

People Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Thursday, 23 March 2017

REPORT TITLE:	IMPROVING LIFE CHANCES STRATEGY UPDATE
REPORT OF:	Director for Health and Wellbeing

REPORT SUMMARY

The Wirral Plan: A 2020 Vision sets out a shared partnership vision to improve outcomes for Wirral residents. Delivery of the priorities and outcomes described in the Plan are underpinned through a set of key strategies and delivery plans.

The Improving Life Chances strategy is a 5-year, partnership strategy document, published in March 2016 which articulates the ambition of the Wirral Plan People Pledge to 'Reduce child and family poverty',

The ambition of the plan is:

“Our ambition is to ensure that no child in Wirral lives in poverty. We will start by supporting 1000 Wirral families to move out of poverty by 2018. This would mean we could reduce child poverty to 20.1% in those we currently know fall into our definition of child poverty. In addition to a range of activity across the borough, we will pilot a radical new approach in our communities, where there are particularly high levels of poverty.”

The Improving Life Chances Steering group is led by Bev Morgan, Chief Executive of Home Start (Wirral). In addition organisations from the public, private, and voluntary sectors have been fully engaged and involved in shaping its development. The strategy is a good example of what can be achieved in partnership.

Since it was published, partners have worked together in new and innovative ways across Wirral to deliver the strategy. The key areas of focus for 2016-17 are to develop the innovative work in the Pilot Areas and to make a real impact on smoking rates.

This report provides an update to the Committee on the progress of the strategy to date.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Committee is requested to note the report and provide feedback.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

The Improving Life Chance strategy has been developed to deliver the Wirral Plan pledge to Reduce child and family poverty. The strategy also supports delivery of other pledges including Vulnerable children reach their full potential; Children are ready for school and Young people are ready for work and adulthood.

Comments are requested to ensure that Members views are taken into account throughout the life of the strategy and how feedback from surgeries and work in the Wards can help support delivery.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

No other options have been considered.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This section provides a summary of key updates and achievements against each of the five key priority areas outlined below. A more detailed report against each action within the strategy is available in the quarterly Wirral Plan Performance Reports published on the performance page of the Council's website.

3.1 Development of the Wirral Improving Life Chances Strategy

3.1.1 Improving Life Chances

The Improving Life Chances Plan builds on and develops the work of Wirral's Child Poverty Working Group. This strategy has been developed in partnership with local families and a range of public, voluntary, community and faith sector organisations. The voices of local families were heard through focus groups and interviews. Local organisations were involved through a Stakeholder event and a number of working group meetings. The Steering Group also carried out a thorough review of national good practice and initiatives that have worked, including the evaluation of national pilot schemes to reduce child poverty

In the introduction to the strategy; Councillor Tony Smith, Cabinet Member for Children's Services clearly articulated why the Plan is so important to the Wirral:

"If we reduce poverty, it will help us to achieve our ambitions for growth, bringing significant economic and financial benefits to the borough and our residents.

Reducing poverty:

- Harnesses people's skills, knowledge and experience, and boosts productivity
- Raises incomes, increasing spend and demand in the local economy, directly benefiting local businesses;
- Reduces welfare spending and demand for public services."

3.1.3 Why were the Indicators Chosen?

Child and family poverty is a multi-dimensional problem. The Strategy takes a more strategic and multi-agency approach to tackling the issues concerned. There is also a recognition that many of the actions required to tackle child poverty and improve life chances cannot be addressed in isolation and will be delivered through a number of other strategies including Children's Families and Young Peoples, Transport, Housing and All Age Disability.

One strategy that will have a significant effect on the Improving Life Chances Strategy is the Wirral Growth Plan. There is clear evidence that reducing worklessness and improving the skills and opportunities for parents and young people is critical in linking economic growth and poverty reduction. The Growth Plan aims to provide good quality jobs as it is estimated that at least half the children living in poverty are part of a working family.

The priorities for action have been built on national research, together with insight from local residents and stakeholders. In determining the focus, it was felt that this particular strategy would be best aimed at learning how to have an impact on a very challenging issue, through using different approaches in pilot areas.

The approach in the pilot areas link to the four priority areas identified in the strategy:

Priority 1: Support people into sustainable employment

Priority 2: Improve life chances for children and young people

Priority 3: Help families to become financially resilient

Priority 4: Tackle the immediate impacts of poverty.

The Improving Life Chances Strategy includes a focus on a number of targeted innovative projects in specific Community Pilot areas. By focusing efforts in the Community Pilot areas partners intend to have a real impact on people's lives.

Helping someone to move out of poverty is not a quick process. It is important to recognise that the outcomes of many of the actions of the Improving Life Chances strategy may only become apparent over a long period of time.

3.1.4 What has already been achieved?

The examples below give a sense of the variety and range of some of the existing initiatives from the Improving Life Chances Strategy.

Community Pilots have been established

Community Pilots are a local partnership of residents, councillors, community groups and agencies who meet every six weeks. They develop and monitor a joint action plan of events and activities, designed to improve life chances for children; support families to be financially resilient; tackle the immediate impacts of poverty ; and support parents into sustainable employment.

The Improving Life Chances (ILC) steering group agreed that the pilot areas would be set up in Seacombe and Bidston and St James wards. Detailed data analysis was used to inform the discussion to select the pilot areas. Factors included high levels of child poverty and high scores on the English Indices of Deprivation 2015. It was also important to determine areas that already had some level of community infrastructure on which initiatives could be built. Food was identified as a potential means of engaging local communities and was considered an area that other services could tap in to address a wide variety of issues from community involvement to tackling stigma and low self-esteem issues.

Christmas Hampers

Christmas time provided an excellent opportunity for the Community Pilots to really engage with their communities. Last Christmas 2,500 hampers were delivered across the community areas. Volunteers were essential in delivering the scheme and funding came from a wide range of donors with many people giving freely of their time. The Hampers did not just include food and basic household essentials. They also included an information pack that gave people the details of local services and support organisations.

The hampers proved to be an excellent way of positively engaging with the community and feedback has been really positive. There will be a more detailed presentation about the Christmas Hamper Scheme at the Scrutiny meeting on 23rd March 2017.

Holiday Food Projects

Birkenhead Constituency Committee agreed in December 2016 to fund a further 14 holiday food projects over the course of the next year. Birkenhead Constituency team are supporting FareShare an organisation that saves good food destined for waste and distributes it to charities and community groups who transform it into nutritious meals for vulnerable people. All the food used is fresh, good quality and in date surplus from the food industry and distributors.

The social nature of the food events enable the team to recruit additional members and encourage more food providers to get involved and establish more luncheon clubs where they are needed.

North Birkenhead Youth Project

The project targets and engages with a group of young people causing (or at risk of causing) anti-social behaviour in the North End of Birkenhead. The group of young people targeted, has been identified by the Police, Wirral Anti-Social Behaviour team and the Youth Offending Team. This project was set up by the Birkenhead Constituency team to address anti-social behaviour and currently offers a range of diversionary activities to young people for a minimum of 5 nights a week for 6 months across venues in North Birkenhead.

Sports nights have also been taking place in Ilchester Square, Birkenhead and at the Bidston Tennis Centre since October 2016, delivered by the Sports Development Team with support from Kontacabus. Youth Inclusion Programme 1-1s started on 9th February 2017 and will continue in Gautby Road, Birkenhead until April 2017.

The 'sitting off' youth project begun at the Gautby Road Play and Community Centre on 20th February 2017. There is now therefore activity for young people in the North End of Birkenhead 5 days a week and this will continue for 6 months. Levels of ASB have already shown a reduction in the area compared with last year.

Activities

It is important that the projects deliver activities young people want and will engage with. A wide ranging consultation exercise has been carried out with the young people themselves. As a result the following activities have been introduced:

- Sports development football sessions delivered at Ilchester Square
- Youth nights 2/3 evenings a week at Gautby Road Play and Community Centre, where they can play Xbox FIFA, table tennis etc.
- Boxing training at the Venture Boxing club in Brassey Gardens
- Martial arts training at Gautby Road Play and Community Centre
- Sport development astro turf football at Bidston Tennis Centre,
- mobile climbing wall sessions at Ilchester Square
- Youth Inclusion 1-1 sessions
- DJ and rapping sessions at Gautby Road Play and Community Centre
- trips to Llandegla and Awesome Walls (Liverpool Climbing Centre)

Local community role models are being encouraged to engage with the group between July-December 2017 for example. Sean 'Masher' Dodd local boxer from Birkenhead is going to talk to the group.

There are a range of weekly sessions planned which will also provide a 'food element' from Gautby Road, which supports the 'Feeding Birkenhead' campaign. The Bidston and St James area has one of the highest rates of child poverty in the country and also is a hot spot for anti-social behaviour. The project delivers sessions of diversionary activities to a group of young people who have been identified as at risk of offending or committing anti-social behaviour.

Welfare Reform

A welfare reform working group has been established which brings together key partners to lead a co-ordinated and strategic response to welfare reform. This includes advice and information on housing, employment, financial inclusion and income maximisation. Focused partnership work to support families who were going to be affected by the recently implemented Benefit Cap has been undertaken, including case conferences, financial and debt advice, job search advice and targeted employment support.

Department Work Pensions (DWP) Super Partners

Super Partner events continue to support parents into employment - DWP Group information sessions for lone parents are held at early years centre at Brassey Gardens. All the parents who attended the sessions have gone on to engage with Gingerbread, a charity that gives help and advice service to single parents.

An additional Super Partner's event was held in December 2016 targeted at parents who have caring responsibilities. This group have particular needs and often face severe barriers that prevent them returning to employment.

A Partnership Framework has been agreed to promote effective working with Wirral Jobcentre Plus and Wirral Borough Council's Early Childhood Service, to help deliver shared aims and objectives, including:

- Support delivery of Wirral's 2020 vision, particularly the pledges directly related to school readiness; and improving life chances (reduce child and family poverty), through different ways of working together and new ideas to better support families
- Sharing information, gaps in child care provision and employment growth sectors in Wirral, to ensure those families who most need the services gain access to them
- Ensuring that up to date, timely information is available to work coaches regarding quality, accessible & affordable childcare to enable parents to take up work;
- DWP Wirral will inform and support early childhood service staff re changes/additions/amendments to relevant policies e.g. welfare reform

Increasing financial resilience

The new Information and Advice service has been commissioned and will start on the 1st April 2017. It will be a one door integrated service called **Ask Us Wirral** which will make it easier and quicker for families to get the debt and financial inclusion information and advice that they need.

Local delivery of targeted information, advice and support on debt and financial inclusion has been provided through initiatives such as the development of the 'top tips' leaflet around how to prevent money worries. There will also be a big push to encourage membership of the Wirral Credit Union.

Townsend Street Community Action Day

Townsend Street held a successful Community Action Day on 7th December 2016. The area had been experiencing rising levels of anti-social behaviour and increased levels of fly tipping. Working in partnership the Birkenhead Constituency Team and Merseyside Police organised the action day.

A mobile police station was brought on site and the police pro-actively went door knocking to really engage face to face with members of the local community.

Biffa, Probation Service, the Council Waste and Recycling Team and Mersey Fire and Rescue Service all got together to tackle the rubbish and fly tipping problem. Three skips were filled and over two tonnes of rubbish was removed.

Gautby Road Community Centre and North Birkenhead Development Trust also took the opportunity to engage with residents in the area. As a result more members of the community have become actively engaged with their area.

Theatre for Democracy

The Neighbourhoods and Engagement team co-ordinated an eight week module which involved Community Drama students from the Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts (LIPA) meeting regularly with community groups in a number of areas across Wirral to research and create a series of performances, with a focus on identifying ideas and solutions for sustainable change and improvement. Performances featured work on a variety of themes including the need for safe spaces, the impact of anti-social behaviour and how to tackle the problems.

LIPA and the young people reported the themes highlighted in the performances to a Panel made up of Councillors and Council Officers to raise the profile of issues in their areas. A number of proposed actions going forward were agreed.

Tackling the immediate effects of poverty – Two Year Old Offer

One of the targets for tackling the immediate effects of poverty was to encourage the take up of the Two Year Old Offer. Free childcare gives children a great start in life. Using only registered Childcare providers the Two Year Old Offer gives fifteen hours of free childcare to people on benefits and low income.

In March 2016, when the Improving Life Chances plan was launched, only 66% of families entitled to the provision were accessing the offer. The take up of the 2 year old offer has steadily improved. Currently the take up is 88% of all eligible children.

A continuing priority is to ensure take up by all eligible children. Birkenhead area still has the lowest reported take up by those children eligible, however the gap is narrowing (84% take up). A partnership approach in order to respond to this issue has been developed with all partners taking responsibility.

Warm Homes Campaign

On Friday 13th January 2017 the National Energy Action (NEA) Warm Homes Campaign came to Birkenhead. Supported by Frank Field MP nearly 100 people attended the event where they received advice and tips on how to make sure their homes are warm and dry. They also received advice on how to save money on fuel bills.

Staff from a wide range of different organisations that support families across the Wirral attended the event and were able to give advice on benefits and housing issues.

Raising Aspirations

The Young Chamber of Commerce has introduced schemes across 19 schools across Wirral aimed at raising children's expectations and linking them in with local employers. They recently held a 'Big Debate' hosted by Birkenhead High School Academy (BHSA). The event featured five senior private sector employers plus the Headteacher who formed a 'Question Time' style panel and were grilled by the students. There have been two further 'behind the scenes' events with both Tranmere Rovers and Contessa Hotel where students were given a behind the

scenes view of how businesses run. Later in the year there will be a Wirral Skills Show where employers will encourage young people to 'have a go' at a variety of skills and experiences.

Child Poverty E learning

An online e learning Child Poverty Training programme has been developed and is widely available to all partner organisations. The training package has been well received and can be found at: <http://enable.learningpool.com>

The Improving Life Chances Steering Group is currently reviewing how many people have completed the training and will be targeting specific workforces to increase awareness of the signs of child poverty and to enable agencies to signpost families to available support.

Annual Improving Life Chances Workshop

The first Improving Life Chances Event was held in October 2016. The event proved very successful in bringing partner agencies from across Wirral together and encouraging detailed discussion about initiatives to discover what is working, examine good practice and analyse what else could be done. A key outcome has been the production and circulation of a 'service directory' to advertise all services available in Wirral, including community events to promote all activities and share information of what is going on to reduce child poverty in Wirral. The directory is accessible for all Wirral residents to ensure that there are no barriers hindering families from accessing information.

The workshop will become an annual event with the next one scheduled to be held in October 2017.

Looking to the Future

The priorities for the coming year will be to build on the initial success of the wide range of activity and partnership working, with a particular focus on the Community Pilot Areas. A lot of good work has already begun and the Strategy will continue to drive partnership working and implement imaginative initiatives in the Pilot Areas.

There has been considerable promotion of Wirral Credit Union, and take up from some organisations. This will be targeted through the Wirral Partnership during April 2017 to encourage sign up.

We will ensure there is an increase in the take up of the child poverty awareness e-learning to be addressed through targeting local agencies.

We will continue to prioritise community engagement and encourage 'ownership' of the Community Pilots. We will make sure communities are represented on each of the Improving Life Chances working groups. Delivery plans are evolving all the time as new partners come on board.

Links between new initiatives, such as non-therapeutic interventions, information and advice will be developed to ensure that most vulnerable people and communities take up support available.

There are also several external and national challenges. Partner organisations have expressed some concerns about the impact of the introduction Universal Credit. In particular the shift to pay Housing costs families rather than direct to landlords has raised concerns about the potential for increased rent arrears and the consequence of these on future housing options for families. The ILC Steering Group will continue to work with a range of agencies to minimise the impacts wherever possible.

There will also be a concerted focus on tackling the levels of smoking rates in some of our most deprived areas.

The delivery plan is currently being revised and will review focused actions specific to this strategy and reference links to other Pledges and Strategies to ensure a co-ordinated approach that has maximum impact in supporting families and achieve the best outcomes possible.

4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The financial implications of the Improving Life Chances initiatives described are met from existing resources.

5 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Not applicable

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: ICT, STAFFING AND ASSETS

The Improving Life Chances strategy is co-ordinated through existing staff resources. Any additional resource requirements will be identified as they arise.

7 RELEVANT RISKS

Initial risks around delivery of the strategy have been identified and include:

- Availability of suitable employment (includes factors such as skills/experience/hours and transport)
- Parents who have not worked for some time being 'job ready' and there being appropriate support for this to happen (when appropriate)
- Availability of affordable childcare
- Effective engagement with local communities
- Staff capacity to complete child poverty awareness training
- Willingness of public/agencies to support food banks
- Reliance on small number of individuals within some agencies
- Impact of Universal Credit, money management and budgeting skills

A comprehensive Risk Assessment will be carried out after the strategy refresh.

8 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

The Improving Life Chances Strategy has been developed through a partnership steering group and has been subject to wider consultation with residents, partners and other stakeholders through the development of the strategy.

A stakeholder event took place in October 2016 and the feedback from the event has been used to inform the refresh of the strategy.

Since the strategy has been published, the Improving Life Chances Steering Group, involving a number of different partners, has met bi-monthly to discuss progress, celebrate achievements and highlight any issues.

9 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

An Equality Impact Assessment was prepared and published in December 2015.

The document can be found via the link below:

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/sites/default/files/all/communities%20and%20neighbourhoods/Equality%20Impact%20Assessments/EIA%20since%202014/Families%20and%20wellbeing/Improving%20Life%20Chances%20Strategy%20-%20Equality%20Impact%20Assessment.pdf>

REPORT AUTHOR: *Fiona Johnstone*
Director of Health and Wellbeing
Telephone: 0151 666 5178
Email: fionajohnstone@wirral.gov.uk

APPENDICES

Improving Life Chances Strategy

REFERENCE MATERIAL

Child poverty strategy 2014 to 2017 – HM Gov. 2014

Does money affect children's outcomes? Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2013

Measuring poverty – Child Poverty Action Group

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
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