



Review on the Potential Impact of the Recession and Welfare Reforms on Mental Health

Health and Adult Services Select Committee

Final Report of the HASSC as agreed
on 5th February 2013

Executive Summary

The scrutiny process for the review took place between June 2013 and November 2013, with Members drawing information from a wide range of sources to gain an in-depth understanding of how mental health, voluntary and statutory services work to support local residents who are impacted by the recession and welfare reforms.

The Council has historically found that the tipping point that has led families, vulnerable adults and older people to need input from Council-funded social care services is often the result of a number of factors and life events that combine to reduce people's overall resilience. It was therefore hypothesised that the impact of the recession and welfare reforms may lead to a similar reduction in resilience, resulting in negative emotional and mental wellbeing being exhibited.

It was decided that the review would seek to answer the following three key questions:

1. How is economic austerity and the Welfare Reforms impacting on our citizens?
2. Will the austerity measures, reduction in income levels and/or poverty lead to more mental ill health?
3. What can we do/are we doing to mitigate the likely impact?

The following key findings were found as a result of the review. The findings should be read in conjunction with the recommendations on the following page which have been put forward for further exploration and action by the Select Committee as a result of their investigations.

How is economic austerity and the Welfare Reforms impacting on our citizens?

As the reforms are yet to be fully implemented the likely impact remains difficult to assess at this point in time and would benefit from further analysis in the future to fully determine the scale of impact. However from undertaking this review there is sufficient evidence to support that increased numbers are experiencing homelessness and presenting to the Council for support with Housing need. In addition large numbers are experiencing debt through rent and council tax arrears. Overall numbers of residents experiencing financial hardship continue to increase with a high number of applications for funds to cover basic needs such as food, electricity and gas.

There is also evidence to support that levels of mental health needs in the Borough are increasing. The review has found that increased numbers of people have been presenting with mental health needs since 2008 in GP practices. However it must be noted that causal factors are difficult to evidence.

The evidence collated within this review would reflect that early indications show that residents are experiencing financial hardship and many are also experiencing increased levels of anxiety and or depression with increased numbers presenting to GPs and other health colleagues.

Will the austerity measures, reduction in income levels and/or poverty lead to more mental ill health?

From the findings presented within the report it would suggest that potentially residents who have been directly impacted by the reforms are experiencing financial hardship due to the cuts and are therefore more likely to experience some level of anxiety and depression.

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Early indications show that increased numbers of residents are presenting to mental health services and GP surgeries with depression. However it must be noted that it is much more difficult to quantify if this will translate into a diagnosed mental health condition, as this would be dependent on other variables such as the individual's resilience factors and how services were able to intervene at an early stage to prevent crisis.

What can we do/are we doing to mitigate the likely impact?

Locally there is a vast amount of work being undertaken from a proactive perspective. There has been a significant amount of assertive outreach work by the Council and its Partners to engage those who the Council has identified will be impacted by the welfare reforms and cuts in benefits and to work with them to establish solutions, e.g. gaining employment, moving home and downsizing.

There are already a number of services in place that offer information, advice and advocacy to help inform residents of their options and provide guidance around financial hardship and benefits advice, including practical support in the shape of the Barking and Dagenham Credit Union and Local Emergency Support Service.

North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT) also has clear pathways in place for those experiencing mental health problems and clinical support is available to support professionals in NELFT, as well as GPs, with the implementation of the Primary Care Depression Pathway. However, there are concerns that this pathway is overly-reliant on the prescribing of antidepressants and that more focus needs to be given to holistic treatment options.

There remain areas that can be further developed to prevent crisis or trigger additional mental health needs. The areas in which most impact can be

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achieved is a comprehensive approach in the sharing and dissemination of information, training for front line staff and ongoing analyses of information to inform ongoing plans to mitigate the further expected impact of the reforms. This scrutiny review has been timely and has been conducted at the same time as a great deal of media coverage, debate and discussion at a national and London-level. In particular, the Greater London Authority have conducted research into mental health in London and published a report in January 2014. Although the report was published at the end of the Barking and Dagenham scrutiny process, it gives a helpful context to the HASSC's own review, discussing prevalence levels, mental health inequalities and the socio-economic impact of mental health issues in London. The report can be found by visiting this link:

<https://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/FINAL%20-%20LMH%20-Full%20Report.pdf>

Recommendations

Following the scrutiny review, the Health and Adult Services Select Committee have put forward the following recommendations for further exploration and action:

1. Access to Information and Support

It is identified clearly within the report that receiving advice early is a key determinant in enabling residents to minimise the impact of welfare reforms and prevent financial hardship which could lead to detrimental effects on general health and mental wellbeing. It is evident that generally people suffer greater anxiety during times of financial difficulty, therefore early intervention and prevention is essential to residents in preventing crisis.

Information about services offering welfare benefits advice and advocacy should be readily and widely available to three key groups to ensure that residents can access services, support pathways and practical advice when they need it most. Information and advice should also be available to help reduce the stigma of mental health. The three key groups identified are:

- Residents
- Practitioners
- Those already known to mental health services

The importance of up-to-date, easy to understand and timely information and advice was raised on a number of occasions during the review. It is therefore recommended that a mapping and consultation exercise on access to information, advice and support is carried out by the Health and

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Wellbeing Board. This exercise would be beneficial in order to ascertain whether there are any gaps in information provision and to establish whether the information formats that are currently available are the right ones.

2. Training and Volunteering

During the review process it was reiterated on many occasions that volunteering played a valuable role in mental health and wellbeing and also provides opportunities to prevent isolation, gain necessary skills and experience, and increases local social capital. It is therefore recommended that the Health and Wellbeing Board:

Recognises the importance of volunteering in maintaining recovery and mental health and wellbeing, using all the opportunities provided by the Council's volunteering programmes and the Third Sector.

See Recommendation 7 below on Mental Health First Aid training.

3. Peer Support Opportunities

It is recommended that the Council and the Health and Wellbeing Board continues to monitor user-led organisations to ensure that robust peer support opportunities continue to be provided to prevent isolation, provide emotional support and aid access to information and advice services as required.

4. Joint Working and Partnerships

The Select Committee considered the appointment of an Elected Member Champion around mental health and recommends that the Cabinet Member for Health considers the appointment of a Mental Health Champion on a fixed term basis on a specific issue, for example reducing

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the stigma of mental health. It is accepted that this would not be taken forward until after the elections in May 2014.

The Select Committee felt strongly that a holistic approach needed to be considered in the treatment options available to patients, particularly as the Select Committee felt that there was an over-reliance on antidepressants as a treatment option in the Primary Care Depression pathway. The Health and Wellbeing Board should give this consideration, as a result of which the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) could be tasked to provide evidence of effectiveness on the implementation of the Primary Care Depression pathway and explore inclusion of alternative therapies, particularly talking therapies, within the pathway. As part of this work, the Select Committee would like to see the CCG undertake a review to determine whether the prescribing of antidepressants is in line with the practice in other areas.

The Select Committee was very positive about the availability of emotional health support for employees in Barking and Dagenham Council. It is recommended that the Council draw on this good practice to support local small employers to provide similar support to their employees.

5. Continued Measure of Need

The Select Committee is aware that within the Council, a Welfare Reform Officer Group is coordinating the response to the austerity and the welfare reforms for Barking and Dagenham residents. The Select Committee supports their ongoing work to bring together data sources that describe the scale of the problem and wish to see this brought to Members at regular intervals. This is particularly important as this review

has been taken at the early stages of welfare reform implementation and so significant further impacts are to be expected.

6. Continued monitoring of Local Services

Commissioning Officers within the Council to continue to ensure that services that are commissioned by the Council continue to remain fit for purpose and meet the needs of residents in the Borough. These services include:

1. Enhanced Welfare Rights
2. Specialist Advocacy
3. Local Emergency Support services
4. Credit Union

7. Mental Health First Aid Training

It is recommended that the Council and the Health and Wellbeing Board offer Mental Health First Aid to professionals across the partnership, as well as other local employers. It is suggested that the Health and Wellbeing Board may wish to look at whether the training that is offered to professionals across partnership organisations is sufficient and offer additional mental health awareness training if appropriate.