

8TH OCTOBER 2024

REPORT TITLE:	OUTCOME OF THE PUBLIC HEALTH RE-COMMISSIONING PROCESS FOR THE COMMUNITY CONNECTOR, 'CONNECT US' SERVICE.
REPORT OF:	ASSISTANT DIRECTOR, PUBLIC HEALTH CONSULTANT

REPORT SUMMARY

On the 23rd of January 2024, the Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee authorised the Director of Public Health to re-commission Community Connector, 'Connect Us' Service in Wirral. The Committee, delegated authority to the Director of Public Health to award the tender to the successful bidder(s) following the tender process. This report provides an update on the re-commissioning process and advises on the outcome in relation to the Community Connector, 'Connect Us' Service.

The process has concluded, the tenders received have been fully evaluated according to the Council's procurement rules and the Director of Public Health is recommended to award the contract to the successful bidder, Involve Northwest. Current commissioning arrangements expire at the end of January 2025.

The commission supports the implementation of the Wirral Working Together Plan 2023-2027 and its core purpose to work together to promote fairness and opportunity for people and communities in Wirral through working to local priorities using local resources to ensure Wirral residents receive the best possible services.

The proposed actions affect all wards within the borough and the decisions requested are key decisions.

Appendix 1 to this report contains exempt information as defined in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. It is in the public interest to exclude the press and public under Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 'Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding the information).

RECOMMENDATION

The Director of Public Health is recommended to approve the award of a four-year contract, with the option of two one-year extensions) in relation to the Community Connector 'Connect Us' Service, to Involve Northwest within the approved budget and as the highest scoring tenderer, in accordance with the most economically advantageous tender criteria at a total cost of £2,871,493.85 over the initial four-year term.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 The current contract for the Community Connector, 'Connect Us' Service, delivered by Involve Northwest expires on 31st of January 2025. A procurement exercise has been completed in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules, utilising the competitive dialogue process.
- 1.2 The tenders that were submitted were evaluated against a 10% contract price, 10% Social Value and 80% contract quality ratio. The successful bidder met all the quality requirements within the allocated budget.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 The current commission was considered as part of the Public Health Grant Review process. Options, including contract length, contract value and service capacity, were explored. The impact of not recommissioning the service was also considered. Not reprocurring the service was not deemed to be a viable option. Given the level of increasing complex needs of residents experienced across the borough relating to mental health and social isolation, the grant review panel concluded that maintaining the service as a Wirral wide resource was the best option.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 Authorisation was given by the Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee in January 2024 to recommission the Community Connector, 'Connect Us' Service totalling up to £4,308,654 (£718,109 per annum) for a four-year contract, with the option of a one year plus further one year extension, commencing on the 1st of February 2025. Delegated authority was given to the Director of Public Health to award the tender to the successful bidder following a tender process.
- 3.2 A Competitive Dialogue Tender was placed on the Chest (the Council's e-procurement portal) on the 6th of June 2024. Two companies submitted a tender; Involve Northwest and another tenderer. Both tenders were evaluated on price, quality and social value submissions and moderated with Wirral Council's Procurement Team. Details of the tender evaluation are set out in the exempt Appendix 1.
- 3.3 The Community Connector service was originally commissioned in response to local insight undertaken to understand the support communities required to address health related worklessness in the borough. Involve Northwest were originally awarded the Community Connector contract by Wirral Council following a tender process in 2017. The contract was subsequently extended in August 2022 in line with Wirral contract procedure rules, and currently runs until the end of January 2025.

- 3.4 The service engages with residents who are disconnected and unlikely to access mainstream services. Through a network of Community Connectors, the service seeks to address 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, striving to build community resilience. 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, the Community Connector service offers a range of wraparound support to local communities including the Good Neighbour scheme, the Sparks Fund and Wirral Infobank.
- 3.5 The new contract will be operational by 1st of February 2025. The current contract for this service will continue during the commissioning and mobilisation period to ensure the continuity of services for service users.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The service is funded from the Public Health grant. The budget for the contract had a maximum contract value for the four years of £2,872,436. The successful bidder submitted a bid within budget at a value of £2,871,493.85
- 4.2 The value and availability of the Public Health grant for 2025/26 onwards is not yet known. The budget for the service has been allocated based on the Public Health Grant funding being consistent with the current financial year. Should the Public Health Grant be reduced, then contract amounts may need to be varied. The procurement process that has been undertaken, includes appropriate mitigating measures to ensure that the Council does not commit to expenditure that is unfunded.
- 4.3 Any inflationary pressures incurred by potential providers will be managed by those providers, for example through operational efficiencies. The contract value will not be amended for inflation and there will therefore be no inflationary pressure to be met by the Public Health Grant.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The recommissioning of the service detailed within this report has been undertaken in accordance with the Public Contract Regulations and Wirral Council Contract Procedure rules.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 The incumbent provider will be recommissioned removing any TUPE implications. The mobilisation plan for the new service structure will be implemented following final approval with commissioners, and delivery of the new service will commence from the contract start date.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 It is necessary to recommission the services highlighted to comply with the Public Contract Regulations 2015 and Wirral Council Contract Procedure rules. There is always a risk of disruption to service provision during service redesign, recommissioning, and commencement of new services. To mitigate against this and minimise disruption, adequate time to plan for, and implement the mobilisation of new services, was built into the procurement process between contract award and commencement.
- 7.2 The procurement process is also subject to scrutiny and at risk of legal challenge. Particular regard is given to contract procedure rules and relevant legislation at all stages of the process and the Public Health team works closely with the Procurement team to ensure compliance.
- 7.3 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 2025/26 onwards is not yet known. This risk will be mitigated by the insertion of appropriate termination clauses in the contract.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 The development and design of the new service was informed by a thorough engagement and consultation process involving key partners, stakeholders, and local communities. The details of this process have been reported to committee previously in January 2024.

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 (EIA) 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. The EIA for this report is here: <https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments>
- 9.2 Within the tender submissions, bidders had to demonstrate how they work to eliminate discrimination and ensure equality rights of people with protected characteristics, in accordance with the Equality Act 2010. Equality contract clauses are included within the Public Health contract, and compliance will be routinely monitored over the lifetime of the contract.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 During the procurement process, bids were evaluated on any social value added to the service which includes potential impact of the contract on Wirral's climate and environment. Social value will be monitored as part of routine contract and performance management arrangements.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

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 1 – Outcome of the Public Health Re-Commissioning Process for Community Connector, ‘Connect Us’ Service – tender evaluation analysis.

Appendix 1 contains exempt information as defined in Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. It is in the public interest to exclude the press and public under Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 ‘Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding the information

BACKGROUND PAPERS

An Evaluation of the Wirral Health-Related Worklessness Programme (2019)

Evaluation of the Community Connector Service LJMU (2023)

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
Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee Community Connector Service	23rd of January 2024