

**WIRRAL APPRENTICE PROGRAMME
SCRUTINY REVIEW**



A report produced by
The Regeneration and Environment Policy & Performance Committee

**FINAL REPORT
SEPTEMBER 2014**

WIRRAL BOROUGH COUNCIL
APPRENTICESHIP REVIEW
FINAL REPORT

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Context: The Wirral Apprentice Programme was launched by Wirral Council in 2009, working with partners to open up apprenticeship places to 'hard to reach' individuals by way of a direct subsidy towards apprentice wages for local businesses.

This review sets out to consider the current Wirral Apprentice Programme and the implications of the 2013/14 budget option approved by Cabinet 18.02.13 which allocated £80,000 for the 're-provision of the bespoke Wirral Apprentice scheme through a partnership with Liverpool City Region (LCR) colleagues.' A subsequent programme proposal to support a minimum of 50 apprentice starts with Wirral Apprentice grants of up to £3,000 was brought forward and approved by Delegated Decision 20.06.13. As a result of budget reductions, the allocation would not support the provision of an Apprenticeship Support Officer, previously resourced through Council budget and European Social Fund.

As the Panel gathered evidence and met with partners, it became evident that a number of issues relating to apprenticeship provision in general existed. Issues regarding the Information and Guidance (IAG) available to those leaving school was highlighted on a number of occasions by all groups interviewed. In addition, barriers to young people considering an apprenticeship were also consistently raised. Despite such matters not being in the immediate scope of the Review, the Panel found that the frequency and importance of the issues raised required thorough consideration and inclusion in this report.

Requirement for support for apprentices: In a delegated report to the Cabinet Member for Economy in June 2013¹, Officers detailed that the proposed 2013/14 Wirral Apprentice Programme budget would not support the provision of an Apprenticeship Support Officer.

The Panel heard from apprentices about how highly they value the support they receive from their employer. A survey carried out in March 2013 by Cambridge Policy Consultants; of employers who recruited an apprentice using the recruitment incentives from Liverpool City Region (LCR), suggested that businesses must be able to maintain a learning environment and support apprentices throughout the life of the apprenticeship for it to be successful. The view amongst Members of the Panel was that a lack of support from businesses to apprentices would result in decreased retention.

Recommendation 1: Officers to develop generic mentoring and pastoral care guidance for all employers engaged in the Wirral Apprenticeship Programme. Officers should consider the use of Business Toolkits, currently being developed as a key action of the LCR Youth Unemployment Task Force report, which aim to support businesses and socialise young people into the workplace. Officers are requested to include the relevant guidance to the existing business induction process from January 2015.

Recommendation 2: Wirral currently support care leavers to access Wirral Apprentice vacancies, using existing dialogue with employers to negotiate

¹ <http://wir06metrognome/documents/s50013452/Wirral%20Apprentice%20Programme%20-%20Report.pdf>

guaranteed interviews. Officers should apply the same principle to an extended priority target group with key organisations the Council is working with. This would result in a supply of guaranteed interviews for these participants. The Wirral Apprentice team should prioritise joint working with specific key partners & employers to identify participants and potential employers. This work should commence by April 2015.

Recommendation 3: Youth Employment Initiative funding through The European Union and the Coastal Communities Fund will both provide funding to support the reduction of youth unemployment. Officers are requested to investigate how any part of this funding could be used to provide or promote pastoral support for Wirral apprentices. This report should be made available to the Committee by November 2015. Officers should further commit to exploring any future funding source which could support this budget.

Improve the availability and quality of Apprenticeship Information and Guidance (IAG) in Schools, Colleges and for NEET young people:

The consistent message from all the young people the panel met with was that the information and guidance given to them to help them make choices about their future was inconsistent and often did not include any information about apprenticeships. The Panel found that the percentage of learners involved in apprenticeships in Wirral has reduced by almost a quarter in the previous four years. Wirral Met College, Connexions and the National Apprenticeship Service (NAS) also voiced concerns regarding the quality of guidance given by some schools.

Recommendation 4: Officers should highlight good examples of the availability and quality of apprenticeship information in schools. This activity should commence by January 2015.

Recommendation 5: Officers should promote apprenticeship opportunities by offering NAS a pop up shop at a venue and date which will maximise footfall from relevant groups. Officers should liaise with Social Landlords and other partner organisations to promote the apprenticeship opportunities available to all groups in Wirral. This activity should commence by January 2015.

Recommendation 6: The panel requests that Officers provide annual reports to the relevant Policy & Performance Committee detailing Participation Trends and that Wirral apprentice outcomes are given a permanent place on the performance dashboard reporting tool, by the beginning of the next reporting period.

Getting young people ready for work:

The panel reviewed evidence from employers and Wirral Met College which highlighted issues with work readiness in young people. Such issues were also highlighted by Officers and young apprentices who supported the panel view that further support is required in the transition from education to employment.

Recommendation 7: Officers from the 14-19 Team should lead in promoting stronger school/employer links via the Chamber of Commerce to raise the profile of traineeships and opportunities for work experience. Officers should engage with this activity by January 2015.

Recommendation 8: Officers should promote the concept of pre-traineeship, extended work experience and work readiness courses where considered appropriate as an intervention through the Risk of NEET Indicator (RONI)

programme from September 2014. As per recommendation 7, this should be facilitated by the 14-19 Team promoting stronger school/employer links via the Chamber of Commerce and Inspiring Futures.

Removing barriers for young people considering an apprenticeship

During the panel's meetings with apprentices and NEETs the issue of travel to and from work was raised. One NEET suggested that they had explored all options but it was simply too expensive to travel from one side of the borough to the other. Another advised that transport links made it difficult to commute to their place of work.

The panel are keen to remove any barriers to young people and the unemployed considering or taking an apprenticeship.

Recommendation 9: Officers and Members to support Merseytravel and key partners in lobbying to make transport more affordable for young people and for the introduction of a travel concession scheme for apprenticeship travel - regardless of the apprentice's age. Officers should look to gain further lobbying support through the Liverpool City Region Apprenticeship link. An update on lobbying developments should be provided to the Committee by April 2015.

Recommendation 10: Officers should arrange to discuss the potential transfer of the Wirral Apprenticeship Programme's responsibilities and associated budgets to Children & Young People's Department.

2. INTRODUCTION

At the meeting of the Regeneration and Environment Policy & Performance Committee on 23 September 2013, Members approved a work programme which included a review of apprenticeships. A Scrutiny Review Panel consisting of four Members of the Committee was established and a series of meetings were held. The purpose of the review was to ensure that funding allocated to the Apprentice Programme is being used effectively and is providing the best outcomes for apprentices through exploiting all available opportunities.

3. BACKGROUND

The Wirral Apprentice Programme was launched by Wirral Council in 2009, working with partners to open up apprenticeship places to 'hard to reach' individuals by way of a direct subsidy towards apprentice wages for local businesses. Across the various iterations, over 350 Wirral employers have benefited from financial investment, supporting over 540 young people and unemployed adults to gain employment and start an apprenticeship.

The programme has developed and changed in response to lessons learnt, business and jobseeker demand and funding requirements over four years of delivery. Cabinet have approved 5x operational phases as below;

Cabinet Date	Phase	Places	Starts*	Subsidy Length	Employer Contract	Funding Source	Amount Allocated
23.04.09	1	100	211	18mth	2 Year	WNF	£1,699,800
26.11.09	2	50		18mth	2 Year	WNF	£807,140
	(1&2)	17		18mth	2 Year	ESF	£275,000
09.12.10	3	146	167	12mth	2 Year	Council ESF	£1,058,579 £655,960
12.04.12	4	114	115	12mth	2 Year	Council	£1,055,000
20.06.13	5	50	36	£3k Grant	1 Year	Council DWP/SF A	£80,000 £82,750
TOTALS		477	547				£5,714,229

*Number of places represents minimum number of full subsidies budgeted within available funding allocation. Number of actual starts can increase due to reallocation of funds for leaver replacements.

Key:

WNF – Working Neighbourhoods Funding

ESF – European Social Fund

SFA - Skills Funding Agency

DWP - Department for Work & Pensions

Each phase throughout has retained key principles and priorities namely:

- Priority Eligibility for Business Selection: transformational sector; growth sector; framework variety;
- Participant Eligibility: unemployed or NEET (not in employment, education or training);
- Employer requirement to wage apprentice at Age Related National Minimum Wage – not Apprentice Rate;
- Access to personalised mentor support for employer & apprentice (removed following Budget Option decision 2013).

City Region Model

As detailed in the Cabinet Report of 20th June 2013, the current programme adheres to the Liverpool City Region model of delivery. As members of the Liverpool City Region Employment & Skills Board, Wirral Council has signed up to a City Deal with Government to offer a consistent maximum pricing of wage incentives to eliminate unintentional price competition across geographical boundaries. This brings together any local match funding, Skills Funding Agency (SFA) and Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) Youth Contract funding into an enhanced, yet straightforward non-competing offer with a consistent payment methodology. To this end, the apprenticeship incentive supported by the current Wirral Apprentice Programme is set at a standard rate of £3,000 per apprentice. Wherever possible, funds are applied on a 'top-up' basis to national incentives such as the DWP Wage Incentive (£2,275) and SFA AGE (£1,500 apprentice grant for employers).

Recruiting to Programme

Recruitment of businesses is conducted via an open invitation (via press, partners and business networks) to submit an expression of interest template. Applications are assessed by an expert panel (Jobcentre Plus, National Apprenticeship Service, Wirral Business Network, Wirral Apprentice Manager) with selection based on priority eligibility. Recruitment of participants is conducted openly via the Government Universal Jobmatch and Apprenticeship Vacancy Service. Incentives are payable in two stages at 13 and 26 weeks of employment on production of satisfactory evidence.

4. ORIGINAL SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Scope

A scoping meeting was convened with the Scrutiny Panel in September 2013. The agreed scope is included as Appendix 1. It was agreed that the focus of the review would concentrate on a review of the current Wirral Apprentice Programme and the implications of the 2013/14 budget option in relation to this scheme.

4.2 Methodology

The Review was undertaken over a number of meetings, from October 2013 to March 2014. These meetings aimed to engage partners, businesses and individuals in the Review and obtain a better understanding of the impacts and issues around the Wirral Apprenticeship Programme. Desktop Research was conducted by the Scrutiny Support Officer and quantitative evidence provided by Council Officers.

As the Panel gathered evidence and met with partners, it became evident that a number of issues relating to apprenticeships in general existed. Issues regarding the Information and Guidance (IAG) available to those leaving school was highlighted on a number of occasions by different groups interviewed. In addition, barriers to young people considering an apprenticeship were also consistently raised. As a result the panel sought to examine existing local, regional and national issues relating to Apprenticeships recruitment.

The Panel heard from a wide range of organisations, individuals and Wirral Council officers, who are all involved in some way with apprenticeships in the Borough. These were:

- National Apprenticeship Service
- 1 x Wirral Apprenticeship Programme Employer (Taylor Russell)
- Wirral Met College

- Connexions Service
- Wirral Council Officers representing the following services; 14-19 Partnership Team, Economic Policy and Children & Young Peoples Department
- Apprentices
- Young people not in education, employment or training.

Members of the Scrutiny Panel would like to thank all those who have assisted in the development of this Review.

5. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Develop & promote ongoing pastoral support for Wirral apprentices.

In the delegated report to the Cabinet Member for Economy in June 2013, Officers detailed that the proposed 2013/14 Wirral Apprentice Programme budget would not support the provision of an Apprenticeship Support Officer, which was at the time resourced under arrangements with external funding sources (European Social Fund). The report stated that reduced staffing capacity introduced an increased risk of:

- reduced monitoring and quality assurance visits to employers;
- reduced pastoral support for apprentices;
- potential disengagement with employers and apprentices beyond the grant payable period resulting in future data and evidence collection issues and loss of ongoing pastoral support.

The panel received anecdotal evidence from current and former apprentices. One former apprentice stated that *“without support I would not have continued or completed my apprenticeship.”* This statement was supported by all of those who had completed their apprenticeship. Current apprentices explained how highly they valued the support they received from their employer and from fellow or former apprentices.

“It’s very important to have support; I couldn’t have survived without the support. You get an ethos to drive forward.”

The panel met with a local employer who has employed around twenty apprentices, some of which have been funded through the Wirral Apprentice Programme. The panel heard from the employer that;

“As a business we support our people as best we can, we have to mother some of them and this support comes at a cost to the business. Without support apprenticeships fail, only the most resilient apprentices could make it without support. It is hard to make money out of an apprentice in the first year; the investment from the company is too high.”

A survey carried out in March 2013 by Cambridge Policy Consultants; of employers who recruited an apprentice using the recruitment incentives from Liverpool City Region (LCR) evidenced further the value of support to apprentices with one employer stating;

“Offering Apprenticeships to young people is not enough if the employers, specifically small businesses are not able to maintain a learning environment and the support from the companies placing the apprentice are there.”

The survey also found that some employers decided not to recruit an apprentice (despite having been approved to receive the incentive) because they recognised that the level of support needed to support an apprentice would be too onerous.

The panel note that the design of the apprentice programme maximises the financial incentive to business. A local employer emphasised this point stating that such incentives “*allow a business to grow with reduced risk*”.

Whilst the panel fully endorse the principles of the design and welcome any assistance Wirral Council can provide in promoting economic growth, it is concerned that the lack of support for apprentices may have resulted in, and is likely in the future to result in, a decrease in retention. The panel therefore considered how this support could be provided at little or no cost, unless funding opportunities can be found.

Recommendation 1: Officers to develop generic mentoring and pastoral care guidance for all employers engaged in the Wirral Apprenticeship Programme. Officers should consider the use of Business Toolkits, currently being developed as a key action of the LCR Youth Unemployment Task Force report, which aim to support businesses and socialise young people into the workplace. Officers are requested to include the relevant guidance to the existing business induction process from January 2015.

Recommendation 2: Wirral currently support care leavers to access Wirral Apprentice vacancies, using existing dialogue with employers to negotiate guaranteed interviews. Officers should apply the same principle to an extended priority target group with key organisations the Council is working with. This would result in a supply of guaranteed interviews for these participants. The Wirral Apprentice team should prioritise joint working with specific key partners & employers to identify participants and potential employers. This work should commence by April 2015.

Recommendation 3: Youth Employment Initiative funding through The European Union and the Coastal Communities Fund have the potential to provide funding to support the reduction of youth unemployment. Officers are requested to investigate how any part of this funding could be secured and used to provide or promote pastoral support for Wirral apprentices. This report should be made available to the Committee by November 2015. Officers should further commit to exploring any future funding source which could support this budget.

Information & Guidance

The purpose of this scrutiny review was to seek assurance that funding allocated to the Wirral Apprentice Programme is being used effectively and is providing the best outcomes for apprentices through exploiting all available opportunities. During the evidence gathering phase the panel heard from young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) as well as apprentices and young people in full employment following a successful apprenticeship.

The consistent message from all the young people the panel met with was that information and guidance (IAG) given to them to help them make choices about their

future was inconsistent and often did not include any information about apprenticeships.

The following statements were made to the panel by young people who are currently NEET;

"I did not receive any careers guidance, ever."

"I was guided by my school to go to sixth form, they never mentioned apprenticeships"

"I have got A-levels but my school only talked about University. I don't want to go to University but my school didn't know what else there was"

"My school didn't ask what I wanted to do."

Current and former apprentices told the panel;

"Apprenticeships weren't discussed at my school"

"Apprenticeships aren't promoted very well or thought of very highly. My old school friends thought I had dropped out by getting an apprenticeship".

Wirral Met College, Connexions and the National Apprenticeship Service also voiced concerns regarding the quality of guidance given by some schools.

The following information regarding participation trends was provided by the Children and Young People Department;

EDUCATION SECTOR	Learner Numbers (Aged 16-18) / Academic Year			
	2009/10	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
FE & Sixth Form College	3,743	3,741	3,572	3,503
School Sixth Forms	4,222	4,078	3,793	4,040
Foundation Learning	946	976	962	723
Apprenticeships	1,799	1,622	1,573	1,217
Totals	10,710	10,417	9,900	9,483
% of learner numbers in Apprenticeship sector	16.8%	15.6%	15.9%	12.8%

The panel noted from the table above that apprenticeships have declined over the last four years (noting that during the same period the total number of learners aged 16-18 also decreased). The panel are concerned that the % of learners in this age group involved in apprenticeships has reduced by over 23% in the previous four years.

The panel consider the delivery of consistent, high quality and impartial IAG is essential to ensure that young people can make informed choices about their future. The panel notes the recommendations from the Liverpool City Region Youth Unemployment Task Force report (May 2013²). The Task Force recommend a holistic review of the current careers support landscape across all ages (11 to 24).

² http://www.lcrskillsforgrowth.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/lcr_yutf_key_findings_and_recommendations.pdf

The panel support such a review in light of the evidence highlighted in both the task force report and the panels findings.

The panel welcomes the statutory guidance released by the Government in April 2014 (*Careers guidance and inspiration for young people in schools*³), which follows Ofsted's report 'Going in the right direction?' which gave a thematic review of careers guidance (published September 2013). The Ofsted report found that the majority of schools needed to do more to ensure that all of their pupils had information on the full range of training and education options and career pathways to help them make informed choices about their future so that they could reach their potential.

The statutory duty requests governing bodies to ensure that all registered pupils at the school are provided with independent careers guidance from year 8 (12-13 year olds) to year 13 (17-18 year olds). The statutory duty states that a governing body must ensure that the independent careers guidance provided;

- Is presented in an impartial manner
- Includes information on the range of education or training options, including apprenticeships and other vocational pathways
- Is guidance that the person giving it considers will promote the best interests of the pupils to whom it is given

The guidance places particular emphasis on the need to offer advice on the full range of routes and opportunities, including apprenticeships. It strongly emphasises the importance of engaging with businesses and employers to help bring careers advice to life, and to inspire pupils with enthusiasm for the world of work. It suggests a variety of ways to do this, identifying a range of organisations that schools can contact for assistance. It highlights the importance of providing face-to-face advice, and asserts that online access alone is insufficient to meet the duty.

The panel recommend that Wirral Council works with its partners to improve the promotion, preparation for, and recruitment of, young people into Apprenticeships including the Wirral Apprenticeship Programme.

Officers advised the panel that work has recently been completed with Liverpool City Region colleagues to identify best practice in Wirral Schools in respect of IAG. The panel encourage Officers to ensure that best practice is delivered across the board.

Improve the availability and quality of Apprenticeship Information and Guidance (IAG) in Schools, Colleges and for NEET young people

Recommendation 4: Officers should highlight good examples of the availability and quality of apprenticeship information in schools. This activity should commence by January 2015.

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https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/302422/Careers_Statutory_Guidance_-_9_April_2014.pdf

Recommendation 5: Promote apprenticeship opportunities by offering NAS a pop up shop at a venue and date which will maximise footfall from relevant groups. Liaise with Social Landlords and other partner organisations to promote the apprenticeship opportunities available to all groups in Wirral. This activity should commence by January 2015.

Recommendation 6: The panel requests that Officers provide annual reports to the relevant Policy & Performance Committee detailing Participation Trends and that Wirral apprentice outcomes are given a permanent place on the performance dashboard reporting tool, by the beginning of the next reporting period.

Ready for work

The panel heard further evidence from an employer and Wirral Met College about young peoples work readiness. A local employer who had taken on over 20 apprentices advised;

“We find the biggest obstacles for young persons are that they find the world of work very scary, the rate at which they settle depends on their confidence and the support they receive. Many of them need their confidence building”.

“The issue is identifying talent and fulfilling the apprenticeship.”

Wirral Met College advised that;

“There is an issue with young people being ready to work but traineeships can help with this. Traineeships also offer an opportunity to experience a job before undertaking a longer apprenticeship course.”

In the key findings & recommendations from the LCR Youth Unemployment Task Force, similar evidence has been highlighted regarding preparing young people for employment. A survey of local businesses asked how prepared young people were for work. Of those who had a specific opinion 46% felt that young people were poorly prepared for work.

The panel consider the same to be true of those entering apprenticeships and accessing the Wirral Apprentice Programme.

At a meeting with young apprentices and former apprentices the panel were advised;

“I came here [to work] at sixteen and I found it scary, without the support I would have left”

“Some people have left because of the money or other problems, but they didn’t look to the future, they didn’t think of it as a career”

The LCR Youth Unemployment Task Force report states that *“when considering why young people were poorly prepared for work, businesses and young people felt that the education system (from 11 to 24) did not adequately prepare young people with the appropriate work and life skills. They highlighted that the support offer needs to be holistic, including basic life skills such as managing money, digital inclusion, appropriate email account access, opening bank accounts, having correct ID to apply for jobs. Businesses themselves felt that young people were not being adequately supported in their transition from education to employment. This came from their viewpoint as a parent as well as an employer in a number of cases”.*

Both young people and employers from the Task Force debated - and indeed valued - work experience as a key support offer for young people. However, young people asked for these opportunities to be opened up and made more accessible with examples of gaining work experience being as stringent as a job application with onerous application and interview processes. From an employer perspective businesses were keen for employment support programmes to include employer based work experience as a key element of preparation for work.

A task force recommendation is to champion work experience opportunities through development of a City Region campaign using positive messages from business and young people. The task force also recommend a pilot of traineeships in the Liverpool City region.

A Traineeship is an education and training programme with work experience that is focused on giving young people the skills and experience that employers are looking for.

The Panel agree that if young people were given a greater opportunity to understand what the world of work is like, to learn skills that would assist them in unlocking their potential and accessing opportunities, this would assist employers and apprentices.

Recommendation 7: Officers from the 14-19 Team should lead in promoting stronger school/employer links via the Chamber of Commerce to raise the profile of traineeships and opportunities for work experience. Officers should engage with this activity by January 2015.

Recommendation 8: Officers should promote the concept of pre-traineeship, extended work experience and work readiness courses where considered appropriate as an intervention through the RONI* (Risk of NEET indicator) programme by January 2015. As per recommendation 7, this should be facilitated by the 14-19 Team promoting stronger school/employer links via the Chamber of Commerce and Inspiring Futures.

* RONI is a data modelling tool designed to indicate at an early age those pupils with a greater likelihood of not participating in education and/or training after the age of 16. RONI is considered a powerful tool for identifying those who may benefit from interventions; prioritising resources such as pupil premium funding; and for transition planning.

Removing barriers for people considering an apprenticeship

The panel are keen to remove any barriers to young people considering or taking an apprenticeship. During the panel's meetings with apprentices and NEET's the issue of travel to & from work was raised. One NEET suggested that they had explored all options but it was simply too expensive to travel from one side of the borough to the other. Another advised that transport links made it difficult for them to commute to the place of work.

In an interview with an apprentice the issue of travel was raised;
"Travel costs are expensive given the wage [paid when first an apprentice]"

Another advised;
"Travel is an issue for some apprentices"

Whilst this evidence is anecdotal the panel are concerned that any barriers, perceived or real, with regard to considering an apprenticeship should be addressed.

In the Richard Review of Apprenticeships (Doug Richard, November 2012⁴) the “apprentice contribution” is considered. Respondents to a call for evidence suggested that apprentices on low wages should be supported in other ways, such as reduced or subsidised travel costs (and other expenses). Apprentices interviewed for the Richards Review generally accepted that they were paid lower wages in return for training and development, and investment in their future, however only where there was significant investment in them, relative to non-apprentice colleagues on higher wages.

Apprentices engaged through the Wirral Apprenticeship Programme are paid the standard national minimum wage based on age, which for people aged 18 to 20 is currently set at £5.03⁵ per hour. This is significantly higher than the minimum rate an employer can pay an apprentice. An apprentice aged under 19 (or in the first year of level 2 or 3 apprenticeships for those aged 19+) paid the minimum rate will receive £2.68 per hour.

Travel across the Borough of Wirral by Bus, according to Merseytravel’s website is £17.60 per week (when a weekly Solo pass is purchased). Travel across the Borough of Wirral by Train according to Merseytravel’s website⁶ is £18.30 per week (when a weekly Railpass is purchased). Prices increase if more than one mode of transport is required to complete the journey.

This means that a Wirral Apprentice earning £169.05 per week could pay over 10% of their wages on travel. An apprentice not engaged through the Wirral Apprentice Programme, who is being paid the minimum rate for an apprentice, could be paying around 20% of their income on travel.

Merseytravel offer concessions to Students and young people aged 16 and under, but not directly to apprentices. Earlier this year Merseytravel advised it was undertaking a full review of its pre-paid tickets which can be used on services run by different operators and some across buses, ferries and trains. In April 2014 Merseytravel confirmed it would work with other commercial operators to launch a multi-operator £2 per day ticket for young people (Under 16’s)⁷.

Merseytravel are in touch with the Department for Transport (DfT) on a regular basis and recently launched a pledge which stakeholders and Liverpool City Region leaders all signed to work together to make transport more affordable for young people. The panel supports this action and would urge Merseytravel & key partners to introduce concessions for apprentices regardless of their age. The panel suggests

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/the-richard-review-of-apprenticeships>

⁵ National Minimum Wage rates are usually updated every October. The rate quoted was effective October 13. From October 14 National Minimum Wage rates will increase.

⁶ Correct as at 24/4/14

⁷

<http://modern.gov.merseytravel.uk.net/documents/s11716/Affordability%20of%20Travel%20for%20Young%20People.pdf>

full support should be offered to Merseytravel when lobbying the DfT for funding assistance in this area.

Recommendation 9: Officers and Members to support Merseytravel & key partners in lobbying to make transport more affordable for young people and for the introduction of a travel concession scheme for apprenticeship travel regardless of the apprentice's age. Officers should look to gain further lobbying support through the Liverpool City Region Apprenticeship link. An update on lobbying developments should be provided to the Committee by April 2015.

It was explained by officers that options for commissioning of this programme were explored on inception. Negotiation of the day-to-day delivery of the programme by way of an Annual Programme Requirement Agreement with the Council's 14 -19 Team provided the best value for money for the Council and this arrangement has been in place since 2009. Officers stated that this approach has also ensured the project sits within the remit that the Council's Children and Young People's Department already has for promoting the broader apprenticeship agenda. The Regeneration & Environment Directorate maintain responsibility for the policy direction and design of the project in relation to key aims; securing match funding where appropriate; and performance / budget monitoring.

The Chair of the Review Panel met with the Strategic Director of Regeneration & Environment and the Cabinet Member for Economy who advised that the outcome of the Apprenticeship Review significantly redirects the scope of the Wirral Apprentice Programme from its original direction and core economic remit. It was stated that as the majority of recommendations link strongly to the broader 14-19 apprenticeship agenda that already exists within the Children & Young People's Department, the programme responsibilities and associated budget should be transferred to the Children and Young People's Department.

Recommendation 10: Officers should arrange to discuss the potential transfer of the Wirral Apprenticeship Programme's responsibilities and associated budgets to Children & Young People's Department.

Policy

The panel notes that at a strategic level, Wirral Council has a plan for NEET reduction and ensure that young people's engagement in education, employment and training is a feature of key strategy documents such as the Corporate Plan, the children and young people's plan, the 14–19 strategy, the homelessness strategy; and the local regeneration plan. These ensure that there is political commitment (at council and strategic levels); and they encourage good data sharing between agencies.

The panel were encouraged to hear from Officers that Wirral currently has the lowest NEET figure ever recorded for the Borough at less than 6%.

Officers report that young people can only access the Wirral Apprentice offer once they are NEET. Becoming NEET can be a damaging process for young people and can lead to expensive intervention being required to break out of damaging life style choices. In 2012, HM Government stated that the cost of being NEET between the ages of 16 to 18 was estimated to be around £56,000 in public finance costs and £104,000 in resource costs (lost labour market potential), over the working lifetime of each person who has been NEET at this age.

The panel considered what effect an amendment to WAP policy to allow those at risk of becoming NEET to access the scheme would have.

Officers advised that much of the programmes success is in supporting businesses with growth potential, meeting their needs by maintaining a competitive recruitment element, albeit that grants are only available for successful applicants who are unemployed. Officers therefore ensure target groups are prepared for interview by networking and marketing vacancies with employment & skills partners across the borough who are preparing young jobseekers. The Youth Unemployment Task Force identified that businesses value CV's/applications that 'stand out' ie: no gaps in activity/periods of inactivity. Those 'at risk of NEET' ie: those IN activity are by design a more 'attractive' proposition to employers than those NOT IN activity ie: young unemployed adults. The Wirral Apprentice Programme was therefore designed to support access to apprenticeship opportunities for this 'harder to reach' participant target group.

The concern is therefore that with limited number of enhanced grants available, opportunities for unemployed young people would be further reduced if the policy was changed.

6. MEMBERS OF THE REVIEW PANEL

Councillor Anita Leech (Chair)



The purpose of the scrutiny review was to review the current bespoke Wirral Apprenticeship Programme reaching our hardest to reach and most vulnerable young people and to ensure that funding allocated to the programme is being used effectively and is providing the best outcome for the apprentice and businesses alike.

Through our scrutiny it became obvious that there were failings in particular regarding to the information and guidance available to the young people leaving school with many schools not discussing apprenticeships at all or seeing it as a failure of the gifted students to even consider this as an option; whereas we should be inspiring young people to grasp these opportunities, helping to reduce poverty within Wirral and in turn securing a healthier economic future for them.

We should continue to develop, support and encourage the creation and accessibility to apprenticeships through providing a supportive and enabling environment and continue to focus on developing skills, which may be much needed as we look forward with our regeneration plans to redevelop Birkenhead and our Wirral Waters Project.

A further concerning matter was that both the young people and businesses emphasised the importance of supporting young people in order for the apprenticeship to be a successful outcome for all; we see this as an essential part of the apprenticeship and we need to ensure that we provide a supportive and enabling environment for this to be the case

The transition from school to work was also seen as an obstacle and sometimes a barrier by businesses and Wirral Met College realising this, offer a bespoke pre-apprenticeship course for this reason, The businesses we spoke to advised that there was a cost to the employer in the first 12-months and some even offered a “mothering” role which students and the business stated that the apprenticeship would never have been successful without this level of support.

I would like to thank all parties that assisted in our scrutiny and helping us to reach our recommendations. I would also like to thank Council officers and in particular Tim Games for the gallant work they do and the enthusiastic way they provided support to the scrutiny group and finally to fellow councillors who I believe worked very well as a team, showed great enthusiasm and if I am not mistaken found it to be an enjoyable journey.

Other Panel Members were:

Councillor Rob Gregson



Councillor Eddie Boulton



Councillor Mark Johnston

