

LONDON BOROUGH OF CAMDEN	WARDS: All
REPORT TITLE Adult Early Help: A test and learn approach to prevention across the Council	
REPORT OF Executive Director, Adults and Health	
FOR SUBMISSION TO Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee	DATE 11 February 2025
<p>SUMMARY OF REPORT</p> <p>The main purpose of this report is to update the committee about the Council's Adult Early Help work. The report outlines the context of Adult Early Help and why the work is happening, the aims of the test and learn, progress so far and any early reflections, and next steps.</p> <p>Local Government Act 1972 – Access to Information</p> <p>No documents that require listing were used in the preparation of this report.</p> <p>Contact Officer: Jessica Lawson, Prevention and Wellbeing Service Manager Adult Social Care London Borough of Camden 5 Pancras Square, London, N1C 4AG 020 7974 5993 jessica.lawson@camden.gov.uk</p>	
<p>RECOMMENDATIONS</p> <p>The Committee is asked to note and comment on the report, addressing the discussion areas highlighted in Section 8 of the report.</p>	

Signed: 
Jess McGregor, Executive Director Adults and Health

Date: 29th January 2025

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. The main purpose of this report is to update the committee about the Adult Early Help (AEH) work, which aims to:
 - Test and develop an AEH approach to supporting adults through a ‘test and learn’ project
 - Evaluate the direct impact of an AEH approach on both adults receiving the support and staff delivering the support
 - Learn about the conditions needed for this approach to work well
 - Consider how best to roll Adult Early Help approaches out across the Council
 - Explore what the trade offs are if similar approaches can or cannot be taken up across the council
 - Understand how funding might be better allocated across council services so that people are supported earlier before their situation becomes worse and stop people falling through the gaps.
- 1.2. The report first lays out the context of the work and why this work is happening, noting how people are falling through the gaps of available preventative support. The negative impacts of this issue affects both the health and wellbeing of people and leads to higher costs for the Council when supporting people whose issues have increased over time.
- 1.3. The report explains how inspiration from residents and other initiatives across the borough and beyond Camden has informed a set of assumptions around what an Adult Early Help offer could look like, and how this approach may lead to more impactful preventative support for adults. The report sets out which ways of working and practices are tested, how they can be applied within a Camden Council context and what conditions (e.g. resource, budget, infrastructure, etc.) are needed for this approach to work well. An Adult Early Help team has been temporarily set up for this test and learn approach.
- 1.4. The report describes how the Council is learning from a ‘test and learn’ approach. Learnings include understanding the impact of the support to both the adults receiving help from the service, as well as the AEH Team staff. Through reflective spaces, officers are also noting what has worked well and what needs to be reshaped during the designing of the service, so that the wider Council can learn from the process of adapting these new ways of working.
- 1.5. The report outlines key challenges to the overarching work.
- 1.6. Finally, the report outlines the direction of next steps, including how insights from the test and learn might address the inadvertent harmful and costly consequences of people falling through the gaps of support.

2. Background and context to Adult Early Help

- 2.1. In 2022, a review of Council activity and spend on services that offered prevention and early intervention support showed that over £52 million was spent for this purpose across the Council, ranging from Adult Social Care Prevention and Wellbeing services to Temporary Accommodation, as well as Public Health services.
- 2.2. Despite this collective investment across the council, it was recognised that some adults in Camden are still falling through the gaps in support. Therefore, adults can miss out on receiving the support that they need at a timely point, even if the support exists. This can be for a range of reasons. Services can be difficult to access due to barriers in language, digital skills, and eligibility requirements. Sometimes these barriers mean that people do not know what help is available in the first place. Services may also be difficult to access for people who are disabled by the system, such as neurodiverse people and people facing physical and mental health challenges. Additionally, many people do not want to engage with the Council due to past negative experiences. Long waiting lists or getting passed on to multiple services without receiving helpful support can lead to deep mistrust with the Council.
- 2.3. Falling through these gaps of existing support can cause challenging situations to negatively spiral into multiple aspects of people's lives. For example, a health condition may result in someone not being able to work anymore, and this could mean they struggle to pay rent, which in turn could put the person in a more serious situation of not having a safe home to live in. To support this person before they risk becoming homeless, services that offer specialist help around health, money and housing, need to work better together to offer joined-up support.
- 2.4. Some people's deep mistrust for Council services emphasises the need for building relationships as an approach to not only supporting people meaningfully, but also identifying people's needs and starting support in the first place. Many people who are eligible for support may still actively disengage with a relevant service despite knowing that the service exists. Alongside their mistrust for the Council, disengagement could be due to their personal anxieties and mental health, or the perceived stigma around receiving help. The longer people refuse to receive support, the more likely the service will 'close' the pathway to supporting that person before being able to offer support, given their limited capacity and extended waiting lists of other people needing help. Creating the conditions for services to build relationships first (such as investing time that staff have to support each person from the start to the end of their support journey) could help break down the invisible barriers between the Council and the individual, increasing the likelihood of people feeling encouraged to receive and benefit from support available, so that they can live a good life within the neighbourhoods that they are part of.
- 2.5. Camden neighbourhoods are brimming with local initiatives that already hold close and supportive relationships with residents, and there is a lot for the Council to learn from their way of working. Through established meaningful

relationships with residents, local initiatives already play a key part in strengthening people's resilience to negative life changes. However, they are often even more restrained in resources than Council services. Learning from and amplifying the value of local initiatives can not only help the Council to strengthen their connections with local neighbourhoods but also foster localised preventative support.

3. Rationale behind Adult Early Help

- 3.1. Not offering joined-up or relationship-based support can lead to negative and traumatic experiences for adults, their families and their social networks, with potential trauma being passed on to future generations. The collective financial costs of supporting people facing extended and multiple life challenges are also expensive, especially compared to the cost of preventing people's situations from getting worse in the first place. For example, enabling healthier lifestyles could prevent the need for long-term treatment for chronic illnesses and financial support needed if the illness limited the ability to work. Fostering safe environments and homes for young people could prevent generations of trauma and costly criminal justice interventions.
- 3.2. Although a joined-up and relationships-based offer is recognised as key to supporting people meaningfully and more effectively, the approach is hard to achieve in reality. Limited funding allocated to the Council puts constraints in the time and resources staff have to support people in a preventative, relational and joined-up way. The Council is also made up of a wide set of services with separate specialisms. These services often follow different guidelines and use different platforms to record data on residents. The various ways of working make it difficult for services to work well together and can create a disjointed set of specialisms across the Council. Since people's issues overlap across the different specialisms, many people do not get the full support that they need. These constraints emphasise the added value in shifting towards more joined-up and relationship-based way of working across different services, so that the Council can better identify and support the full extent of people's needs sooner.
- 3.3. Currently the Council has well-known Family Early Help teams supporting children and families so that their negative circumstances do not worsen. However, the Council does not have a similar model which focusses on adults as individuals, rather than adults as their connection to the child (e.g. the mother, father, etc). Whilst this work has learnt from Family Early Help, it recognises that supporting adults as individuals requires very different conditions from supporting people within a children and family context. With this in mind, there was an opportunity to explore the following questions:
 - 3.3.1. In what ways would a more joined-up and relationship-based approach to support prevent adults' situations from worsening?
 - 3.3.2. How feasible would it be for different services across the Council to adapt to these ways of working?

- 3.3.3. What is the impact of the council not taking up joined-up and relationship-based approaches? Who are the groups of people being impacted the most?
- 3.3.4. How might funding be better allocated across council services so that people are supported earlier and prevent their situation worsening?
- 3.4. In November 2023, senior officers, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Health, Wellbeing and Adult Social Care, agreed that the best way to explore these questions is to learn from applying and testing different ways of working that are new to the Council. They agreed to do this through setting up an 18-month-long project to develop an Adult Early Help (AEH) Team who will test more joined-up and relationship-based ways of preventing adults' issues from worsening.
- 3.5. Inspiration from residents, local initiatives across the borough and the Council, as well as initiatives beyond Camden shaped a set of assumptions around the types of practices and ways of working that the AEH Team could test. Initiatives that gave inspiration included Camden services like Family Early Help, Floating Support, the Domestic Violence Navigator Service and organisations such as Voluntary Action Camden. External programs included Hackney Link, Gateshead's Liberated Model and Waltham Forest's Adult Early Help Service.
- 3.6. Whilst the AEH Team applies and tests these different ways of working, officers from the Council's Strategy teams and Public Health will learn from the experience of delivering an Adult Early Help offer of support. Additional work will happen in parallel to the test and learn project and the evaluations. This work will consolidate learnings to better understand what an Adult Early Help way of working could look like, the conditions needed to do it well, and to understand the impact and feasibility of an Adult Early Help way of working to prevention as a whole Council.

4. The intended impact of Adult Early Help

- 4.1. The intended impact of this work is that people can be more resilient to life changes in the future.
- 4.2. Although everyone's life is unique to them, some life events are relatively expected for an adult. This might include going to school, getting a job, starting a family, and retiring. However, most people experience significant life changes that are unexpected which can pose a stress in their lives, such as experiencing a loss of a person, suffering from an injury, or experiencing domestic violence. There are also issues that are caused by several significant life changes which are not tied to one particular event. These experiences can be tipping points in people's lives, from being able to cope themselves to not being able to cope. Some examples include experiencing substance misuse, long term unemployment, spiralling debt.

- 4.3. People who have easy access to available resources for support may be able to withstand life changes that impact negatively on them. This resilience can seem like a strong safety net of formal support (offered by the Council or other organisations) or informal support (friends or families lending a hand in times of need). Over time however, accumulated events in life might weaken the safety net, as each thread of support becomes thinner, or breaks. People who don't have strong support networks or have weak safety nets may not have the resilience to cope with significant life changes.
- 4.4. If the Council can provide or foster early support for people, it can help to prevent people from getting tangled in their safety nets or become too reliant on support. Strong safety nets can help people have choice and autonomy in decisions about their future.
- 4.5. To do this, the Council needs to first understand how it might be reshaped in both its approach to support and its distribution of investments, with a focus on improving its ability to prevent adults' from falling through gaps of support and to strengthen people's resilience to change.

5. Overview of the Adult Early Help work

Scoping of Adult Early Help

- 5.1. As part of a range of transformation work happening across the Council, in 2022 a project started to explore how the Council might deliver long-term savings through prevention and early intervention approaches. In addition to this, the work would also understand how to most strategically invest and align the Council's spend with its purpose and vision. This work took the well-understood concept of Early Help for children and families as a starting point, whilst recognising that a model for adults would be different.
- 5.2. A scoping exercise was undertaken to identify what existing services were provided by the Council that fall within the working definition of Adult Early Help. This definition stated that *“Adult Early Help is about supporting and enabling people to live a good life. It refers to our collective offer of targeted services designed to reduce or prevent low-level needs from becoming entrenched and more difficult to address. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to Adult Early Help as support can be provided in different settings and in different ways across a continuum from information and advice towards more specialist support. Adult Early Help prevents and delays the need for specialist services and connects residents to the wider offer of universal support, often found in local communities.”*
- 5.3. The purpose of the scoping review was to collect feedback from heads of services and directors across the Council around two assumptions:
 - 5.3.1. That a Camden Adult Early Help offer would improve residents' outcomes and might save money for statutory partners through reduced demand for long term, complex support.

- 5.3.2. A more coherent Camden Adult Early Help offer would identify areas of duplication and potential monetary savings.
- 5.4. A total of 40 directors and heads of services across the Council were interviewed to respond to the assumptions. Their comments included:
- 5.4.1. The understanding that the disjointed system of support leads to people falling through the gaps in support.
 - 5.4.2. That there may be duplication in the commissioning of activities aiming to help people who need support from different areas of the council.
 - 5.4.3. It could be difficult to demonstrate direct and short-term financial savings for the Council and statutory partners as early help is about investing early to reduce the long-term need for support and the related costs.
 - 5.4.4. It would also be difficult to prove the value of an Adult Early Help model of support through the existing ways that services are evaluated and monitored.
 - 5.4.5. There was an opportunity to test out a more joined-up early help offer for adults and linking the learnings to 'Neighbourhoods' work that is underway.
- 5.5. Alongside getting comments on the assumptions, officers in the Council's strategy team began to categorise what types of Council activities might fall within the remit of Adult Early Help, based on the working definition of Adult Early Help. Services were categorised into groups based on the extent to which they fall under an Adult Early Help remit.
- 5.5.1. A total of 16 services across the council, including Public Health services, were categorised as 'In-scope' as they were seen to have a core Adult Early Help function, actively and purposefully supporting people with additional needs.
 - 5.5.2. 14 services were categorised as 'Partially-in-scope' as they were not seen as having a core Adult Early Help function, but if delivered through best practice may provide preventative or early help.
 - 5.5.3. 10 services were categorised as 'Not in scope', as at the time, they were seen to have no Adult Early Help function within the service, based on the above working definition.
- 5.6. The total costs of activities across the 16 services seen as in-scope to providing an Adult Early Help function amounted to over £52 million. Whilst this investment has led to services that are well valued, some people are still falling through gaps of support as services are not sufficiently joined-up. Not working in the most cohesive way risks a duplication of services across the Council, its partners and the voluntary and community sector.

- 5.7. Outcomes from this early scoping exercise led to a discovery phase that explored what 'good,' joined-up help looked like to residents and what conditions are needed to provide 'good' help.
- 5.8. Informed by the working definition of what 'Adult Early Help' means, there was a range of assumptions about what a preventative approach could look like in Camden. These assumptions were gathered from Council officers through surveys and interviews. Alongside these initial assumptions, inspiration and reference points were gathered from relevant initiatives both within and beyond Camden to conceptualise a set of practices and conditions for a more joined-up approach to 'good' preventative support.

The Adult Early Help Team

- 5.9. In 2024, an AEH Team was recruited for the next 18 months to test this concept of an Adult Early Help approach through delivering the test and learn project. Evaluating this approach will help the Council understand the difference or impact it would have on adults and the Council if staff had more time and flexibility to build meaningful relationships with the people they are supporting. Additionally, learnings from the AEH Team's support will help the Council understand how other services across the Council could work better together and across the borough. These insights will help to inform opportunities for the Council to be more preventative in its approach, alongside the feasibility of these opportunities.
- 5.10. The AEH Team is testing a way of supporting people that:
- Is based on people's strengths
 - Is 'generalist' in terms of skills-sets, emphasising their role in navigating different specialist councils
 - Considers people's trauma and how the trauma might affect them
 - Helps people achieve personal goals
 - Helps people build meaningful connection with services across the council and local communities
 - Allows staff to have the time needed to build trusting relationships with people. This will be done through limiting the number of people the team support to up to 4 people at a time
 - Allows staff to have a level of flexibility in how much money they spend when supporting people, within a certain budget
 - Allows staff to adapt their way of working so that it aligns with the individual values and circumstances of each adult they support.
- 5.11. The AEH Team's role also involves working collaboratively to shape the support offer. They are adapting both the support itself and the team's operations and ways of working as they learn. This approach will help us understand the right conditions that a team of this nature will need to effectively work in a preventative way.
- 5.12. The AEH team is made up of 4 team members who are supervised by an AEH Pilot Lead and the team is hosted in Adult Social Care. A values-based approach was taken to recruiting the team, with the recruitment panel

prioritising values aligned to the AEH model of support over specialisms. The result was the recruitment of a team with a variety of professional backgrounds and skills, with experience of working to support people with experience of care, the criminal justice system, and domestic and gender-based violence. The AEH Team started between September and October 2024.

The Test and Learn Project Core Support Offer

- 5.13. There are currently 12 adults being supported by the AEH Team, with ages ranging from 18 years to 66 years old. 7 adults identify as female and 5 as male. There is a mixture of ethnicities, including Black British/ African, Black British/ Caribbean, Bangladeshi, Indian, mixed race, White American and White British. These adults were selected out of 39 nominations from the following services and organisations: Social Prescribing and Link Workers, Housing Services, Change Grow Live, Family Early Help, Adult Social Care and other voluntary, community and enterprise organisations.
- 5.14. The criteria remained broad for this initial selection process of adults to be supported. The ask was for people to be aged 18 years or older, to live in Camden (or if they have no fixed address, to have a strong social connection to Camden), and to be facing multiple challenges in their lives. To ensure a better understanding of diverse situations and needs, the first cohort of 12 adults to be supported came with and from a spread of:
- Council services and partners
 - Experiences of falling through the gaps and facing multiple challenges
 - Personal characteristics (e.g. age groups, gender, ethnicity, household income, and location)
- 5.15. The process for selecting the adults invited to receive AEH support involved the following stages:
- Officers across services in Housing, Adult Social Care, Health and Disability services, as well as people working in local initiatives were invited to nominate up to 5 adults who may benefit from Adult Early Help support and explain why they think the adults would benefit from this support.
 - The people who made the nominations were invited to a workshop to discuss their nominations.
 - The AEH Team reviewed the list of nominated adults and decided on the final list of adults that they should first invite to receive AEH support.
 - The Adult Early Help Team met with the service or partner who nominated each adult to discuss how best to invite them to AEH. Where the adults were not selected for support at that stage, the team still met with the service or partner who made the nomination to discuss other routes of support.
- 5.16. Alongside bespoke one-to-one support, the AEH Team is holding monthly 'internal drop ins' which are open to everyone in the Council. The 'drop ins'

are a space for people from different services across the Council to meet, make connections, and help each other navigate the often-convoluted system of support services. People can also hear more about AEH work and discuss potential nominations of adults that may benefit from support from the AEH Team.

- 5.17. The AEH Team is also organising 'Outreach Surgeries' which will be placed within local communities. The purpose of these surgeries is to make connections with local initiatives and neighbourhoods. Additionally, people in local initiatives can hear about AEH and make potential nominations where they feel community members could benefit from being supported by the AEH Team.

Evaluation and Learning

- 5.18. Whilst the AEH Team deliver support, there will be two streams of evaluation running in parallel.
- 5.19. First, officers from the Council's Insight Learning and Impact Team are evaluating the impact of the test and learn service, particularly on the AEH Team providing the support and the adults receiving the support. The approach and framework used was developed with input from officers in Public Health. The Insight Learning and Impact Team will be collating qualitative data through beginning, mid and end-point surveys and interviews with the Adult Early Team and adults supported through the service.
- 5.20. Secondly, officers in the Council's Strategy and Design and Strategy Supporting People Team are holding a more explorative piece of evaluation, where they collect the AEH Team's thoughts and opinions through facilitating 'Learning Sessions' and offering the space to share anonymised reflections. The summaries from these reflections can inform potential changes that could be made for the AEH Team to action. The AEH Team has been involved in setting this up, deciding the best format for sharing meaningful feedback.
- 5.21. As the AEH Team only began supporting people in November 2024, it is too early to share insights from the formal evaluations. Early insights from the evaluation can be shared with the wider Council in Spring 2025.
- 5.22. Learnings from evaluating the test and learn project will be used to inform work that will:
 - 5.22.1. Define what Camden's Adult Early Help approach to support could look like in terms of practice models and the conditions needed for this to happen (such as financial costs, resources, staff skills, data, connections with other services and Council partners)
 - 5.22.2. Explore the potential value and feasibility of other teams across the Council to take more Adult Early Help approaches to support

- 5.22.3. Explore opportunities for how investment could be better allocated for a more coherent Adult Early Help offer across the Council.

6. Challenges and risks of the work

- 6.1. Defining the boundaries of Adult Early Help was not a straightforward decision as individuals facing multiple challenges need support from a range of specialist services. Whilst the AEH project is testing the role of helping adults navigate between services, this shared responsibility can make it difficult for one specific service to hold accountability for the adults' full journey of support.
- 6.2. Defining a shared understanding of what Early Help means for adults has also been challenging. Whilst the initial definition of Adult Early Help stated that it was for adults with "low level" needs, the test and learn project has surfaced that individuals are already facing multiple challenges that were not known by the Council. What is known as "early" for the Council is often "late" for individual adults. The test and learn project is showing that offering the time for staff to build meaningful relationships with the adults that they support has made it easier for AEH Team to better understand the adults' challenges, which were unknown to services that have previously been in contact with the adults.
- 6.3. Evaluating the long-term preventative impact of the test and learn is also difficult, as many of the expected impacts may not happen until a number of years, or decades. That said, the AEH Team are already able to collect positive events in people's lives as a direct result of 2 months of support from the test and learn project. The team are confident that there will be more positive impact stories gathered over the next 10 months of the project.

7. Next Steps for 2025

- 7.1. The test and learn project will continue to support adults until the end of 2025. This includes bespoke support for individual adults, phased in 12-week blocks, "internal drop-ins" for services across the Council can network and learn from each other, and outreach sessions to connect with the local communities.
- 7.2. The impact of the test and learn project will continue to be evaluated. Baseline data will be collected from January to March, ongoing mid-point data will be collected from April to June, and endline data collection will happen from July to September. Whilst data will be analysed and shared continuously across the year, October to December will be dedicated to ensure that all sets of data are consolidated so that the full set of insights can be communicated across the wider Council.
- 7.3. Group Learning Sessions and space for anonymous feedback will capture the AEH Team's reflections on delivering the support and the conditions needed to deliver the support. Learnings will be focussed on processes and practice models within the context of the Council's organisational culture.

- 7.4. Learnings from the two evaluation streams will feed into work that will understand what a more impactful way of working to preventative approaches could look like across the Council, and how that might be more effectively funded.

8. Discussion areas

- 8.1. The committee is asked to note and comment on the report, in particular:
- 8.1.1. Evaluation learnings gathered as part of the test and learn approach
 - 8.1.2. Any further data the team should collect to understand the extent to which an Adult Early Help offer is feasible across the Council
 - 8.1.3. The way the work is communicated so that it aligns with local and national plans around preventing people's negative life experiences from worsening
 - 8.1.4. The journey of the work so far.

9. Equalities Impact Assessment

- 9.1. An Equalities Impact Assessment has been drafted and the team is in consultation with officers from the Council's Equalities and Disproportionality Service. Given that this work focusses on understanding how the Council can better support people who are falling through the gaps of support, intersectionality of people's identities and situations is heavily considered. Specific actions include:

- Ensuring that there was a spread of personal and protected characteristics and situations included in the cohort of people who are supported by the Adult Early Help Team.
- An inclusive recruitment campaign for the Adult Early Help team was based more on candidate's values rather than their past experiences.
- Hiring candidates who have similar lived experiences to the adults that are supported.
- The Adult Early Help team brought their skills and experience of using accessible language to shape the support they offer. The team also attended Language Matters training and have had consultations with expert Clenton Farquharson to ensure the team use language that uplifts adults rather than cause potential harm by adding labels or phrasing that may reinforce internalised and systemic shame and stigma.

10. Finance Comments of the Executive Director Corporate Services

10.1. The Council has allocated £384,000 to fund this 18-month pilot, this is funded from Social Care Reserves. Based on the outcomes, funding allocations across the services may be adjusted following the pilot's evaluation.

11. Legal Comments of the Borough Solicitor

11.1. The Council has a duty under the Care Act 2014 Section 2 to provide services, facilities, resources, or other steps to prevent, delay, reduce needs for care and support of adults in its area. The Council should have regard to the Care and Support Statutory Guidance in fulfilling this duty.

12. Environmental Implications

12.1. This project has no environment impacts.

REPORT ENDS