



Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee

Tuesday, 29 November 2022

REPORT TITLE:	COMMUNITY CONNECTOR SERVICE
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH

REPORT SUMMARY

This report provides an update to the Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee on the current Community Connector service commissioned by Wirral Council.

The report provides an overview of the Community Connector Service, its performance to date, the important role the service played in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and how the service will continue to evolve moving forwards.

The report supports the implementation of the Wirral Plan 2021 - 26 and its core purpose to improve equity for people and place through the provision of a Wirral-wide service that directly supports people in need.

The proposed actions affect all wards within the borough and is not a key decision.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee is recommended to note the information contained within this report and acknowledge the invaluable work that the service has undertaken in responding to the pandemic.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 To provide an update to the Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee on the Community Connector Service commissioned by Wirral Council.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 Other options were considered, such as a briefing note; it was agreed it would be suitable to provide an update report to the Committee.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Involve Northwest were originally awarded the Community Connector contract by Wirral Council following a tender process in 2017. The service aims to engage with residents that are disconnected through a network of Community Connectors to tackle social isolation and promote active inclusion to improve mental health and wellbeing. The service takes a person-centred approach, based on individual need and is community centred always striving to build community resilience. Subsequently the contract was extended in August 2022 in line with Wirral contract procedure rules, until January 2025.
- 3.2 The Community Connector service was commissioned in response to local insight undertaken to understand the support communities required to address health related worklessness in the borough. The research got into the heart of communities and told us that people were not in the space to come to a 'service'. People did not have the confidence to come out of their homes or know what was going on in their area. The research used a collection of over 25 people's stories, a very powerful and a innovative way of portraying what life was like for residents and communities within the borough.
- 3.3 The service aims to engage the disengaged through a network of community connectors in the community to tackle social isolation and promote active inclusion to improve mental health and wellbeing. The Community Connectors provide outreach and 1:1 support to individuals to encourage greater access to social groups and activities within the community and access to mainstream services. In addition to this the Community Connector service offers a range of wraparound support to local communities including the Good Neighbour scheme, the Sparks Fund and Wirral Infobank.
- 3.4 Since the service was commissioned in 2017, the Community Connectors service has between February 2017 and February 2020 provided the following support:
- Worked directly with 5,745 individuals on their caseloads.
 - Established 233 new groups in local communities, including sewing groups, peer support groups, gardening and cooking groups.
 - Of those on the Community Connectors' caseload and as a direct result of ongoing contact with the Community Connector service 522 individuals have

taken up volunteering, 360 individuals have moved into further education and 651 have been supported to gain employment.

- Around two thirds (64%) of the people the Community Connectors have supported have reported an improvement in their wellbeing after three months engagement with the service, increasing to 68% of people after six months support.
- The Community Connectors use door knocking as their main form of engagement with individuals and have knocked on 237,196 doors and engaged 63,409 individuals in conversations during the last 5 years.
- The Community Connectors also engage with individuals through referrals from external agencies and have received 2,737 referrals from external agencies. Referrals are from a wide range of organisations, mainly DWP (34.7%), Clear Minds (6.1%), Spider (4.3%), Neo Café (4.2%), Adult Social Care (3%), Primary Care (2%), Merseyside Police (1.4%) and Magenta housing (1%).
- The issues people are being supported across the caseload are wellbeing (16.8%), community support (16.4%), poor health (13%), welfare/benefits (10.2%), isolation (9.5%), unemployment (8.2%), debt (8%), housing (7.9%), drugs and alcohol (5%) and other (5%).

3.5 The Community Connectors offer small amounts of funding, up to £1,000, as part of the Sparks Fund initiative. This fund allows grass roots community groups and individuals across Wirral to apply for a 'kickstart' funding to get local initiatives started to benefit the community. The funding has allowed an additional 72 new groups to form in local communities with many now evolving into community interest companies and continuing to support local communities.

3.6 The good neighbour scheme was developed as part of the Community Connector Service in 2017 and is delivered in collaboration with Wirral Older People's Parliament. The initiative aims to:

- Reignite community spirit
- Encourage community integration
- Make people feel valued and safe in their neighbourhoods.
- Trigger conversations to bring people together
- Celebrate good neighbours
- Establish a recognisable symbol of the community spirit (providing a 'Good Neighbour Sticker' to display on their windows)

15,424 Wirral households/community premises and commercial businesses have opted in to be part of the Good Neighbour initiative.

3.7 Throughout the pandemic the flexibility of the Community Connector Service to support the humanitarian response was crucial. The award of Contain Outbreak Management Funding enabled the service to mobilise additional capacity quickly to support local communities in a variety of ways such as providing food deliveries and prescription pickups, supporting people to isolate, enhanced local contact tracing, promoting vaccination uptake and continuing to support communities in addressing their health and wellbeing needs.

3.8 In addition the Community Connectors have supported the development of Wirral Infobank. The Connectors have provided the key links between the community and

being able to share their wealth of knowledge and support they have to offer to all Wirral residents through the uploading of information to the website. It has enabled an avenue to share the information they hold to consistently and proactively update the site which has improved the usage Wirral Infobank is an online directory of support to make people aware of what support is available in their local area. There are currently over 2,300 active pages of community support available through Wirral Infobank: <https://www.wirralinfobank.co.uk>. Between 01/09/22 and 02/11/22 there have been a total of 2472 searches by category on Wirral infobank with the top three searches relating to cost of living support, hobbies and things to do and care and support for adults.

- 3.9 The Community Connector service was independently evaluated by Liverpool John Moore's University in 2019. The evaluation demonstrated the system wide outcomes achieved by the service including, reductions in medical interventions, social care interventions and increases in employment, volunteering, and further education outcomes. This evaluation highlighted how many people the service were working with that described situations of desperation, of contemplating suicide; others described being housebound or socially isolated for many years. The knock on the door for many people was seen as saving them from their situation. The positive features people identified with the service was that the Community Connectors worked at the speed of individuals and showed they really cared by spending time with people, allowing them to engage at their own pace and in their own environment. The service is not linked to any statutory services, which also increased levels of trust. The team work on the 'what can you give' ethos rather than 'what do you need', supporting individuals who felt initially like they did not have anything to give.

The evaluation is to be repeated in 2023 with a final report due in October 2023 to inform any future commissioning decisions. The evaluation will examine how the service has responded and adapted during the pandemic and how they adapt to other societal issues such as cost of living.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 This current contract is funded from the Public Health grant. The total value of the contract is £718,109 per annum. The Community Connectors Service also received £648,788 additional funding, through the Contain Outbreak Management Fund, from December 2020 to support local people throughout the pandemic. This funding ceases in December 2022 and will not be continued. An additional £50,000 Contain Outbreak Management Fund was awarded in 2021, to support the Sparks Plus fund, working with local grassroots organisations with recovery from the pandemic. 100% of those funds went to community groups.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The current contract was commissioned in accordance with the Public Contract Regulations and Wirral Council Contract Procedure rules.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

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

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

7.1 In the current challenging financial climate, the impact of any future reductions in budget or policy implications on the amount of funding available for Public Health is unknown. The value and availability of the Public Health grant for 2023/24 onwards is not yet known. This risk is mitigated by the insertion of appropriate termination clauses in the contract.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

8.1 In order to inform the continued development and design of the service moving forward, engagement and consultation will be undertaken with key partners, stakeholders, and local communities. This will include:

- Engagement with local commissioners of health and care and community services to understand the impact of increasing cost of living.
- Engagement sessions with a wide range of stakeholders to understand their current concerns and challenges that are affecting local residents including any key policy changes.
- Working with third sector and community partners to engage with local communities to understand their needs in relation to information and advice services.
- Qualitative insight work with local residents to understand the impact and ways support can be tailored to meet their needs.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 As part of the recommission an equality impact assessment (EIA) will be undertaken to ensure all equality impacts are considered and relevant actions are taken to mitigate any potential negative impacts. The current EIA is available here:
<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments>

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The current contract is monitored against social value targets on a quarterly basis. These returns demonstrate how the service has a positive impact on Wirral's environment and climate.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH BUILDING

11.1 Community Wealth Building is a people-centred approach to economic growth which reorganises local economies to be fairer and stops wealth flowing out of communities, towns, and cities, and instead places control of this wealth into the hands of local people, communities, businesses, and organisations. This service supports several of the key outcomes within the strategy.

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APPENDICES

- Appendix A – Community Connector Service Case Studies
- Appendix B - Connect Us video <https://youtu.be/DDZaJrjvBe8>

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Improving Individual Health and Wellbeing across Wirral.
<https://www.wirralintelligenceservice.org/media/2013/final-wirral-toolkit-1d.pdf>

An Evaluation of the Health Related Worklessness Programme.
https://www.wirralintelligenceservice.org/media/2942/wirral-worklessness-evaluation-timpson-et-al-2019_final.pdf

TERMS OF REFERENCE

This report is being considered by the Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee in accordance with Section 2.2(c) of its Terms of Reference:

all Public Health functions (in co-ordination with those functions reserved to the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's statutory health functions)

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date