

CABINET PORTFOLIO SUMMARY REPORT

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| REPORT OF | Councillor Bernie Mooney |
| CABINET PORTFOLIO FOR | Children and Families |
| CO-ORDINATING CHIEF OFFICER | Deborah Gornik, Acting Director of Children's Services |

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is an update from the Cabinet Portfolio Holder to Members of the Council on matters relevant to her portfolio.

1 VULNERABLE CHILDREN REACH THEIR FULL POTENTIAL

The pace of improvement within our social care services for children is steadily increasing, and I am delighted to be able to report major progress to the Council.

We continue to work closely with colleagues from Ofsted and the DfE and, following the most recent monitoring visit, we have received extremely encouraging feedback. Ofsted found progress in all areas they reviewed, including noting a 'reinvigorated' approach to working with Care Leavers as part of the new service we have established. It is clear there is still work to do, but I am confident in the progress we are making, and I am heartened to see the impact it is having on the lives of our most vulnerable children. We must continue this positive momentum, and I commit to keeping Council fully updated on our progress.

After an extensive, nationwide search, we have been able to secure one of the most sought after leaders in children's services to take on the role of Director for Children. Paul Boyce – current Executive Director for Children at Knowsley Council, and architect of the significant improvement in children's services in that borough – will officially start work in December.

Paul is experienced, hugely talented and excited to get started. I know he will hit the ground running and continue the momentum we have built up over the past few months. I would also like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the work of Deborah Gornik in her role as Acting Director. Deborah has entirely dedicated herself to the work, and has done an incredible job while holding the fort.

I would like to thank Members of all parties who supported this appointment through the recruitment process. You can read more about Paul's appointment on the [Wirral Globe website](#) and in [Wirral View](#).

2 CHILDREN ARE READY FOR SCHOOL

We continue to deliver excellent services in this area, with hundreds more children benefitting from our 2 year old offer. As of today, more than 9 in 10 children in Wirral who are under 5 are accessing services which will help them start school ready to learn. This is an increase of 7% on our already excellent performance from last year.

We have also seen an increase of 15% in the number of children receiving health checks at 12 months old, alongside an increase of 3.6% of children at 2 years old.

Building on this work, our next major project is to develop an extensive service directory, fully mapping all of the services available for parents to access in the borough from public, private and voluntary organisations.

Every month, Wirral View carries stories and features to provide parents with helpful information on services available to them. The most recent edition can be found [here](#)

3 YOUNG PEOPLE ARE READY FOR WORK AND ADULTHOOD

We are currently seeing the highest number of young people (16-19) in Apprenticeships since 2012, which is extremely positive and encouraging as we continue to try and support our young people and help make sure our businesses are able to recruit skilled, talented employees locally.

We have to put focussed attention onto improving school attendance. Ofsted reviews into our schools during the last academic year have demonstrated that a number of schools attendance performances were in the lowest 10% nationally. While we are still pleased to see 9 in 10 Wirral schools being judged as 'good' or better, it is important we provide our schools with every possible support to maintain and improve performance.

This challenge becomes more difficult as Government remain committed to ongoing budget reductions. We know we are facing the removal of the Education Support Grant, a £3 million cut from Wirral which will directly impact on our ability to help schools provide excellent education to our young people. We have already written to the Education Secretary to express our grave concerns and we will continue to lobby Government to provide fair funding to Wirral pupils.

4 REDUCE CHILD AND FAMILY POVERTY

New areas have been added to the 'improving life chance' pilot, to address smoking cessation and working with the Health Visiting Service to increase the impact of the Healthy Child Programme. The food hubs in the community pilots continue to provide a means to engage local communities and case studies that we are collecting are building a picture of the potential of this approach to meet the needs of families.

A recent example of this was for a young family that were collecting food who were referred on to Energy Projects Plus, through identification of fuel debts and limited kitchen appliances. There were already 2 young children and the mother was expecting her third child. Through this referral, the family were able to clear the debts and received funding for a fridge freezer and washing machine. The mother reported that this had 'changed her life and made it a lot easier', and that she was managing her finances much better through the debt being cleared, the impact being not only on her physical health, but also her mental wellbeing.

Ask Us Wirral is now well established and is seeing a high demand for the service, 8330 service users have accessed the service in the first 2 months. A new 'Ask Us Wirral' column has been created in the Wirral View publication, providing helpful advice to residents every month. Read the latest column [here](#).