



Wirral Link Forum

30 July 2012

Councillor Wendy Clements
Chair
Children and Young People Overview
& Scrutiny Committee
Wirral Council

Dear Wendy

Re: Children's Services Commissioning

As you are aware, Wirral Link Forum is basically an umbrella organisation for voluntary, community and faith sector organisations that work with children, young people and families in Wirral, offering them a voice through representation on the Children's Trust Board, Local Safeguarding Children Board and Every Child Matters Outcome Groups. We also act as a conduit between the statutory and voluntary sectors, cascading information through our website, weekly bulletins and at our monthly meetings. Link Forum was set up in 2005 because existing infrastructure organisations were unable to provide the services/support/information needed for those voluntary organisations that were working with children, young people and families. We work closely with Wirral's Children & Young People's Department, who have funded a paid worker for us for several years now, and are committed to doing so for the foreseeable future.

At a recent meeting of Link Forum members, concern was expressed regarding the plans for commissioning of children's services from April 2013. A representative of Link Forum plays an active part in the planning meetings for the commissioning process, and it is apparent that Commissioners are restricted from meaningful forward planning due to the uncertainty around the Council budget.

The impact on the voluntary sector of this lack of clarity around the budget planning process and the apparent necessity of issuing 12-month contracts only means that:

- Valued, experienced staff can only be offered short-term employment contracts, which can result in low staff morale and the loss of highly skilled staff.
- Lack of certainty of continued service provision can affect the confidence that vulnerable children, young people and families have in services, and their willingness to engage with a service on a short-term basis.

- Frustration amongst statutory partners who are unsure of service availability and who to make referrals to.
- Organisations are unable to enter into long-term tenancy agreements with local landlords, adversely affecting the local economy.

We recognise the difficult situation that the Council face in the current financial climate but would like to offer some suggestions for consideration as a way forward:

- Commissioning of services on a minimum 3-year basis to ensure continuity of workforce and development of sustainable services to meet the needs of Wirral children, young people and families/council priorities
- Commissioners able to focus on effective monitoring of commissioned services, with the authority to alter or terminate contracts if agreed outcomes are not being achieved
- An annual review of commissioned services based on performance, outcomes, value for money, budgetary constraints, and meeting local and national indicators.

As a Sector, we feel we can offer an alternative approach to delivering effective and professional children's services in Wirral and would value the opportunity to explore this further with you.

Yours sincerely

Lynn Loughran

Lynn Loughran
Link Forum Co-ordinator
On behalf of Wirral Link Forum

c.c. David Armstrong
Julia Hassell
Maureen McDaid

Ref:

Department for Communities and Local Government
<http://www.communities.gov.uk/news/corporate/2188300>

Peer challenge Wirral



Wirral Presentation
MMD.ppt