



Local early action: how to make it happen

Report from the Southwark and Lambeth Early Action Commission

Many of our biggest societal challenges – from childhood obesity to violent crime – are preventable. The Southwark and Lambeth Early Action Commission aims to find ways of taking local early action to improve people's quality of life and reduce the strain on public services.

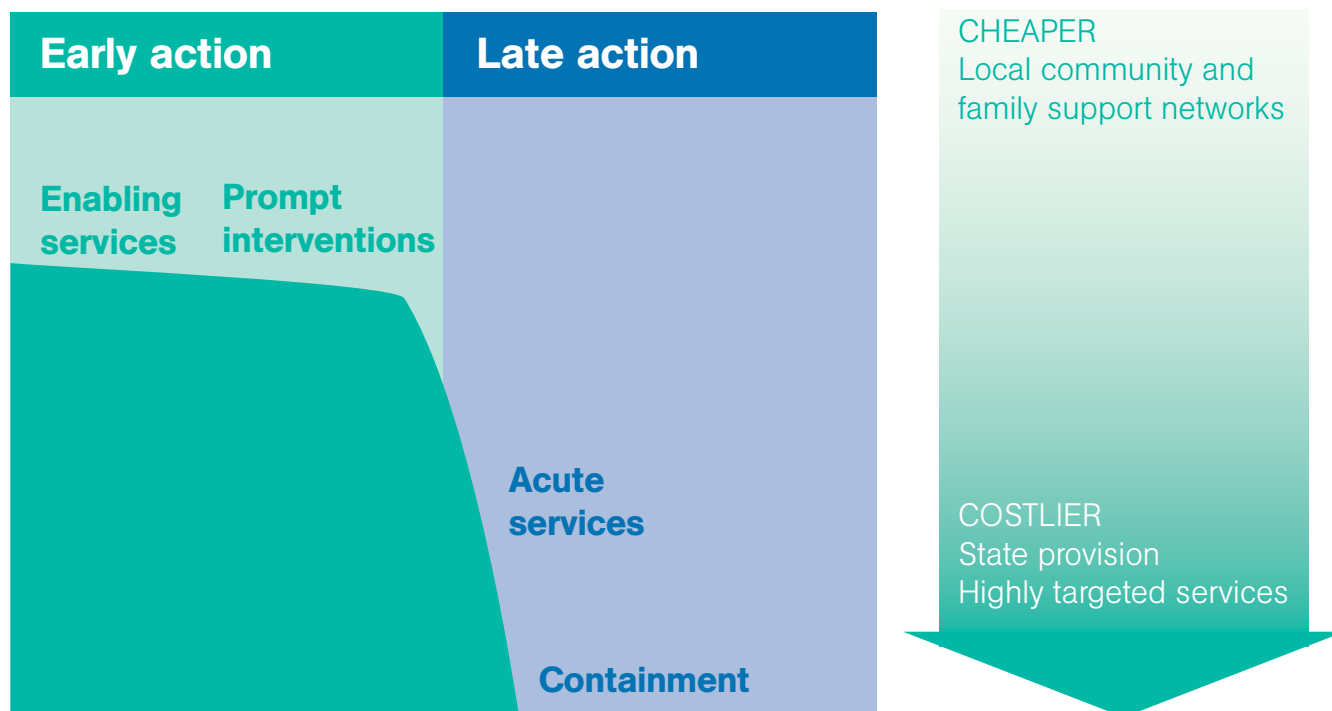
Local authorities are under increasing pressure both to maintain essential services and to cut their spending. A shift towards investing in upstream preventative measures is a wiser way of spending public funds than coping with the consequences through downstream treatment and care. Southwark and Lambeth set up the Southwark and Lambeth Early Action Commission to help them realise the potential benefits that a preventative approach can bring.

The Commission has examined local conditions in Lambeth and Southwark, especially the underlying causes of pressing local problems, and what works best to prevent them.

The Commission has identified four goals for early action in Southwark and Lambeth. These are designed to address problems as early as possible and focus on what can be done locally in the context of extreme budgetary constraints. To help achieve these goals it will be important to find additional resources.

- **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 the quality of neighbourhoods has a positive impact on how people feel and enables 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.

Distinguishing early action from late action



Source: The Early Action Task Force. (2011). *The Triple Dividend*. Retrieved from http://www.community-links.org/uploads/documents/Triple_Dividend.pdf

Recommendations

Effective early action depends on changing whole systems over a sustained period of time. These recommendations build on the good practice that's already taking place. They must be pursued together and placed at the heart policy and practice in both Southwark and Lambeth. We hope they are also useful for others trying to move towards early action.

Stage 1: Prepare the ground

- **Establish senior leadership and commitment.**
Early action must be central to Health and Wellbeing Boards' strategies, with all members firmly committed to making it happen and Public Health promoting change.
- **Map assets across both boroughs.**
Locate, develop and connect local assets through mapping, already practiced in both boroughs, to identify human and social resources that are vital to early action.

Stage 2: Find resources

- **Co-ordinate charitable funding for early action.**
Bring together independent funders across both boroughs to share knowledge and work together to offer grants for early action.
- **Set up a dedicated Change Fund to support systems change.**
Financed partly or wholly by a local grant-giving foundation, this aims to stimulate profound changes in the design and operation of local systems.
- **Review and strengthen community returns from regeneration.**
Maximise funds generated through sale of redevelopment sites, Section 106 negotiations and the Community Infrastructure Levy, and focus them on prevention.
- **Pool budgets between organisations and departments.**
Make resources for early action go further, by consolidating existing funds and focusing

them on prevention, while strengthening collaboration between the boroughs.

- **Tap into community-based assets.**
Unlock human and social assets in the community by working more closely with VCS organisations, and by applying the principles of co-production.
- **Make strategic use of social finance models, including Social Impact Bonds.**
These involve raising investment from the private sector to finance service provision. Social Impact Bonds are useful for experimenting with new initiatives in the transition to early action.

Stage 3: Change systems

- **Classify spending to distinguish early action from downstream coping.**
Spending should be loosely classified, adapting guidance from the Early Action Task Force, to show whether funds are allocated to coping with problems or preventing them.
- **Establish a long-term plan, across 5-10 years, with specific milestones.**
Decision-makers and budget-holders should commit to a step-by-step transition to early action, over the longer term, with specific milestones.
- **Commit to shifting a significant percentage of yearly spending to early action.**
Both boroughs should commit to shifting a specific proportion of total spending each year to early action, with targets reviewed annually and 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 regular progress reports, the first no later than November 2016.

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

Decisions about commissioning should be taken in partnership with local people, encourage collaboration, and focus on assets, on early action and on outcomes.

- **Develop a shared evaluation framework.**
For use by VCS and public sector bodies, this would reflect a shared understanding of early action, and shared criteria for monitoring, including wellbeing indicators.

- **Assess community assets alongside needs.**

Asset assessment should be integrated with the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment to give a more rounded view of the community and higher priority to early action.

Stage 4: Change practice

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

This involves linking up people and organisations, improving communications, building a shared sense of purpose and enabling groups to complement each other's efforts.

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

Strengthen partnerships through information-sharing, adapted commissioning, pooled budgets and integrated working: this should build momentum towards early action.

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

Increase opportunities for local people to use parks, open spaces, schools, underused buildings and empty properties for meeting, building networks and acting together.

- **Make more use of ‘place shaping’ powers to support early action.**
Councils should use their powers 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 find ways of devolving more power and resources to communities and transferring community assets to residents.
- **Promote and support local early action.**
Health and Wellbeing Boards should support local preventative initiatives, draw out lessons to stimulate further action and contribute to systemic change.
- **Increase participatory budgeting.**
This aims to deepen public engagement in governance by empowering citizens

to decide how public funds are spent, engaging them in democratic decision making.

- **Promote and apply the principles of co-production.**
Co-production, already applied in some places in both boroughs, should become the standard way of getting things done in all sectors, encouraged through commissioning.
- **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.

A dynamic model of early action

