Update on Pilot Projects to Build Resilience April 2016

Report of the Lead Divisional Director, Adult and Community Services

Open Report

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Summary:

At the Health and Adult Services Select Committee (HASSC) meeting in November 2015 a report was presented providing an update on the two pilot projects which had arisen as a result of a review/cessation of the Local Emergency Support Service. The pilots were designed to run from November 2015 to May 2016, and are as follows:

- The Debt Counselling and Mentoring Service, which would provide 50 residents with debt management support and 25 people (who were 18 - 35 years old, non-priority homeless with additional needs) with intensive debt management, counselling and mentoring; and,
- A Fuel Poverty Service, which would impact around 700 homes in the Ibscott Close neighbourhood which has a high prevalence of fuel poverty.

The HASSC requested an update for the April 2016 meeting. The update is that:

1. The research partner is Care City/UCL Partners.
2. The fuel poverty project has formally launched in the Ibscott Close neighbourhood and assessments are underway.
3. The outcomes framework for the debt counselling and mentoring service has been agreed and work has begun with the two cohorts.

As these are research initiatives some challenges have been encountered around setting out the outcomes frameworks and referral processes which has led to slight slippage on the timelines, but both projects are on track to deliver by the end of August and the final evaluation will be available in October. The evaluation will feed into the models of working that are being explored across the Council and its partners and can be used to inform external funding bids.

Recommendation(s)

The HASSC is recommended to review this report and comment on the current progress in developing the two pilot projects which have now started.
Reason(s)

The new approach to welfare reform, which these pilot projects are designed to test, aim to better deliver the Council’s vision of enabling social responsibility by “supporting residents to take responsibility for themselves, their homes and their community”.

1. Introduction and Background

1.1 On 4 November 2015 the HASSC received a report on the two pilot projects that had been commissioned in October 2015 and asked for a further update on the projects in April 2016.

1.2 The budget remaining from the additional revenue support grant has enabled the commissioning of the two pilot projects to build resilience in vulnerable groups. The first is a Fuel Poverty Service pilot valued at £60,000 and a Debt Counselling and Mentoring Service pilot valued at £70,000.

1.3 Alongside this, a research project has been commissioned for £20,000 to work with the funded providers on the impact of the proposed interventions and learning from the investment that will inform the ongoing work of the Strategic Welfare Reform Group. This will inform our understanding of developing resilience for vulnerable people.

2. Information on the Projects

2.1 As noted at the HASSC meeting in November 2015 the projects were awarded to:
   i) Fuel Poverty Project: Sustainable Housing Survey Company
   ii) Debt and Mentoring Project: Barking and Dagenham Citizen’s Advice Bureau.

2.2 Alongside the projects the evaluation that has been commissioned is being led by Care City/UCL Partners and considerable work has been put into ensuring the evaluation is robust and effective.

Fuel Poverty Pilot Project

2.3 The Sustainable Home Survey Company will partner with Income Max as the advice provider working with individuals.

2.4 The ‘Fuel Poverty’ pilot project is supporting Barking and Dagenham’s wider strategic aims to tackle financial hardship. Fuel poverty is a clear contributory factor in health issues such as excess winter deaths, respiratory diseases, falls, mental health and, educational problems. The service is working in the Ibscott Close neighbourhood which is mixed tenure and has high levels of fuel poverty. It is providing a range of practical support to the residents - seeking to reduce fuel bills, manage fuel debt and build community resilience. The initiative is addressing benefits take-up, low level property insulation, fuel switch support and practical tips on keeping warm.

2.5 The project will also seek to explore whether physical/capital installations are sufficient to lift residents out of fuel poverty. Wider support will be given in the form
of income maximisation through benefit checks, encouraging behaviour change, community development and building social networks. The project seeks to:

- Target households in a supra output area in the borough with a higher level of fuel poverty. The target areas will be an area specified as the neighbourhood of Ibscott Close in Village Ward;
- Assist residents most likely to be in fuel poverty and most vulnerable to the negative health impacts of living in a cold home regardless of housing tenure or other characteristics;
- Maximise income in the targeted households;
- Improve the health and wellbeing of residents;
- Reduce household fuel bills in the area via fuel switching and tips to reduce consumption;
- Reduce fuel debt in the area;
- Increase neighbourhood support networks developed in the area and strengthen and development communities;
- Use networks to encourage community resilience and behaviour change to ensure further households don’t fall into fuel poverty in future; and
- Work in tandem with phased insulation work being taken forward by LBBD Housing.

2.6 A full and robust Outcomes Framework has been formulated for the Fuel Poverty Service. There are a full set of key performance indicators for the project on all aspects of the service specification. In addition to this it has been agreed that there will be aspirational goals for the project – especially in the key areas of the project which are the setting up of community and peer support networks and intensive interventions on income maximisation and fuel usage for those suffering acute fuel poverty.

Progress, challenges, and time-line for completion of project and progress

2.7 After negotiation on the timeline and significant work on the project outcomes framework, the Fuel Poverty project started in January 2016. The majority of the delivery of the project will finish before the end of May, but there are some interventions that will continue until the end of June. These deliverables are mainly actions to fully embed some of the peer support and community engagement components of the project.

2.8 On 11 February there was a successful “Village Energy Neighbours” launch event designed to highlight the peer support and community development aspect of the project, and to outline the planned interventions in the area of circa 750 homes in the Ibscott Close neighbourhood.

2.9 Sustainable Housing are currently in the process of assessing the 750 households in the Village Ward/Ibscott Close area, providing tailored energy-saving advice and assistance, assessment of home energy efficiency and additional assistance on income maximisation and tariff switching if required.

2.10 Sustainable Home Survey Company (SHSC) has previously worked with LBBD Housing Strategy and Affordable Homes to deliver a programme in December 2014 to 149 homes to establish levels of fuel poverty and resident wellbeing in housing that had been identified as having poor insulation. SHSC have agreed, as part of this latest Fuel Poverty project, to re-visit 10-15 households that were part of the
previous programme. The assessments from households will be re-visited and these residents will be scrutinised to check changes in the level/depth of fuel poverty and perceptions of health and ability since the earlier interventions. This will contribute greatly to the research and evaluation of the pilot.

Related Fuel Poverty Programme

2.11 The Council, through the Housing Strategy in Growth and Homes Division, has also commissioned Sustainable Housing Survey Company to carry out a second phase of fuel poverty assessments in the borough. This is to take place between February and May 2016 in 300 properties over six wards, mainly in the Chadwell Heath area. These assessments will be less intensive than the ones in Ibscott Close area concentrating on referrals to collective fuel switching schemes run by the Council or partners for lower energy bills and energy saving tips and advice on heating controls and ventilation.

Debt Counselling and Mentoring Service: Barking and Dagenham Citizen’s Advice Bureau.

2.12 This service has two strands:

- To work with a cohort of 50 vulnerable residents offering practical welfare advice, debt counselling and seeking to empower people to help themselves with regard to financial management and changes in behaviour.
- To work with a cohort of ‘young (18 - 35) single non-priority homeless’ people through an intensive scheme offering mentoring alongside debt management and counselling. The scheme will include developing a relational point of contact for the individual, providing advice, practical support and guidance to alleviate their current concerns, and empower them to change their circumstances.

2.13 The Debt Counselling and Mentoring Service is seeking to incorporate a persistent and proactive approach which emphasises the building of resilience, self-reliance and the changing of behaviours. This is being assimilated into all the interventions. The model has proved highly effective in tackling anti-social behaviour and providing early intervention for those families with multiple problems in the community and it is being replicated for vulnerable individuals.

2.14 The outcomes for the pilot are as follows:

- Help individuals restore control over their personal finances, achieve orderly repayment of debts, thus enhance their quality of life;
- Help prevent financial and social exclusion in the community, resulting from prohibitive levels of personal debt;
- Help prevent or reduce poor health brought about by debt (for example by advising on shopping techniques and nutrition);
- Help prevent or reduce the social, housing and employment-related consequences of debt by means of effective debt reduction/rescheduling strategies;
- Achieve positive long term outcomes by equipping people with the skills needed to manage their challenges and personal finances without incurring further debt;
- Help people to access resilience within themselves through mentoring;
• Enable access to education and employment and suitable and stable accommodation;
• Help vulnerable people build peer groups and social networks and for the mentored to become mentors, and
• Make informed decisions about life choices.

Progress and challenges for the completion of the Debt Management Project

2.15 From November 2015 work began on developing both a full and robust outcomes framework and identifying the cohorts of clients. As this is a research pilot it is recognised that development of the outcomes and the identification of the cohorts would not be straightforward.

2.16 The framework has been developed to include indicators on interventions relating all aspects of debt management including directly tackling indebtedness and building financial capability. In addition it considers interventions designed to assist the cohorts’ education, training and employment, and housing needs. Motivational training and support with mental health issues is also being included to increase self-confidence and resilience.

2.17 There have been a number of challenges in identifying the metrics for the cohorts for the Debt Management and Mentoring Scheme. Self recognition around debt is a challenge which although anticipated, was not built into the timeline of the project. The number of people identified for the intensive ‘18 - 35 at risk of homelessness’ cohort was stated within the service specification as being 25. In the period between November 2015 and February 2016 there has been a significant amount of work to gather 25 people who fit the criteria. Initial triage work carried out has been positive and 12 of the 25 have now expressed a wish to be moved to the less intensive Debt Management Service project.

2.18 Early indications did not anticipate this positive movement across the cohorts and there has now been a need to replace those who were initially identified for the 18 - 35 year old intensive Mentoring Scheme. The provider is now approaching the requisite numbers to commence the programme for both cohorts within the project. 18 people have now been triaged for the intensive Mentoring Scheme and similar triaging work has been undertaken for the 50 general Debt Management Scheme. The changes within the cohort (albeit positive) have created slippage on the timeline for the project, and the pilot is now scheduled to be completed by the end of August. The slippage will still enable the final research findings to feed into the proposals for new ways of working that are currently being explored across the Council and its partners.

3. Evaluation Partner for the Pilot Programmes

3.1 Care City has been commissioned in conjunction with UCL Partners, to be the research and evaluation partners for both pilots for vulnerable adults. UCL Partners is an academic health science partnership seeking to improve health outcomes and create social wealth both locally through Care City and across North East London and adjoining counties.

3.2 Care City and UCL Partners are undertaking research, planning, outcomes planning support, interview with recipients, interviews with commissioners, interviews with service managers, data analysis and synthesis and, a final report on both projects.
In evaluating the projects for possible further investment, there will be an analysis of what works and what does not, and an assessment of capacity for the up-scaling of the interventions in the future.

3.3 The findings will be fed into the relevant developments across the Council and its partners to inform ongoing work. The final report will be available in October 2016.

**Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report:**

Cabinet paper, 23 June 2015: Review of Local Welfare and Crisis Support Schemes to Vulnerable Residents with options for the Local Emergency Support Service:


HASCSSC meeting on 4 November 2015


**List of appendices:**

None.