

Children and Young People Task Force: Options and Recommendations

Introduction

'Wirral's Future' is the largest and most far-reaching consultation exercise ever undertaken by the Council. The decision to develop it was initiated at a meeting of the Council's Cabinet on the 24th June 2010 in response to the existing budgetary challenges faced by the local authority. The level of engagement undertaken within the scope of the consultation has been significant, with over 40,000 paper questionnaires being distributed, as well as being available online. Through the consultation road show, 10,000 people were directly engaged.

Four independent Task Forces were established with a remit to review the Council's services in relation to four areas: Economy and Regeneration; Living in Wirral; Adult Social Services and Children and Young People's Services. The Task Forces were independently chaired. Task Forces were asked to develop a series of options papers which would form the basis of a wider public consultation and programme of engagement with residents, staff, businesses and stakeholders in the voluntary, community and faith sector. The key mechanism for consultation and engagement activities was a questionnaire based on the options papers which contained a general Part A (including questions about satisfaction with Wirral as a place to live) and four themed sections relating to each of the Task Forces. Information relating to the Task Forces and the how the public consultation was undertaken is available at www.wirral.gov.uk/wirralfuture

Children and Young People Task Force

Discussions took place across the following areas:

- Supporting Wirral's schools;
- Supporting vulnerable children and families;
- Ensuring that all young people achieve their full potential;
- Who is best placed to deliver services for children and young people? This includes the contribution of the voluntary, community and faith sector and working with partners.

Further to these discussions, the Task Force agreed a series of options that they wished to be considered and for consultation with the public. The section of the questionnaire relating to children and young people's services was developed in accordance with the options proposed by the Task Force. The questions asked and the consultation responses can be found at www.wirral.gov.uk/wirralfuture

This document revisits the original options proposed by the Children and Young People's Services Task Force and makes recommendations for the Council's Cabinet.

These have been agreed following consideration of the consultation responses at a final meeting of the Task Force.

Options and Recommendations

In relation to services to support schools , the Task Force suggests

The Council must:

Option 1

Ensure that it provides support to schools based on each school's individual need. Generally, smaller schools need and should be given relatively more support than larger ones.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

The Council should:

Option 2

Review the provision and cost of schools support and services to schools (such as HR services provided by the Council) to reduce costs and/or increase income. Whilst the Task Force accepts that the Council has an obligation to make sure that several statutory services are delivered, this does not mean that it always has to deliver these services itself, and where the Council does provide a non-statutory service to schools, it should never do so at a loss.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet. The Task Force requests that Cabinet takes into account the issues raised by respondents to the consultation relating to maintaining the quality of services to schools, enabling schools to buy in the services they need from others if this will be more cost effective and ensuring that any increases in charges do not have a negative impact on educational standards.

Option 3

Review the additional support provided for children with Special Educational Needs and looked after children to identify whether there could be more opportunities for other organisations to provide these services.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet. The Task Force requests that Cabinet takes into account the issues raised by respondents to the consultation relating to maintaining the quality of services and ensuring that children are safeguarded, and ensuring that other organisations have the necessary support to deliver services. The Task Force also requests that the Council seeks to work with Wirral-based voluntary, community and faith sector organisations in developing these opportunities and recognises the need to consider the implications and costs of delivering transitional arrangements.

Option 4

Encourage schools to work together to purchase services more cost-effectively.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

Option 5

Scrutinise Children's Centres to get better value for money.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

The Council should **stop**:

Option 6

Delivering support for the Extended Schools and Healthy Schools Programmes, which already have maximum levels of take up in schools.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

The Council should **find alternative ways** of:

Option 7

Delivering activities which are currently running at a loss or have high unit costs, e.g. Oaklands Outdoor Centre and the Schools Music Service

This option was upheld as a recommendation to Cabinet, on the basis of amending it to read that the Council should investigate alternative ways of providing the Oaklands Centre and Schools Music Service in order for services to be continued.

In relation to services to support vulnerable children and families , the Task Force suggests
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The Council **must**:

Option 8

Protect Wirral's children and young people from harm and ensure that vulnerable children and families are supported.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

The Council **should**:

Option 9

Do more with potentially less money, to engage earlier with those at risk and reduce future demand for services. The Task Force recognises that supporting vulnerable children and families is demand-led and that preventing demand will reduce costs in the longer term.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet. The Task Force wished to clarify that ‘doing more with less’ was largely about improving value for money but that also Cabinet might wish to consider investing to save in this area. The Task Force also recommends that Cabinet takes into account the suggestions raised by respondents to the consultation in relation to engaging communities in early intervention activities, including:

- **Increasing outreach activity in local communities to work directly with children and families and make sure that they are accessing the right services and support;**
- **Alongside this, increased promotion of local children’s centre activities to attract harder to reach families;**
- **More effective use of skilled professionals and practitioners in schools and homes.**

The Council should **find alternative ways** of:

Option 10

Providing cost effective care for looked after children, e.g. through increasing fostering and treatment fostering placements and collaborating with other local authorities.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet. The Task Force recognises the existing focus on reducing the cost of care, and the need to safeguard children and young people. The Task Force recommends that Cabinet takes into account the suggestions raised by respondents to the consultation in relation to involving communities more in identifying foster carers.

Option 11

Providing residential care facilities for children with disabilities, e.g. by out-sourcing to the voluntary sector.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet. The Task Force requests that Cabinet takes into account the issues raised by respondents to the consultation in relation to maintaining the quality of services and ensuring that children are safeguarded, and ensuring that other organisations have the necessary support to deliver services.

In relation to services to children and young people outside of school and achieving potential , the Task Force suggests

The Council **must**:

Option 12

Ensure that any statutory youth services are being delivered in Wirral.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet. The Task Force requested that clarification of statutory and non-statutory youth services be included in the report. Statutory Youth Services include the provision

of a Youth Offending Service, provision of information and guidance and promotion of positive activities.

The Council should:

Option 13

Scrutinise the impact of the pan-Merseyside Connexions programme to ensure that future contracts for providing advice and guidance to young people continues to provide value for money.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet, with due regard to emerging national guidance.

The Council should find ways of:

Option 14

Reducing the non-statutory youth services it provides whilst working with the voluntary and private sectors to develop alternative ways of delivering them.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet. The Task Force requests that Cabinet takes into account the need to have appropriate levels of support in place to facilitate a seamless transition of services.

Option 15

Delivering play services differently and more cost-effectively, making links where possible to other areas of activity.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet.

In relation to the contribution of the voluntary, community and faith sector to delivering services for children and young people , the Task Force suggests
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The Council should:

Option 16

Work with the voluntary, community and faith sector to increase their role in delivering services currently delivered by the Council. The Task Force recognises that the Council needs to work with the sector to ensure that the right infrastructure is in place to transfer services effectively.

This option was upheld by the Task Force as a recommendation to Cabinet. The Task Force also requested that the Council seeks to work with Wirral-based voluntary, community and faith sector organisations to progress this.

The Chair of the Task Force stressed that Cabinet must be clear that there were a number of underpinning papers, available on the website, which detail the

rationale for these options and recommendations. These should be read in conjunction with this report and can be viewed at:

<http://www.wirral.gov.uk/my-services/council-and-democracy/have-your-say/wirral-future-consultation/consulting-children-young-people>