The Health and Adult Services Select Committee (HASSC) has now completed its scrutiny review on the impact of the current recession and the welfare reforms on the mental health and wellbeing of residents in Barking and Dagenham. Over the course of the review, the Select Committee met for formal meetings on four occasions, attended two site visits and hosted a World Mental Health Day event with local residents. They have received information from a wide range of sources, including Council services (Revenue & Benefits, Housing and Employment & Skills), the Citizens Advice Bureau, Richmond Fellowship, the Samaritans, and representatives from the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT).

At the last Select Committee meeting in November, the HASSC discussed their initial findings with Councillor Maureen Worby, Cabinet Member for Health and Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board. Councillor Worby provided useful additional information for the review, particularly in how the Health and Wellbeing Board and the subgroups are taking forward the mental health agenda. A summary of the session with the Cabinet Member is included in this report.

Members of the Committee also discussed the draft recommendations at the November meeting and proposed amendments and additions. Officers have made revisions and the final report and recommendations for the scrutiny review is attached at Appendix 1 for HASSC approval. Following this, the report will be presented to the Health and Wellbeing Board and its relevant subgroups for discussion and agreement in how the recommendations of the review can be taken forward.
Recommendation(s)

Members of the Health and Adult Services Select Committee are recommended to:

1. Approve the final draft of the review into the impact of the recession and welfare reforms on mental health, with any amendments they wish to see.

2. Note that the Health and Wellbeing Board will receive the final scrutiny report at its meeting on 25 March 2014 for review and discussion in how the recommendations will be taken forward.

1. Introduction

1.1 The Health and Adult Services Select Committee (HASSC) chose to conduct a scrutiny review on the impact of the recession and welfare reforms on mental health and wellbeing as their scrutiny topic for 2013/14. The review began in June 2013 and the final information gathering session was held in November 2013.

1.2 The review has sought to answer three key questions:

   (1) How are economic austerity and the Welfare Reforms impacting on our citizens?

   (2) Will the austerity measures, reduction in income levels and increases in poverty lead to more mental ill health?

   (3) What can we do, or what are we currently doing, to mitigate the likely impact?

1.3 Members have been proactive in their investigations in answering these questions and have attended a number of formal meetings with representatives from the Council, voluntary sector, Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and North East London Foundation Trust (NELFT) to inform their findings, as well as two site visits with Job Centre Plus and the NELFT Service User Reference Group. Members of the HASSC also hosted a focus group event with residents and mental health service users on World Mental Health Day (10 October 2013) to find out further views on how the current recession is affecting mental health and wellbeing in the Borough.

2. Summary of the session with the Cabinet Member for Health (12 November 2013)

2.6 Councillor Maureen Worby, Cabinet Member for Health and the Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board was invited to the November HASSC meeting. This session was an opportunity for the Select Committee to discuss the initial findings of the Mental Health Scrutiny Review with the Cabinet Member, in particular asking her to comment on mental health service provision in Barking and Dagenham, future commissioning intentions and priorities, and how issues that have been raised in the review may be explored in further depth by the Health and Wellbeing Board.

2.7 Councillor Worby stated that mental health was one of her top priorities for the Health and Wellbeing Board and provided some useful additional information for the Select Committee, particularly on how the Health and Wellbeing Board and the subgroups of the Board are working on mental health in Barking and Dagenham. This included:
The work that the mental health subgroup is conducting on service delivery, particularly integrated mental health services between the Council and NELFT (conducted through a Section 75 agreement).

The preventive ‘public mental health’ interventions that the Public Health Programmes Board subgroup are coordinating on behalf of the Health and Wellbeing Board. This included projects such as the Big White Wall, a free online 24/7 support network which is commissioned by Public Health for residents over the age of 16 who are going through a difficult time with family, work, money, relationships and need some support to help them self-manage their condition.

Funding to mental health social workers to work as part of the integrated care cluster arrangements with GPs, to support those presenting with lower-level mental health issues, not requiring specialist mental health service intervention.

2.8 The Cabinet Member also discussed some of the initial findings of the scrutiny review and particularly agreed with the Select Committee that GPs and health colleagues should ensure that they are suggesting a range of therapies as an alternative to antidepressants. It was suggested that the Health and Wellbeing Board could discuss this issue when they receive the final scrutiny report, as a result of which the Committee indicated that they would like to see the Clinical Commissioning Group provide evidence of effectiveness on the implementation of the Primary Care Depression pathway, and explore the inclusion and prominence of talking therapies within that pathway.

2.9 Additionally, Councillor Worby stated that she agreed that a review of the information and advice available to residents on welfare reform, the recession and mental health would be welcome, and that better promotion of the services that are available to residents was required. It was discussed that the Health and Wellbeing Board is currently looking at the way that services engage with residents on health and wellbeing issues and that mental health was one area that the Board will be focusing on when delivering their engagement strategy.

2.10 Officers have used the information and discussion from the session with Councillor Worby to inform the final report and shape some of the recommendations, particularly those which HASSC are proposing that the Health and Wellbeing Board take forward over the coming months.

3. Approval of the final report

3.1 A final draft of the Mental Health Scrutiny Review has now been completed, taking into account all of the analysis and information gathered during the review and comments that have been made by Members of the Committee on draft versions of the report. The final report and recommendations is attached at Appendix 1 for approval by the Health and Adult Services Select Committee.

3.2 It should be noted in particular that the report contains a revised version of the recommendations following the discussion that the Select Committee had on the draft recommendations at the November meeting. In particular, these changes were: 

- The recommendation regarding 'access to information and advice' to include ways to help reduce the stigma around mental health, as well as practical advice.
• An additional recommendation under ‘training and employment’ to include that the Health and Wellbeing Board should satisfy themselves that sufficient training for professionals on mental health and mental health awareness is in place across the Partnership.

• Refinement of the draft recommendation about the appointment of a Mental Health Elected Member Champion, to suggest that this should be in a ‘task and finish’ capacity, focusing on one mental health issue such as the stigma attached to mental health.

3.3 Following the approval of the final report, the report will be presented at the Health and Wellbeing Board in March 2014 for further exploration and action of the recommendations. The delivery of any recommendations will be monitored by HASSC through a series of progress reports on the action plan produced by the Health and Wellbeing Board in response to the review.

4. The invisible costs of mental ill-health

4.1 On 22 January 2014, the Greater London Authority published a report titled ‘London Mental Health: The Invisible Costs of Mental Ill-health’. This landmark report:

• Highlights the scale of the problem and London’s health inequalities in respect of mental health

• Issues a call to action for London to confront and recognise mental health issues and treat them as equal to other health issues

• Quantifies the economic and social costs of mental ill-health. The report estimates that mental ill-health costs London £26 billion; of which £10 billion is borne by the public sector.

• In exploring the social costs of mental ill-health, the GLA report echoes findings of the HASSC that show the disproportionate impacts of people with mental health conditions who are unemployed (or in low paid work), and worklessness as a stress factor leading to mental ill-health. The GLA report, along with the HASSC’s review, also takes into account reduced quality of life due to stress anxiety and other mental health conditions.

4.2 It is hoped that the timely work of the HASSC can act as a catalyst for Barking and Dagenham responding to the GLA’s call to action and help to raise the profile of mental health issues locally.

4.3 The full report of the Greater London Authority can be found at this link: http://www.london.gov.uk/sites/default/files/Mental%20health%20report.pdf

5. Publicising the findings of the review

5.1 It is important that the work done by the HASSC gets the necessary exposure it needs to influence other relevant work being undertaken on this issue (or related issues). To this end, the HASSC’s review will be publicised in the following ways:

• A press release will be issued summarising the findings of the Committee to inform residents of the HASSC’s work
• The following individuals or organisations will receive copies of the report:
  o All stakeholders who participated in the review
  o London Councils - to inform the work taking place at a London-wide level into the impacts of the economic downturn
  o The Mayor of London’s Office
  o The Centre for Public Scrutiny - to be uploaded to their archive of scrutiny investigations
  o The LBBD Strategic Welfare Reform Group (an officer group chaired by Darren Henaghan, Corporate Director, Housing and Environment)

6. List of Appendices