

Please reply to:

Councillor Phillip L Davies
Leader of Wirral Council

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to Mr John Jarvis
Local Government Association
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my ref
service Public Health
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Dear Mr Jarvis

Systems Leadership: Local Vision
Application from Wirral Health and Wellbeing Board

With reference to the above, please accept this application from the Wirral Health and Wellbeing Board to participate in the Systems Leadership programme. Our breakthrough issue is the need to take action to tackle food inequalities in the borough.

The Health and Wellbeing Board recently debated and agreed to develop a Wirral Food Plan. The aim of the Plan is to break from traditional approaches to addressing complex public health problems and is dependent of building a coalition of action across organisational and community boundaries. We aim to utilise the assets of our local communities to change our local food culture thereby positively influencing health and wellbeing. The development of the Plan is in its embryonic phase and would therefore benefit from the enabling support afforded by the System Leadership programme. An outline of our breakthrough issue and proposal is detailed below.

The Challenge

Food is an intimate and integral part of daily life. Access, availability, quality and cultural attitudes to food impact unequivocally on both the health of the population and the local environment.

Food inequalities are emerging as a significant problem in the UK. In Wirral, the local food bank has supported 6177 residents since its inception last year. Just over one in three of these recipients are children, providing real evidence of the levels of food poverty locally. Research also suggests that 5% of people on a low income report skipping meals for a whole day. The cost of basic foodstuffs has leapt by 35 per cent in the past five years; a period in which many incomes have risen only marginally or not at all. Lowest income households are the hardest hit by food price fluctuation. Studies also show that amongst low income groups price is the greatest motivating factor in food choice.

Recent data from ONS indicates that weekly expenditure on food and non alcohol beverages in the North West is £50.80 (based on a 2.4 people household) which is lower than the average national spend of £53.50 and is second only to the North East in terms of lowest weekly expenditure nationally. North West families spend less on fresh produce such as fruit and vegetables and spend more on cakes, buns and biscuits when compared to other wealthier regions. In the North West just 1.4% of weekly food expenditure is on fruit and vegetables.

The cost of food can be exacerbated by a lack of confidence and skills in shopping for, preparing and cooking food, which may lead to reliance on ready-made meals and further deskilling. There is also some evidence to suspect that lower income groups may be more exposed to unsafe foods as food of poorer quality is more likely to be on sale at lower prices and families on a low income may also be more motivated to keep left over foods to eat the next day.

Food inequalities translate into health inequalities with older people and young families, especially those on low incomes, particularly vulnerable to the adverse impact of diet on health. A poor diet is directly related to coronary heart disease, some cancers (e.g. bowel, oesophageal, gastric, oral and breast) osteoporosis, diabetes, poor mental health and obesity. Wirral's response to food related physical and mental ill health has traditionally relied on treatment services for those already in crisis e.g. weight management services.

The proposed development of a Food Plan is a departure from this traditional approach and signals a radically different approach to tackling the complexity of how food impacts upon residents' health and wellbeing. Our aim is for the Food Plan to address issues in the local food environment and economy e.g. local food suppliers for local businesses; improve access to affordable, healthy food and influence positive local attitudes towards food in an attempt to tackle the causes of ill health rather than the symptoms.

Our challenge is significant. Wirral has a population of around 300,000 people and is located in the North West of England. According to the IMD 2010, we are the 60th most deprived of the 326 districts in the country and therefore in the bottom 20% nationally. We are however an area of stark social and health inequalities. The Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) places 30 of our LSOAs in the lowest 5% in England and 23 LSOAs in the 3% most deprived nationally. By contrast we have some of the most affluent areas in England, with 3 areas being in the top 3% nationally in the IMD. The gap in life expectancy between the most and least affluent within the borough is 14.6 years for men and 9.7 years for women. Data also indicates that we have the largest gap in Disability Free Life Expectancy (DFLE) for males and females of any authority in England (20.0 years for men, 17.1 years for women).

Levels of overweight and obesity in children and adults are higher in Wirral than the national average; whilst initiation and prevalence of breastfeeding is significantly below the England average.

The Solution

The Wirral Health and Wellbeing Board recently endorsed an ambitious proposal to develop a Food Plan for Wirral which adopts a broader perspective to food issues linking health, health inequalities, the local environment and local economy; focusing on addressing 'upstream' causes rather than issue led responses and treatment services.

The underlying concept is to transform our local food culture and attitudes to eating whilst enabling economic growth and prosperity in order to improve the health and wellbeing of the local population. The proposed approach aims to facilitate collaborative leadership, utilising local assets, infrastructure and policy as a means to influence health and wellbeing rather than a reliance on treatment services e.g. weight management services. Local partners acknowledge that this approach will require a local coalition for action, with collaborative leadership across organisational and community boundaries.

The success of the Plan is dependent on community leadership and a key aspiration of this work is to enable community based solutions for tackling complex public health problems. The initiation of a local Food Plan coincides with the Council's development of a new neighbourhood working model across Wirral's four parliamentary Constituencies, led by local ward members, and with the support of a team of officers embedded in the community.

This new approach is intended to ensure that service and community engagement are more effectively and efficiently configured, targeted and delivered. The rationale for this approach being that strong neighbourhood working can provide the basis for the Council, public services and the wider community to facilitate a more flexible response to residents' issues through co-ordinated services and involving residents in shaping decisions and services. In this way of working a range of public, private and social sector community services can be linked together in terms of their operational activities on these Constituency footprints.

This model reinforces Wirral's recent commitment to an 'asset-based' approach to community development, which utilises the gifts and resources already present within communities to improve quality of life rather than agencies imposing solutions from outside.

The Food Plan proposal resonates with this new approach. Combined with the recent transfer of Public Health into the Council, local conditions are fertile for the development of a transformational approach to addressing complex health issues in new, innovative ways through a local coalition for action.

The local social and economic backdrop to these fundamental shifts in collaboration is also opportune. Community participation in food production presents the opportunity to reduce spatial inequalities, make places more attractive and create a sense of pride in the local environment. Crucially, there is now mounting interest in the production and consumption of healthier, more sustainable food. Individuals and communities are increasingly growing food in back gardens on allotments and other sites and schools are setting up growing spaces whilst using healthy food to learn about healthier lifestyles.

Moreover, Wirral is fast gaining a reputation for its food production and service industry which has rejuvenated the food scene locally. Wirral's unique blend of coast, rural landscape, villages and towns means that the produce available to locals is among the most diverse locally produced food in the UK.

The Benefits

Ultimately the Food Plan aspires to fundamentally change local attitudes to food and therefore improve health and wellbeing. We also want to use this programme to develop a new model of working for tackling complex health issues through a strong local coalition, enabled by the process of developing and implementing the Food Plan. We recognise the following as the potential benefits for our community:

- Local people eating a healthy and sustainable diet
- A strong, local network of leadership and partnership to tackle complex health issues and foster sustainable collaborative leadership
- Development of community leadership; providing a breakthrough issue on which the emerging constituency footprints can develop localised solutions.
- Stronger community cohesion
- Support for the developing local food economy, generating prosperity, innovation, employment opportunities and increased tourism
- A sustainable food environment; promoting food production and consumption that is respectful of our natural environment
- Support for Wirral's emerging identity in relation to the food production and service industry
- Savings for the public sector via a reduction in investment in weight treatment services from healthy eating classes to bariatric surgery

There is clear commitment from the Health and Wellbeing Board to investigate and support new approaches to local collaborative working and to addressing the challenge of complex health issues. Wirral would benefit significantly from the support of the Systems Leadership Programme in realising our vision for the Food Plan by enabling local leadership across the public, social and community sector building on the commitment to this issue and the transformational way in which Wirral is developing relationships across organisational and community boundaries. We believe this approach will provide a model for other areas, as well as contribute to the evidence for approaches to tackle complex public health issues; health inequalities and to increase community involvement.

To share our learning from this work both within Wirral and across other areas we will establish a website dedicated to the Food Plan, providing 'real time' feedback on the process to develop the Food Plan. Longer term we will also publish the evaluation of this work and the process underpinning it. We would also plan to showcase our experience and findings through an Information Day, inviting other areas to learn from our experience and to input into our ongoing development of approaches to improve the health and wellbeing of local people.

The proposed Wirral Food Plan has already garnered much interest from our local communities and media and our commitment to address this complex issue agreed amongst partners (details of the partners represented on the Health and Wellbeing Board are included in appendix A). As such we have already dedicated resources to the development of the Food Plan and are committed to contributing £10,000 to work with the Systems Leadership Programme in our area. As the development of the Food Plan is in its infancy, with a consultation event planned for September, a partnership with the programme is timely. The enabling leadership support from the Systems Leadership Programme would augment our efforts to transform the way in which Wirral works together to tackle complex health issues.

I look forward to hearing from you

Yours sincerely,



Councillor Phil Davies

Leader, Wirral Council

Chair, Wirral Health and Wellbeing Board

Organisation	Representative
Wirral Borough Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All three party leaders • Chief Executive • Director of Public health • Director of Adult Social Services • Director of Children and Young Peoples services
Wirral Clinical Commissioning Group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chair • Chief Clinical Officer
HealthWatch	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Representative
National Commissioning Board – Local Area Team; Cheshire, Warrington and Wirral	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director

Co-opted members

Wirral Borough Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Portfolio holder for Adult Social Services • Portfolio holder for Children & Families • Portfolio holder for Health and Wellbeing
Voluntary, community and faith sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief Executive, Voluntary & Community Action Wirral
NHS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chief Executive, Wirral University Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust • Chief Executive, Wirral Community NHS Trust • Chief Executive, Cheshire & Wirral Partnership Trust • Chief Executive, Clatterbridge Centre for Oncology NHS Foundation Trust • Representatives from the three divisions of the Clinical Commissioning Group to present annual commissioning plan
Local Safeguarding Children’s Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chair – to present annual report
Local Safeguarding Adults Board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chair – to present annual report