus, Elevate, CAB, DABD, Barking and Dagenham College to better support residents in a range of priority areas through:
Sustaining and securing tenancies by making people as financial independent as possible

Reducing residents’ debts and giving them the support and skills to manage their finances

Creating greater opportunities for our residents so they may realise their potential

Supporting and helping our most vulnerable residents giving them the security and confidence to improve their lives

Council Tax discount applied
Eviction stopped
Payment arrangement set up
Reduction in arrears Council Tax
Reduction in arrears Rent
Reduction in arrears other DHP Implemented
Budgeting plan set up
Baliff cost cleared

Outcomes Met- 10 April 2018- 30 May 2018

The Hub is already enabling strong performance in job outcomes. The combined target for job outcomes this year is 500 and we have achieved 160 in the first quarter - therefore overall we are on track to achieve the year-end target.

4.4 Work and Skills function – following a strategic review of the inherited employment and skills and Adult College functions, we are proposing creation of a new integrated Work & Skills Service. This will accelerate Community Solutions ability to deliver on two key agendas; enabling residents to improve their employability through the acquisition of the skills and qualifications that employers want and building the resilience of residents through improved wellbeing.

4.5 Children’s and Adult’s Care and Support – In co located a number of key teams under the new Triage lifecycle, working relationships and operational processes have been improved, which means Council departments, partner agencies and most
importantly, residents, are receiving a more efficient service where they are concerns about the safety of a child, young person of vulnerable adult.

This is having an impact on key measures of success including:

- **Number of contacts referred to Children's Care and Support** – in the year to date, we are successfully referring fewer contacts to children’s care and support. This is a result of our strong focus on accurate, timely and in-depth screening of contacts in Triage (MASH) and early signs of our work with referring partners to prevent contacts in the first place. Year to date performance for children's contacts escalated to Care & Support (Section 47 of the Children's Act 1989 / Assessment) is 24.1%.

  The target for last year was 30% (or below), this year it is 25% (or below). Work is ongoing to strengthen the early help offer to ensure that more children can be deflected away from acute services in an earlier and in a safe manner.

- **Proportion of adult assessments leading to a service** – performance in the year to date is currently at 70% which is below the target of 83%. This target assumes that ComSol is working with all or most adults before they receive a full Adult Social Care assessment. This is not yet the case. ComSol and Adult Services are working on improving the front door triage and throughput through Integrated Care.

  Work has started to also include the large group of referrals relating to Hospital discharges. In the meantime, all services are working with residents to prevent, reduce and delay need for care. As with children, the early trend is providing positive signs that we aim to build on.

4.6 **Dagenham One Stop Shop** – successfully transitioned the running of these services in Community Solutions from March 2018. While a majority of services are delivered online, there has been the introduction of self-scanning facility through the document scan station. This enables residents to scan through evidence in relation to housing, council tax benefit and other claims.

4.7 **Volunteering** – It’s well documented that volunteering has a positive impact on local communities, boosting social skills, networking and sense of purpose. There has been an 80% increase in volunteering in the past year, from 259 to 457, coordinated through Community Solutions Universal lifecycle. 7 of those volunteers have found employment as a result of the experience and skills gained. This is a key area in supporting Barking and Dagenham residents to development their self-confidence, work readiness and overall wellbeing.
4.8 We have also received numerous endorsements on a national level. Examples include:

- **Workforce transformation** – nominated and finalist for the workforce transformation MJ 201 Awards.
- **DCLG recognition** – endorsed by Richard Williams, DCLG who commented:
  
  “When we visited Barking & Dagenham, in relation to their readiness for the homelessness reduction act, you could see this was an organisation looking at whole system change, with strategies that underpinned choice and options”

- **Troubled Families Earned Autonomy** – one of only two London boroughs and 11 nationally to have its bid for autonomy endorsed and approved by DCLG. This has provided financial flexibility for the service and enabled early draw down on funding to support our objectives – evidence of DCLG confidence in our service model and the early signs of positive impact.

- **External funding** – in addition to troubled families, we have secured several external funding bids across areas including employment and skills and housing

4.9 The service has also focused on consolidating the service design to provide a robust foundation on which to build and continue to evolve the service. This includes:

- **Service restructuring** – completion of a whole service restructure - included 350+ staff, the introduction of new streamlined management tiers and new job descriptions and roles for all staff.
- **Workforce development and training** – a wide range of training and staff development activities undertaken across the year to help staff transition into and thrive in the new service model, minimising risk to service disruption through such a complex and large-scale change programme. Externally recognised through nomination for the MJ workforce transformation award.

- **Use of data** – as a service we want to be known and recognised for doing things that are based on evidence. We want to understand how and why demand comes through our services and understand what factors lie behind our most costly services. By doing this we can better anticipate and respond to future needs, thereby ensuring that scarce resources are best used to support individuals and families at an early stage. In doing so, we can better support them at an early stage so that they overcome or avoid issues that might otherwise tip them into crisis and dependency. Working in this way, we want to protect services that safeguard and support the most vulnerable.

- **Savings** – against the £5m target we have achieved £2.98 up to the end of 2018/19, whilst we remain on track for the overall by the end of 2021.

5. **Priorities for the current year and beyond**

5.1 Our main service priorities for the current financial year are summarised below:

- **Culture change** – maintain our focus on embedding great behaviours and new ways of working;

- **New locality offer** – completing our review of assets and establishing a new locality service offer that is matched to local needs and circumstances;

- **Future service models** – complete our review of the employment and skills and adult college functions and set out a new long-term vision and provision for employment, skills, learning and job support;

- **Prevention through partnership** – expand our service reach and offer through collaboration with partners and by seeking new partnership arrangements with community and voluntary organisations to enhance our universal services;

- **Demand management** – continue to invest in building data models and using insights that help us better understand current, and predict future demand, across priority functions including adult and children social care and housing / homelessness – enabling us to ensure resource is deployed in the right place at the right time;

- **Digital enablers** – collaborate with cross-cutting programme to deliver digital solutions and realise benefits. This will build on current work to update the council website and introduce new information and advice content;

- **Savings** – deliver on our savings commitments;
• **Evaluation** – demonstrate the impact and positive difference the service is making to people’s lives and ensure resident feedback is used to inform continuous improvement.

6. **Consultation**

6.1 The progress updates set out in this report have been presented to relevant internal Boards through the year. Key proposals relating to service reviews, savings initiatives and restructuring have been considered by and endorsed by meetings of the Community Solutions Strategy Board. Additionally, regular programme reports, summarising progress have been presented to and considered by Corporate Strategy Group.

7. **Financial Implications**

Implications completed by: Olufunke Adediran, Group Accountant

7.1 This report gives an update on the council’s new Community Solutions service which was set up in October 2017 partly to contribute towards the Council’s overall estimated funding gap at the time of £70m by 2020/21. The service is working towards achieving its overall savings target of £5m.

7.2 There are no direct financial implications arising because of this report, but the service would need to ensure that it contains its spend within its available budget allocation year on year.

8. **Legal Implications**

Implications completed by: Dr. Paul Feild Senior Governance Solicitor

8.1 The Target Operating Model of Community Solutions incorporates the well-established understanding that people in need of Council Services are likely to be in need of more than one form of support and assistance. This requires a well-designed and effective means of assessment hence the use of the MASH. The services while accessible through the one door approach will have their own legal and organisational criteria and defined thresholds for intervention. Getting the triage assessment right is critical to preventing cycles of decline and reversing the process so that people become empowered and independent and it also reduces the risk of legal challenge.

8.2 The performance regime established by the Local Government Act 1999 as amended by the Local Audit and Accountability Act 2014 together with supporting legislation, requires the Council to work to achieve continuous improvement and best value. This means that going forward Community Solutions will be a dynamic service constantly reviewing its corporate plan, its objectives and over time how the delivery measures up in terms of outcomes of which this report to the Assembly plays its part.
9. **Other Implications**

9.1 **Risk Management** – There are no specific risk management implications associated with this report. Risks are managed as part of operational business and service delivery.

9.2 **Contractual Issues** – There are no contractual issues associated with this report. Any contractual issues relating to delivering activities to meet the service priorities will be identified and dealt with through operational business and service delivery.

9.3 **Staffing Issues** – There are no specific staffing implications associated with this report.

9.4 **Corporate Policy and Equality Impact** – Community Solutions directly contributes to the council’s four main priorities and is at the forefront of the council’s work to ensure no one is left behind. There are no specific equality impact issues to consider as a result of this report. Working towards delivery of the vision and priorities will help tackle inequality. A key part of this is ensuring growth is inclusive and that no-one is left behind. Developing a new locality offer will help strengthen access to services and support – ensuring that support is available where most needed to meet demand.

9.5 **Safeguarding Adults and Children** - Community Solutions contributes to ensuring the safeguarding, protection and well-being of vulnerable children and adults in the community. The service provides a wide range of activities and support aimed at tackling issues early and resolving challenges before they escalate. This includes early help for both children, families and adults. The service monitors a range of indicators which relate to children and adults to ensure support is provided early and proportionately and in a means that ensures the council effectively discharges its safeguarding duties.

9.6 **Health Issues** - Community Solutions delivers a range of support and activities that contribute to the council’s enabling social responsibility priority. These include activities to support prevention and resolution of health issues, promotion of healthy lifestyles and general well-being and information, advice and guidance to assist residents. Together with other services and partner agencies, the service is committed to tackling health inequalities to help improve health outcomes in areas such as smoking.

9.7 **Crime and Disorder Issues** – Community Solutions provides activities and support that help to tackle crime and disorder and anti-social behaviour issues. This links to the council’s civic pride priority. The service delivers these alongside partners through the Community Safety Partnership.

9.8 **Property / Asset Issues** – There are no specific implications relating to property / assets in this report. The service aims to make the best use of the assets / property it uses to provide the best possible outcomes and support for residents.

**Public Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report:** None

**List of appendices:** None