



CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Wednesday, 06 March 2024

REPORT TITLE:	BREAKING THE CYCLE
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES & EDUCATION

REPORT SUMMARY

This report provides the Children, Young People and Education Committee with the third of three reports on the Breaking the Cycle programme, focused on system change. The Breaking the Cycle programme has been a key strand of the early help and prevention approach, informing long-term system change and contributing to demand reduction for acute services.

The report outlines how Children's Services will be remodelled in 2024 informed by best practice learning from the Breaking the Cycle programme and aligned with the new Children's Social Care National Framework (Department for Education, December 2023).

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.

The report supports the Health and Wellbeing Strategy Priority 3, identifying the elements of the Breaking the Cycle programme which make the biggest difference to children, young people and families.

This is not a key decision.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Children, Young People and Education Committee is requested to note the learning gained from the Breaking the Cycle programme and endorse the approach to remodelling Children's Services based on that learning and best practice.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 The Breaking the Cycle programme is a cross-Council, multi-agency programme which is producing valuable learning about the experiences of people facing multiple disadvantage and how well the local system responds to meeting current need and its planning to prevent future need. The Breaking the Cycle programme has provided opportunity to test and learn informing operational and strategic system change.
- 1.2 The Council has a duty to commence implementation of the Children's Social Care National Framework (DfE, 2023) during the 2024 calendar year.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 No other options have been considered as the Breaking the Cycle programme links to a range of strategic priorities and informs the future operating model that promotes efficient use of resources and improved outcomes for children and families.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Since 2019 we have been developing a system for children and families to get the help they need at the earliest possible stage, constructing a system for self-help, community-led earliest help, and family help that includes a number of virtual and physical access points where families get help to help themselves. The Breaking the Cycle programme provided the opportunity to test and learn about how best to work with families experiencing multiple disadvantage, to extend practitioner capacity and to pilot new approaches. Reports have been provided to the Children, Young People and Education Committee detailing learning and outcomes. This third and final report outlines how that system learning is being applied to inform the remodelling of Children's Services over the coming twelve to eighteen months.
- 3.2 The timing of this report, and conclusion of the formal Breaking the Cycle programme, is fortuitous as it comes following the publication of the new statutory Children's Social Care National Framework in December 2023 and publication of the recent Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) report in February 2024. We are therefore in the position to outline how Children's Services will be remodelled in accordance with both publications and our local learning from Breaking the Cycle.
- 3.3 This is an exciting period for Children's Services as the expectations of the new national framework correlate very well with the values and ethos of the Early Help & Prevention Services we have developed in Wirral. Where it had been our intention to roll out the approach to wider Children's Service, including Children's Social Care and Education Services, this is now the expectation of the Department for Education, and Wirral is ready for this change.
- 3.4 The 'Children's Social Care National Framework' is central to delivering the reforms set out in 'Stable Homes, Built on Love', the governments response to the Care Review. It is expected that local authorities will make good progress towards implementing the new framework within the calendar year. The new framework has 4 identified outcomes:

- Outcome 1- children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need.
- Outcome 2- children and young people are supported by their family network.
- Outcome 3- children and young people are safe in and outside of their homes.
- Outcome 4- children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes.

The remodelling of Children's Services described in this report will support achieving those outcomes. Over coming months, we will prioritise the following four areas of work.

3.5 Create a system to proactively support child development and welfare for all children and young people in the borough.

The Childhood Offer model (Appendix 1), which was co-produced with parents in early 2020, illustrates ten key elements which are considered important to children having a positive childhood experience. The elements are:

1. Happy, healthy pregnancy
2. Positive birth experience
3. Form strong attachments
4. Opportunities to play and explore
5. Engage in learning
6. Opportunities for hobbies and socialising
7. Learn and develop self-care
8. Learning on future employment, education, and training
9. Have your health needs met
10. Benefit from good parenting

- 3.6 The thinking behind the model assumes that if the children's system can enable these ten elements to occur, then the likelihood of children having unmet need or requiring more acute services are reduced. The model relies on universal services being available and accessible to all children and families, with Children's Services playing the role of facilitator, ensuring that the universal offer is taken up by all. Children and young people benefit from their universal offer, and their engagement means that if a need is to occur it is more likely to be identified and responded to early by those universal services.
- 3.7 Through the Cradle to Career project we have tested the Childhood Offer model and proven it can reduce demand for statutory Children's Services. In 2020, when the project commenced there were 1,618 referrals to Children's Services from the Bidston St. James ward. In just two years of project delivery this had reduced to 1,086.
- 3.8 The Children's Services team within the Cradle to Career project has relied on (i) having strong working links with local education settings, health providers, and community organisations that deliver the universal offer, and (ii) having staff within the team who have specialist knowledge in areas such as early years, employment, and youth services. This combination has ensured that universal services such as the 2.5-year-old review and early years entitlement have been optimised for children in the area. In addition to this, where there have been concerns highlighted, such as

school attendance, the team have been able to work in partnership with local schools to respond proactively. This 'cohort' rather than 'case' approach has been integral in meeting need early and reducing demand for statutory services, therefore the Childhood Offer model will become a cornerstone of Children's Services delivery.

3.9 It is our intention to roll out and promote the Childhood Offer model across the children's system. Using a geographical approach, Children's Services will optimise engagement with universal services and promote earliest intervention when additional need is identified through a community-led earliest help approach. Working on the existing four localities footprint, relationships with education settings, health providers, and community organisations will be effectively developed to maximise the universal offer and promote the welfare of all children and young people in the borough.

3.10 **Deliver family help through local, multi-disciplinary teams.**

Using a phased approach, we will co-locate multi-disciplinary teams across the four localities to deliver effective family help. In the first phase, Early Help & Prevention Service workers are being deployed into multi-disciplinary teams, including Family Workers, Adolescent Response Team Workers, Domestic Abuse Workers, School Readiness Workers, Youth Workers, and Play Workers. The first phase will be implemented by 01 April 2024. The next phase will include Social Workers, followed by education staff such as Locality Attendance Officers, Inclusion Officers, EHCP Co-ordinators (Education, Health and Care Plan) for SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities). When established, these teams will deliver early help plans and Section 17 Child in Need plans.

3.11 The Breaking the Cycle programme provided the opportunity to test multi-disciplinary teams and approaches. Teams were established for domestic abuse and Cradle to Career, and all eight projects benefitted from a practitioner network and operations group providing access to multi-agency reflection, joint training and enhanced co-operation across services. In both the Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI- December 2022) and Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS- September 2023), Ofsted highlighted the multi-disciplinary teams as being areas of strongest practice. Inspection reports noted:

- The place-based Cradle to Career team "allows easy access to support across a wide range of multidisciplinary services...This is a model that starts with a good understanding of the community's needs and how best to engage them. The wide range of effective services are leading to improved outcomes for many children and families."
- The domestic abuse hub was noted as having "support to children and families experiencing domestic abuse is comprehensive and effective; this includes perpetrator and victim programmes as well as a community hub for victims and survivors that offers direct support and wraparound service for all levels of risk."
- Multi-disciplinary approach in Compass- "There is a strong multi-agency approach, and intelligence and information are shared in daily meetings to ensure that an appropriate service can be provided. Specialist workers

undertake meaningful direct work with children, coordinate meetings and provide consultation to professionals, to reduce risks to vulnerable children.”

- 3.12 It is our intention to build on what works, from our experience and from external validation, to increase the multi-disciplinary teams for family help from two to six by April 2024, thereby providing cross-Wirral coverage.
- 3.13 The multi-disciplinary teams will work from the established Family Hub sites. By April 2024, the Family Hubs project will have delivered twelve operational hubs in accordance with the Department for Education (DfE) Family Hubs contract. The locations of the Family Hubs are as follows:

North Wirral

Eastway Primary School (Primary School)
Seacombe Family Hub (Local Authority Children’s Centre)
Millennium Centre (Wirral development Trust- Voluntary Sector)

South Wirral

Grove Street Primary School (Primary School)
Bromborough Family Hub (Local Authority Children’s Centre)

East Wirral

St. James Centre (North Birkenhead Development Trust- Voluntary Sector)
Brassey Gardens Family Hub (Local Authority Children’s Centre)
Equilibrium Centre (Equilibrium-Voluntary Sector)
Koala Hub (Koala Northwest- Voluntary Sector)
Joy (The Open Door- Voluntary Sector)

West Wirral

Ganneys Meadow School (Maintained Nursery School)
Pensby and Stanley School (Primary and Specialist School)

- 3.14 Each of the twelve Family Hubs listed above will provide the services required to meet the conditions of the DfE grant, listed in Appendix 2. In addition to the twelve hubs, fourteen organisations have opted to be partners to the Family Hub offer. These are organisations who could not commit to the full expectations of being a Family Hub, but are keen to deliver services that compliment the wider offer. Details of their role will be published in April 2024.
- 3.15 It has been highlighted as good practice by the national Family Hubs Team that Wirral has secured provision in community and education settings as well as through local authority bases, which sets Wirral’s approach apart from other areas.
- 3.16 There will be a multi-disciplinary team presence in each of the Family Hubs. Using DfE funding a programme of training for all Family Hubs staff is being rolled out to ensure consistency of service delivery, that builds upon the existing training staff have accessed through local provision. This includes:
1. Early language and the home learning environment
 2. Importance of children’s good oral health
 3. Understanding and supporting families with SEND
 4. Supporting parents with learning difficulties and disabilities
 5. mental health awareness- children, adults, first aid, and parent-infant
 6. Understanding and responding to trauma

- 3.17 Staff working in the multi-disciplinary teams will be competent in using online resources including Family Toolbox, Sandbox, SENDLO and Zillo to maximise self-help for children and families. There are potential opportunities, working with the Neighbourhoods Directorate, to upskill Family Hub staff in supporting residents to access wider Council services and thereby improve the customer journey.
- 3.18 The multi-disciplinary teams will use a matrix management approach, building on what we know works from existing multi-disciplinary teams such as Cradle to Career, Compass, Youth Justice Service and the domestic abuse hub. Learning from the Breaking the Cycle programme has been used to understand the needs of practitioners including joint training, group reflection, practitioner forums, and the importance of cross-service communication. A Locality Manager has been appointed for each of the multi-disciplinary teams who will oversee the deployment of their staffing as well as retaining professional responsibility for their practice area.
- 3.19 Our Family Help plans are aligned with the expectations of the Children's Social Care National Framework which aims for (i) Outcome 1- children, young people and their families stay together and get the help they need, and (ii) Outcome 2- children and young people are supported by their family network.

3.20 **Introduce multi-disciplinary child protection to deliver effective intervention that leads to positive behaviour change.**

It is our recent experience, through tackling domestic abuse and child exploitation, that multi-disciplinary approaches which create a team around the child and family lead to reduced risk and improved outcomes. The Breaking the Cycle programme, delivered through Early Help & Prevention Services, succeeded in matching practitioners with the right skills to family needs. This was highlighted in the ILACS report with inspectors recognising the impact these practitioners are making, "Skilled family workers carry out purposeful work which makes a positive difference to children's lives. When risk to children escalates, it is recognised and acted on quickly." It is our intention to enhance the existing social care teams which deliver Child Protection work with multi-disciplinary staff who can deliver a range of purposeful interventions and behaviour change programmes to support successful delivery of the child protection plan.

- 3.21 Delivering effective and impactful child protection services are critical to managing our children looked after population and budget. Since 2020 we have achieved reductions in our children looked after rate (per 10,000 population), from 122.0 to 117.5 in 2023, but this is still significantly higher than statistical neighbours at 111.0 and England average of 71.0. It is imperative that we strengthen our child protection to ensure that as many children as possible are able to continue living safely with their families.
- 3.22 The Breaking the Cycle programme provided the opportunity to increase our capacity in responding to issues faced by parents which can often lead to children needing to be taken into care. This includes those facing multiple disadvantage categories including domestic abuse, risk of homelessness, alcohol and substance misuse, mental health issues, and involvement with the criminal justice system. Practitioners have been upskilled to deliver behaviour change programmes with several approaches now incorporated into the mainstream service offer. Our links

with partner organisations and adult-facing services have greatly improved through the Breaking the Cycle work and we will build on this to create effective multi-disciplinary child protection teams.

- 3.23 Key roles within the multi-disciplinary child protection teams, to support social workers, will include Family Group Conferencing Co-ordinators, Pre-Birth and Infant Workers, Domestic Abuse Workers, Substance Misuse Workers, Homelessness Worker, and Child Exploitation Workers. This will provide social workers, children and families with immediate access to interventions to manage and reduce risk.
- 3.24 A key success element for the Breaking the Cycle programme was developing communities of practice, with workers from across services and agencies coming together to share, learn and reflect. This operational group instigated several important system changes and strengthened collaborative working. A community of practice will be established for child protection work, with Independent Reviewing Officers, Child Protection Chairs and Team Managers being the key focus. Their professional development will be prioritised to ensure that they are able to positively influence and drive the highest standards of child protection practice. This is aligned with the expectations of the Children's Social Care National Framework, which identifies these 'practice supervisors' as being key enablers for (i) Outcome 1- children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need, (ii) Outcome 2- children and young people are supported by their family network, and (iii) children and young people are safe in and outside of their homes.
- 3.25 **Connect children's services to children, families, and residents through relationship-based practice, co-production, and increased transparency.**

The Breaking the Cycle programme provided the opportunity to better connect children, young people and residents with public services and to learn about the power of those connections. Place-based approaches with residents, employing workers with lived-experience, using advocates, facilitating creative arts projects, and de-mystifying complex processes have all been evidenced to have a positive impact on outcomes. It is our intention to apply this learning across the wider Children's Services system making residents feel better connected to and more likely to engage with help and support.

- 3.26 In designing and delivering Early Help & Prevention Services from 2019 onwards, considerable engagement and co-production has taken place with several hundred families. There have been two words which are used repeatedly by parents- 'afraid' and 'trust'. Over recent years our early help system has evolved to reduce levels of fear experienced by families and through giving them help to help themselves developed greater levels of trust. Wirral's Family Help approach is underpinned by the words of a parent, who stated, "Trust that we know what we need, and with the right people around us, we can do it." We intend to build on this and are taking motivation directly from Breaking the cycle participants who outlined key elements for transformational relationship-based practice as:

Agency: when individuals are encouraged to act independently (with guidance from their keyworker where required), their sense of self improves and self-reliance is enhanced

Creativity: When trying to recover from self-destructive habitual behaviour, employing creative activities may provide hope and belief.

Honesty: Many people prefer to be told the truth up front by service providers even if these truths are sometimes challenging to hear.

Flexibility: If key workers are able to adapt to service user specific, and sometimes challenging, circumstances and requirements, it helps the individual to feel valued and respected.

Reality: Many people prefer to meet in real spaces as it helps to build relationships and put them on a more equal footing.

Relatability: It motivates service users to be treated as an individual and not as a statistic or 'case'.

- 3.27 To achieve a greater connection between residents and Children's Services we will co-produce online guidance for parents and families to explain what child protection processes are, what to expect, what they need to do, making it easier and less fearful for them to engage with. We will establish a Family Help Forum to ensure that the experiences and voice of families can inform service development and delivery. Family Hubs will be venues which promote community ownership, with support programmes designed and co-delivered by parent carers, creating a connection as has been evidenced with both the Cradle to Career setting and domestic abuse hub. Family Hubs will host open sessions with Children's Services teams to enable more face-to-face contact, and a robust communications plan will keep residents informed of their Children's Service offer and community support.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no specific financial implications arising from this report. Existing resources will be used differently as opposed to new resources being sought.

4.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 In December 2023, the Department for Education (DfE) published the Children's Social Care National Framework and outlining an expectation that local authorities will meaningfully commence implementation of the statutory guidance within the calendar year. The remodelling of Children's Services described in this report support the delivery of those statutory requirements.

5.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 The Children's Service remodelling seeks to improve co-ordination of resource without impacting on staffing, ICT or assets by effectively utilising both staff and resource assets currently available.
- 6.2 Co-location enables an enhanced level of collaboration between third sector organisations and public services is providing an enhanced offer to Wirral residents. The Family Hubs project has delivered twelve co-location venues which will service the new delivery model effectively.

6.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 Failing to deliver a co-ordinated approach to prevention programmes presents the risk of missed opportunity, both in terms of meaningfully tackling issues that lead to health inequalities and in managing demand for statutory services.
- 7.2 Following the Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) in December 2022 and Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) in September 2023, Wirral Council provides action plans for improvement to Ofsted. The remodelling detailed in this report relates directly to those action plans and will impact on future inspection outcomes.

7.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Over the months November 2020 to April 2021, considerable engagement has taken place to develop the Prevention Policy Statement, Prevention Framework and Breaking the Cycle Prospectus. Supported by an external agency, Peopletoo, activity included workshops, focus groups, one-to-one conversations, use of online surveys, and interactive message boards. Engagement took place across Council directorates, with partner agencies, third sector organisations, and with youth voice groups.
- 8.2 Throughout the Breaking the Cycle programme participants have provided regular feedback on service design and delivery. A creative arts project, 'Storytelling' was used to gather experiences and inform service design. The use of Advocates and co-production has been extensive over the 30-months of programme delivery.

8.0 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.
- 9.2 It is recognised that a disproportionate number of people facing multiple disadvantage have protected characteristics of the nine groups protected under the Equality Act 2010.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no environmental or climate implications arising from the remodelling of Children's Services. It is expected that there will be no impact on the emission of greenhouse gases.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 Many community organisations are significant stakeholders in early help and prevention services. A key driver of the programme is to support local residents in achieving stability, employment and mobility, which contributes to community wealth.
- 11.2 Fundamental to the Breaking the Cycle programme, Family Hubs and Family Help delivery 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. Where services are co-located with community organisations this is having a positive impact.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

Wirral Council's Prevention Policy Statement and Framework

<http://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/documents/g9548/Public%20reports%20pack%2006th-Dec-2022%2018.00%20Children%20Young%20People%20Education%20Committee.pdf?T=10>

Children's Social Care National Framework, Department for Education, December 2023
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-national-framework>

APPENDICES

Appendix 1- The Childhood Offer

Appendix 2- Family Hubs Annex F requirements

TERMS OF REFERENCE

This report is being considered by the Children, Young People and Education Committee in accordance with section a of its Terms of Reference:

(a) exercising management, oversight and delivery of services to children and young people in relation to their care, wellbeing, education or health, with the exception of any powers reserved to full Council.

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Children, Young People and Education Committee	July 2023
Children, Young People and Education Committee	December 2022
Children, Young People and Education Committee	October 2021