

## **CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

DATE: Tuesday 22<sup>nd</sup> March 2018

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>Improving Life Chances pledge</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>Chair of the Improving Life Chances Steering Group, Bev Morgan (CEO of Home Start Wirral)</b>

### **REPORT SUMMARY**

The Improving Life Chances pledge is co-ordinated by the multi-agency Improving Life Chances Steering Group. Within the group there are specific leads for each of the priority action areas. These leads work in partnership with appropriate agencies to deliver the identified actions. The group meets on a quarterly basis to provide updates, share any challenges and agree progress updates.

The report provides the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee with progress on the priority areas for the Improving Life Chances pledge.

### **RECOMMENDATION/S**

It is recommended that the Committee notes the report and the proposed actions for taking the priority areas in the Improving Life Chances pledge forward.

### **1.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The Improving Life Chances pledge is co-ordinated by the multi-agency Improving Life Chances Steering Group. Within the group there are specific leads for each of the priority action areas. These leads work in partnership with appropriate agencies to deliver the identified actions. The group meets on a quarterly basis to provide updates, share any challenges and agree progress updates.

The initial ambition set out in the strategy was to work with partners to look at opportunities to tackle child and family poverty in Wirral communities and break the cycle of disadvantage. Many of these areas are delivered through strategies that underpin the Wirral Plan and pledges. These include, growth, children being ready for work and adulthood, housing and skills. The priorities for action were informed through evaluation of national research and best practice, together with insight from local residents and key stakeholders.

The strategy was developed in partnership with local families and a range of public, voluntary, community and faith sector organisations and informed through a review of national good practice. The group is chaired by Bev Morgan, Chief Executive of Home Start (Wirral). The focus has been on establishing community pilots in Seacombe, Bidston and St James and Beechwood to target action and evaluate the impact of this effort. The community pilots are a local partnership of residents, councillors, community groups and agencies who meet every six weeks. Each pilot area has developed and monitor progress against a joint action plan.

### **1.1 Priority areas in the Improving Life Chances strategy:**

Priority 1: Overarching actions

Priority 2: Supporting parents into sustainable employment

Priority 3: Improve life chances for children and young people

Priority 4: Supporting families to become financially resilient

Priority 5: Tackling the immediate effects of poverty.

### **1.2 Overview of progress**

The body of this report seeks to provide members with an overview of activity and outcomes delivered during 2017-18, it does not include activity from earlier stages of the Wirral Plan period (Quarter 3 performance report for 2017-18 is attached as Appendix 1).

The most recent data released in the last month on children living in low income families shows a drop for Wirral to 19.9% from the 23.3% reported in the Quarter 3 performance report. It should be noted that the data relates to 2015.

### **1.3 Priority 1: Overarching actions:**

What we said we would do:

- organise an annual Improving Life Chances/Child Poverty conference to raise awareness of issues affecting local families, highlight local services and celebrate achievements and to further develop opportunities for joint action
- target specified agencies to complete child poverty awareness training
- monitor the impact of community pilots
- co-ordination and support volunteering groups in each of the community pilot areas
- reduce smoking in community pilot areas

What we have done so far:

The second annual Life Chances/Child Poverty conference was held in October and attended by a range of organisations. Each pilot area presented on their activities, achievements and challenges. These included:

- Cookery clubs/Education and wellbeing courses/foodbanks
- Increased partnership working
- Improved community engagement

It provided the opportunity for sharing good practice and learning from the more developed community pilot areas. The presentations were followed by a networking session.

Uptake of the e-learning training has been limited, feedback from some agencies has suggested that condensed training at team meetings would be more appropriate, this is currently being explored. Face to face child poverty awareness training continues to be delivered, although this is limited at present it has evaluated well. Workshops were provided around the rollout of Universal Credit (UC), both for the Steering Group and community organisations, the sessions were well attended and gave participants key messages to share/signposting for their clients. The popularity of the additional session provided in q3 on Universal Credit and available local support further demonstrated the preference for face to face sessions. Following this session a resource pack was developed for councillors and other key stakeholders.

Citizens Advice Bureau held a course in September to training frontline volunteers in community pilot areas around navigating their website to enable them to support the people that they are working with. The community pilots are heavily supported through volunteering activity, examples include the following:

- A series of community clean ups have taken place by community members and local organisations
- Forty sites entered across the community pilot areas entered the In Bloom competition

Volunteer sessions have been planned with Community Action Wirral for quarter 4 to recruit more volunteers in each of the pilot areas.

A drop in smoking cessation clinic commenced at Seacombe Children's Centre in January with staff being trained to deliver brief advice and intervention training around second-hand smoke. A Better Life's (ABL-smoking cessation provider) specialist pregnancy adviser will be available one day a week at the centre. A similar offer is currently being negotiated with St James' Children's Centre.

An evaluation to date of the community pilots has been completed and the final report will be available in April 2018.

#### Evidence of impact

Just one example following the annual event has been a local voluntary sector organisation trialling a social supermarket similar to one of the community pilots.

Following the UC session a resource pack was developed for councillors and other key stakeholders. Feedback on the session was positive, and illustrated the strong local partnership working to mitigate the impact of the implementation of digital Universal Credit.

Both the 'In Bloom' and 'Clean Up' activities not only presented volunteering opportunities, they also resulted in improvements in the physical environment and improvement in the mental wellbeing of those taking part and the people living in the area.

The evaluation of the community pilots demonstrates a range of outcomes, including: engagement of local communities, increased opportunities for volunteering, reduction in anti-social behaviour, improved wellbeing through debt advice.

### Next steps

The Improving Life Chances Steering Group will continue to provide opportunities for good practice to be shared and celebrated. We will provide regular key updates/practical tips/signposting for agencies to support families experiencing poverty to mitigate the lack of uptake of the child poverty awareness training.

We will be considering the findings of the evaluation in relation to the aim of reducing the number of children and young people living in poverty (this is discussed more fully in the main body of the report).

Ensure that the learning and good practice from the pilots is shared and further areas developed and the work taken forward strategically as part of the Wirral Together approach.

## **1.4 Priority 2: Supporting parents into sustainable employment**

### What we said we would do:

- Provide employment training courses at children's centres and appropriate settings in the community
- Promote affordable childcare opportunities in community pilot areas to enable parents to return to work

### What we have done so far:

DWP have been providing a range of group information sessions, which included two of the children's centres – Ganney's Meadow and Bromborough.

Catering courses have been delivered in partnership with Crosby Training and Tranmere Rovers FC. In addition, a job fair was delivered at the ground by DWP and a range of key stakeholders.

Wirral Early Childhood Services delivered a campaign during the summer school break promoting the 30 hours free childcare offer for working parents.

The Lifelong Learning Service has provided Education and Skills courses and session in each of the pilot areas, with one of the areas running a job club.

### Evidence of Impact

The job fair was well attended by 260 people, over 300 job applications were made and 60 training opportunities discussed on the day.

As an example of the Life Long Learning opportunities offered, during 2017/18 in Bidston and St James, 94 people accessed education and learning courses. Just under a third had no previous qualifications, whilst 40% had achieved Level 2 or below qualifications prior to the course. Following the course, 97% indicated that they intended to complete further learning.

At the start of the summer prior to the awareness campaign around free childcare uptake of the offer was 60%, by 1<sup>st</sup> September this had risen to 75%.

### Next steps

To develop a more strategic approach to increasing employment for parents in the community pilot areas through linking up with other pledges areas, such as the Growth Strategy.

## **1.5 Priority 3: Improve life chances for children and young people**

### What we said we would do:

- Work with Health Visitors to maximise the impact of the Healthy Child Programme in community pilot areas
- To increase take up of breakfast clubs/holiday provision in community pilot areas

### What we have done so far:

Health visitors working in the pilot areas are striving to increase the uptake of the 2-2½ year developmental review to enable any additional support that a child may need in order to be ready for school to be identified early.

Healthy weaning sessions have been piloted and evaluated positively so have continued. Opportunities for joint working are currently being explored with children's centres and foodbanks, including the distribution of Healthy Start vitamins.

There is a range of food provision in the community pilot areas, which includes:

- hot meals as part of its Youth Club provision 3 times per week, plus 'fit and fed' sessions
- take away lunchboxes during school holidays
- breakfast bags during school holidays
- activity sessions which include meal shares

### Evidence of impact

Uptake in the community pilot areas of the 2-2½ year old developmental reviews was 70.5% of those eligible at the start of the pledges, at the end of q2 this was now 83.1% (data is a quarter behind due to this being collected nationally).

As an example of holiday food provision, during the summer (quarter 2), in Bidston and St James alone 3896 meals were given out through youth clubs, family sessions and lunch box distribution.

### Next steps

We are recommending that the need to tackle overweight and obesity in childhood is tackled through the steering group for children being ready for school. In particular, we will ask that the steering group targets action against levels of high need.

## **1.6 Priority 4: Supporting families to become financially resilient**

### What we said we would do

- Target frontline staff to raise awareness of debt and financial advice in community pilot areas
- Increase uptake of Wirral Credit Union among partners organisations and the wider community

### What we have done so far

A number of events have been held through the year including the following:

Ask Us Wirral frontline staff learning event took place in June 2017, attendees included frontline staff working in community pilot areas. The event showcased routes to debt and financial advice including through the Ask Us Wirral service and the Building Better Opportunities Better Off Finance projects.

A workshop was delivered in September for staff working directly with families or supporting community groups in the pilot areas.

Wirral Credit Union roadshow was held in June 2017. The aim was to increase take up amongst staff and volunteers and raise awareness of benefits for clients.

### Evidence of impact

As a result of the workshop staff reported increased access to debt and finance information and a greater understanding of pathways to get advice through the Ask Us Wirral service. The Ask Us Wirral Service is currently exceeding all targets set for the service. Feedback once clients get through to the service is positive, however, issues around capacity are still being addressed.

Between July and December, Wirral Credit Union signed up 130 new members, a third sector organisation signed up as a partner to enable staff members to have monthly payroll deductions and 2 other local organisations are currently in discussion to sign up.

### Next steps

We will seek to strengthen the links with the Community Connectors/organisations that are able to provide initial signposting information and advice. Ask Us Wirral have committed to address any issues that clients have in getting through to their service.

## **1.7 Priority 5: Tackling the immediate effects of poverty**

### What we said we would do

- Implement a neighbourhood approach to tackle food poverty in community pilot areas
- Ensure the selective licensing scheme connects to the work of the ILC community pilots

### What we have done so far:

Food hubs have been established in each of the community pilot areas, food is provided through subscription to Fareshare and his Church and they offer weekly non means tested discounted supermarkets to residents. Sources of food have also expanded to include Costco, Tesco, M&S and Nandos.

The food hubs also provide food within their sessional activities. Christmas hampers were distributed across the community pilot areas again this year.

Approval for expanding the selective licensing scheme was granted in December and consultation on the rollout to the additional areas is currently underway.

### Evidence of impact

In each of the community pilot areas a range of support has been established around food provision from holiday/breakfast clubs, youth sessions providing a hot meal to social supermarkets/foodbanks/fuel vouchers. The following is an example of support provided:

*“One evening we had a mum crying in the Centre. She regularly comes in for support via the social supermarket but she was crying because she had -£4 in her energy fuel account and had no money to top up her gas and electricity for that night. Usually we signpost to the St James Centre but it was closed. We didn’t have any spare funds at Gautby Road either; on occasion we do and are able to help but unfortunately not this time. Luckily, because of the Community Pilot’s we have been working in partnership with the Beechwood Little Centre, so I rang them and they were able to provide emergency assistance for the mum”.*

The community pilots have now had time to become established within their areas and evaluation has recently been undertaken to inform their future development. Findings of the evaluation were presented to the Improving Life Chances Steering Group in February to inform identifying actions going forward.

## **2.0 Improving Life Chances Community Pilot Evaluation Feedback session**

The evaluation of the community pilots was presented to the Improving Life Chances Steering Group meeting in February to discuss options/key actions for 2018/19. The presentation slides highlighting the findings are provided in Appendix 2. It was agreed that the success in engaging local communities and all that the community pilots have achieved should be celebrated and the good practice identified shared. However, in order to sustain the efforts that have gone in to establishing the pilots, it was agreed that they should be transitioned into the Wirral Together community engagement and volunteering strategy.

When the initial Improving Life Chances strategy was developed, it was acknowledged that child and family poverty is a multi-dimensional problem. There is increasing recognition that many of the actions required to tackle child poverty and improve life chances cannot be addressed in isolation and will be delivered through a number of other strategies including Children’s Families and Young Peoples, Domestic Abuse, Housing and All Age Disability.

One strategy that has the potential to have the biggest effect on reducing the number of children and young people living in poverty is the Wirral Growth Plan. There is clear evidence that reducing worklessness and improving the skills and opportunities for parents and young people is critical in linking economic growth and poverty reduction. It was proposed and agreed at the Steering Group Meeting to discuss the evaluation that it would be more effective to have child poverty as a strand running through appropriate pledge areas and for a ‘champion’ to be identified within those pledges to ensure that actions within other pledges seeks to address child poverty.

### **3.0 Challenges**

The ILC Steering Group has identified the following challenges to reducing child poverty:

- It is acknowledged that the community pilot areas are achieving a whole range of positive outcomes as demonstrated through the evaluation which include community engagement and volunteering, however, there is limited evidence that they are reducing child poverty beyond tackling the immediate effects of poverty
- It is difficult to mitigate fully against the impact of national policy through local action, Universal Credit is an example of this, although tackling the immediate effect of poverty has been addressed
- Priorities of the communities will not always mirror those identified through review of good practice, and in order to fully engage communities they need to take ownership and drive projects/developments.

### **4.0 Next steps**

The evidence from the evaluation demonstrates that there is real value in bringing communities together to look at how we can collectively make a difference in challenged communities. It must be acknowledged that, while this has value in its own right, it has not to date had a significant impact on child and family poverty. As discussed and agreed at the Improving Life Chances Steering Group, we will take the community pilot work forward as part of our approach to volunteering and community engagement and look to take priority actions forward through other key pledge strategies.

### **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

### **5.0 LEGAL**

There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

### **6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS**

There are no resource implications arising directly from this report.

### **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

Not applicable.

### **8.0 ENGAGEMENT / CONSULTATION**

Not applicable.

### **9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

This report is for information only and there are no direct equality implications.

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**APPENDICES: Two**

**Appendix 1**

**Quarter 3 performance report for 2017-18**

**Appendix 2**

**Improving Life Chances community pilot evaluation**

**SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Cabinet</b>	
<b>People Overview and Scrutiny Committee</b>	