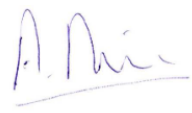


London Borough of Waltham Forest

Report Title	Early Intervention & Prevention - Building Stronger Communities
Meeting / Date	Cabinet, 7 th October 2025
Cabinet portfolio	Councillor Andrew Dixon, Portfolio Lead Member for Stronger Communities
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Wards affected	All
Public access	Open
Appendices	Appendix A – Prevention Programme Overview Appendix B – Equalities Screener

1. Summary

- 1.1 Early intervention and prevention sits at the heart of Mission Waltham Forest and our ambition to make this a more equal and inclusive borough. We have a proud history in this space, including high quality delivery across our Family Hubs, tackling air pollution to prevent serious poor health, embedding early identification of those at risk of losing their homes to prevent homelessness and working relentlessly to address health inequalities to prevent long-term conditions arising.
- 1.2 Despite this progress, we are seeing unprecedented demand and cost across our services – particularly in relation to temporary accommodation, support for children with SEND and in the cost of adult social care packages. Now more than ever we need to fundamentally shift as a council to hardwire prevention in everything we do, moving away from treating symptoms and focusing on building strong and resilient communities that support everyone to thrive. This is a challenge shared right across the public sector and Waltham Forest is no different.

- 1.3 Many of the levers to correct these pressures are held by central government, but while we continue to lobby, we must take urgent action at the local level, taking bold, focused choices and shifting resources to where they have the greatest impact. This means sharpening our understanding of which parts of the community need support the most and the demand drivers that result in them reaching crisis point.
- 1.4 To address the urgent challenge, we are determined *to embed early intervention and prevention at every opportunity, so that we can build resilience in our communities, improve the lives of residents and ultimately reduce pressure on acute services.*
- 1.5 Focusing on embedding early intervention and prevention means helping people to stay healthy, fulfilled and independent for as long as possible. It is critical to tackling inequality, addressing the barriers that hold too many people back – working with our diverse communities, not doing to, developing tailored and responsive solutions to social problems that enable people to help themselves and each other, reducing the chance of issues arising in the first place and building resilience to manage challenges when they do.
- 1.6 This paper outlines how we are building on firm foundations to become a prevention-focused council. We know from our own experience in Waltham Forest, and from learning across the country, that tinkering around the edges will not be enough to meet the scale of the challenge. We need a system-wide approach bringing the Council together with partners across the community, including VCS and community organisations and other statutory services so that everyone is working together to put early intervention and prevention – building stronger communities – at the heart of everything we do.

2. Recommendations

2.1 Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1.1 Note the Prevention Programme Overview outlined in Appendix A to this report.
- 2.1.2 Note the plans for scaling up our approach as part of the next phase of change so that early intervention and prevention becomes the driver for change across the entire Council and informs the way we work with partners and communities to build resilience in the face of the challenges ahead.
- 2.1.3 Note the track record of investment and delivery in support of this ambition, including for example Family Hubs, our response to the Marmot review and the recent roll out of Waltham Forest Max.
- 2.1.4 Reaffirm the commitment to putting early intervention and prevention at the heart of Mission Waltham Forest as the key driver for building stronger communities and making this a more equal and inclusive borough as well as to ensure financial sustainability into the future.

3. Proposals

- 3.1 Across the country, there is strong consensus that prevention is both the right thing to do for people and families and essential to long-term financial sustainability across the public sector.
- 3.2 Against the backdrop of austerity, the Covid-19 pandemic and the cost-of-living and housing crises, there are evident stark inequalities in educational, employment, housing and health outcomes nationally and it is clear that new solutions are required to tackle the increased complexity of challenges and break the pervasive cycles of disadvantage that people face.
- 3.3 The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) have said that pressure for statutory demand-led services has increased significantly, quantified by a 15% increase in requests for adult social care support, a 19% increase in looked after children, a 140% increase in Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) for young people and an 84% increase in households in temporary accommodation in the last decade.
- 3.4 These are challenges that are impacting heavily on our communities here in Waltham Forest. Our residents tell us consistently that the cost of living is a top concern, and data backs up the significant financial challenges our residents face now:
- the average monthly private rent has increased by 8.1% in the last year alone, almost 2% above the rise across London (6.3%).
 - Meanwhile, house prices have risen by 118% between 2014 and 2024, the fastest growth anywhere in the country.
 - There has been a sharp increase in the number of residents in the borough needing Temporary Accommodation; 15 in every 1,000 residents in Waltham Forest live in Temporary Accommodation.
 - The child poverty rate in Waltham Forest is 39%, slightly above the London average of 35%.
- 3.5 *Firm foundations: a strong track record of early intervention and prevention in Waltham Forest*
- 3.5.1 We have a long and successful history of working together with our communities to tackle these challenges.
- 3.5.2 Our Family Hubs deliver preventative support in neighbourhoods. Working alongside partners, the Family Hubs help to give children the best start in life. We have created one stop shops for families across the borough. From light touch advice to in-depth support, they bring family services together with professionals working more seamlessly so families only have to tell their story once. Family Hubs support families

from pregnancy, through the child's early years and later childhood, giving all children the very best possible start in life. In 2024 alone, Family Hubs saw over 16,500 people.

- 3.5.3 We are creating healthier and more sustainable environments for everyone in the borough where active lifestyles and improved air quality support preventing health conditions from emerging and escalating. For example, through Enjoy Waltham Forest we have pioneered active travel by creating over 55km of cycle track, installed over 800 bike hangars, and trained over 29,000 residents in cycle skills. In addition to this, we have implemented 24 school streets that improve air quality for all residents, but especially children and young people.
- 3.5.4 In December 2022, we became the first Marmot London borough as we set out to respond to [Sir Professor Michael Marmot's Institute of Health Equity report showing the scale of health inequalities across Waltham Forest](#) and, crucially, how some residents experience unfair and preventable differences in health. Through [our Marmot response](#) we have supported nearly 300 people with long-term health conditions who wanted help to remain or get into work, created greener and more resilient estates that support the health and wellbeing of residents, and spurred a system-wide focus on the mental health of Black boys and young men focusing on five key areas of focus: experience with education and school exclusions, parenting and family support, mentoring and role models, access to quality mental health services, and targeted mental health promotion.
- 3.5.5 The council has also taken bold leadership in the face of the cost-of-living crisis. Poverty and poor health are inextricably linked and prevents people and families from defining and living a good life. In Winter 2022, the council took a bold, data-led approach to help thousands of residents improve the energy efficiency of their homes. This meant free energy-saving home installations, as well as materials and advice. Supported by a comprehensive and accessible response through community sessions in Family Hubs, Libraries and VCS-led community living rooms. The programme is helping residents save more than £1.5m on their energy bills over the next 5 years. The Council are continuing to invest in energy-saving support through our partnership with The HEET Project who act as the single point of contact for the borough for low-income residents struggling with keeping their home warm. This partnership helps to build capacity in a local non-profit organisation and over the last three years we have secured £285k discretionary funding so that HEET can support more households.
- 3.5.6 As part of our mission to tackle the housing crisis head on, we have enhanced the capacity in Prevention and Assessment services to embed early intervention and prevention in our housing offer. The Housing Sustainment Team, which supports families in the private rented sector who are at risk of losing their tenancy, has helped residents to claim an additional £106,514 in welfare support between the

start of April to the end of August 2025. This helps to prevent debt and financial difficulties which can lead to losing tenancies. The team has also successfully prevented 22 households from becoming homeless so far this year between the start of April and the end of August 2025, providing an estimated cost avoidance already of £273,038.

3.6 *Stronger Communities: testing new approaches to build resilience*

- 3.6.1 Prevention sits at the heart of Mission Waltham Forest. Our commitment to bringing this to life was exemplified through the creation of the Stronger Communities directorate in early 2024, which brought together many of the council's preventative services enabling the delivery of new interventions with the aim of preventing, reducing and delaying the chances and impact of residents reaching crisis point.
- 3.6.2 While there are these existing preventative activities within Stronger Communities – and in many other parts of the Council – we need to transform across the organisation to go further and enable prevention at every opportunity. This means fostering deeper, meaningful relationships between professionals and residents to support informed, strengths-based decision-making. It also means having a specific laser focus on people we know are at risk of tipping into crisis, working with them to tackle problems and stay resilient before they reach that point.
- 3.6.3 We want to strengthen communities and support people to build their resilience – to be able to fulfil their potential and live the life they want to lead, independently or with support from safe and welcoming networks and communities. We know that the meaning of resilience is dynamic and different from person to person. Neither is resilience about putting up with adversity and suffering the consequences. Resilience is about having the resources and capacity to adapt, stay well, and fulfil potential.
- 3.6.4 In Waltham Forest, we understand there to be key building blocks to resilience that can help us understand where people are and what they might need to improve their resilience. In many cases, people who are 'at risk' or 'in crisis' will have multiple and connected things going on in their life, rather than one standalone thing that needs to be resolved.
- 3.6.5 The following grid gives flavour of what those the building blocks to resilience are and can act as an aide to identify ways and methods for supporting residents. This is not an exhaustive list, but this grid can help us to understand how things connect in someone's life and ensure that the limited resource available to the council is targeted on giving people the tools and confidence to make positive changes that ultimately lead to stronger and resilient communities:

Resilient	Safe and secure place to call home	Good physical and mental health	Strong social connections	Good work and decent income	Safe, supportive environments	Personal growth and talents
	Income above the poverty line	Physically active	Strong family relationships	Access to education and skills	Participating in cultural opportunities	Vision for the future and how to get there
	A place to live	Debt free	Supported in the community	Access to childcare	Access to green spaces	Self-confidence and esteem
At risk	Unstable housing	Low level mental health issues	Poor social relationships	Low skilled	Domestic violence	Can't afford transport costs
	Struggling to pay rent	At risk of frailty	Insecure employment	No access to childcare	Poor literacy	Recently bereaved
In Crisis	Homeless		Isolated and reliant on council support	Unemployed and unable to afford essentials	Unmet physical and mental health needs	

3.6.6 Key priorities within the current Prevention programme overview (see Appendix A) are to: *hardwire prevention, track impact, work locally and deliver in partnership*. Some of the key delivery highlights to date are summarised below.

3.6.7 Waltham Forest Max is a new, neighbourhood-based service launched borough-wide in September 2025, following a successful pilot at Walthamstow Library and the Lea Bridge Welcome Hub. Operating from six libraries across three localities, Waltham Forest Max brings together advice, employment support, and family help under one roof, making smarter use of council spaces to deliver prevention-focused support in the heart of communities. Built on principles of inclusion, relationships, co-design, and data-led delivery, WF Max aims to:

- Root services in equity and local need
- Build trust, belonging, and resilience
- Prevent crises through early intervention
- Ease pressure on statutory services

3.6.8 Local working groups coordinate enhanced offers, like the rapid setup of Lea Bridge Library as a Welcome Hub for 200+ asylum seekers, delivering ESOL, wellbeing, and migration support within days. Evaluation with UCL's Bartlett Institute showed WF Max empowers residents, builds networks, and delivers timely, people-centred support. Co-design sessions led to tangible improvements; from better wayfinding to enhanced staff training.

- 3.6.9 The Adult Early Help (AEH) Link Worker service provides targeted, preventative support to residents experiencing a range of health and wellbeing challenges. This service is designed to intervene early, particularly for individuals whose needs are escalating and who may be at risk of requiring statutory interventions such as Adult Social Care. AEH also work with residents already engaged with statutory services who would benefit from additional support to foster independence and resilience and reduce the amount of statutory intervention needed.
- 3.6.10 The service adopts a holistic, person-centred approach, working collaboratively with individuals to identify goals and build capacity. Resident outcomes include increased motivation, improved physical capability, enhanced home environments and stronger financial resilience.
- 3.6.11 We have also prioritised work to improve financial resilience and unlock inclusive work, as part of our Inclusive Growth and Economy Framework. This is a direct response to the growing challenge many residents face in rising living costs, insecure work, and already entrenched inequalities. Our iMax (income maximisation) approach has centred on targeted uptake campaigns, utilising the Low Income Family Tracker – a tool that enables data-led identification and proactive action. So far this has helped us carry out a process that could see up to 400 eligible, but not previously registered, families receive Free School Meals through auto-enrolment. Future campaigns will focus on the uptake of specific benefits such as Attendance Allowance, Pension Credit, and Healthy Start. Our focus on inclusive work also aims to maximise residents' income, supporting those facing barriers to secure and sustain meaningful work through targeted, integrated employment programmes.
- 3.6.12 As part of this action, we are wrapping community infrastructure around residents, creating space for them to access one-to-one support with claims. This is delivered through community drop-ins, which are run by trained officers, partners and volunteers. With over 4,000 attendees per year, we know that community drop-ins are a vital way of reaching residents.
- 3.6.13 In order to demonstrate impact of our early intervention and prevention work, we are piloting use of a new tool called Signal. Signal works on two levels. First it facilitates a structured conversation, in which users are encouraged and enabled to self-evaluate and measure progress against a wide range of aspects of their current life situation, supported by a trained facilitator. At the same time, it aggregates anonymised data into a map of local needs to provide the Council with a detailed view of the needs of residents, which we can use to make better-informed decisions about how we act to prevent crisis. Signal is being piloted for six months from September 2025 to March 2026 with regular continuous learning moments to ensure effective use of the tool.

3.7 Building stronger communities: a council-wide endeavour

- 3.7.1 Although we are proud of our track record on early intervention and prevention, we know we need to go much further still to support our residents and communities in the face of the challenges ahead. Mission Waltham Forest sets out a bold ambition for a more equal and inclusive borough, with early intervention and prevention to build stronger communities as a central pillar. Given the budget pressures we are facing, we need to go deeper and faster with embedding prevention than we have before. This means fundamental shifts in the way we work as a Council.

From crisis response to crisis prevention – putting more time and resources into early support that prevents problems from escalating and reduces demand from expensive acute services, particularly in relation to children’s social care, SEND, adults social care and temporary accommodation.

From wide reaching to targeted delivery – our drive for a more equal borough means we must concentrate our efforts where the need is greatest and the opportunity for impact is strongest, engaging with residents to better understand the barriers and challenges they are facing and working with community partners to tailor support, particularly for marginalised and underserved communities.

From “doing for” to “doing together” – recognising that local people and communities are the experts on their own lives and know what is likely to make the most difference, building cultural competence and supporting them to lead where they can.

From working around services to working around missions – aligning teams and functions behind shared challenges to make the most of limited resource and achieve greatest impact.

From incremental cuts to rethinking our offer – recognising that we cannot do everything we currently do, we will redesign services around where we can make the greatest difference rather than making incremental cuts across the board.

- 3.7.2 To deliver these shifts, we are looking at how we need to change the way we work across the Council so that everyone plays their part in embedding early intervention and prevention as the way we do business across our workforce, culture and practice.

- 3.7.3 We are exploring the following key themes:

(i) Integrated Neighbourhood Teams

Putting neighbourhood-based delivery at the heart of our early intervention and prevention offer, so that we are prioritising and coordinating our limited resources to design support around residents rather than services and be far more responsive to local need. We plan to build on successes to date, bringing together multidisciplinary teams to strengthen community engagement and co-production, increase

social connections and reduce isolation, and develop new collaborations with community and statutory partners in order to tackle local priorities together. These multidisciplinary teams would work hand in hand with three more targeted offers focusing on key areas of need, helping to reduce demand for expensive acute services: family help, community help and housing help.

(ii) Family Help

In line with national Children's Social Care reforms, we plan to bring together targeted early help and children in need into a cohesive family help offer which targets resources at those families with multiple needs. This will enable family support workers, social workers and other specialist practitioners, to come together to provide the right help, at the right time, reducing hand offs and building support within communities, so fewer families reach crisis and more children grow up in safe, loving homes.

(iii) Community Help

Again aligning with the national direction of travel towards a "Neighbourhood Health Service", we want to shift investment towards building stronger community support and networks to build resilience and independence for vulnerable and older adults in our borough. We want adults in Waltham Forest to be able to access community-based support that helps them to make positive connections, reducing social isolation and helping them to thrive. This will mean working more closely and investing in our voluntary and community sector, shifting towards more creative and collaborative commissioning models to strengthen existing services and develop new tailored options to address gaps in provision.

(iv) Housing Help

We have already invested in new prevention services to support residents early to address their housing needs with solution-focused advice and assistance. We want to use all the available tools to intervene early to help people remain in their homes or where necessary to find alternative settled homes. We need to strengthen our efforts to target support for the most common reasons for loss of accommodation – for example, family breakdowns, domestic abuse or debt – and embed specialist expertise in teams to reduce these outcomes. Given the growing cost of private sector rented housing in the borough, we know we will need to offer enhanced support to families in temporary accommodation to help them move into settled homes, whether in Waltham Forest or elsewhere, to enable smooth transitions.

(v) A new approach to Culture and Practice

In addition to these focus areas, we intend to put early intervention and prevention at the forefront of our culture and practice across the council to ensure system-wide change. This means leveraging the full set of skills and relationships of our workforce, with clear objectives for every member of staff, new training programmes to support insight-led, strengths-based practice, new approaches to community engagement based on principles of working with not doing to and new neighbourhood based networks that help to develop relationships across services and strengthen knowledge of local priorities and assets.

- 3.8 We will continue to work up plans on each of these key components of our future delivery model over the coming months in collaboration with staff, partners, members and communities. Given the scale of the challenges we face and the urgency to mobilise change, we need to be bold and move quickly. Our ambition is to build on our strong track record in this space to make early intervention and prevention everybody's business in Waltham Forest.

4 Options & Alternatives Considered

- 4.1 This report is for noting only therefore no alternatives have been considered.

5 Council Strategic Priorities (and other National or Local Policies or Strategies)

- 5.1 A preventative approach for stronger communities is one of the key missions set out in Mission Waltham Forest. This paper sets out the action we have taken to date to deliver on this mission and what we are planning to do next in light of the financial challenges we face.

6 Consultation

- 6.1 No formal consultation was required but as our approach to prevention continues to develop, there will be engagement with residents and communities to shape delivery.

7 Implications

7.1 Finance, Value for Money and Risk

- 7.1.1 Whilst no financial requests are being made as a direct result of this report, one of the main aims of putting early intervention and prevention at the heart of Mission Waltham Forest is to help to ensure financial sustainability into the future. Our proposed next steps in terms of future delivery model are focused on tackling key areas of high need and demand where we are seeing rapid escalation in spend. We believe this

focus is essential to reducing spend in both the immediate and longer term.

7.2 Legal

7.2.1 There are no legal implications identified.

7.3 Equalities and Diversity

7.3.1 Our approach to prevention aims to tackle inequalities, especially around improving access to support and opportunities for protected characteristics, addressing health inequalities early before they escalate into serious problems and preventing inequalities developing.

7.3.2 We anticipate that early intervention and prevention will have a positive impact on all residents especially in helping to reduce health inequalities, create opportunities of support for those especially experiencing inequality and difficulties and improve practice towards residents. The next stage of this work will be to develop a clear model and programme of delivery, at which point a further EQIA will be completed to detail the impact on protected characteristics.

7.4 Sustainability (including climate change, health, crime and disorder)

7.4.1 By continuing to strengthen how we work across partners and with the community to intervene early to address the root causes of vulnerability, such as adverse childhood experiences or lack of positive support and opportunities, we will help to improve health and wellbeing and reduce crime and disorder.

7.4.2 Similarly, positive climate action holds strong ties to public health. Our mission to lead the way for a net-zero borough recognises strong progress to reduce the impact of air pollution and that further action is required to prevent serious health issues. In turn, preventative activity to improve health outcomes, such as promoting active lifestyles can have a positive impact on climate change.

7.5 Council Infrastructure

7.5.1 There are no council infrastructure implications at this stage.

Background Information (as defined by Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985)

None.