



CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE & EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 27 October 2021

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| REPORT TITLE: | PROCUREMENT OF SERVICES TO ENCOURAGE, ENABLE AND ASSIST YOUNG PEOPLES PARTICIPATION IN EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION AND TRAINING |
| REPORT OF: | DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION |

REPORT SUMMARY

Since April 2013 Wirral Council has been part of a joint Liverpool City Region NEET participation service commissioning group. Halton Council has historically led the procurement process and created a Framework Agreement for the service incorporating Liverpool City Region local authorities, including, Liverpool, Knowsley, Halton, and Wirral.

The current service contract, awarded to Career Connect, which came into effect 1st April 2018, is due to finish 31st March 2022 with no options to extend.

Wirral Council and the other partner Liverpool City Region local authorities are again in favour of a joint commissioning exercise to procure a service to encourage, enable and assist young people's participation employment, education and / or training from 1st April 2022.

Halton Council have again agreed to lead on the procurement activity on behalf of the partner local authorities. Local authorities in this new service procurement include Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council and Halton Council.

The joint procurement process would seek to procure a service from April 2022 for a period of four x 12-month periods. This will allow for consistency of service from 2022 to 2026 but with the option to reduce or terminate the service annually should the Council's statutory duties change, or further budget savings require a reduction.

The annual Council revenue funding available for the new service will be equal to that invested for 2021/22 at £500,790. The Wirral service provider costs for a 4-year procured service would therefore have a value of circa £2million (Wirral delivery element only).

Costs associated with this service will be met from the overall ongoing budget provision for 14-19 Team / NEET participation services. The budget for this service in the 2021-22 financial year is currently £1,026,600.

Delivery of participation and NEET services supports two of the key strategic Council themes, as outlined in the Wirral Plan 2025 (note: these are the same themes that will be included in the refreshed Wirral Plan 2021 – 2026, being considered at Full Council in September). These themes include (1) Brighter Futures through the delivery of interventions to engage NEET young people and the provision of careers support, and (2) Safe and Pleasant Communities through targeted engagement of young people aged 16 and 17 (and those with SEND up to the age of 25) and their families in the Borough's most deprived communities / ward areas.

This matter affects all Wards within the Borough.

This is a key decision.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children, Young People and Education Committee is recommended to:

- 1) to provided delegated authority to the Director of Children, Families and Education to enter a partnership service delivery contract with Halton Council, Knowsley Metropolitan Borough Council, and an approved service provider, at the end of the procurement process. The procured service provider will deliver a service to support and enable NEET young people to positively participate.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 Providing a service to support young people NEET are a vital component and support mechanism to ensure the full discharge of the Council's statutory duty to support full participation. This service will become more important as we enter the post pandemic recovery phase with young people challenged by competition for jobs, the consequences of interrupted education and social isolation.
- 1.2 There is also significant advantage to being involved in a joint procurement process with the other local authorities across the City Region. The proposal to jointly procure a service across the four local authorities will bring economies of scale which will financially benefit Wirral Council.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 The Council could procure its own service independent of the other Liverpool City Region local authorities; however, in doing so Wirral would fail to benefit from: -
 - a. The financial benefits associated with being part of a much larger commissioning activity where providers can reduce service costs based on economies of scale.
 - b. Reduced issues associated with tracking and providing consistent support for Wirral young people who travel and / or relocate to other Liverpool City Region local authority areas.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The current Liverpool City Region (LCR) local authorities' contract with Career Connect expires on 31st March 2022. A new service is required to be commissioned for delivery from 1st April 2022. Service delivery options will, again, need to be aligned to the post Covid-19 challenges and opportunities whilst also meeting the dynamic complex needs of Wirral NEET young people.
- 3.2 The current service procurement and contracting arrangement has been led by Halton Council procurement services. The service specification was developed and agreed by all Council partners and their representative officers. Each Council in the partnership has its own funding schedule based on the individual services required by that locality. Service performance is also managed at a Council level. This approach works well for Wirral, and it is planned will be retained for the new service from 2022.
- 3.3 The proportion of young people currently not in employment, education and / or training (NEET) is 4.3% (July 2021) or 316 young people. Compared to the same period in 2020 the current NEET rate has reduced by 0.6%. This is a recognised LCR local authority's trend as the nation emerges from the periods of lockdown.
- 3.4 The Department for Education (DfE) published data (March 2021) illustrated Wirral to have a NEET rate lower than the Northwest and England combined measure averages. As a borough Wirral also performs well compared to neighbouring LCR

local authorities but still falls short of Sefton by 1.1% (combined NEET plus not known metric). Table 1 below provides a Liverpool City Region comparison. Table 1. A comparison of NEET rates for 16- and 17-year-olds

| AREA | % 16-17s NEET | % 16-17s Not Known | Combined NEET & Not Known Performance |
|---------------|----------------------|---------------------------|--|
| ENGLAND | 3.0% | 2.0% | 5.0% |
| NORTHWEST | 3.6% | 1.5% | 5.1% |
| Halton | 3.3% | 0.7% | 4.0% |
| Knowsley | 7.0% | 0.7% | 7.7% |
| Liverpool | 5.1% | 2.5% | 7.6% |
| Sefton | 3.3% | 0.3% | 3.6% |
| St. Helens | 4.0% | 1.0% | 5.0% |
| Wirral | 3.7% | 1.2% | 4.9% |

(Source: DfE, March 2021)

- 3.5 The specification for this service will maintain some similar features to current but will need to recognise and respond to the challenges and barriers facing young following the national pandemic; these include disruption to compulsory education, social isolation, and other mental health related challenges. Young people in receipt of this support service are often vulnerable with multiple and / or complex needs. These challenges have evolved since the last commission in 2018.
- 3.6 Proposed refinements to the current participation and engagement services for Wirral NEET young people include: -
- i. Build on the successful integration of the service with key Children’s Services team, for example, service staff based with the Youth Offending Team, Leaving Care Services and the 14-19 Team and support for young people with special educational needs and / or disabilities (SEND).
 - ii. Development of a Participation Coach role which will support vulnerable young people aged 16-19 NEET and those socially isolated linked to mental health issues.
 - iii. Stronger focus on peripatetic service delivery and use of digital technology – to also include intensive delivery out in the community to include ‘door knocking’.
 - iv. Increased focus on supporting and the re-engagement of young people NEET rather than offering / delivering pure careers guidance.
 - v. Retain a small, fit for purpose, flexible professional careers guidance service for those young people requiring an intensive 1:1 service.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The costs whilst still to be finalised will be met from the overall budget provision for 14-19 Services which is currently £1,026,600 (FY 2021-22). The tender specification

will be designed to give commissioners flexibility at point of procurement with services disaggregated into different investment lots, for example engagement services, coaching services, and careers services.

- 4.2 Break clauses will be legislated for at the end of each contract year to take account of available budget.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Local authorities have a duty to make available to all young people aged 13 to 19 (and to those between 20 and 25 with special educational needs and disabilities), support that will encourage, enable, and assist them to participate in education or training. This is a duty under Section 68 of the Education and Skills Act 2008.

In addition, the Education and Skills Act 2008 placed two 'Raising the Participation Age' related duties on local authorities regarding 16- and 17-year-olds:

3a. Local authorities must promote the effective participation in education and training of 16- and 17-year-olds in their area with a view to ensuring that those persons fulfil the duty to participate in education or training. A key element of this is identifying the young people in their area who are covered by the duty to participate and encouraging them to find a suitable education or training place.

3.2b. Local authorities must make arrangements – i.e., maintain a tracking system - to identify 16- and 17-year-olds who are not participating in education or training. Putting in place robust arrangements to identify young people who are not engaged in education or training or who have left provision enables local authorities to offer support as soon as possible.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 There are no resource implications arising from this report.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 The Council commissioning framework must be fully applied, and an appropriate service provider procured to ensure the Council can continue to meet its statutory duty to support and enable participation of young people.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Career Connect as the current service provider have been duly made aware of the local authority's plans to procure a new service via Halton Council (as the commissioning lead).

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 A full Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and published and can be found using the link below:

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments>

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Consideration has been given to the climate emergency in the redesign and overhaul of services to encourage, enable and assist young people to participate. The service provider will have to demonstrate how they will maximise the efficient use of technology to reduce carbon. This will include reduced community-based visits and the use of greener transport options.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The service provider that wins the opportunity to deliver this service to support and enable young, post-16, to participate in employment, education and / or training (EET) will be required to demonstrate their track record in relation to working alongside Wirral further education providers and employers. Supporting and enabling the participation of young people has a known long term economic benefit to the local area through reduced reliance on public funded services and local spending.

11.2 The appointed service provider will be key in supporting and developing successful careers plans alongside the young people that find themselves NEET. Priority will always be given to local opportunities EET because of the benefits linked to sustainability of placement (minimised travel barrier / environmental impact) and local economic advantage.

REPORT AUTHOR: **Paul Smith**
(Paul Smith, 14-19 / Adult Learning Strategy Manager)
telephone:
email: paulsmith@wirral.gov.uk

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Department for Education: Participation of young people in education, employment or training Statutory guidance for local authorities



Participation-of-you
ng-people-in-educat

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

| Council Meeting | Date |
|-----------------|------|
| | |