Foreword

We are extremely grateful to the Steve Morgan Foundation and SHINE for supporting this work, and we would like to thank Wirral Council, Birkenhead Park School, the St James Centre and Merseyside Police for their invaluable contributions to this process. We would especially like to thank North Birkenhead Development Trust's community organisers for expertly leading the community consultation, and the residents and community members in North Birkenhead, who shared their views openly and showed an untapped capacity for leading local change.

Introduction

Since September 2019, Right to Succeed has worked in partnership with SHINE, Steve Morgan Foundation, North Birkenhead Development Trust and Wirral Council to conduct Discovery in North Birkenhead around outcomes for children and young people aged 0-25, from cradle to career.

The work has included rigorous desktop research and analysis, and a range of interviews with key stakeholders working to understand their readiness and capacity for a collective, long term and sustainable place-based change initiative. The Discovery phase was supported by a steering group made up of our funders, Wirral Local Authority, local schools, Public Health, the Police, academic research, the community, local faith groups and other key local organisations, who have offered a breadth of experience and resources to aid the governance of the Discovery phase. This steering group will be expanded and continue to govern programme delivery.

There have been two overarching aims to this work. Firstly, we have sought to understand the enablers and barriers that children, young people and their families face at home, in school and in the community. The findings of the Discovery phase, led in part by local prioritisation, have focused particularly on the enablers and barriers impacting on educational engagement from Early Years to young adult, and there are still gaps to be addressed around extraneous factors such as housing and health access, or maternity support.

The second and greater aim of Discovery has been to evaluate to what extent the conditions for place-based change are present amongst key stakeholders currently living and working in the community. The conditions we seek to put in place are based on the evidence from reviews of collective, place-based approaches internationally, and this report is designed to provide key stakeholders with an oversight of the findings and recommendations around these conditions, with a view to making a collective decision about how we address the complex issue of improving outcomes for children and young people across a generation. Whilst we acknowledge there will be ongoing need to explore further enablers and barriers, this report will form the foundation that will enable the community to develop strategies that will close attainment gaps, raise aspirations and allow the children and young people in the area to thrive on a cradle to career basis.

Key Barriers and Enablers for Children, Young People and Families

Aspirations vs Expectations

Low education and employment outcomes, including indicators such as school attendance rates, are issues of concern in communities such as North Birkenhead on Wirral. The concept of "raising aspirations" is used by local services to describe their approach to addressing these outcomes, but many local leaders and residents argue there needs to be greater recognition of complex and structural factors perpetuating low aspirations and work needs to be done by services to recognise historic failure and build trust with the community by addressing these issues. Broadly, two themes emerged around residents' views: (i) residents had low expectations of what employment and training opportunities were available locally, and (ii) residents had low expectations of the education system's capacity to ensure children and young people were employment ready, given the narrow, academic focus of the curriculum. Other stakeholders highlighted that professionals and many services had lower expectations of children and young people from North Birkenhead and that stigmatisation of the community negatively impacted aspirations and self-belief.

Holistic Mental Health and Wellbeing Support

Mental health was cited by many stakeholders as the biggest unaddressed need across Wirral, and an area which will be exacerbated due to Covid-19. Increased need and overcrowded statutory CAMHS pathways are leaving many families on long waiting lists during which time needs are escalating. However beyond statutory support, there is no systematic or at-scale approach to early intervention for mild-to-moderate mental health needs, especially amongst children and adolescents or holistically for families and parents. There is no well-publicised messaging around positive mental health and wellbeing and families struggle to know when and where to access support for mental health, for themselves or their children. There is also no coordinated approach to supporting children and young people to develop resilience, self-confidence and self-esteem from a young age, or supporting communities to develop their own systems of support.

Identification of Need and Appropriate Support

Support for Speech, Language and Communication needs, Special Educational Needs, low literacy levels and SEMH were cited by stakeholders as areas of concern. Overcrowded statutory support pathways were again highlighted as an issue, reflecting a national picture. However late diagnosis, lack of effective earlier intervention and variations in teachers' and schools' capacities to identify and meet needs effectively in the classroom were highlighted as problematic. School leaders cited high rates of pupil movement as impacting on progress towards a stable system of identification and support. Parents showed frustration at the lack of communication or advice and little knowledge of what support was available, as well as concern around academic progress for pupils with additional or hidden needs. In the face of what has been acknowledged as an increase in the number and severity of challenging cases coupled with insufficient pathways, there was an identified need to address issues as early as possible, including more community-based intervention support for families of young children around a range of issues.

Youth Crime, Antisocial Behaviour, Engagement and Safe Places

Residents were concerned about increases in antisocial behaviour and youth crime, including drug and alcohol abuse. As part of this, some were critical of police involvement in the area, suggesting the police did not like North Birkenhead, however some interviewees called for a better relationship to be developed. However, a key stressor of youth criminality identified by residents was the lack of positive engagement or role models for older teenagers, including the lack of a localised youth offer, exacerbated by peer pressure. Current youth provision in Birkenhead for older teenagers, located at The Hive, was not seen by the community as accessible, affordable or inclusive and many wanted to see simple but safe and inclusive space developed in the community led by local role models.

Supportive and Aspirational Relationships

A strong and positive relationship of support with a key person emerged as an important enabler for children, young people and parents across the community consultation and the school focus groups. Children and young people participating in school focus groups highlighted staff and teachers who were approachable, encouraging but challenging, and at home or in the community referred to adults who were engaged with their progress at school, rewarded achievement and gave guidance and advice. Parents referred to key people who had helped them practically, non-judgmentally and in a range of small ways. Many parents expressed a desire to strengthen family relationships with their children, especially simply more opportunity and resources to spend time with their children, have fun and relax. Stakeholders argued that local, relatable role models should be mobilised in the community and that any effort to engage young people and families must focus on developing opportunities for healthy, long-lasting and positive relationships within the community, in a culture where people are known and supported before needs are escalated.

Community

There was a divided approach to how different stakeholders viewed the community of North Birkenhead, with local leaders more likely to highlight negative elements of the community identity impacting on young people's aspirations, and community residents and pupils more likely to be positive about their immediate communities and the supportive, cross-generational relationships built with neighbours. Residents did highlight issues such as antisocial behaviour, rundown streets and shops and issues with drugs and alcohol, suggesting that there are some, more vulnerable groups underrepresented in the consultation and excluded from the positive local networks of support. Many young perpetrators and families were known within the community but there was some division on how these young people should be engaged - ranging from punitive to positive engagement. Overall, residents showed awareness of the challenges within their community and a keen desire to participate in community-led initiatives to address these issues.

Current State of Conditions for Collective Impact

Common Agenda:

There is a shared understanding across services of the problems that children, young people and families face, although there is inconsistency in understanding some of the underlying drivers of low aspirations within the community. North Birkenhead lacks a common vision that is shared by those that live in and work with the community, but there is a sense of a growing culture within the community to want to focus on designing solutions, with many local leaders echoing residents' desire for a community-led vision that shapes a proactive, person-centred and preventative system of support.

Shared Measurement Framework:

There is no shared measurement framework in Wirral that tracks outcomes for children and young people effectively across sectors or across a continuum of provision. Many leaders were clear that this needed to be addressed for any long-term impact to be seen and were keen to see the development of a shared and positive measurement framework that promotes clarity around what success looks like when working with children and young people, including more consistency in what should be measured, what tools should be used and definitions of key concepts.

Mutually Reinforcing Activities:
There are over 90 organisations working into North Birkenhead, from statutory services to community programmes and groups. The vast majority of interviewees agreed that residents could access a range of choice in support from Early Years to career. However, while interviewees agreed on the variety of support open to the community, they suggested that these activities are not strategically aligned and accessibility is inhibited by a number of factors.

There was consensus on what a support system would look like: a move towards a relational support model of early intervention and prevention that looks at every stage of children's lives from birth to adulthood, promotes positive approaches to behaviour and self belief and is deeply embedded in the community. However, services and organisations are not strategically linked together to offer a clear continuum of provision and current early intervention models are not aligned with local area priorities, meaning there is often a gap between need and provision. Many stakeholders called for more community-owned initiatives to tackle these gaps, including the gap in localised youth provision, the lack of peer-led parental support and positive messaging for children and young people.

Clear and Open Communication:
Communication, or its lack, was a central concern across the consultations with both local leaders and community members. Knowledge of what support is available was found to be inconsistent and often limited to locally-led initiatives, and this was true of the community and professionals. However communication problems were deeper than simply lack of information. Stakeholders across consultations felt that strategic communication from the local authority and between organisations was poorly executed and that many initiatives or services set up to enhance communication and transparency between groups often lost momentum quickly through lack of shared ownership, organisational fatigue, competition for resources and fear of sharing openly around failures.

Backbone Support:
All stakeholders expressed concern that funding across services, sectors and geography in Wirral is insufficient to address needs both immediately and long-term for sustainable solutions. However, some respondents suggested that one complicating factor was the disconnect between commissioners and delivery partners, and that funders and commissioners have a role to play in directing collaboration to avoid organisations relying on limited and depleted resources. Many stakeholders reiterated the need to empower the local community to innovate and own locally-led solutions as a key to ensuring sustainability. This was repeated in discussions around recruitment and retention of high quality staff in education and local authority services, with interviewees asserting that there needs to be improved capacity building and upskilling for professionals to engage with early identification and intervention practices.

Summary of Report Recommendations

Common Agenda:
1. Support and build capacity with North Birkenhead residents to **develop a long-term, place-based vision for children and young people** that puts the community in the driving seat, to be adopted as a primary goal across all services and community groups working with children, young people and families.
2. Develop a **research-informed, in depth and collective understanding of trauma, hidden need and the systemic drivers of disengagement, and their effects on child development**, to be adopted by all services and community groups working with children, young people, and families.
3. Support professional engagement with **research and best practice in early intervention and prevention, person-centred approaches and holistic support** across services and community groups working with children, young people and families.

Shared Measurement Framework:

1. Co-design on and implement a **shared measurement framework for all services and stakeholders working with children and young people** that is positive-focused, informed by a professional understanding of child development and preventative work, clarifies definitions of success and aligns with the community-led vision.
2. Conduct a **sector-wide mapping and review of assessments** used and identify a group of **standardised tools and resources** to be used amongst those working with children and young people in order to improve collective understanding of need and of effective intervention.
3. Identify areas where information sharing is problematic and work with stakeholders to **improve clarity, regularity, transparency and accessibility of information** between services and organisations.
4. Support the **mobilisation and embedding of the new monitoring system from Early Help** to ensure vulnerable families are identified and supported quickly.

Mutually Reinforcing Activities:
1. Work with all stakeholders to **prioritise gaps to address as part of long-term plan** and ensure that activities are strategically aligned, including:
   a. **Families**: develop two Connector roles within the local community to build relationships and trust with, and improve service access for, vulnerable families.
   b. **Education**: work with education providers to develop effective and research-informed approaches to early identification and intervention by identifying and addressing barriers to pupil engagement and progress within their school context - this could include improving intervention support for SEND, SLCN, literacy or wellbeing.
   c. **Community**: work with residents to develop inclusive and accessible support embedded in and led by the community and informed by evidence and best practice - this could include addressing antisocial and challenging behaviour, developing a localised youth offer, addressing wellbeing and positive self belief, or developing peer-led learning support for parents.
   d. **Services**: encourage strategic linking of professionals and services to design responses to need that improve collaboration, flexibility and positive relationships between services, groups and families.
2. Conduct an **in-depth mapping and evaluation of existing programmes of support** against a cradle to career continuum of provision in order to identify further systemic gaps and promote collaborative responses.
3. **Support information sharing, collaboration and shared learning** across all stakeholders and groups to ensure activities remain well governed, mutually reinforcing and aligned to the programme vision.
4. Continue to **identify and engage with organisations employing best practice of preventative, holistic and person-centred support** to expand and develop their offers and support capacity building for others.

Clear and Open Communication:
1. Work with local community groups and professionals to **amplify the voice of vulnerable children, young people and families** and to inform and shape effective co-designed support.
2. Work with residents, services and community groups to **improve communication of what is available for families locally**, including developing a localised website and improving dissemination of information through existing local channels.
3. **Build transparency, honesty and an iterative learning culture into programme governance structures** to develop a community of practice between residents, professionals and experts.
4. Actively **engage with existing Wirral forums and networks** to feed in project learning, build wider collective impact working and explore opportunities to strategically link support and offers.

Backbone Support:
1. **Formalise a Cradle to Career steering group** made up of local leaders, commissioners, academics and policymakers to govern project activities in line with vision, ensure stakeholder engagement with national and international evidence, and lead on best practice at all levels.
2. **Develop a sustainable working group structure** whereby residents, education professionals, local leaders and experts are able to collectively discuss, shape and direct the design of programmes and support for children and young people.
3. Work with the local authority, residents and key organisations to **develop a localised, collective commissioning model** for children and young people in North Birkenhead, including the strategic redevelopment of public

resources for the local community, and capacity-building with residents to own the design, commissioning and delivery of some services.

4. Work with education and service providers locally and nationally to understand what training, coaching and peer-to-peer support networks should be developed to ensure sustained engagement with evidence and capacity-building for professionals, to **develop an attractive offer for recruiting and retaining high quality staff**.

5. Work with the steering group, local and national partners to **develop, pilot, evaluate, scale and disseminate learning for promising locally-led approaches** that have shown signs of early impact.

6. Be there for the long term, understanding that **until we've seen a child go all the way from cradle to career, we won't have seen the full impact of what we can achieve together**.

Cradle to Career Project Response

Cradle to Career will bring together the community, families, education sector and local organisations and services in a place-based, collective impact approach to improving outcomes for children and young people, by:

1. Developing a locally-led governance structure of key stakeholders who, led by the community, will take responsibility for developing a long-term vision and plan for children and young people in North Birkenhead. This will focus on positive child development opportunities and will support the creation of a shared measurement framework.

2. Promoting a community of practice around some of the key issues highlighted in Discovery that includes a cross-section of expert voice - including those with lived experience and the voice of children and young people.

3. Building capacity within these groups to use evidence-informed practice and an action research cycle (identify, design, delivery, reflect) to collaborate on the design and implementation of effective strategies.

4. Supporting the dissemination of programme learning and an area-level consistency in understanding of and approach to the underlying drivers of disadvantage, including the commissioning of early intervention and prevention work.

In response to the findings of Discovery, the four main areas which Cradle to Career will address will be:

(i) Education: Capacity building in education to improve outcomes for vulnerable learners
Activity: We will deliver an action research project involving 12 education providers serving North Birkenhead's children and young people, covering Early Years to Secondary School. The project will build the capacity within schools and early years centres to use robust measures to understand child development and well-being, before working to design solutions using the evidence base of effective interventions, and then delivering effective intervention.

The project will focus on developing and promoting great practice around supporting vulnerable learners to better engage in their education, improve their well-being and gain early support with Literacy/Speech Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) and any other Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Schools will work together as part of an Education Working Group to support each other and share learning with the North Birkenhead Steering Board.

Building on existing good practice: This project will seek to link into and build on existing Local Authority and Health-led projects in similar thematic areas. Building on these projects, for example, the robust SLCN support delivered to Wirral Early Years providers with the Local Government Association Peer Challenge, Department for Education Professional Development Fund's Language Champions in Early Years, and Mental Health Support Teams in schools, will ensure that good practice across Wirral is amplified in North Birkenhead.

(ii) Families: Improve the engagement and support of the most vulnerable families
Activity: We aim to further develop and build upon the Community Connect Us team through Involve Northwest/ Wirral Public Health. There are currently two Community Connector roles in North Birkenhead, commissioned by Public Health. The Connectors work with individuals to build strong relationships, identify individual's needs and support the individual's pathway to appropriate health outcomes based on individual/family goals.

The project is very successful, but very small-scale at present. We propose to hire two further Community Connectors to focus on families, particularly vulnerable/hard-to-reach families, and support them to gain access to the support from local services required to deliver the goals identified by the family.

Building on existing good practice: The project will build on an existing model from Involve North West, hiring and developing local people for the role of Community Connectors. The Community Connectors will oversee a Families Working Group, bringing together local family representatives and key services to improve the family offer in North Birkenhead. The Families Working Group will report and make recommendations to the North Birkenhead Steering

Board, ensuring that the experiences of the most vulnerable families are represented in decision making, and that any learning from referrals to local services can be enacted by the Board.

(iii) Community: Enabling the community to take ownership and address key issues affecting them
Activity: In partnership with local community centres, we will support residents to tackle issues facing children and young people in the community, working to design, deliver and support community-owned and community-led solutions and campaigns that work across generations and across sectors.

This work will be supported by the Community Fund that will work alongside the local Spark Fund. Residents have so far identified the following priorities:

1. **A community-led campaign to tackle anti-social behaviour**, including facilitating strategic collaboration with Merseyside Police Prevention Unit, providing community training on Child Criminal Exploitation, County Lines or other identified knowledge gaps, and supporting a community-led campaign.
2. **Supporting parents**, considering how more experienced parents and local agencies could support neighbours who are new to parenthood in the early years, including parent support groups, parent mentors and other approaches.

Building on existing good practice: The project will bring together the three local community centres (St James Centre, BEE Wirral and Gautby Road). It will use the North Birkenhead Development Trust's Community Organisers to support the community to develop relevant campaigns through a Community Projects Working Group.

(iv) Services: Capacity building in local services to improve collaboration and communication
Activity: A Community Services Collaboration Group will be created, including key local service representatives and residents. There will be funding available via a Services Collaboration Fund supporting the building of capacity and collaboration between local organisations that provide services to the community to address priorities identified by residents. The Fund will be overseen by the Community Services Collaboration Group and local services will be invited to apply to the fund based on a clearly identified community need, and challenged as to how they might address it collectively with others.

The first priority the community seeks to address is the lack of a collective youth offer for the children and young in North Birkenhead, and particularly those most vulnerable groups who are excluded from some local provision.

Building on existing good practice: There are 90+ organisations supporting North Birkenhead's community, with some excellent practice within, but there is some way to go for this to be the support that will help the community transition its young people out of poverty. In the youth-work space, there are high quality youth centres in neighbouring communities (The Hive and Gautby Road - who are based in North Birkenhead but don't work with children over 14, and other local provision), but for reasons already set out, the community don't feel their young people can travel and access these provisions safely.