

WIRRAL'S STRATEGY FOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND FAMILIES

**Wirral Council
March 2016**

THE WIRRAL PARTNERSHIP

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1.0 FOREWORD

Councillor Tony Smith

Cabinet Member for Children and Families.

Our ambition is to enable every child, young person and their family in Wirral to lead good and fulfilling lives, where children have the opportunity to reach their full potential and fulfil their dreams.

By 2020 many more of our youngest children will be ready for school; young people will be ready for work, with all the skills they need to thrive as young adults, and children who are vulnerable and need extra support will get help as soon as they first have problems.

Children in Wirral will go to schools which Ofsted rate as 'good or outstanding', and children and young people will have the emotional, developmental and social skills they need to make a flying start in life.

We will make sure that children feel safe and secure within their families, in their communities and that they have good places to go, to play, be together and have fun. We will understand what makes children and young people feel unsafe; work with children, young people and families to put plans in place for them to feel safer, and make sure everyone working with children and young people knows what to do if they are worried.

We will listen to what local children, young people and families tell us, and we will use the best national and international practice to do whatever we can to get it right for our youngest citizens. We know there can be different outcomes for children and young people depending on where they live or go to school. We want to be sure all children grow up to achieve, regardless of where they live and their backgrounds – we will work together to make this a reality.

Through listening to what children and young people tell us is important we will get better at combatting bullying; providing advice and support when young people's exams are looming and pressures feel overwhelming; we will tailor our support to respond in ways which make the biggest difference, learning from what children and young people tell us works.

Special educational needs or disabilities will never be a barrier to children and young people thriving and achieving in Wirral – our ambitions remain the same that they are supported to achieve well in their early years, in school and in college, that they lead happy and fulfilled lives and that they have choice

The skills taught in schools and colleges will equip young people for jobs in Wirral and the city region. The Young Chamber programme is already engaging with schools and colleges to make sure there is a good fit between what children learn and their journey into work.

By doing the right things early to support children and parents, more children and young people will avoid the need to enter care, and thrive and be safe in their own families. Where children and families need additional help for a brief period of time we will work together to provide flexible support to keep children at home where possible. If children do need to come into care we will work with families to help them understand what they need to do to keep their children safe and thriving enabling them to return home when it is safe to do so.

For children and young people who are looked after, we will provide high quality care, with carers who support children to be safe, well, loved and nurtured, aspiring for the best for them, with no limits set!



A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Tony Smith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Councillor Tony Smith

2.0 INTRODUCTION

This strategy has been produced to ensure that all our children achieve their potential.

In developing this strategy the most important information we have used is what children young people and their families have told us about what matters to them. The information includes findings from a recent programme of research and engagement with over 4,000 school aged children and young people which has provided us with a rich insight into what is most important to them. This consultation and in depth discussion with children, young people and families has helped to identify the strategy priorities.

This strategy is about all partners in Wirral signing up to a shared set of outcomes for children and young people; and using our budgets, our buildings, our people and any other resources to achieve these common goals. We have set out an ambitious but realistic plan for the future based on insight, on sound evidence and a good understanding of where we can make significant impact through working better together to maximise the resources we have in Wirral, and where helpful, across the region.

The Wirral Plan 2020 sets out a clear approach for all Wirral partners to work with residents, including children and young people, to achieve the following pledges:

Children are ready for school

We must make sure that every child is equipped with the emotional, social and developmental skills to be ready to start school and to learn. We will achieve this through a range of early interventions, engagement and support for families within our communities.

Young people are ready for work and adulthood

Our children deserve to be educated in 'good and outstanding' schools. We want to see continued improvements in literacy and numeracy skills with more of our pupils achieving 5A*-C GCSE with English and Maths, closing the gap between the highest and lowest achievement across our schools.

Vulnerable children reach their full potential

We want to see Wirral's children thrive and be safe in their own families and communities. Today, around 675 young people are living in care in Wirral. This is significantly higher than local authorities with similar needs and context to Wirral. Over the course of this plan we aim to reduce the number of children in care by at least 100 to bring Wirral in line with similar areas.

Whilst this strategy focuses on children and young people it recognises that they and their families' lives are affected by many factors including housing, the creation of jobs, community safety, disability, child poverty and domestic abuse.

This strategy is therefore closely aligned with the other strategies developed from the Wirral Plan 2020 including the Improving Life Chances, Domestic Abuse, Leisure, Culture, All Age Disability and Early Help and Prevention Strategies. It is within this context that we set out below the ambition which drives the strategy.

Our Ambition

It is our ambition that all children in Wirral have the best start in life, that they are **ready for school**; that young people develop well through their childhood and as young people, become **ready for work and adulthood** and that **vulnerable children reach their full potential**.

We know what makes childhood a good time for most of our children, young people and their families, based on what they tell us, from childhood studies and research. This is what we aspire to for all our children and young people.

From **conception to birth** we know babies do well if their mothers take good care of themselves before their baby is born, and they are supported in this by their families, their doctor and midwife. Opportunities to meet with and talk to other parents can be very reassuring. Antenatal care works best when it is locally-based, joined up, personal to parents' needs, and each stage of care is co-ordinated and consistent. Where parents experience emotional problems before or after their baby's birth, this needs to be picked up quickly and sensitively. Preparation for a baby is important and good parenting classes, for fathers and other partners too, can help create conditions where stress is reduced, positive bonds and attachments can form and language and communication skills can develop. For new born babies to thrive they need somewhere warm, safe and clean to sleep, clothes and fresh nappies. Babies need cuddles, a family who loves and cares for them, and parents need the company, support and friendship of their family, friends and other parents as well as baby friendly places to go and things to do.

In the **early stages of life** babies need to feel loved, safe and cared for straight away, with parents and carers who soothe them when

they feel upset; and who meet all their physical needs. Babies and toddlers develop and grow rapidly, learning to walk and talk, and are stimulated through opportunities to splash in water, play with toys, with friends and learn new skills before starting school. Baby classes, stay and play and story sessions in local communities provide good time together for mothers and toddlers, and having fun and laughing together, as well as being read to, helps young children develop well. Childhood immunisations keep children healthy as they are growing up, and eating healthy and nutritious food helps children thrive and be strong.

Good information for parents about what's available and easy access to support and advice is really helpful. Children learn and develop good social skills in high quality child care and early years provision, where they are cared for by workers who know about child development. This supports parents to return to work or study, with confidence when they want or need to. Making young children's environment safe is important, this means their homes, their bedrooms, and where they play, and also keeping homes smoke free and free from lots of shouting and arguments.

When children get upset and cry very loudly, they are usually trying to tell us something; they may be testing their family and need their family and carers to be reassuring, fair and firm, setting consistent boundaries. Talking to other parents or getting support from parenting classes can help parents during these testing times. What matters most to children at this age is that their family makes them feel safe and wanted, they receive praise and live in a house full of learning and laughter, where they can play with brothers and sisters and other children; they live in vibrant, lively and interesting communities, where each day is an adventure.

Between the ages of five and ten children go to primary school. Starting school can be scary for children, but talking with parents and family about what it will be like before starting really helps, and children might feel excited as well. Good schools help children settle quickly, and build on all the learning children have done so far. Parents get support from talking to other parents and joining together in activities to support the school or local community. Children need to go to school every day, unless they are unwell, to keep in contact with friends and learning through lessons. Children thrive when parents take an interest in their school work and start asking them what they want to be when they grow up; children need to know their parents will love them whatever they do

Teachers notice when children need extra support and help, and take time to give good feedback about their work; younger children feel valued when older children help them in school, and look out for them in the playground. Children may take packed lunches to school, or they may enjoy nutritious school meals; children will mostly eat healthily in the evening and enjoy time with a parent reading a book or doing homework, before getting a good night's sleep. It's important for children to travel safely; wear a seat belt when being driven or a cycling helmet when on their bike and that they know not to speak to strangers. It's good when children are encouraged to play with their friends outside rather than staying indoors and playing games or watching the television.

Children learn to socialise through play and learn to use their imagination. Parents, carers and teachers can help children when they are upset, perhaps when another child was mean to them; this helps children learn the right and wrong ways to deal with situations, builds their confidence back up and stands them in good stead for the rest of their life. At this age

children need to feel loved, nurtured and encouraged, safe, and to have stability in their lives. It is this time of life when children start to grow in confidence, self-esteem and develop their personality, so that they are starting to be the person they want to be.

Most children find **starting secondary school** interesting, enjoying learning different subjects, but sad at the same time, as some of their friends will have gone different ways. Good schools think about how it must feel for a child starting a much larger school with different teachers teaching different lessons and make good plans to support children to settle in quickly. Teachers help children decide which subjects to choose and families support children in their subject choices too. During adolescence young people value having their own space, as well as chance to be with brothers and sisters. They will generally eat healthily, but have the odd treat too, they know diet is important and will see the doctor or school nurse if they are worried about their health. Young people will start looking after themselves more, learning to cook and wash with help from their parents. Young people will feel safe at home, but know they can speak to the Police if they are worried when out and about and will use other emergency services such as an ambulance, if they need them. Other people young people can rely on include the dentist, optician or GP to stay healthy. Generally young people at this age like meeting friends in leisure centres, youth clubs and cinema's where they feel safe and can go with friends of their own age.

Whilst young people are generally not earning money at this age, they are starting to gain trust and independence by using public transport; so having a good bus service where young people live and to get around at a reasonable price is really important.

In **later teenage years, aged between fifteen and eighteen** young people can find moving into Year 11 at secondary school both exciting and terrifying. It's a time of big exams and big choices. Young people need teachers to keep them interested and occupied in lessons and to run extra-curricular revision sessions; families to provide somewhere quiet to study, but also leisure time to be with friends. Young people need people to turn to if things get tough at home or with friends, people such as the pastoral tutor at school or the school nurse. Health issues are important, so school nurses can help, as well as free dental and optical care. Young people and friends are becoming sexually aware and so it is important to have someone to talk to and to get advice to keep themselves safe.

Secondary school is a time when young people need access to good advice about college, sixth form and apprenticeships, and need information about choosing the right career path. Young people value somewhere to go and something to do in their leisure time, and so local facilities or good bus routes to go to great activities are important.

Young people need to know how to get help if they don't feel safe, or how to get help if they are in trouble with alcohol, feeling really anxious or experiencing peer pressure or bullying; it's a time when parents can also value support from school or community groups or from other parents whose children are experiencing similar issues. Some young people at this point are starting to think about moving out of home, perhaps going to university or college, or starting work.

Adolescence can be a time of great highs and lows, as young people are moving between childhood and adulthood, with all the physical and emotional changes that occur. With help from parents, friends, family and teachers young people learn to become resourceful and resilient adults.

Some of the things young people at secondary school have told us are important to them are¹:

- Making it less awkward to talk about mental health issues in school; many believe things have got worse with the "explosion" of social media, so it is not just pressure surrounding school work and exams, but also peer pressure and cyber bullying;
- Access to reasonably priced public transport and things to do such as access to gym facilities, and more interesting places to go, to relax and learn new skills to succeed in life;
- Valuing peer support in school, providing additional support with subjects, mentors to speak to about bullying, and support for children experiencing similar problems, such as family breakdown;
- Being a school councillor and seeing improvements for students in my school;
- More opportunities for pupils to do work experience with local businesses to improve their job prospects;
- Volunteering and being a good citizen, and wanting for example, to take better care of the environment and keep Wirral clean and tidy
- Being concerned about young people who have less money and the pressures on them to have the latest phones and "high end brands".

CHILDREN IN WIRRAL

OVER 23% OF THE WIRRAL'S POPULATION ARE 0-19

AND THIS IS PROJECTED TO INCREASE 2.8% BY 2021
[SOURCE: CHILDMAT – FIGURES BASED ON 2014,
INCREASE BASED ON 2011 BASELINE]²

IN 2015 THE PERCENTAGE OF

PUPILS ATTENDING GOOD OR OUTSTANDING PRIMARY SCHOOLS WAS 87%,

WHILST THE PERCENTAGE OF PUPILS ATTENDING
GOOD OR OUTSTANDING SECONDARY SCHOOLS
WAS 71%, COMPARED TO 85% IN PRIMARY
SCHOOLS AND 74% IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS
ACROSS THE REST OF THE UK

80% (55) OF CHILDREN SURVEYED

IN WIRRAL SAID THAT THEY DO NOT FEEL CONFIDENT
THAT THEY CAN KEEP THEMSELVES SAFE ONLINE⁷

69.5% OF CHILDREN IN WIRRAL

ACHIEVE A GOOD LEVEL OF DEVELOPMENT
AT AGE 5 COMPARED TO 66.3% NATIONALLY
[DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION]³

78.6% OF FAMILIES WITH A CHILD UNDER 5

LIVING IN THE MOST DEPRIVED AREAS ARE REGISTERED
WITH A CHILDREN'S CENTRE ONLY 24.1% HAVE
SUSTAINED CONTACT WITH A CHILDREN'S CENTRE⁴

WIRRAL HAS A HIGHER RATE OF CHILDREN IN CARE

PER 10,000 THAN THE NATIONAL AVERAGE.
IN WIRRAL THIS WAS 100 (2014/15)
COMPARED TO 60 IN ENGLAND.
[SOURCE: DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION]⁵

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT FOR CHILDREN
LOOKED AFTER (CLA)

AT KEY STAGE 4 IN 2013 WAS 12%,

WHICH IS BELOW THE NATIONAL AVERAGE OF
15.5%, BUT THE GAP BETWEEN CLA AND THEIR
PEERS IS SIGNIFICANT: THE OVERALL FIGURE FOR
WIRRAL IN 2013 WAS 86.9%⁶

We are stronger together

We want Wirral to be a great place for children, young people and families to live, grow up and work. Strong health services, good local schools, safe streets, decent housing and a variety of leisure and cultural opportunities will enable most families to lead healthy and fulfilling lives and are what the Wirral Plan 2020 aims to secure for all children and families. These provide the solid foundation upon which our children and young people will develop into confident, creative and successful adults:

For a small number of families serious problems can arise that require input from hospitals, social care, the police, the fire and rescue services or the courts. At a time when financial pressure is high right across public services we cannot continue to let problems become severe enough to be the responsibility of these high cost, acute services. We cannot afford it.

The arguments for intervening when problems first arise and preventing them escalating are compelling.

Where children are at risk of harm they must be removed from danger and kept safe, but there are many areas where, on average, outcomes for children in care are worse than

for those who are not. For example nearly 23% of the adult prison population has been in care yet care leavers make up only 1% of the population. The impact on children and young people's lives is one of the strongest arguments for catching problems early, working with families to help them make the changes needed to raise their children safely and successfully.

We have seen an increase in families referred for additional help because of family breakdown. We know from Wirral's successful Family Intervention Service that to turn the fortunes of families around, a multi-agency response is needed across health, the police, the voluntary community and faith sector and the council; that practical and persistent advice and challenge works; and that families can and do recover:

"Then (key worker) started working with us and things changed. She came round and did stuff to help instead of just talking. And she always came back and if I hadn't done what I said I would do she would ask me why not and say, right we're going to do it now. That's when things actually started to change"

Parent receiving support through the Family Intervention Service (Troubled Families Programme).

Our challenge is to increase our collective capacity and identify needs earlier so that we make the right intervention at the right time, leading to lasting improvement.

This should reduce the need for the costly involvement of hospitals, police stations, children's social care or the courts.

This strategy seeks to work with partners to re-think the model of care, support and intervention for children, young people and their families by adopting a whole-system approach to prevention. We have the building blocks in place, with strong relationships across partners and shared high ambitions for all our children and young people.

We will need to go further in joining up services across the public sector to realise our ambitions.



3.0 OUR PRIORITIES

3.1 Children Are Ready For School

What We Know

Children's development at a very early age can be a good predictor of health and success later in life.

Where parenting is effective children develop confidence, a sense of wellbeing and self-worth. Parenting and a child's home environment affect their ability to take full advantage of their schooling. In addition to parenting two further contributors are a school's readiness to support less developmentally ready children and community support for school readiness. This outlines the importance of a whole-system approach to school readiness.

We know that breast feeding provides a unique opportunity for attachment between mother and baby and can protect the child from maternal neglect. It can protect the child against obesity, and support children's speech, sense of wellbeing and security and how they relate to others.

Talking with Children, Young People and Families:

Consultation through parents' forums provided key messages about what was most important for them during pregnancy, following the birth of their baby and in preparing their children for school:

Parents value practical support:

"We get most of what we need from being able to talk to other parents"

Parents want to access co-ordinated services in their local area:

"Services should be based on what parents think they need and not what box you fit into"

Feeling isolated is a prevalent emotion among new parents:

"I didn't leave the house for 5 weeks then I came to the Children's Centre for a class and it changed my whole experience of being a mum".

Parents want to do their very best for their children:

"I want my child to be confident and achieve the best they can".

Where are we now?

- The percentage of children reaching a good level of development at age 5 is 69.5%, compared to 66% nationally. However the gap between the lowest attaining children and their classmates was 33%, slightly higher than the national average of 32%.³
- Engaging with hard to reach families remains challenging. Whilst 79% of families with a child under 5 living in the most deprived areas are registered with a Children's Centre only 24% have sustained contact. Of those children and families with additional needs, only 77% are taking up Children's Centre services.⁹
- At 66% Wirral compares well, both regionally and nationally, for the take up of the government funded 2 year old child care offer but this means over 500 eligible children miss out on the opportunity for good quality early education and care.¹⁰

- Wirral breastfeeding rate at 6-8 weeks has consistently been lower than national rates since 2010/11.¹¹
- Childhood obesity is around the national average at age 4-5, but this masks striking differences across the borough. Children are twice as likely to be overweight or obese in some parts of the borough compared to others.¹²
- Working with families we will take a fresh approach to designing services, bringing together budgets and resources from a range of partners and agencies including health visiting, Family Nurse Partnership, midwifery and antenatal services, early years provision and the government funding that is provided for early education for 2 to 4 year olds.

How are we going to improve?

Our aim is that every child will have the emotional, social and developmental skills to be ready to start school and to learn. To support parents and children we will focus primarily on three areas - maternity and health visiting, support for parenting and early education.

- We will review how funding is currently spent across the Council and its partners to help us make best use of our collective resources.
- We will focus future spend on improving all children's health and development, parental support, building children's resilience and their readiness to learn.
- We will ensure that parents expecting a baby are able to take up ante natal classes; that all families with young children are able to get advice and help from a health visitor; that parents can go to toddler groups and parenting classes providing more targeted support for those who need it; we will support a range of community services such as stay and play.
- We will ensure that children go to a good nursery or childminder to take up the 3 and 4 year old early education offer, and for those children that are eligible make sure they can start at age 2.
- We will identify achievement gaps across our borough and actively work to reduce them to ensure that all children are ready to learn and enjoy school.
- We will work together to identify children and families where early intervention is needed to stop problems escalating and deliver our support in local communities through a range of effectively targeted early intervention, engagement and support services for families.
- We will improve information sharing with our partners to have a single, joined-up view of what support a family needs and how that can be delivered most cost effectively.
- We will develop the knowledge and skills of our workforce so that a wider range of staff are able to work successfully with families.

"Through my training (with the family intervention service) I was able to work with the family to identify that the alcohol issues were due to a very poor relationship with her husband. The son colluded with her husband and both were mentally abusive to the mother. I was able to support her to engage with alcohol and mental health services, where in the past I would have just looked at the quick fix of the criminal justice system route."

Community Police Support Officer,
Merseyside Police.

How we will measure if we are getting it right?

Over the life of this plan we will see an improvement in:

- Children's obesity rates at age 4, and breastfeeding rates at 6-8 weeks, right across the borough.
- Children's readiness for school measured through the new baseline assessment in reception year, with an emphasis on continuing to close the gap for less advantaged children.
- Sustained contact with maternity and early childhood services that makes a measurable difference to children's outcomes, especially for families with children who have additional needs such as those who need protection or looking after.

3.2 Young People Are Ready For Work and Adulthood

What we know

We know that children and young people need to develop a whole range of skills throughout their childhood to be successful at negotiating a pathway to adulthood. The importance of a young person's self-esteem and individual resilience cannot be emphasised enough, and both are key components of their identity development. To achieve this young people value "somewhere to go to, something to do, and someone to talk to.

"In December 2016 Onside, working with partners in Wirral, will open a youth zone, called 'The Hive' for the borough's young people aged 8-19 and up to 25 for those with disabilities".

An additional challenge is the increasing number of young people with poor mental health who are unable to access mainstream education therefore needing bespoke packages of teaching and learning. There is also growing evidence of pressures mounting

on younger children in school settings, including the impact of social media. Girls as young as eleven are suffering stress due to issues including bullying, online activity, body image, pressures at school and family breakdown. 1 in 5 girls (11-13 years) polled said they had experienced emotional problems in the last year, a 55% increase from 2009¹³. The NSPCC reports that contacts to Childline have increased by 36% since 2012/13.

"Future in Mind" will transform child and adolescent mental health services from clinic-based services to primary Mental Health Workers for young people based in schools in three localities. It will be easier for schools, young people and the children's workforce to access support and the offer will be flexible to meet the needs of the child."

Education is a vital service for children, young people and the wider community. School leaders, governors and parents working in partnership with the local authority lead the drive for improvement in standards to ensure all learners thrive at school. Local authorities will continue to provide strong leadership for the local system, championing children and young people's achievement regardless of school structure. However, one thing that is certain is the future will not look like the past. We will need to work together to ensure that all the schools in Wirral are ready for the next 20 years, able to play a full and active role in preparing Wirral's young people for successful adulthood.

There are also key questions we must ask about how we provide education for children and young people with special educational needs. An Ofsted review in 2010 highlighted that as many as half of all pupils identified for School Action would not be identified as having special educational needs if schools focused on improving teaching and learning for all, with individual goals for improvement (Ofsted 2010 - The special educational needs and disability review).

Talking with Children, Young People and Families

Through the 2015 survey children and young people have told us:

- Their future career and jobs is the second most important thing in their lives after caring for their family. School work, friends and relationships and health are also important.
- Regarding their ambitions for their future the main goals are getting a job (47%) and going to University (35%), with 4% having a goal to get an Apprenticeship.
- They identified the key things that they thought would help them get a job as experience, support and careers guidance.
- They identified the key things they thought they would help them to do better at school or college as good attendance, extra support and someone to talk to who could help with their problems.

Children and young people highlighted things which would help including:

“encouragement and support for people who are struggling”;

“learning partners and having somebody around you who you really, really trust”.

“knowing where to go to if we were being bullied, and we would help others, by sticking up for them, if teachers were doing nothing about it”.

Wirral Youth Support Service spoke to young people who said that more provision was needed for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) issues, and as a result young people were supported to set up a group for LGBT teenagers. The New Horizons group meets once a week at Wallasey Youth Hub, and is able to access specialist advice from the Terrence Higgins Trust. In 2015 the Wallasey Youth Hub, supported by Wallasey Constituency Committee, received the Navajo Charter Mark, which recognises work to support LGBT young people.

Where are we now?

- The supply of school places across the borough is uneven with some schools oversubscribed and others struggling to recruit enough pupils.
- Educational attainment in Wirral is good overall with 62% of pupils gaining 5 GCSEs (A*-C) in 2015. However there are significant inequalities across the borough. At the highest achieving school 100% of students gained 5 good GCSEs compared to 30% at the lowest.³
- The attainment of disadvantaged children compared to their peers is the greatest single educational challenge for Wirral. Although Wirral performs strongly across the key stages in a range of indicators the attainment of children in receipt of free school meals (FSM) is significantly lower than that of non-FSM children at all stages of education.³
- There is a large difference in adults with no education qualifications, ranging from 4% in Heswall to 45% in Bidston St. James. This has a significant impact on employment prospects and future income.¹⁴

- In 2015 the percentage of pupils attending good or outstanding primary schools was 87% (85% nationally), whilst the percentage of pupils attending good or outstanding secondary schools was 71% (74% nationally).
- Educational attainment for children looked after in Wirral at Key Stage 4 was 13% in 2015, a gap of 48.8% with their peers across the borough.¹⁵
- A higher number of young people needing support due to self-harm and other risk taking behaviours than the national average.¹⁶
- In 2015 the percentage of Wirral pupils with Special Educational Needs and/or Disability (SEND) having statements or Education Health Care Plans (EHCP) was 3.1% compared with the national figure of 2.8%. This provides challenges in relation to provision of high cost school places, medical support and the transition from school to work.⁶
- At the age of 16 (the end of Key Stage 4) the positive destinations figure (92%) is equal to or better than the national and North West averages. Sixth form and Apprenticeship destinations are similar to national figures. The percentage of young people achieving a Level 2 or a Level 3 qualification by the age of 19 has increased, however the inequality gap has widened in both indicators.¹⁷
- At the age of 18 transition to employment, education and training (EET) is higher than the national average at 84%. 27% of young people get places in the top third of Higher Education Institutions which is higher than the national average.¹⁸
- The percentage of 16-18 year olds who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) shows a four year downward trend to 4.3% in 2014 with a NEET cohort of

around 600 young people. However, the position is uneven across the borough. Local data for 2016 shows the highest NEET rate of around 8.5% across the Birkenhead and Tranmere, and Bidston and St James' localities.¹⁹

The 'Get Real' programme is specifically targeted at care leavers aged 16 to 19 not in education, employment or training (NEET). The programme has four distinct phases which aim to raise the young people's aspirations, self-esteem, develop essential skills for work and promote team building through a residential element. It also includes an internship placement. The programme is run annually, late in the autumn term and is delivered by the Brathay Trust supported by a 14-19 Service Personal Coach. In total, 38 of Wirral's most challenging and vulnerable care leavers who are NEET have participated in 'Get Real', of which 61% are now positively engaged in some form of employment, education or training.

Dawne joined Get Real in 2014 with confidence issues, lacking direction and had struggled to find employment. Dawne attended a 6 week internship with NYAS (National Youth Advisory Service), Birkenhead and enjoyed a very successful time there.

At the end of the 6 week period NYAS offered Dawne in a full time Apprenticeship.

The 14-19 Service was able to support NYAS through our Wirral Apprenticeship Programme with a grant which enabled them to employ Dawne. She is now a confident public speaker who briefs new Get Real participants to talk about her journey and inspire other young people as a 'Get Real' graduate.

How are we going to improve?

Our aim is that every young person in Wirral is ready for work and adulthood. This starts from birth and builds on our ambition to ensure that every child has the best start in life.

- Work in partnership with Headteachers and governors to review education provision across the borough and develop our Strategy for Schools, to ensure we have the right provision of the right quality in the right location fit for the next 20 years.
- All our children deserve to be educated in 'good or outstanding' schools. We want to see continued improvements in literacy and numeracy skills with more of our pupils achieving a good GCSE level in English and Maths.
- We will support schools to continue their work in delivering year on year improvements. We will also ensure that our schools continue to focus on reducing attainment gaps between groups of pupils, for example between those children in care and those in low income families and the rest.
- We will develop ambitious and inclusive plans to improve outcomes for children with special educational needs and / or disabilities, using their plans and national best practice to inform our local approach to commissioning school places.
- We know that the best approach to reducing gaps is to intervene early, as success in the early stages of education results in sustained success in later years. Until the closing gaps in primary education fully work through to secondary education we will support schools in adopting the Raising Attainment of Disadvantaged Youngsters (RADY) programme.
- We will ensure that the range and scope of continuing education and training from 16-18 includes opportunities provided by schools and colleges, underpinned by good careers advice and guidance.
- We will support teenage parents and vulnerable young people back into education through targeted interventions
- We will reduce the number of young people classified as NEET, providing specific and targeted interventions that pay particular attention to young people who are more vulnerable, such as those with learning difficulties or disabilities, care leavers, those known to youth offending or a young parent.
- We will complete the implementation of the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) section of the Children and Families Act 2014.
- We will ensure Study Programmes for young people help them improve their confidence to help them build self-esteem and improve our response to and the prevention of bullying.
- Where there are signs of developmental difficulty we will ensure partners work together to undertake assessments in a timely way, providing support for parents as a first response before prescribing medication.
- We will equip schools with the skills to respond to children's anxiety and identify signs of poor mental health providing access to specialist advice in schools and enabling young people to access advice themselves.

- We must also make sure that education leads to employment, our continuing work with business embracing opportunities provided through the Young Chamber programme, our work with Wirral Met our local FE college that supports all vocational skills sectors and through other partners such as the Local Enterprise Partnership. This will provide insight into different industries and workplaces to help young people develop an understanding of the employability skills required to be successful in their careers.
- Wirral has a relatively traditional model of providing support for young people, through services including youth centres. A new stakeholder group will be tasked with developing an innovative and creative approach to designing new youth provision to improve outcomes.

We are working collaboratively with different education providers on fresh approaches to learning Maths. At the new Wirral Waters Campus a different approach for all 16-18 year olds on construction courses who have not achieved A*- C in Maths GCSE is being tested. Attendance at the Project Maths groups started improving within the first weeks of the project and, most importantly, it is helping young people recognise the need to improve their skills in this key work-related area

Birkenhead Sixth Form College delivers a 'Maths Trajectory Project' to a similar group of young people who may not have achieved a grade 'C' at GCSE in Maths. The programme is supported by bespoke written and multimedia materials. The College's GCSE Maths results have consistently been above 74% for the last 3 years, an achievement recognised by Ofsted in November, 2015

How we will measure if we are getting it right?

- Increasing the percentage of pupils achieving 5 or more good GCSEs including English and Maths.
- All schools will be above the DFE floor target for Progress8, the new progress measure, with a year on year improvement in this measure for all schools
- The percentage of children attending good or better schools increases.
- The percentage of 16-18 years olds that are Not in Education, Employment or Training is reduced.
- Reducing the gap in achievement for children receiving free school meals and their peers at key stages 2 and 4.
- A reduction in hospital admissions and attendance as a result of self-harm.
- A reduction in the use of medication for Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

3.3 Vulnerable Children Reach Their Full Potential

What we know

In 2015 it was reported that over two million children in the UK today are living in difficult family circumstances²⁰. These include children whose family lives are affected by parental drug and alcohol dependency, domestic abuse and poor mental health. For some families without early help difficulties escalate, family circumstances deteriorate and children are more at risk of suffering significant harm. Neglect remains the most common form of child abuse across the UK. Emotional well-being (including low mood, unhappiness, self-harm and suicidal feelings) remains a key reason for young people to ask for support.

There is a compelling case to support more children and young people early, research indicates that providing effective multi-agency preventative early help is seen as crucial and can do more to reduce child abuse and neglect than reactive services which are put in place when issues arise.

Wirral's Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) is helping to protect the most vulnerable children from harm, neglect and abuse. Police, social care, health and organisations such as Catch 22 are working jointly as a first point of contact for new safeguarding concerns. It is significantly improving information sharing between agencies allowing a full picture of the associated risks to a child to be formed. As a result, better decisions are being made about what action to take and targeted support is quickly provided to the most vulnerable children and young people. This approach will now be extended across a greater range of partners which will continue to improve integration between services and better outcomes for children and their families.

Our schools, GPs, early years settings, colleges and youth centres are at the heart of families' daily lives – universal services open to all children and young people. If we configure preventative services around these, in neighbourhoods and localities that make sense to children and their families, we believe we can make better use of our resources and spot difficulties early before they become stubborn, hard to shift problems.

There is strong evidence both locally and nationally about the impact of the troubled families programme on families experiencing difficulties, in Wirral this programme is called the Family Intervention Service. The programme is about giving families the skills, tools and confidence to be resilient and independent. This leads to better outcomes for the whole family and less need for specialist services including health, police and social care. Training for staff across a range of services has given our workforce the skills and tools to support and challenge families effectively, for example:

"I have adopted a much more reflective approach when working with families. My intent now is always to ensure the identified goal is that of the family member and not just mine"

Troubled Families Employment Advisor,
Job Centre Plus (Family Intervention Service)

Talking with Children, Young People and Families

Our children in care told us ²¹ that they want all the people involved in providing support to them to promise certain things to help them feel happy and safe while we are looked after:

- To be safe;
- To be heard, not just listened to;
- My plans to be made clear to me;
- To take part in plans that are about me;
- My carer to be able to teach me things I need to know;
- To be healthy and to know how to find out about being healthy;
- To be treated the same as everyone else;
- To have meetings when I am not in school
- To be accepted by everyone with lots of help;
- Information about what I am meant to get to help me do well;
- To know and understand who can make decisions for me so I can enjoy growing up just like other young people.

'Changes of social worker are not good – you have to tell your story over and over'

Young person looked after

Another young person said:

'I want you all to ...look out for the child that is unhappy, that doesn't want to be in school, that has no friends, that seems to be going out an awful lot, that could be driving around in cars, has more than one mobile, that has an attitude, that seems to have a lot of boyfriends and ask yourself, is this a victim of CSE?'

Young person who has experienced Child Sexual Exploitation, Report of the Inspection of Rotherham MBC, February 2015

Where are we now?

- a higher rate of children looked after compared to the national average and compared to local authorities similar to Wirral.²²
- Successfully worked with 910 families, as part of the family intervention service (troubled families programme) to support 99% of them to achieve positive outcomes by December 2014.²³
- 41% of children who leave care were not in education, training or employment (NEET) in 2014.²⁴
- High levels of domestic abuse in families, and it is a common thread in the majority of referrals into children's social care services.^{25,26}
- Above average rates of hospital stays related to alcohol abuse among those under 18 compared to the rest of England.²⁷
- Reduced numbers of young people who have teenage pregnancies, however the numbers have not reduced as fast as other areas, and the current rate of 33 young women per 1000 is worse than the England average of 24 per 1000.²⁸
- 88 child deaths across Merseyside were reviewed by the Child Death Overview Panel between April 2014 to March 2015, 15 of which were from Wirral. 26% (23) deaths were considered to have factors that could have been changed including unsafe sleeping practices for babies, risk taking behaviour, sharing of information and clinical management, drug abuse, birth trauma or negligence.

In July 2015 the Children in Care Council organised the “Good Intentions and Warm Words are Not Enough” conference, bringing children looked after and professionals to work together to ensure children and young people’s voices are heard. The conference was the first in the North West to have been devised and run completely by young people. The day was a great success with brilliant feedback. It was agreed that we will hold conferences annually, display Children’s Promises in all offices, now refer to children in care as children looked after, consistently involve children in writing their care plans and make sure children understand them.

How are we going to improve?

Our aim is that all Wirral’s children thrive and live safely in their own families and communities. We have a moral imperative to support children who are vulnerable or at risk, but we also face a financial challenge. We invest ten times more public resource into the support of 675 children in our care than other children. The more children we can keep safe and thriving in their families then the more resources are available to be invested into other areas like prevention.

- We will focus on the early identification of need so we can intervene early and prevent difficulties from developing.
- We will work assertively with the families of children on the edge of care to support and challenge them to change behaviours and keep children safe and secure. If children need to come into care we will continue to work with families so they can return to a safe and stable home wherever possible, as quickly as possible.

- We will increase the number of foster care homes and people who wish to adopt so that, where young people cannot live safely at home, we have a supportive, family based setting where they can be placed.
- We will minimise delays in achieving a permanent home for children looked after, so that they feel safe and secure and are able to develop and grow emotionally and academically.
- We will commit to ensuring that every child who leaves care has the opportunity to start work, further their education and training, undertake a traineeship or progress into an apprenticeship.
- We will design services in a way that they are joined up so children and families they tell their story once and receive appropriate support, at the right time and in the right place.
- We will tackle child sexual exploitation (CSE), learning the lessons about strong multi-agency working, being vigilant, raising awareness and increasingly identifying vulnerable children, and putting plans in place to secure their safety.
- We will focus on reducing the incidence of domestic abuse, working together through the domestic abuse alliance to deliver the strategy to reduce the harm to children and families.
- We will ensure guidance and training is provided across partners to tackle radicalisation and raise awareness of the Prevent agenda.

'On one condition ...' is the latest peer education theatre production, funded by Public Health and Merseyside Police it has been created by Creative Youth Development's Last Minute Theatre Company. The production contains a number of scenarios which have been designed to raise young people's awareness about what exploitation is, some of the types of grooming methods used and where to get help and support. Each scenario is accompanied by an interactive question and answer section to aid learning, and there is also the opportunity to have a follow up workshop with Catch22.

How will we measure if we are getting it right?

- The rate of children looked after will be safely reduced to be in line with local authorities similar to Wirral, to around 570 children.
- The expanded multiagency Family Intervention Service will work with more than 3,000 families during the next five years, maintaining the high proportion of families successfully turned around and so contributing to the reduction in children looked after and children in need of help.
- The number of adopters will increase and children will be placed with adoptive parents more quickly.
- More children living in or close to Wirral in foster care, residential children's homes, residential special schools and health placements.

4.0 HOW WE WILL DELIVER THIS STRATEGY

To deliver this strategy the Children's Joint Commissioning Group (CJCG) has been established, with oversight of the commissioning and delivery of integrated services.

The CJCG will ensure this strategy is delivered and will regularly report progress to the Health and Wellbeing Board as the overarching partnership group which has the responsibility of improving health and wellbeing outcomes for the local population.

An annual report will be prepared which will outline progress on the actions and demonstrate the outcomes that have been achieved through the delivery of the strategy.

The voices of children and young people will be at the heart of all activity, so the most important part of our monitoring will be asking children, young people and families what impact the strategy is making to their lives. This engagement, surveying and feedback will be carried out in a number of ways across all ages including with our most vulnerable and at risk groups.

5.0 AMBITION TO ACTION

Each of our three pledges are underpinned by priority areas and backed up with a detailed action plan that will take us through from ambition to action:

Children are Ready for School Priority Areas

- More children achieve a good level of development at the end of the early years foundation stage.
- Children receive sensitive and responsive care from their main caregivers in the first years of life.
- Increase the percentage of children achieving a good level of development at the end of the early years foundation stage.

Young People Are Ready For Work and Adulthood Priority Areas

- Young people have access to high quality learning experiences which support them into employment.
- Children and young people enjoy good health and well-being into adulthood.
- Children and young people effectively participate in their communities.

Vulnerable Children Reach Their Full Potential Priority Areas

- Support children to live at home in their own community and prevent them entering care.
- Children who need protecting have good, consistent plans to support them to be safe.
- Children who cannot live at home with their family or extended family live in homes where they feel safe, secure and supported to reach their full potential.

DETAILED ACTION PLAN

CHILDREN ARE READY FOR SCHOOL

Priority One: Children in Wirral will start life well

Theme Lead: Wirral Clinical Commissioning Group

Action	By When	Lead Organisation
1. Increase the uptake of maternity services delivered by integrated teams in locality-based settings.	March 2018	Children's Joint Commissioning Group
2. Improve young children's health outcomes: raise breastfeeding rates so performance is equally good across the borough; targeted reduction in obesity at age 4-5.	March 2017	Children's Joint Commissioning Group

Priority Two: Children receive sensitive and responsive care from their main caregivers in the first years of life

Theme Lead: Wirral Council – Early Childhood Delivery Group

Action	By When	Lead Organisation
3. Provide training and mentoring for childminders, nurseries and childcare settings which focuses on the attachment needs of babies and infants.	September 2016	Children's Joint Commissioning Group
4. Review both evidence-based parenting programmes and peer-led and community based activities to ensure all parents can access support for effective parenting.	January 2017	Children's Joint Commissioning Group

Priority Three: Increase the % of children achieving a good level of development at the end of the early years foundation stage

Theme Lead: Wirral Council – Early Childhood Delivery Group

Action	By When	Lead Organisation
5. Close the gap in readiness for school for disadvantaged children	July 2017	Children's Joint Commissioning Group
6. Percentage of schools and childcare settings rated good or outstanding increases	December 2017	Children's Joint Commissioning Group
7. Improve the take up of 2, 3 and 4 year old nursery places for vulnerable children by sharing responsibility as a partnership.	September 2018	Children's Joint Commissioning Group

DETAILED ACTION PLAN

YOUNG PEOPLE ARE READY FOR WORK AND ADULTHOOD

Priority One: Young people have access to high quality learning experiences which support them into employment

Theme Lead: Wirral Council – Children’s Services

Action	By When	Lead Organisation
8. Work with Headteachers and governors to devise and implement a schools’ strategy for Wirral	September 2017	Children’s Joint Commissioning Group
9. To ensure that schools below the DfE floor standards and schools causing concern make good or better progress	July 2017	Children’s Joint Commissioning Group
10. To close the inequalities gap in attainment between those young people in receipt of free school meals and their peers	July 2017	Children’s Joint Commissioning Group
11. To reduce persistent absence and strive to improve attendance for all pupils with a specific focus on the most vulnerable	July 2017	Children’s Joint Commissioning Group
12. Progress for children with special educational needs and disabilities is the same as for all children and young people - that they will achieve well in their early years, at school and in college, and lead happy and fulfilled lives	April 2018	Children’s Joint Commissioning Group
13. To make sure that the local special educational needs and disability provision is responsive to local needs and promotes children’s achievement	September 2018	Children’s Joint Commissioning Group
14. To provide challenge to schools/ education establishments so that all Children Looked After make at least expected progress across each key stage	September 2017	Children’s Joint Commissioning Group

Priority Two: Children and young people enjoy good health and well-being into adulthood

Theme Lead: Wirral Council – Public Health

Action	By When	Lead Organisation
15. To deliver the Employability Skills Programme for Care Leavers (14-19 model)	January 2017	Children's Joint Commissioning Group
16. Work with schools and other stakeholders to roll out the 'Future in Mind Strategy' designed to provide support so that schools and colleges are more equipped to work with young people with lower levels of mental health	February 2017	Children's Joint Commissioning Group
17. To support agencies to promote resilience, early intervention and prevention for young people	March 2016	Children's Joint Commissioning Group
18. To provide targeted drug and alcohol interventions so reducing misuse	September 2016	Children's Joint Commissioning Group
19. To reduce the number of teenage conceptions by work with young people on healthy relationships and good sexual health	September 2017	Wirral Council - Public Health & Youth Service

DETAILED ACTION PLAN

Priority Three: Children and young people effectively participate in their communities

Theme Lead: Wirral Council – Children’s Services

Action	By When	Lead Organisation
20. To raise aspirations, engage local employers and improve vocational awareness develop opportunities for young people through the Young Chamber and Wirral Met College	September 2017	Chamber of Commerce Wirral Met College
21. To promote citizenship and volunteering opportunities, with a specific focus on community involvement	July 2017	Children’s Joint Commissioning Group
22. To provide initiatives which look at reducing anti-social behaviour	July 2017	Children’s Joint Commissioning Group
23. To complete a review of youth provision in Wirral.	April 2017	Children’s Joint Commissioning Group / Youth and Play Advisory Committee



DETAILED ACTION PLAN

VULNERABLE CHILDREN REACH THEIR FULL POTENTIAL

Priority One: Support children to live at home in their own community and preventing them entering care

Theme Lead: Wirral Council – Children’s Services

Action	By When	Lead Organisation
23. Reduce the number of children and young people needing children’s social care services or becoming looked after through timely and persistent interventions with families of children on the edge of care.	September 2016	Children’s Joint Commissioning Group
24. Ensure the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) operates as an effective single front door for children, young people and families to access support and services when needed	September 2016	Wirral Safeguarding Children Board

Priority Two: Children who need protecting have good, consistent plans to support them to be safe

Theme Lead: Wirral Council – Children's Services

Action	By When	Lead Organisation
25. Fully implement the graded care profile by both children's and adult services, to increase the early identification of vulnerable children.	March 2017	Wirral Safeguarding Children Board
26. Develop a single plan for children, young people and families, ensuring services they access work together and this is evidenced by a single coherent description of their journey.	March 2017	Children's Joint Commissioning Group
27. Consistently implement a pre-birth assessment tool specifically for those expectant parents known to present as higher risk.	December 2016	Wirral Safeguarding Children Board

DETAILED ACTION PLAN

VULNERABLE CHILDREN REACH THEIR FULL POTENTIAL

Priority Three: Children who cannot live at home with their family or extended family live in homes where they feel safe, secure and supported to reach their full potential

Theme Lead: Wirral Council – Children’s Services

Action	By When	Lead Organisation
28. Develop a city and regional approach to delivering adoption services to increase choice and opportunity, ensuring children are more quickly placed in permanent, loving, adoptive homes .	March 2017	Children’s Joint Commissioning Group
29. Deliver the Sufficiency Strategy to ensure there is a good supply of high quality accommodation and excellent, aspirational care in the borough for children and young people who are looked after	March 2017	Children’s Joint Commissioning Group

5.2 How will we know if we are improving?

Indicator	Current Performance
<p>Children Are Ready For School</p> <p>An increasing percentage of children achieve well in the reception year.</p>	69.5%
<p>Percentage of Health Visitor visits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6-8 week review • 12 month review • 2 ½ year review 	<p>86.2%</p> <p>59.1%</p> <p>73.2%</p>
<p>Young People Are Ready For Work And Adulthood</p> <p>Percentage of schools rated as 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted</p>	84%
<p>5 or more A*-C grades at GCSEs including English and Maths (end of Key Stage 4).</p> <p>To become 5 or more good GCSEs including English and Maths</p>	61.8%
<p>16-18 year olds that are not in Education, Employment or Training</p>	4.3%
<p>Vulnerable Children Reach Their Full Potential</p> <p>Children Looked After Rate per 10,000 aged under 18</p> <p>Children In Need Rate per 10,000</p> <p>Family Intervention Service engagement with families</p>	<p>100</p> <p>426.3</p> <p>98.8%</p>

6.0 CONCLUSION

This strategy focuses on the needs of children, young people and their families. It is child centred, outcome driven and focused on the child's journey. The voices of children, young people, and their families are at the heart of the strategy and will continue to be so as it is delivered.

The strategy focuses on early identification and prevention, the delivery of joined up multi-agency services so that children young people and their families only have to tell their story once and receive the right support at the right time and in the right place.

Wirral's children are our greatest asset. This strategy is designed to positively impact on all their lives to create a better future; for them and for Wirral.

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