



## **CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**Tuesday, 21 June 2022**

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>WIRRAL'S EARLY HELP SYSTEM</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION</b>

### **REPORT SUMMARY**

The purpose of the report is to provide members of the Children, Young People and Education Committee with an opportunity to apply scrutiny to Wirral's early help system, led by Children's Services. Since inception of the Early Help and Prevention Service in 2018, there has been ambition to:

- Optimise the total resource in the system for early help
- Lead high-quality early help services that prevent children and young people requiring statutory intervention
- Transform services to provide empowering, strengths-based support for children, young people, their parents, and carers

The report is aligned to priorities of Wirral Council's Plan 2026:

- Working for brighter futures for our children, young people and their families by breaking the cycle of poor outcomes and raising the aspirations of every child in Wirral.
- Working for safe and pleasant communities where our residents feel safe, and where they want to live and raise their families.
- Working for happy, active and healthy lives where people are supported, protected and inspired to live independently.

This is not a key decision.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Children, Young People and Education Committee is recommended to review the performance of the early help system and scrutinise its current effectiveness and future development plans.

## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

### 1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 The Council, as part of the Local Area, has a duty to ensure provision of a comprehensive range of early help services for children and young people.

### 2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 Alternative reporting methods were considered but as the early help system is fundamental to supporting children, young people and families across the borough, formal scrutiny and assurance is required.

### 3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Since January 2019, Wirral's early help system has been on a steady trajectory of development, from *initiating*, to *emerging*, to the current state of *maturing*. The impact of growing capability and capacity in the early help system is evidenced by performance data, external scrutiny and user-experience feedback. There are several key factors which have contributed to the growing strength of Wirral's early help system, and a clear direction set to enable the system to reach *maturity*.
- 3.2 The impact of Wirral's early help system can be evidenced in performance data over a 3-year period (January 2019 to January 2022) as follows:

Figure 1: Key Indicator Snapshot

	January 2019	January 2022
Contacts to Children's Services	14,900	7,639
Referrals to Children's Social Care	3,200	2,454
Social Care Assessment	4,314	3,266
Rate of Children in Need	418.8	379.9
Rate of Children in Care	124.1	117.6
Completed Early Help Episodes	1,867	2,855
Early Help Episodes closing with <i>Needs Met</i>	59%	87%

- 3.3 Reduced demand for Children's Social Care is accompanied by increasing numbers of early help episodes (support that includes a formal assessment, plan(s), and is reviewed/delivered over an agreed period). This indicates that more children, young people, and families are being successfully supported outside of the statutory system.
- 3.4 As early help extends beyond Children's Services, involving education settings and voluntary, community and faith organisations, it is not possible to quantify the exact volume of contacts for early help or early intervention work which has taken place. However, the most reliable measures of the effectiveness of early help are those indicating demand for statutory child protection services, which are decreasing.
- 3.5 In assessing the performance of Wirral's early help system, it is useful to compare performance data with regional and national statistics. Although published datasets

are only available up to March 2021, they provide an indication that Wirral's direction of travel for statutory demand is changing.

Figure 2: Rate of Referrals to Children's Social Care Comparative Data

<b>Rate of Referrals to Children's Social Care</b>			
	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Wirral	626.1	592.1	449.3
Statistical Neighbour Group	532.8	607.2	524.3
North West	584.3	553.2	518.0
England	544.5	434.8	494.3

Figure 3: Rate of Repeat Referrals to Children's Social Care Comparative Data

<b>Rate of Repeat Referrals to Children's Social Care</b>			
	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Wirral	24.6	27.6	23.5
Statistical Neighbour Group	19.3	20.5	22.6
North West	22.6	22.0	22.2
England	22.6	22.6	22.7

Figure 4: Rate of Children in Care Comparative Data

<b>Rate of Children in Care</b>			
	2018-19	2019-20	2020-21
Wirral	123.0	120.0	123.0
Statistical Neighbour Group	94.8	101.0	101.8
North West	94.0	97.0	97.0
England	65.0	67.0	67.0

- 3.6 The comparison with other local authority referrals and repeat referrals shows that Wirral's demand has reduced since the investment in early help and prevention services has increased. With regard to children in care, it is noteworthy that Wirral, whilst continuing to be significantly higher, has remained stable, whilst others have increased (North West average by 3 points, England average by 2 points, and the Statistical Neighbour Group by 7 points).
- 3.7 Recent data published by the Regional Information Group (RIG), shows a national increase in Children Looked After of 3%. Children Looked After numbers in Wirral have not risen by 3%, but have fallen by 5%, bucking the national trend, and reducing potential demand, in total, by 8%. This has significant financial implications, enabling Wirral's Children's Services to deliver within the 2021-22 budget in contrast to the 8 out of 10 local authorities in England whose Children's Services have overspent.
- 3.8 A further indication of early help system performance is provided through the Supporting Families Programme (formerly Troubled Families). Wirral has been signed-up to the national initiative since its inception in 2011. During this time there have been four periods of activity, with positive outcomes being funded through a

Payment by Results schedule. Wirral’s performance and draw-down of funding has improved over the course of the initiative, which reflects the growing strength of the early help system.

Figure 5: Supporting Families Programme Performance

	Period	% Successful draw-down of funded PbR outcomes
Troubled Families Phase 1	2012-15	81%
Troubled Families Phase 2	2015-20	70%
Supporting Families Phase 2 Extension 1	2020-21	100%
Supporting families Phase 2 Extension 2	2021-22	100%

Further information on the Wirral’s Supporting Families performance is contained in Appendix A- Supporting Families Annual Performance Statement.

- 3.9 As part of the Supporting Families Programme, Wirral receives regular external audit and assurance visits. The most recent Assurance Visit took place in February 2022, at which point Wirral’s claims were validated by the national team and positive feedback was given in the progress made within the early help system. Further information is provided in Appendix B- External Assurance of the Supporting Families Programme.
- 3.10 With performance data and external assurance indicating increased capacity and capability in Wirral’s early help system, it is possible to identify contributory factors to progress. These include both strategic and operational factors:

Strategic Factors:

- In January 2019, with support of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, the Community Matters initiative launched
- In November 2019, the partnership *Domestic Abuse-No Excuse* strategy and partnership delivery plan were published
- In February 2020, Cabinet approved Phase 1 of the Youth Offer Review
- Cabinet support for a 3-year Cradle to Career project was given in July 2020
- The Safer Adolescence Strategy was approved by the Children, Young People and Education Committee in March 2021
- In June 2021, the second and final phase of the Youth Offer Review was approved by the Children, Young People and Education Committee
- In October 2021, Wirral Council, on the recommendation of the Children, Young People and Education Committee, adopted a Prevention Policy and Prevention Framework
- Wirral’s Health and Wellbeing Board endorsed plans for Wirral’s Early Years Strategy in March 2022

Operational Factors:

- The Early Help and Prevention Service was formally reviewed, with additional investment of approximately £600k to establish a single service area for early intervention, enhancing the Children's Centre and Early Years offer, formation of the Family Matters Service and establishing a Schools and Community Service
- From January 2019, an additional 900 families per year received co-ordinated, early help support through Community Matters, delivered by third sector organisations
- In July 2019, the Youth Justice Service transferred from Neighbourhoods to the Contextual Safeguarding Service, in Early Help and Prevention
- In November 2019, the Council's domestic abuse provision joined the Early Help and Prevention Service, followed by significant increase in capacity made possible by successful funding applications, with *We Can Talk About Domestic Abuse* commencing in January 2021 and *Drive* in April 2021
- The multi-disciplinary Cradle to Career Team begins working in North Birkenhead during September 2020
- In March 2021, the targeted early years project, 1001 Days, launched as a partnership between the Local Authority, Koala NW, and the Foundation Years Trust
- The Dolly Parton Imagination Library launched in April 2021, supported by the Children's Centre Advisory Boards
- In May 2021, the Early Help and Prevention Service leads, on behalf of the Council, the *Brighter, Kinder Futures Programme*, as part of its approach to reducing domestic abuse perpetration
- Council-delivered domestic abuse services co-locate with third sector partners at *The Lighthouse Centre* in September 2021
- Zillo, the website by young people for young people, launches in October 2021
- In January 2022, the new neighbourhood Youth Offer model is in place
- In March 2022, the Community Matters initiative concludes, and the Family Toolbox, back by the Children, Young People and Education Committee is set to launch in April 2022
- Café Create, a response for young people in crisis, opens in Pilgrim Street Arts Centre in April 2022

3.11 Several evaluations are being undertaken to further understand the impact of the preventative approaches, with a report on *Breaking the Cycle* to be presented to the Children, Young People and Education Committee in October 2022. This report will include external evaluation of funded programmes, including *We Can Talk About Domestic Abuse*, being evaluated by Manchester Metropolitan University, a report from Right to Succeed on the Cradle to Career project and interim Drive evaluation.

3.12 The strategic and operational factors described in 3.10 outline how Wirral has built *layers* of intervention within its early help system. Increasing community-led support and capacity within the third sector has been intentional, establishing a robust

Council-delivered early help and prevention service has been focused, and the introduction of several issue-specific interventions has enabled support to be targeted. Across each layer, the importance of digital platforms has been included in the offer, with Zillo and Family Toolbox giving Wirral residents high-quality tools for self-help which are available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

3.13 Moving into a system which promotes self-help is a fundamental shift. In the Early Help report to the Children, Young People and Education Committee in February 2021, a behaviour model was introduced, informed by learning from Community Matters engagement. The behaviour model described the process by which the system can encourage, or *nudge*, individuals (young people and parents) to respond to issues or problems they may be experiencing. The five-step model is as follows:

- Step 1- I go to my own resources
- Step 2- I look for new resources
- Step 3- I talk to someone who can help
- Step 4- I engage in activity that will help
- Step 5- I share my learning with others

3.14 The newly commissioned early help alliance, Family Toolbox, is instrumental to facilitating this shift in behaviour. In October 2021, the Policy and Resources Committee gave agreement to award a 5-year alliance contract, with a plus-2, plus-2 option. The contract was awarded to an alliance of 7 established local community organisations. The key features of an alliance contract are as follows:

- One contract and one performance framework
- Aligned objectives and shared risks
- Shared co-ordination and collective accountability
- Based on trust and transparency
- Change and innovation in delivery are expected

3.15 The values of the Family Toolbox Alliance are:

**We give tools, not answers.**

We believe that everyone has skills and strengths, so when people need a helping hand, we see what's already strong and coach to build up knowledge, skills and confidence. In all our relationships- whether families, communities or colleagues, we all ways do with, not to.

**We make sure families stay in control.**

We are removing the language and behaviours of referrals, professional assessments, levels and thresholds, so that we can really get to the heart of what's going on for families, as and when they choose.

**We work together.**

We don't just work together to get a great result, working together is, in and of itself, a great result. Everything that we do is about building positive relationships (professionally and personally) so we put time, effort and commitment into building relationships with one another, being shaped by the perspectives and experiences of those around us.

### **We keep things simple for families.**

We prioritise people over systems, processes and procedures. It's simple to get involved with- we're joined up and accessible, and we make sure that families can access something that helps them straight away. We speak in simple terms and talk about asking for help as the way you show you're a great parent- not a failing one.

- 3.16 Family Toolbox will give access to a wide variety of supportive experiences – things families have said would help them to thrive. From online resources, one-to-one family coaching, grassroots activities, and group support, the Alliance will ensure these experiences are available to all families across Wirral. The central coordination of support functions will grow and sustain the model for the future. The core provider group will be delivering on what they've promised in their bid and attracting income to bolt-on to the core funding. They'll be keeping in touch with real-life family experiences through data and feedback so they can clearly identify what is working and where there are gaps. In addition, they'll have raised the profile of Family Toolbox through the use of the core brand and communications tools that have been co-designed with local families. Additional information is provided in Appendix C- Family Toolbox Promotions and Appendix D- Family Toolbox Further Information.
- 3.17 The Alliance will support a growing network of wider organisations and partners under the Family Toolbox 'membership mark'. They will not be duplicating services but will bring those organisations that are already doing great work into the fold and aligning them to the Family Toolbox thinking. The membership mark will quickly help families identify people and organisations who are there to help them if they need it, without judgement, criteria, or professional referrals.
- 3.18 Launching on 04 April 2022, the Family Toolbox has had over 3,000 unique users viewing over 19,000 pages on content in its first month. Early feedback from parents and carers is positive:
- “This is the bomb-exactly what I've been looking for!”
- “It's great to have something all in one place, that I can go to when I am struggling to be a parent. As dads we are often forgotten about, and it's so good that I can have a look at what is out there to help me if and when I may need it.”
- 3.19 To support the shift in culture towards an empowering, self-help model, the guidance for early help workers has been revised. Applying values and behaviours consistent with both the Family Toolbox and the Prevention Framework, the guidance asks workers, when in contact with a family facing an issue or in need of help, to consider 3 sequential questions:
1. Can I help them to help themselves?
  2. Can I help?
  3. Do I need to get someone else to help?

Family Matters, the Council-delivered early intervention service, will work to coach, advise and guide workers in providing empowering support for Wirral families. This will include providing advice, supporting casework and delivering training on Early

Help Assessments, Early Help Plans and Early Help Episodes. Further information is contained in Appendix E- Growing Up Well- Early Help Guidance for Workers.

- 3.20 The impact and effectiveness of the early help system will be monitored over the next five years, reporting to both the multi-agency Partnership for Children, Young People and Families and Children, Young People and Education Committee. A mature early help system that empowers people, meets need quickly, reduces demand for statutory services, and supports children in Wirral to grow up well are the shared system objectives.

#### **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 Reducing demand for statutory social care is a key component of the medium-term financial plan for Children's Services. It is therefore imperative that preventative approaches are used to meet need early, at a lesser cost. Without a robust prevention offer there is a risk that demand may escalate, as is being experienced within Wirral's statistical neighbour cohort and across Liverpool City Region.
- 4.2 In April 2022, the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) confirmed a third phase of the Supporting Families initiative for the 2022-2025 period. Wirral has committed phase three, with approval from the Chief Executive. As the Supporting Families Programme includes a Payment by Results scheme, Wirral's income potential will be determined by the level of successful interventions achieved with families.

#### **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The Children and Families Act 2014 sets out the statutory requirements and responsibilities for the local authority and partners in providing support and services for children, young people and families. This legislation is underpinned by statutory guidance: Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018), which states that, "Local areas should have a comprehensive range of effective, evidence-based services in place to address assessed needs early." The early help system described in this report outlines how Wirral meets this duty.
- 5.2 Where services have been commissioned by Wirral Council, the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 (as amended) and Wirral Council Contract Procedure rules have been applied and commissions are compliant with those regulations.

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

- 6.1 Within the Early Help and Prevention Service, arrangements have been made within the Family Matters service to ensure that those families who require a co-ordinated early help episode are supported by the right professional at the right time. A Family Matters Advice Team will offer practice guidance, deliver multi-agency training, and work to embed the early help approach described in the growing Up Well Guidance.
- 6.2 The Family Toolbox Alliance, as part of their contract agreement, are expected to actively seek additional funding through grants, philanthropists, and funders to increase the capacity of community-led earliest help. In addition to this, the alliance



will use the Family Toolbox membership mark to recruit local organisations as part of the network for children and families in Wirral.

## **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 7.1 Failing to deliver a co-ordinated approach to early help and prevention presents the risk of missed opportunity, both in terms of meaningfully tackling issues that lead to health inequality and in continuing to manage demand for acute, high-cost services.
- 7.2 The Family Toolbox and Growing Up Well guidance for early help aim to influence how people behave when they are faced with a problem or need help. We are conscious that more challenging may be influencing how professionals and organisations behave when people need help. Currently there is a culture of ‘fixing’, ‘signposting’ and ‘referring on’ rather than listening and helping people to help themselves. This is a challenge which will require time, workforce development and system-leadership from the Partnership for Children and Families. Implementing the model will provide a solid platform to build on, and it is anticipated it will take 2-3 years for this to be fully embedded.

## **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 The early help system has been shaped and developed through a series of workshops and engagement sessions with parents and carers, education leaders, local authority officers, health officers, community organisation partners, children and young people and existing forums, both at strategic and operational levels.
- 8.2 Where appropriate, appropriate consultation and co-production activity has been undertaken. Key examples are: engagement with 450 young people, parents and carers to understand how they want the early help system to deliver which led to the publication of Why Community Matters; the 3,000 young people who participated in the Youth Offer Review; and the Voice Group, which collaborates with the partnership Domestic Abuse Alliance. Engagement, lived-experience, being family focused and community-led are core principles of the agreed Prevention Framework.

## **9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 It is recognised that a disproportionate number of people facing disadvantage have protected characteristics of the nine groups protected under the Equality Act 2010. A full Equality Impact Assessment has been completed for the Family Toolbox and early help system.
- 9.2 The Family Toolbox website was built to be compliant with Web Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.1). It has in-built accessibility tool called Reach Deck. On launching the site on 01 April 2022, it was 93% compliant with the WCAG standards.

## **10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 The Prevention Policy Statement and Prevention Framework are intended for application across public services and relevant to each aspect of the Wirral Plan, including the sustainable environment domain. Both documents should be used to

inform and support development of prevention activity with Wirral residents in relation to the environment and climate emergency.

- 10.2 There are no environmental or climate implications arising from the delivery of Wirral's early help system. It will have no impact on the emission of greenhouse gases.

## 11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 As detailed in Section 3, many community organisations are significant stakeholders in the early help system. Wherever practicable, Wirral's approach supports community organisations to develop capacity, secure external funding, and provide opportunities for work experience, volunteering, and employment for local people.
- 11.2 For both the Cradle to Career project and domestic abuse services, Council teams have co-located with third sector organisations in the community. This enhances the community-offer and supports sustainable third sector delivery.
- 11.3 Fundamental to the maturing early help system is the importance of community. It is recognised that individuals and families will be more likely to sustain positive outcomes if they are living, with a sense of belonging, in a community where support, friendship and advice are easily available. Peer support and 'giving back to others', as the model promotes, will contribute positively to building community wealth.

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## APPENDICES

Appendix A- Supporting Families Annual Performance Statement  
Appendix B- External Assurance of the Supporting Families Programme  
Appendix C- Family Toolbox Promotions  
Appendix D- Family Toolbox Further Information  
Appendix E- Growing Up Well- Early Help Guidance for Workers

## BACKGROUND PAPERS

Prevention Policy  
Prevention Framework  
Domestic Abuse- No Excuse  
Safer Adolescence Strategy

## SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Policy and Resources Committee	October 2021
Children, Young People and Education Committee	June 2021
Children, Young People and Education Committee	March 2021
Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee	October 2020
Cabinet	July 2020

Cabinet  
Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee

February 2020  
November 2019