



## Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee

23<sup>rd</sup> January 2024

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>COMMUNITY CONNECTOR SERVICE</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF PUBLIC HEALTH</b>

### REPORT SUMMARY

This report seeks agreement from the Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee to progress proposed commissioning intentions for Community Connector Service, Connect Us.

The report sets out the requirement for the current community connector service to be recommissioned from February 2025. The current service is experiencing increasing demand, supporting residents and communities with a wide range of complex issues in following the pandemic and in response to the ongoing cost of living crisis. This report sets out the proposed funding model for the re-commission, which includes use of the Public Health Grant, given the strong links between the service outcomes, and improved population health.

Evaluation undertaken to date will shape the delivery and outcomes of this recommission, and an evaluation of the new service will take place to inform any future recommissions.

The report 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 is a key decision.

### RECOMMENDATION/S

The Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee is recommended to:

1. Authorise the Director of Public Health to re-commission the Community Connector service totalling up to £4,308,654 (£718,109 per annum) for a four-year contract (1<sup>st</sup> February 2025 – 31<sup>st</sup> January 2029) with the option of a one year plus further one year extension.
2. Agree that delegated authority be given to the Director of Public Health to award the tender to the successful bidder following the tender process.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

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

- 1.1 To allow Public Health to implement the commissioning intentions for the community connector services as outlined in this report.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 It is necessary to recommission the service highlighted to comply with Public Contract Regulations and Wirral Council Contract Procedure rules.
- 2.2 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. One of the options contemplated by the review panel was to reduce the current contract value by a third with a specific focus on those areas with the highest levels of deprivation. However, given the level of needs being seen across the borough relating to mental health, social isolation and increasing complex needs of residents, the grant review panel concluded that keeping the service Wirral wide was the best option. The impact of not recommissioning the service was also considered.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 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. 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 January 2025.
- 3.2 The service aims to engage 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; always 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 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
- 3.3 Since the service was established in 2017, the Community Connectors have signed up 7,581 community members from across the Wirral. This figure includes only those who have formally engaged with the service, meaning once door knocks and community events are included, this figure is much higher. Data from the Connect Us database shows that high proportions of community members engaged with the service were out of work due to long-term sickness, having a disability, or being unemployed (n=5,164, 68.7%). The service also supports a relatively high number of retired community members (n=806, 10.7%).

- 3.4 The Community Connector service has been independently evaluated by Liverpool John Moore's University (LJMU) in 2019 and again in 2023. Both evaluations demonstrate 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 using the service 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.
- 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 Community Connectors have supported the development of Wirral Infobank, an online directory of support to make people aware of what support is available in their local area. The Community Connectors are key to ensuring that Infobank is consistently and proactively updated. Providing a platform to share the wealth of knowledge and support on offer to all Wirral residents. There are currently over 2,300 active pages of community support available through Wirral Infobank: <https://www.wirralinfobank.co.uk>.
- 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 Key recommendations from the Liverpool John Moore's University evaluation have been used to ensure the new specification focus on the following elements:
- **Promoting the service:** The service remit (including the roles, activities, and responsibilities of the Community Connectors) could be promoted more clearly across the whole system, alongside clear definitions of the signposting function of the service.
  - **Partnership working:** Work should continue to be undertaken to continue to develop and strengthen these relationships, particularly in the statutory sector.

- **Flexible approach:** It is important, for the sustainability of the service, to continue to follow a flexible model, providing a preventative, proactive and person-centred approach.
- **Signposting or case holding:** Further exploration may be undertaken to see whether a 'case worker' approach would be suitable for specific Community Connectors to undertake, with a 'link' role for those Connectors working with service users who may require initial support or handholding but are then referred on for case work.
- **Asset building:** Creative approaches such as the Sparks fund using existing strengths should continue to be explored (e.g. retired professionals offering coaching and mentoring to increase aspirations amongst others).
- **Engagement with community members:** It was suggested that door-knocking should be maintained but consider focusing resource in areas where the presence of Connectors is less well-known.
- **Evidencing impact:** Ways in which to capture informal feedback and conversations to evidence system impact should be explored.
- **Support for Community Connectors:** It would be beneficial to provide specific support and training to the Community Connectors, ensuring all are Trauma Informed and have access to support for their own wellbeing.

3.8 The service will be commissioned in line with Wirral Contract Procedure Rules and will follow an open tender process. Soft market testing will be carried out with all potential providers including mapping of similar or existing community roles to avoid duplication and understand capacity across local communities.

## 4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The current contract is funded from the Public Health grant. The total value of the proposed contract is up to £718,109 per annum equating to a maximum of £4,308,654 over the length of the contract (4 years contract plus the options of adding one year followed by one further year).
- 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 will be undertaken will include 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 will need to be undertaken in accordance with the Public Contract Regulations and Wirral Council Contract Procedure rules.

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

6.1 Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 (TUPE) will be applicable from one provider to another.

## **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

7.1 It is necessary to recommission the services highlighted in order 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, re-commissioning, and commencement of new services. To mitigate against this and minimise disruption, adequate time to plan for, and implement the mobilisation of new services, is 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 2024/25 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 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- Community Connectors December 2023 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

N/A

## 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](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
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Adult Social Care & Public Health Committee

29<sup>th</sup> November 2022