Local Government Association Briefing
Debate on improving mental health services for people from black and ethnic minority communities
House of Lords
Tuesday 28 November 2017

Key messages

- Good mental health is essential for a healthy and prosperous society. Councils have a range of statutory duties and non-statutory functions related to mental health and supporting mental wellness. From housing to public health, social care, culture and leisure services, councils lead local services that help prevent mental ill health, support early intervention and provide ongoing support.

- We need to look at how the whole system around mental health works, and could work better. Local government must be at the heart of a new drive to improve our nation's mental health.

- Figures suggest some black and ethnic minority groups are detained more frequently under the Mental Health Act.

- The independent review of the Mental Health Act is welcome. It is intended to address a number of issues related to improving mental health services for people from BAME communities. Strong local partnerships that bring together health services, councils, communities and other public bodies are key to ensuring everybody is supported to be mentally well and receive timely support.

- English local authorities will have seen reductions of £16 billion to core central government funding during the course of this decade. This is money that councils use to pay for services for their local communities including mental health services.

- Supporting councils to develop appropriate early intervention and mental wellness initiatives in order to prevent poor mental health is more cost-effective than treating serious mental health issues.

- The voluntary and community sector (VCS) are key partners in helping our communities keep mentally well, and in supporting people when they become mentally ill.

Background

Mental health and the BAME community

As the NHS Five Year Forward View for Mental Health[i] states, people in marginalised groups are at greater risk of developing mental health conditions, including black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) people, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, disabled people, and people who have had contact with the criminal justice system, among others. BAME households are more likely to live in poorer or over-crowded conditions, increasing the risks of developing mental health problems.

Further, figures suggest some black and ethnic minority groups are detained more frequently under the Mental Health Act. Where this is the case, it is addressed by local services working with local communities and drawing upon the Mental Health Crisis

Concordat. [1] The independent review of the Mental Health Act is an opportunity to move away from a focus on risk, detention and medication, to build on a person's strengths, the provision of personalised support and the services that enable a person experiencing mental health issues to live a healthy and fulfilling life.

Under the Equalities Act 2010, and as part of representing the broad spectrum of people living in any area, councils must have regard for age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion/belief, sex, and sexual orientation in all their activities, commissioning and services.

Youth justice and mental health

As the Taylor Review from 2016 indicates, many children who offend have mental health, behavioural or learning difficulties, and often these conditions have gone undiagnosed. These problems can be at the root of a child's offending, and frequently are a barrier to engagement or progress in education.[ii] This is particularly concerning given that as many as 60-70 per cent of children and adolescents who experience clinically significant difficulties have not had appropriate interventions at a sufficiently early age.[iii]

BAME young people are overrepresented in the youth justice system. Despite making up just 14 per cent of the population, over 40 per cent of young people in custody are from BAME backgrounds. As a proportion of youth prisoners, this is an increase from 25 per cent to 41 per cent in the decade 2006 -2016.[iv]

Role of councils in tackling mental health

Good mental health is essential for a healthy and prosperous society. Unfortunately, it is easier to focus on what happens when a person becomes mentally ill, and how the health service intervenes, rather than how to keep our communities mentally well in the first place, preventing mental health issues arising, intervening early if problems do start surfacing, and helping people manage their lives going forward.

For many people, mental health may be the cause or effect of a wider set of issues within their lives. This could include relationship break-downs, domestic violence, homelessness or housing difficulties, missed education opportunities, unemployment, financial difficulties, debt, ill health, substance misuse and interaction with the criminal justice system. For a lot of people it will be a combination and complex interaction of all of or some of the issues listed. Councils have a unique role in making the links between these sets of issues and can tackle the underlying causes, rather than waiting to deal with an individual crisis.

Local government needs the right funding and the right levers to use their position as local leaders, place-shapers, commissioners and deliverers of services across all these areas to really improve the mental health and wellbeing of our community and stop people falling into a mental health crisis.

Funding for local councils

English local authorities will have seen reductions of £16 billion to core central government funding during the course of this decade. By 2019/20, more than half of all English councils, including three quarters of district councils, will no longer receive the revenue support grant. In order to continue to meet their range of statutory duties and non-statutory duties related to the provision of mental health services and ensuring

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[1] The Mental Health Crisis Concordat aims to set out the standards of care people should expect from public services if they experience a mental health crisis and how the emergency services should respond. Along with 21 other organisations, the LGA was a founding contributor to the Concordat and all local areas have signed the Concordat.

mental wellness for the communities councils have clearly prioritised social care and support services. Data from our State of the Nation report shows that this has inevitably and unavoidably been achieved to the detriment of other local services. Every council will have made their own decisions in this process but it is safe to assume that the services that had to deal with deeper reductions to funding would have included things like libraries, leisure, and bus services. This is clearly a false economy given these universal neighbourhood services are preventative in the widest sense and contribute to wellbeing.

Working with the voluntary and community sector

The voluntary and community sector (VCS) are key partners in helping our communities keep mentally well, and in supporting people when they become mentally ill. Locally based voluntary groups that provide specialised support, and are based on the uniqueness of local circumstances, are invaluable partners in providing targeted support in the mental health system, including for BAME groups.

In our recent publication on the role of local government in mental health and wellbeing, 'Being mindful of mental health', we provide a number of examples of the work the VCS are undertaking to improve mental health and mental wellness across the country.

LGA reports

LGA Budget Submission 2017

LGA 'Being mindful of mental health' 2017

LGA State of the Nation report 2017

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[i] NHS (2016), the NHS Five Year Forward View for Mental health, www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Mental-Health-Taskforce-FYFV-final.pdf
[ii] For further information please see:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/577103/youth-justice-review-final-report.pdf
[iii] For further information please see:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/414024/Childrens_Mental_Health.pdf
[iv] For further information please see:
https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/643001/lammy-review-final-report.pdf