



HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

16th June 2021

REPORT TITLE:	TACKLING HEALTH INEQUALITIES THROUGH REGENERATION: HEALTH & EMPLOYMENT
REPORT OF:	JULIE WEBSTER, DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH

REPORT SUMMARY

This report outlines collaborative Council investment to address health related worklessness and improve social, economic and health outcomes.

This matter affects all wards within the Borough; it is not a key decision.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Health and Wellbeing Board is requested to note the information included within this report.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 The relationship between employment and health is well established. This report provides an overview of the key issues in relation to health and employment and highlights the existing work being carried out across Wirral.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 The schemes referenced within the report were developed using a range of evidence, based on data for Wirral and research about what works. Colleagues from across the Council will work together to review the existing schemes and develop longer term proposals for the sustainability of the schemes referenced within this report.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Being in good employment protects health, while unemployment, particularly long-term unemployment, contributes significantly to poor health. Evidence shows that good quality work is beneficial to an individual's health and wellbeing and protects against social exclusion through the provision of income, social interaction, a core role, identity and purpose. Good employment opportunities are therefore a fundamental tenant of our collective effort to improve health outcomes. As well as being vital to individual health; an economically active population also enables more economically prosperous communities that are sustainable for the future. Promoting and protecting health and creating a vibrant economy is not a binary choice, both must be viewed as complimentary aspirations and this report provides an overview of the work to achieve this.
- 3.2 Unemployment and health related worklessness have presented longstanding challenges within the Borough with poorer health outcomes in areas with increased deprivation, unemployment and within that health related worklessness. In response, Wirral has for many years sought to address health related worklessness and has had success in doing so by reducing it at a rate that is double the national average. However high levels remain, with rates that far exceed the regional/national averages. The pandemic and associated social and economic response, has further highlighted the need to augment work that supports people to enter the job market and maintain economic independence for themselves and their families. Currently:
- Claimant count data currently shows that there are 12,345 working age people claiming an out of work benefit in Wirral, this is 6.4% of the population (NOMIS, March 2021), the national average is 6.5%.
 - The claimant count has increased by 5,215 claimants (73%) since March 2020 and the start of the pandemic.
 - Currently, 2,695 of claimants are aged 18-24 which is a rate of 12.1% much higher than regional and national averages at 10.1 and 9.1% respectively.

- In our most deprived areas such as Birkenhead and Seacombe rates can reach up to 17%, particularly for young males aged 18-24.
- Universal Credit (UC)¹ data for February 21 shows that there are 31,352 people who are claiming UC. There are 20,211 people claiming the 'not in employment' element of UC and 11,131 people claiming the 'in employment' element. (DWP, Stat Xplore)
- 36% of UC claimants are searching for work (11,287) and 26% have no work requirements as part of their benefit (8,112).
- The Birkenhead and Wallasey Parliamentary Constituencies account for 41% and 32% of all UC claimants in Wirral.
- 9,045 people have been claiming for 2 years or more which highlights the area of Health related worklessness, with mental health being the most common primary condition within the Employment Support Allowance (ESA) element accounting for 51% of all claims.

3.3 One of the most immediate and inequitable impacts of the COVID-19 containment measures has been in relation to employment and income. According to analysis from the ONS, the mortality rate from COVID-19 in the most deprived areas was almost double that in the least deprived areas between March and July 2020, the latest period for which mortality data by deprivation are available. Both employment and income are closely related to health outcomes and the impacts of containment measures on employment and income will have profoundly negative impacts on health and levels of health inequality unless effective mitigating action is taken.

3.4 In addition to the individual, family and community health and wellbeing benefits there is a strong economic argument to address worklessness, across public expenditure, the wider economy and personal and household income. It is estimated that when a claimant moves into a job paying the National Living Wage, there are savings of £6,900 for government, a £13,100 boost to the local economy, and £6,500 gain to the individual.

3.5 **ACTIONS TO TACKLE UNEMPLOYMENT & HEALTH RELATED WORKLESSNESS**

In 2014 Wirral Council embarked on the Health Related Worklessness Programme, with a focus on the parliamentary constituency of Birkenhead, starting with detailed engagement and conversations with residents, stakeholders and employers to explore how best to integrate and sequence a bespoke package of support to reduce health related worklessness and reduce the cost to the public sector.

3.6 Realising the synergies between those who were not working due to their health and those populations that had low levels of life expectancy and poor health outcomes public health partners were engaged to develop the programme. An innovative approach using ethnographic research was used to shed new light on the problem,

¹ Please note current UC data for those not in employment is also included in the Claimant Count data set as this is currently a 'experimental dataset' to account for changes in benefit regimes since 2010.

understanding the real experiences behind the statistics and to aid the development of solutions. The insights revealed a fundamental disconnect between the worlds of health and employment which meant that low level mental health barriers which limit a person's ability to work were often deemed non-urgent in a healthcare setting.

- 3.7 This immersive approach enabled the Council to understand the individuals behind the statistics – seeing first-hand how individuals were stuck in a cycle of demotivation, isolation and low-level mental health – while services inadvertently exacerbated these problems. The stories of real people catalysed a Wirral wide innovation resulting in the commissioning of the Community Connector service aimed at directly addressing the problems identified in the research.
- 3.8 A jointly funded commission for a new programme aimed specifically at Employment Support Allowance (ESA) claimants with low-level mental health issues was implemented. This commission was jointly funded by the Public Health Grant and the Investment Team within the Council. The Investment Team had traditionally commissioned services with job outcomes as the focus of the programme, however this new programme focused on improving individual's wellbeing as the insight work demonstrated that people were so far from the job market that this was an unrealistic target.
- 3.9 The programme, Connect Us delivered by Involve North West, intends to tackle socioeconomic inequalities focused on the underlining issues affecting people's lives rather than the symptoms of it. The Connect Us team use door knocking as a means of engagement, using an asset-based community development approach, focusing on people's strengths and encourages individuals to do things for themselves with some support. The programme increases connectivity into the wider community for individuals, allows greater access to information, self-help, improves wellbeing and tackles social isolation. Using a community 'sparks fund' the service had also improved community resilience and developed community spirit through funding small groups to set up at a neighbourhood level. Connect Us is person-centred approach, offering help and support based on individual need with a community focus, striving to build community resilience at all times. The needs of individuals they help vary greatly from simply getting someone to take the bin out to getting others into employment and volunteering. The programme has been independently evaluated by John Moore's University and evidenced outcomes for the programme include improved social connectiveness, financial stability, family relationships including access to children, physical and mental wellbeing and an increased uptake to training, employment and volunteering opportunities.
- 3.10 The model for Connect Us was based on the success of the Reach Out model which Involve North West have been delivering for over 13 years, helping local residents find employment. The service originally engaged residents through door knocking to support them to overcome barriers that were preventing them from going to work. Reach Out provides residents with a personalised job coach who provides one to one support with writing or amending CVs, online job searching, help with job applications, interview techniques and builds individuals confidence to help with the transition of starting a new job. Reach Out offers this support through work clubs in the wards with the highest levels of unemployment.

- 3.11 Reach Out is currently funded through the European Social Funded (ESF) Wirral Ways to Work Programme, matched through investment from the Public Health Grant. The ESF and match funding has only allowed for short term funding to support the service, not providing any stability or long-term investment in the programme. Wirral Ways to Work has supported over 7,600 residents with employment support since it started in April 2016 and has a positive outcome rate of 54%.
- 3.12 The table below details the current Council investment into programmes designed to improve health through employment.

Commissioned Service	Investment	Funding Source	Contract Expiry
Connect Us	£717,121	Public Health	Feb 2023 (option of additional +1, +1)
(extra investment in programme- further 22 connectors to support COVID)	£598,881	Tier 3 COVID monies	March 2022
Reach Out	£1,450,500	European Social Fund- £934,766.67 Public Health- £515,733.33	October 2022

3.13 PLANNING FOR HEALTH & ECONOMIC RECOVERY

- 3.14 Covid-19 has had a profound effect on the UK labour market. Many workers have been furloughed and unemployment is likely to rise materially over the next year, and as of March 31st 2021 Wirral had 17,200 workers on furlough. The unemployment rate took seven years to return to pre-recession levels after the past two recessions and the expected rate could take even longer. The two key factors to determine this is firstly the uncertainty about future demand, this can cause firms to delay any hiring decisions. The impact of Covid-19 is different in nature to past impacts on unemployment levels, Covid-19 has led to greater uncertainty about the economic outlook and the likelihood of finding a job. The pandemic has led to fewer new business starts and less recruitment from businesses who have survived, making it difficult for those furthest from the labour market and excluded groups who are now competing against those recently unemployed who may be more 'job ready'.
- 3.15 The broader strategy for the economy and our regeneration plans is integral to our efforts to address existing social and health inequalities within the borough. This is particularly significant in the aftermath of COVID-19. Places such as Wirral, with existing economic and health inequalities, have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19. Additionally, the long-lasting effect of measures to tackle COVID-19 (e.g. business curfews and temporary closures) will impact on our community and economy increasing demand for local services and the financial resilience of the borough. This requires an enhanced focus on regeneration to mitigate these as well as identifying opportunities to respond to a new way of working and living due to the pandemic.

3.16 Services like the Community Connectors and Wirral Ways to Work will be an invaluable resource for local communities as they begin to recover from the lasting impacts of Covid-19. They are a trusted 'brand' with expertise skills in engaging those communities who do not typically engage with services. They can provide a holistic and seamless transition for people to encourage and guide them to build their confidence to progress into volunteering or employment opportunities. The regeneration programme for Birkenhead provides an advantageous opportunity for local people to gain employment, however there is need to be investing in the development of skills and knowledge in the present day to ensure that when those opportunities arise residents are equipped to be able to take full advantage of the opportunities available.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

4.1 This report describes the existing investment in the schemes outlined in this report. Whilst they are currently funded and commissioned, they are resourced from grant and or short-term funding. Long term commitment to these schemes needs to be considered as part of the MTFS.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

6.1 This report and work referenced within it has been developed by public health and investment teams working collaboratively. There are long term risks in relation to recurrent funding and therefore the sustainability of the work referenced within this report.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

7.1 The schemes described within this report are currently commissioned for a specified period using grant and or other short term funding. They are not therefore secure longer term

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

8.1 No public engagement or consultation has been undertaken in relation to this report. However, the schemes of work referenced within the report engage with services users to inform delivery and development.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.

9.2 The Equality Impact Assessments for the ReachOut and Community Connector Programmes can be accessed here:

Wirral Growth Plan (2016) EIA: [Microsoft Word - Wirral Growth Plan - Equality Impact Assessment](#)

Wirral Council (2019) EIA: Community Connector Recommission.
<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments>

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 No direct climate implications.

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APPENDICES

N/A

BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 1) Timpson et al (2019) An Evaluation of the Wirral Health-Related Worklessness Programme Executive Summary. Liverpool John Moores, Public Health Institute
<http://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/documents/s50077845/Timpsonetal2019.pdf>
- 2) Wirral Council (2021) ReachOut Project Evaluation.
<http://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/documents/s50077846/ReachOutProjectEvaluation.pdf>
- 3) Wirral Intelligence Service (2021) Wirral JSNA. Economy, Business and Skills
<https://www.wirralintelligenceservice.org/this-is-wirral/economy-business-and-skills/>
- 4) ONS (2020) Deaths involving COVID-19 by local area and socioeconomic deprivation: deaths occurring between 1 March and 31 July 2020
<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/bulletins/deathsinvolvingcovid19bylocalareasanddeprivation/deathsoccurringbetween1marchand31july2020>
- 5) HM Government (2021) Build Back Better: our plan for growth
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/build-back-better-our-plan-for-growth>
- 6) Health Equity Institute (2020) Health Equity in England: The Marmot Review 10 Years On
<https://www.health.org.uk/publications/reports/the-marmot-review-10-years-on>

- 7) HM Government (2019) Public Health England. Health Matters: Health and Work.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/health-matters-health-and-work/health-matters-health-and-work#how-phe-can-support-you>

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date