

**CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE****Wednesday 27 November 2024**

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>CARE PROGRAMME PROGRESS UPDATE</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION</b>

**REPORT SUMMARY**

This report provides an update of the care programme endorsed by committee on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September 2024.

The aim of the Care programme is to safely reduce our reliance on residential care placements by, wherever possible, enabling children and young people to be raised by their families, within their family network, or in a family environment. The Care Programme seeks to align good quality care with proactive transformation work to mitigate against significant budget pressures in Children's Services.

The report is aligned to Wirral Council's Plan priority, working for brighter futures for our children, young people and their families and it is aligned with the Health and Wellbeing Strategy Priority 3 which supports the best start in life for children and young people.

This is not a key decision.

**RECOMMENDATION/S**

The Children, Young People and Education Committee is recommended to note the progress update and agree to receive a further update in January 2025.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 1.1 The report of 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2024 identified that proactive transformative steps need to be taken to mitigate against the forecast overspend for our children's care.
- 1.2 To maximise the programme outcomes whilst safeguarding and maintaining standards for our children and young people, regular reporting and monitoring oversight is required from Elected Members via committee reports and corporate parenting board forums.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 Not to act would lead to a significant overspend for care services. This would negatively impact on the Council's overall financial position and the ability to deliver wider Children's Services provision.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 The Care Programme commenced after endorsement on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2024.
- 3.2 In the 7 weeks since the commencement of the programme, the following milestones have been achieved.
  - The establishment of a care programme board, with clear terms of reference linking to other forums, projects and programmes of work.
  - Activity, actions and timescales established across the four strands of the programme. 20 of the 45 actions are complete as of 11<sup>th</sup> November 2024.
  - Briefing of staff teams, managers and leadership across the directorate.
  - Engagement sessions with universal and targeted youth workers to generate ideas, understanding and wrap around offers in support of the transformation programme.
  - Identification of a dedicated youth work team leader to plan approach and oversee wrap around offers.
  - Selection of an operational social work lead, specific to the transformation work.
  - Set up of an operational group to oversee edge of care support cohorts and plan appropriate exits from residential care settings, where possible.
- 3.3 Early staff and leadership briefings have assisted in professionals identifying early opportunities to support children and young people on the edge of care as the more detailed medium to long term plans were being developed through the programme board. This has resulted in the overall levels of children looked after reducing.
- 3.4 In September 2023's report, the number of Wirral children looked after was 747. The numbers of children in care as of the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 2024 was 723. The period November 2023 saw 788 Wirral children in care.
- 3.5 As of the 11<sup>th</sup> of November 2024 48 children and young people have left care since the beginning of September 2024. The breakdown of this is as follows:

- 35% (17) have returned home to love with parents or relatives.
- 16% (8) have stayed with their former foster carers.
- 41% (20) of the 48 care leavers in this period had turned 18.
- The same period in 2023 saw 45 children leave care.

3.6 September and October 2024 saw 21 children and young people enter care. The same period in 2023 saw 45 children become looked after.

3.7 Leaders in children's social care have been working closely on a day-to-day basis with colleagues across early help and prevention to prevent escalation, manage crisis and support families. This is having an impact on those entering care and allowing children and young people to stay closer to their support networks.

3.8 Feedback from leaders through their quality assurance activity offers reassurance that the decisions being made remain in the best interests of the child, young person, family and community. Leaders fed back that the additional resources through wrap around; added to the use of family network support packages, has helped to reduce the numbers of children needing to enter care.

3.9 Focused 'edge of care' audit activity through the Practice Improvement Team will take place in the next 4 weeks and will be fed back into the care programme board for consideration.

#### **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The Council's ability to set a budget for 2025/26 is dependent on a stable financial position.

4.2 In year work to rebalance our use of high-cost placements, avert crisis; and prevent escalation through flexing our local resourcing model will help in setting a balanced budget.

4.3 Early help and prevention services are being refocused in the shorter term to support more local wrap around, reduce escalation, manage risk and keep our young people within their communities.

4.4 Longer term sustainability of a lower rate of children becoming looked after; plus, a rebalanced more appropriate use of residential care may be negatively impacted should prevention resources be reduced.

4.5 Financial impact of The Care Programme activity should be more evident after Q3.

#### **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 The Council has a duty to provide care for children and young people in accordance with Section 20, Sections 22 and 31 of the Children Act 1989.

5.2 Statutory guidance on the purpose, principles for practice and expected outcomes for children's social care are defined in the Children's Social Care National Framework issued by the Department for Education in December 2023.

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

- 6.1 A dedicated team manager has been identified to lead the care programme coordination. This manager is supported by bespoke early help and prevention staff wrap around; and work alongside case holding social workers and managers.
- 6.2 Youth work and Family Matters professionals have engaged with the care programme transformation project and are prioritising this activity wherever possible. This is being overseen by a dedicated youth team leader, with Head of Service oversight.

## **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 7.1 The programme board standing agenda considers risk and issues and has oversight from Children's Services Directorate Management Team (DMT).
- 7.2 The primary risk relates to the high cost of care, mitigated through the programme. Risks to delivery will be addressed as the programme develops.
- 7.3 As of this update report, there are no programme risks requiring formal Council risk register status.

## **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 Foster carers have shared their views on recruitment and retention issues, contributing to the development of the Care Programme.
- 8.2 The Programme Board Chair will present to the Children in Care and Care Leaver Councils in early 2025.

## **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.
- 9.2 It is recognised that care experienced young people are more likely to face disadvantage. Strong corporate parenting oversight ensures that our young people are provided with the help they need to narrow the gap and achieve their potential.

## **10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS**

- 10.1 There are no environmental or climate implications arising from this transformation programme. It is expected that there will be no detrimental impact on the emission of greenhouse gases.

## **11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS**

- 11.1 Plans to recruit and retain local foster carers, providing them with specialist training, will enhance community wealth.
- 11.2 Strong corporate parenting, which leads to care leavers making successful

transitions to adulthood through their education and employment will support community wealth building.

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**APPENDICES:**

Appendix 1: The Care Programme 2024-2025.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

Children Young People and Education Committee 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2024:

- Public reports pack Pages 115-121.
- Printed minutes. Pages 6-8.

The Children Act 1989

Children's Social Care National Framework

**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)**

<b>Council Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Children young people and education committee.	September 2024.