

1.0 Background

Wirral Link Forum is a network of voluntary, community and faith sector organisations that work with Wirral children, young people and families. It's a practitioner-led organisation, coordinated by a paid worker, who was previously a practitioner in Wirral. The work of Wirral Link Forum and the Coordinator is directed by the needs of the members and partners in the Children's Trust. Our strength lies in our specialism and the member organisations' and paid worker's experience in delivering services to children, young people and families.

Between 2005 and 2011, the part-time coordinator post was funded from a combination of Health, Children and Young People's Department and Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) grants from. Since then, the post has been funded through the Children's Services commissioning budget (formerly Early Intervention Grant). The Service Level Agreement specifications are available at Appendix 2. These are summarised in our strategic aims, which are:

- to support and strengthen voluntary, community and faith sector organisations working with children, young people and families in Wirral
- to promote and support influential, effective partnerships with the statutory sector, within the voluntary, community and faith sector and with other sectors

The Coordinator is employed by a host organisation, which was Forum Housing Association for the period of this report.

This report is a summary of the Wirral Link Forum Annual Report for the year ended 31st March 2014, which is at Appendix 1.

2.0 Key Achievements 2013-14

- We have increased our membership by 19% this year, reaching 121 voluntary, community and faith sector organisations that are working with Wirral children, young people and families. Although this is a fraction of the Sector on Wirral, we are engaging a diverse range of organisations, from local branches of national charities and mid-sized local charities, to parent support groups, faith groups and community youth organisations. We've also seen an 8% increase in the number of organisations sending representatives to our monthly meetings
- Our free *introduction to safeguarding children and young people* training sessions, delivered by Wirral's Safeguarding Training Officer, Steve Withington, were well-attended, particularly by smaller local organisations and faith groups. We were able to facilitate 5 sessions this year, attended by 165 volunteers and paid staff. Feedback from the sessions is favourable and demand remains constant
- The Child Poverty Awareness eLearning module was made available for staff and volunteers from all sectors across Wirral. More work is needed to encourage

completion of the training across the Trust and plans are in hand for delivery of face-to-face sessions in various organisations

- We continue to provide representation across the structures of Wirral Children's Trust and Safeguarding Children Board, enabling the voluntary, community and faith sector to work together with statutory partners to improve outcomes for Wirral children and young people.

3.0 Key Issues and Challenges 2014-15

- Funding to the voluntary, community and faith sector has seen continued cuts, resulting in the downsizing or closure of some member organisations. This could result in reduced capacity to represent the Sector within multi-agency groups, and engage in Link Forum meetings. We need to ensure that we continue to encourage a diverse membership and support members to take up representative roles for the Sector.
- Statutory job losses, restructures and remodelling of statutory departments have led to the loss of established relationships with our statutory partners. Combined with the cuts to the voluntary, community and faith sector, this could impact on our ability to influence future services and outcomes for children, young people and families in Wirral. However, the remodelling of services also offers an opportunity to influence service delivery from the outset and we need to ensure that our representatives are supported to do this.
- Our own funding has had a substantial reduction, resulting in a reduction in the Coordinator's working hours and cuts to other spending, such as office costs, meeting room hire and staff training. The Children and Young People's Department have assisted by offering a desk for the Coordinator in Hamilton Building and member organisations have offered meeting space. The reduced capacity of the coordinator has pushed us to refocus our work and a new Strategic Plan has been developed to guide Wirral Link Forum through the next stage of our development.
- Competition for scarce funds could cause divisions in the Sector but it is important that we continue working together for the best outcomes of our children, young people and families. We need to have meaningful discussions about consortia development in Wirral and to encourage more partnership working.

4.0 Recommendations

That the Children's Trust Board:

1. Note the report
2. Acknowledge the vital contribution of the sector to the work of the Children's Trust Board
3. Consider the continued funding of Wirral Link Forum

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Appendices:

- I. Wirral Link Forum Annual Review 1st April 2013 – 31st March 2014
- II. Service Level Agreement 2013-14 Service Specifications