

# Early Action in Southwark and Lambeth

## Report from the Southwark and Lambeth Early Action Commission

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### SUMMARY

#### Aims of the Commission

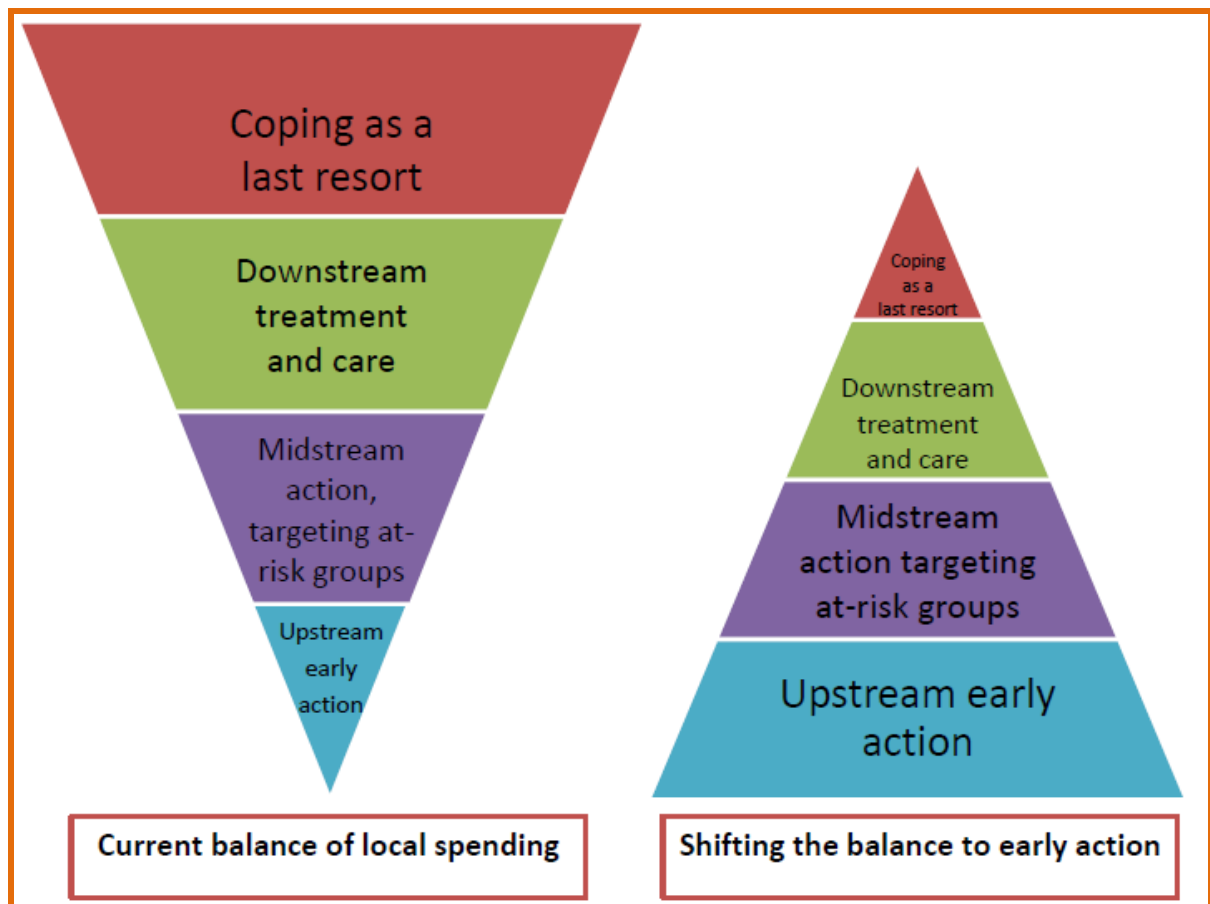
The Southwark and Lambeth Early Action Commission aims to find ways of taking early action at local level to prevent problems that reduce people's quality of life and generate needs for public services. Problems such as childhood obesity, social isolation, unemployment and violent crime all generate high demand for services and yet are often preventable. Both councils are committed to more effective prevention, but it is a big challenge to turn this commitment into effective and sustainable early action.

"I want to us to think about how we treat the causes of problems rather than the consequences... Prevention and resilience should be at the forefront of all our work." *Council Leader Lib Peck introducing Lambeth's Community Plan 2013-16*

"For people to lead healthy lives, we need to tackle the root causes of ill health and reduce the inequalities that limit the lives of too many in our society".

*Southwark's Fairer Future Council Plan 2014/5to 2016/7*

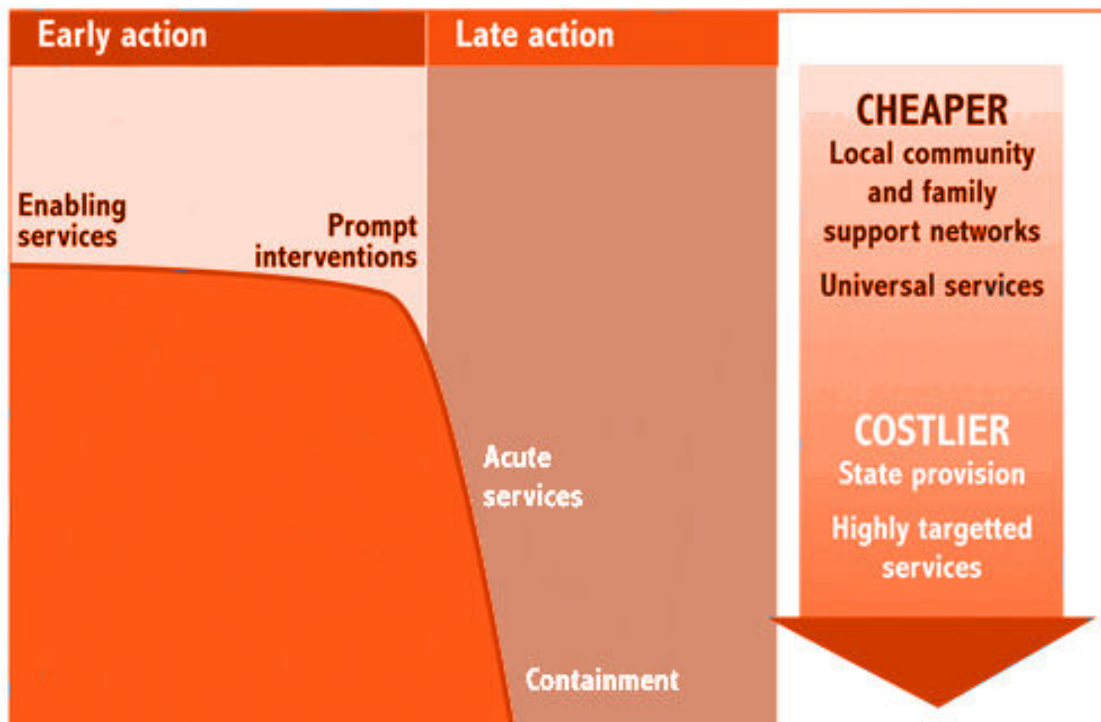
Public resources are severely constrained. This acts as a barrier to change but also as a stimulus, because early action is the only viable response to spending cuts on the scale now demanded of public authorities. The aim must be to shift the lion's share of spending from "downstream" treatment and care, to "upstream" preventative measures. This would avoid waste and make wiser use of public funds. It would also improve the quality of life for people in Southwark and Lambeth by reducing needs for acute services and maintaining wellbeing for all residents.



The Commission has examined local conditions in Lambeth and Southwark, especially the immediate and underlying causes of pressing local problems, and what works best to prevent them. It has carried out a review of local strategy, policy and practice; explored more than 30 examples of good practice in the two boroughs and further afield; and engaged with local residents and community-based groups and with other experts, through workshops and interviews.

### Early and late action

The diagram below shows the difference between early (“upstream”) and late (“downstream”) action. Downstream action can only cope with or contain a problem once it has happened. Prompt interventions or “mid-stream” action can stop people already considered ‘at risk’ from developing more serious problems. “Upstream measures tackle the underlying causes of a problem to remove the risk of it happening in the first place. They are generally for everyone, not just for people who are ‘vulnerable’ or ‘at risk’.



If acute needs are not prevented, they must of course be dealt with, but the aim should be to reduce the volume of demand for them as far as possible.

The underlying causes of most social problems can be traced to the same bundle of social and economic issues. Some of these, such as poverty and inequality, are strongly linked with national policy, so that it is hard tackle them locally. But there are plenty of opportunities for local early action to prevent problems by improving local conditions and social relationships.

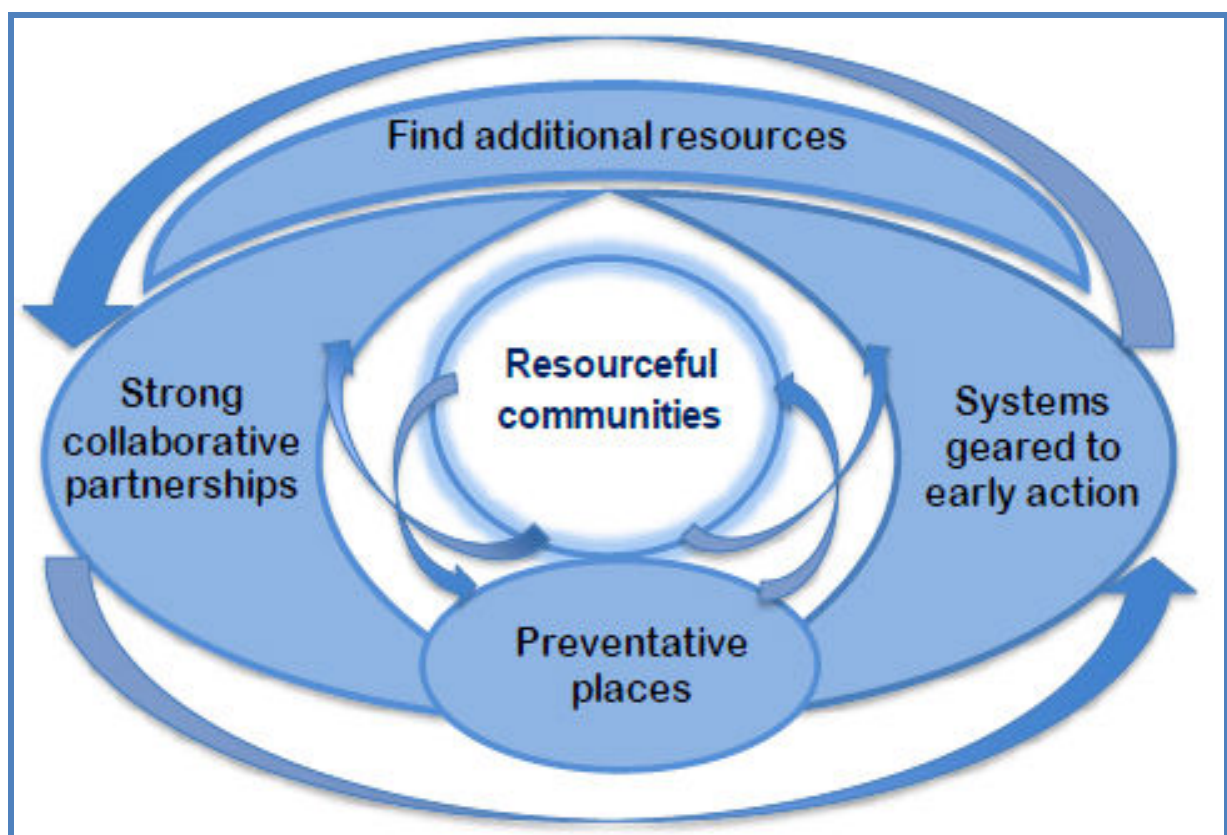
### Goals for early action

The Commission has identified four goals for early action in Southwark and Lambeth. These are designed to reverse the balance of spending and to address problems as far upstream as possible. They focus what can be done locally in the context of extreme budgetary constraints. They interact with dynamic effect and are intended to be mutually reinforcing and sustainable over time. It will be important to find additional resources to help achieve these goals.

- **Resourceful communities** where residents and groups are agents of change, ready to shape the course of their own lives. To achieve this people need actual resources (but in the broadest sense), connections and control.

- **Preventative places** where material conditions have a positive impact how people feel and enable them to lead fulfilling lives and to help themselves and each other.
- **Strong, collaborative partnerships** where organisations work together and share knowledge and power, fostering respectful, high-trust relationships based on a shared purpose.
- **Systems geared to early action**, where the culture, values, priorities and practices of local institutions support early action as the new 'normal' way of working

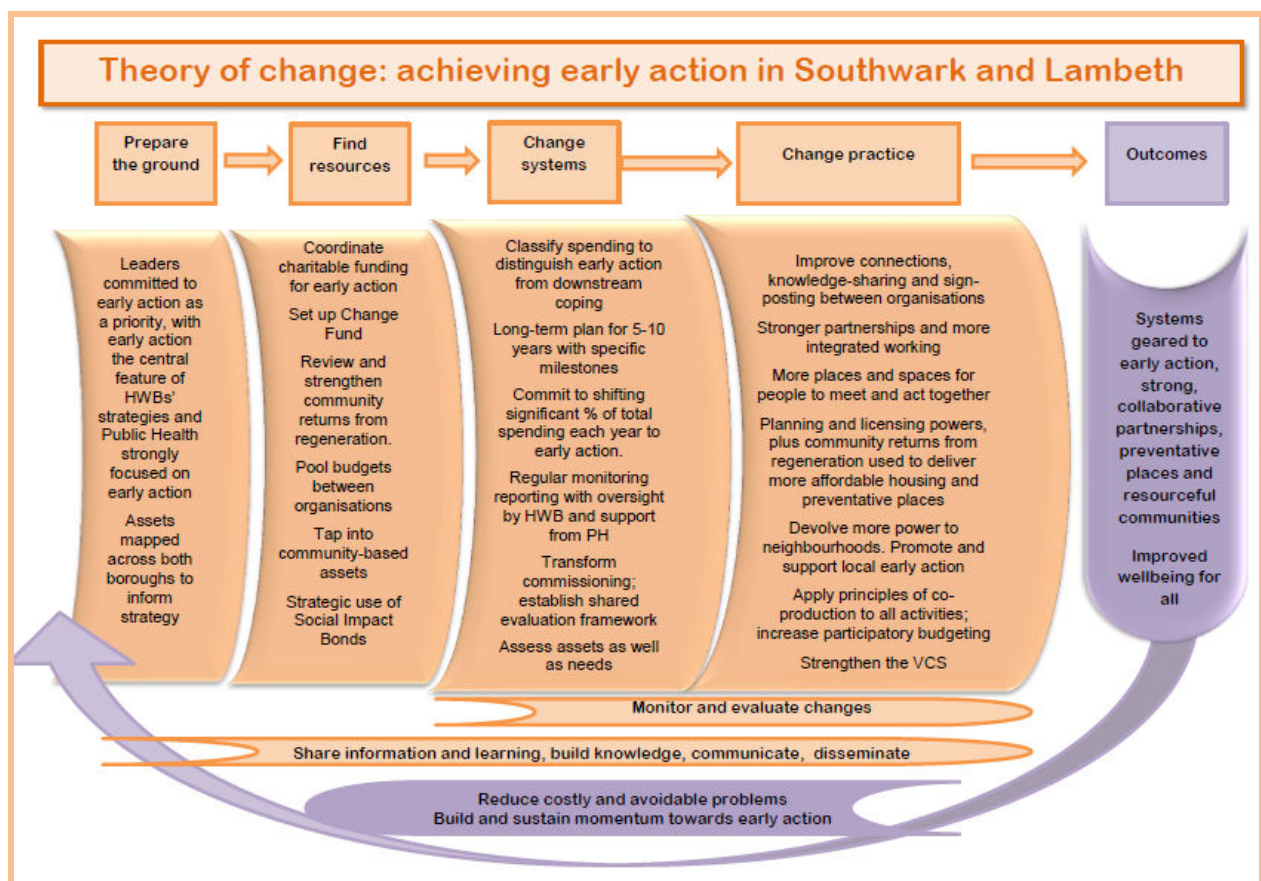
***A dynamic model of early action***



## Recommendations

Effective early action depends on changing whole systems, not just launching new initiatives. These recommendations build on good practice already underway in Southwark, Lambeth and elsewhere. To make a real difference, they must be placed at the heart policy and practice in both boroughs and pursued forcefully and consistently over time. Taken together, they contribute to the four goals: resourceful communities, preventative places, strong, collaborative partnerships and systems geared to early action.

The diagram below suggests a sequence in which each stage facilitates the next. But there is no strict chronological order. Action to change systems should not wait until resources are found, nor should changes in practice wait for systems to be geared to early action.



### **Step 1: Prepare the ground**

- ***Establish senior leadership and commitment.***

Health and Wellbeing Boards must ensure that early action is a central feature of their strategy, with Board members firmly committed to implementing it. The Public Health department should play a key role in driving the changes.

- ***Map assets across both boroughs.***

Asset mapping, already practiced in both boroughs, identifies human and social resources, which are abundant in every locality and play a vital role in early action. This should be strengthened to locate, develop and connect local assets.

### **Step 2: Find resources**

- ***Co-ordinate charitable funding for early action.***

Bring together independent funders across both boroughs to share knowledge about early action and work together to offer grants for activities that tackle problems more systemically and further upstream.

- ***Set up a dedicated Change Fund to support systems change.***

This could be financed partly or wholly by a suitable local grant-giving foundation and dedicated to stimulating profound changes in the way local systems are designed and operated.

- ***Review and strengthen community returns from regeneration.***

Opportunities to generate funds through sale of redevelopment sites, Section 106 negotiations and the Community Infrastructure Levy should be maximised, with funds used to prevent problems, e.g. through housing and spatial planning.

- ***Pool budgets between organisations and departments.***

This can help to support early action and make resources go further, by consolidating existing funds and focusing them on early action, as well as strengthening collaboration between the boroughs, and sharing risks and rewards.

- ***Tap into community-based assets.***

Unlock human and social assets in the community (see asset mapping above), by working more closely with VCS organisations, and by applying the principles of co-production.

- ***Strategic use of Social Impact Bonds.***

These involve raising investment from the private sector to finance service provision (usually by the VCS). They are useful in *limited* conditions, especially as a tool for experimenting with new initiatives in the transition to early action.

### ***Step 3: Gear local systems to early action***

- ***Classify spending to distinguish early action from downstream coping.***

Spending bodies should know whether the money they spend is allocated to coping with problems or preventing them. Spending should be loosely classified – as a rule of thumb - adapting guidance from the Early Action Task Force.

- ***Establish a long-term plan, across 5-10 years, with specific milestones.***

To avoid local systems defaulting to downstream coping, leading decision-makers and budget holders in Southwark and Lambeth should commit to a step-by-step transition to early action, over the longer term, with specific milestones.

- ***Commit to shifting a significant % of spending each year to early action.***

Both boroughs should commit to shifting a specific – and significant - proportion of total spending each year towards early action. Targets should be subject to yearly revision but we suggest 5% as an initial goal.

- ***Establish clear oversight arrangements, with regular monitoring and reporting.***

Health and Wellbeing Boards should oversee the shift to early action, supported by Public Health, with a shared evaluation framework (see below), quarterly reporting to the HWB, and reporting back to a reconvened Early Action Commission.

- ***Transform the commissioning process to support early action.***

Decisions about what services and other activities are required should be taken in partnership with local people, with commissioning focused on assets, on how to prevent problems, and on outcomes, and encouraging collaboration.

- ***Develop a shared evaluation framework.***

For use by VCS grant-holders and contractors, and public sector bodies, this would establish a theory of change reflecting a shared understanding of early action, and shared criteria for monitoring progress, including wellbeing indicators.

- ***Assess community assets alongside needs.***

Asset assessment should be integrated with the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA), changing the focus of data collection generate a more rounded view of the local community and higher priority to early action.

#### ***Step 4: Change practice***

- ***Improve connections, co-ordination and knowledge-sharing.***

This involves linking up people and organisations, improving communications between them, and enabling them to exchange information, build a shared sense of purpose and complement rather than duplicate each other's efforts.

- ***Stronger partnerships and more integrated working.***

Stronger partnerships, promoted through information-sharing and the commissioning process, as well as by pooling budgets and more integrated working, should strengthen the momentum towards early action.

- ***Create and support more spaces for people to get together.***

There should be more opportunities for people in Southwark and Lambeth to use parks, open spaces, schools, underused public buildings and empty properties for meeting each other, building networks and doing things together.

- ***Make more use of “place shaping” powers to support early action***

Councils should take stock of their “place-shaping” powers and make the best possible use of them to create conditions that help to prevent problems, working with local people and building on existing good practice in the two boroughs.

- ***Devolve more power to neighbourhoods.***

Local councils and their partners should look for ways of devolving more power and resources to communities and community groups, and transferring community assets to residents.

- ***Promote and support local early action.***

Health and Wellbeing Boards and their constituent bodies should support local preventative initiatives and draw out lessons that can stimulate similar action elsewhere and contribute to wider, systemic changes.



- ***Increase participatory budgeting.***

This aims to deepen public engagement in governance by empowering citizens to decide on how public funds are spent, engaging citizens in democratic deliberation and decision making.

- ***Promote and apply the principles of co-production.***

Co-production, already applied in some programmes and initiatives in both boroughs, should become the standard way of getting things done, encouraged through commissioning and adopted by choice in all sectors.

- ***Strengthen the focus and funding of the VCS in Southwark and Lambeth.***

The local VCS should be encouraged and supported to strengthen its focus on upstream measures, and to adopt an inclusive and participative approach to their activities. Funding should be better co-ordinated and directed at early action.