



CHILDRENS YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Wednesday 5th March 2025

REPORT TITLE:	THE CHILDREN'S WELLBEING AND SCHOOLS BILL
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

REPORT SUMMARY

This report provides an overview of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill 2024-25 (the Bill).

The aim of this report is to raise awareness of the Bill, timescales, and next steps.

The report is aligned to Wirral's Council Plan theme two, *Early help for children and families* and supports The Health and Wellbeing Strategy priority three, *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 overview and agree to receive further updates, as the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill 2024 progresses to Royal Assent and implementation.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 The Bill stems from the Government's 'Plan for Change', under the mission 'Break Down Barriers to Opportunity'.
- 1.2 The long-term activity in the Plan for Change has four key areas, linked to; a best start in life, thriving in school, building skills for opportunity and growth; and building family security. The committee will recognise these areas as closely aligned to the responsibilities and priorities for Wirral Council, and the work of Children's Services in particular.
- 1.3 Understanding the Bill will assist Wirral Council in being ready for change, help understand the requirements on the Council of the Bill; and be better prepared to realise the intended benefits from new legislation.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 Scanning ahead for significant changes to statutory guidance or legislation, supports the Council to be prepared for change, understand where challenges may lie and considers the impact of new legislation on the Council services. No other options have therefore been considered in context at this stage.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill 2024-25 was introduced on 17th of December 2024. A second reading in the House of Commons was on the 8th of January 2025. A General Committee debate took place on the 21st of January 2025. The government tabled an amendment on the 28th of January 2025. A further debate is scheduled on the 11th of February 2025, to debate this amendment.
- 3.2 The ambitions of The Bill are set out in seven key parts:
 - Making a child-centred government.
 - Keeping families together and children safe.
 - Supporting children with care experience to thrive.
 - Cracking down on excessive profit making.
 - Driving high and rising standards for every child.
 - Removing barriers to opportunity in schools.
 - Creating a safer and higher quality education system for every child.
- 3.4 Making a child-centred government includes changes to statutory and regulatory powers around safeguarding, care and accommodation.
- 3.5 Keeping families together and children safe aligns with the national Pathfinder work, under the Council's Families First for Children project.
- 3.6 Supporting children with care experience to thrive may result in greater public understanding on leaving care through mandated publications, extending the role of

The Virtual Headteacher and broader offers nationally around staying close and kinship care.

- 3.7 Cracking down on excessive profit making includes a potential legal cap on profit for providers, creating regional co-operatives and increased financial oversight in the sector. This aspect of The Bill relates most closely to the work of the Care Programme in Wirral.
- 3.8 Driving high and rising standards for every child is focused on education, including pay and conditions, national curriculum and innovation around new school development.
- 3.9 Removing barriers to opportunity in schools considers equity and inclusivity around access to meals and branded uniform limits.
- 3.10 Creating a safer and higher quality education system for every child broadly comprises additional register requirements for children not in school, restrictions on home education and greater regulation of independent schools.
- 3.11 The information in Appendix 1 sets out the current detailed policy notes in respect of The Bill.
- 3.12 Sections 4, 5 and 6 references how Children's Services will track the Bill's progress and timescales for implementation.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Bill is likely to achieve Royal Assent in Autumn 2025 with most education-based requirements coming into being in September 2026, with others likely to follow in 2027. The exact timings, and final content, are not yet fixed.
- 4.2 Financial impact of The Bill should become clearer in the coming weeks and months as it works through the parliamentary system.
- 4.3 The Children's Services Directorate Management Team (DMT) have scheduled a further review on the 3rd of April 2025, to establish The Bill's progress and plan the next steps. This will include a workshop and a further report to committee, as per the recommendation set out earlier.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Council will be expected to deliver any additional legal requirements introduced by the Bill. Further information around timings and context should become available as the Bill passes through the parliamentary system.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

6.1 Section 3 indicates that the areas under consideration in the Bill are either already underway in some form in Wirral due to projects, innovation or transformation work; or align closely with existing business. The specific impact on these areas will be determined through a more detailed review and workshop as set out at 4.3, above.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

7.1 At present there are no specific risks to report. Advance consideration of future changes and impact as set out at 1.3 and 2.1 mitigate future risks.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

8.1 In passing through the parliamentary system, The Bill is subject to engagement and consultation at a constitutional level.

8.2 Local engagement and consultation will be undertaken through workshop and implementation activity; and further reported to committee as per this report's recommendation.

8.3 Consideration will be given to how Children's Services support children and young people to understand the Bill and its contents, including any impact there may be on them.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way the Council conducts its work, do not discriminate against anyone.

9.2 It is recognised that the young people the Bill seeks to focus upon are more likely to face disadvantage due to vulnerabilities already experienced.

9.3 An Equality Impact Assessment for Wirral children and young people will be undertaken and reported back to committee in the more detailed follow up report.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT, BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no significant environmental, biodiversity or climate implications arising from this work. 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 develop regional hubs for care oversight and the work of Wirral's Care Programme support the enhancement of community wealth.

11.2 A better start in life, driving standards higher in education and supporting transitions to adulthood will contribute to community wealth building.

REPORT AUTHOR: **Anthony Kirk**
Assistant Director Early Help, Prevention and Effectiveness
anthonykirk1@wirral.gov.uk

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1: Policy Summary Notes. The Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill.

BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Plan for change. Milestones for a Mission-Led Government. (gov.uk/missions)

What parents need to know. The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. (gov.uk/The Education Hub).

Children’s Wellbeing and Schools Bill. Government Bill. (UK Parliament).

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date