### Title: Update on the Scrutiny Review on the Potential Impact of the Recession and Welfare Reforms on Mental Health

**Report of the Corporate Director of Adult and Community Services**

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**Summary:**

The findings of the Health and Adult Services Select Committee's scrutiny review on the ‘Potential Impact of the Recession and Welfare Reforms on Mental Health’ were first presented to the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWBB) at its meeting on 25 March 2014.

In response to the review evidence findings the HWBB tasked the Mental Health Sub Group to produce a plan aimed to meet the seven recommendations for further exploration and action. The summarised recommendations are:

- Better information and advice is needed for residents, practitioners and those already known to mental health services on issues of welfare reform, advocacy, and support for coping with stress/depression/anxiety
- Recovery and resilience can be supported/built up through training and volunteering opportunities
- Peer support opportunities must be developed to prevent isolation, provide emotional support, and share knowledge
- The primary care depression pathway should be reviewed to ensure it is holistic and not overly reliant on the prescription of anti-depressants
- The effects of the austerity and welfare reforms should be measured so that the Council and its partners understand the impacts on residents and levels of need
- Demand on local services (advocacy, local emergency support, credit unions, welfare rights) should be closely monitored
- The Mental Health First Aid training programme should be delivered to professionals across the partnership and other local employers. Additional mental health awareness training should be provided where appropriate.
The action plan (Appendix 1) was presented to, and agreed by the HWBB at its July 2014 meeting with a request for six monthly progress reports. The action plan is presented to the Health and Adult Services Select Committee for discussion and comment.

**Recommendations**

The Health and Adult Services Select Committee is recommended to:

1. Note and discuss the implementation action plan (Appendix 1) from the Mental Health Sub Group
2. Agree that an update on progress of the implementation of the action plan is scheduled to be presented at a HASSC meeting in six months’ time.

**Reasons**

It is best scrutiny practice for the select committees to monitor the progress of recommendations made as a result of investigations carried out previously to evaluate the impact of scrutiny reviews.

**1. Introduction and Background**

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 sought to answer three key questions:

- How are economic austerity and the Welfare Reforms impacting on our citizens?
- Will the austerity measures, reduction in income levels and increases in poverty lead to more mental ill health?
- What can we do, or what are we currently doing, to mitigate the likely impact?

1.3 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. Through the evidence gathering the HASSC received information from a wide range of sources.

1.4 Following the evidence gathering, HASSC arrived at four broad conclusions:

- Welfare reforms are a source of anxiety (especially to those with pre-existing mental health issues).
- Financial hardship is putting strain on residents and is the cause of emotional distress.
- There is increased demand for voluntary sector services.
- There is increased demand for health service interventions.

1.5 In response to the evidence and findings the HASSC made 7 recommendations which are summarised as follows:
• Better information and advice is needed for residents, practitioners and those already known to mental health services on issues of welfare reform, advocacy, and support for coping with stress/depression/anxiety.

• Recovery and resilience can be supported/built up through training and volunteering opportunities.

• Peer support opportunities must be developed to prevent isolation, provide emotional support, and share knowledge.

• The primary care depression pathway should be reviewed to ensure it is holistic and not overly reliant on the prescription of anti-depressants.

• The effects of the austerity and welfare reforms should be measured so that the Council and its partners understand the impacts on residents and levels of need.

• Demand on local services (advocacy, local emergency support, credit unions, welfare rights) should be closely monitored.

• The Mental Health First Aid training programme should be delivered to professionals across the partnership and other local employers. Additional mental health awareness training should be provided where appropriate.

1.6. The review final report was shared with stakeholders who participated in the review, the Mayor of London’s Office, London Councils, the Centre for Public Scrutiny and LBBD’s Strategic Welfare Reform Group.

1.7 The findings of the scrutiny review were first presented to the Health and Wellbeing Board (HWBB) at its meeting in March 2014, which resulted in a request that the mental health sub-group develop an implementation action plan to take forward the reports 7 recommendations and that this to be presented to the HWBB July 2014 meeting.

2. Implementation Action Plan and Governance

2.1 The development of the Implementation Action Plan (Appendix 1) has been overseen by the Mental Health Sub Group members. It has been discussed at each of the last three sub group meetings. The implementation action plan is currently being updated to reflect progress achieved to date based on information received from the responsible lead officers.

2.2 The implementation of the plan is intended to positively impact on the wider health and care systems and services to assist performance and quality improvements aimed at minimising the negative impact that current welfare reforms and austerity measures are having on the people experiencing mental health issues.

2.3 Under the Council’s agreed scrutiny processes the HWBB has responsibility for the implementation of the recommendations and action plan.

2.4 The action plan will be monitored at six-monthly intervals by the HWBB (for quality assurance purposes) and the HASSC (for measuring progress).
3. **Options Appraisal**

3.1 Not applicable as this paper is to inform HASSC of progress made in the development of an implementation action plan and agreed processes for quality assurance and measuring progress.

4. **Consultation**

4.1 A service user engagement event to mark World Mental Health Day has been organised in October, at which the recommendations arising from the scrutiny review and associated implementation action plan will be shared to obtain further service user feedback. This feedback will also inform a wider mental health needs assessment that is currently being undertaken within Barking and Dagenham.

5. **Financial Implications**

There are no financial implications directly arising from this report. However, there are a number of actions in the Action Plan where a further report may be needed to set out the potential costs and how these are to be funded, unless these are from within existing budgets from which savings will be sought. For example, action 5A is to consider enhancing the floating support services that help residents maintain tenancies and avoid homelessness, and to develop fully costed proposals if required.

Implications completed by: Roger Hampson Group Manager Finance (Adults and Community Services) LBBD.

6. **Legal Implications**

As this report is for noting, there are no direct legal implications relating to the report itself or in the action plan.

Implications completed by: Chris Pickering – Principal Solicitor (LBBD)

7. **Other Implications**

7.1 **Customer Impact**

The review found that residents were bewildered by the scale of the welfare reforms and did not always know where to go for support or understand the information they were given. Recommendation 1 should result in better information about welfare benefits advice and advocacy preventing the escalation of problems that might affect a person’s health and mental wellbeing.

It is expected that the delivery of recommendations 2 and 3, which seek to build resilience and support people’s recovery through training, volunteering and peer support, will have a positive impact on those experiencing emotional distress or mental ill-health.
7.2 Health Issues

The public’s mental health and well-being is a complex area of policy. It demands our attention because focusing more on mental well-being and improving people’s mental health is the right way to go. This report shows that improving mental well-being is a significant and growing priority in spite of, and because of, the poor economic situation we find ourselves in. It is clear that building community resilience and improving mental well-being will improve social, health and economic outcomes. The pending refresh of the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy should continue view the causes of our major health challenges with a mental health lens – from obesity to drug and alcohol misuse to smoking. Without a focus on how people think, feel, behave and relate (their mental wellbeing), we will not make the progress we need to.

Background Papers Used in the Preparation of the Report:

Health and Adult Services Select Committee’s scrutiny review on the ‘Potential Impact of the Recession and Welfare Reforms on Mental Health’:


List of appendices:

Appendix 1 Action Plan: Scrutiny Review on the Potential Impacts of the Recession and Welfare Reforms on Mental Health