

Work in Progress

Health and Employment in Wirral

Annual Report of the Director of Public Health 2023/2024



Contents

Foreword	3
Executive Summary	4
Introduction	5
Chapter 1 Inequalities and Employment	8
Chapter 2 Employment and Skills in Wirral	21
Chapter 3 Creating an Inclusive Economy in Wirral	24
Chapter 4 Helping people find good jobs and stay in work	33
Afterword	50
Recommendations	51
Further reading	52

Foreword

Welcome to my first Public Health Annual Report (PHAR) since coming into post as Director of Public Health. I am delighted to be Director of Public Health for Wirral. The borough is a unique place with many assets. Natural assets - with areas of outstanding natural beauty, a stunning coastline, and lots of blue and green space, which we know is so good for our mental and physical health. We are also rich in community assets, including a strong and diverse Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise sector (VCFSE), resilient and resourceful residents, and over 10,000 businesses across the borough.

There are, of course, challenges. The borough experiences significant health inequalities. Although not all health inequalities are a result of poverty and socio-economic deprivation, we know that our health is very closely linked to the conditions in which we are born, grow, live, work and age. These 'social determinants of health' are very evident in Wirral, with a gap in life expectancy that closely mirrors the pattern of social deprivation.

Evidence is clear that whilst there are a number of social determinants that impact our health and wellbeing, the connection between employment and health is pivotal. That is why I am really keen to use my first Annual Report to convey the importance of good employment on our health and wellbeing, and highlight the inequalities and challenges faced by people who are excluded from the employment market, or who hold insecure, low-paid, and unsafe jobs.

Within the report we highlight the potential Wirral's ambitious regeneration plans have to shape the future of the borough for many years to come. The regeneration programme aims to not just improve on how some areas of the borough look, it also seeks to ensure that our aspirations for the borough are inclusive, and that all residents are able to access the opportunities that economic growth and development will bring. Building in community health and wellbeing is integral to regenerating our borough, and inclusive employment opportunities are central to that.

I am pleased that we have been able to include so many of our residents' stories within the report. It is these stories that help us understand the

challenges that local people are facing, and that really emphasise why it is crucial for us to work together as a Wirral system to do all that we can on this agenda. Hearing the positive outcomes for people when they have found a route into a good job, and seeing the difference that it has made to their lives, should really inspire us to want to do more, think big, think differently, be even more ambitious, and really break down the barriers that some of our communities are facing.

I know that by working together, our strong partnerships across Wirral and our commitment to doing the best by our residents, means we are well-placed to really deliver. Our ambition is to facilitate a whole system way of working that enables more people to get into work, and for our workplaces to be settings that support health and wellbeing. Achieving this will lead to sustainable, long-term improvements in the health of our population.

Very much like our work on employment, the preparation and production of this report was a collaborative effort, so I would like to thank all those who contributed to its content and design, as well as to all those partners and residents who have willingly shared their experiences.

I hope you find the report an enjoyable and thought-provoking read. I am keen that as well as highlighting some of the issues and making recommendations for how we can collectively address these, we also shine a light on some of the brilliant work currently happening in the borough that we can build on and strengthen together.



A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Dave Bradburn". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline.

Dave Bradburn
Director of Public Health

Executive Summary

Good employment is good for health. It is good for the health of individuals, good for the health of families, good for the health of communities, and good for the health of the economy.

This report draws together information and evidence from a range of sources and considers some of the barriers and challenges faced by local people. It sets out some of the evidence on what we can do as a system to address these barriers, and perhaps most importantly, provides an account of the lived experience of some of our residents.

Chapter One outlines how and why employment is important to health and wellbeing, looking at what the evidence tells us about the role that work plays in people's lives and considers the impact of unemployment and inactivity on health. The chapter looks at how different groups are disproportionately affected, and explores the needs and experiences of young people, of parents, and of older people. The chapter also considers the challenges faced by people with additional needs or long-term health issues, care leavers, unpaid carers, ex-offenders, migrants, refugees and asylum seekers, and the homeless.

Chapter Two provides an overview of some of the statistics for Wirral, looking at data on employment rates and providing information relating to some of the challenges and inequalities within the borough.

Chapter Three sets out Wirral's ambitions and aspirations for an inclusive economy. It reviews the changing economic growth sectors and opportunities presented by our large-scale regeneration programme to create inclusive employment opportunities. It also explores the training and the skills development that will support residents to meet projected workforce demands.

Chapter Four explores how supporting people into employment is only the first step on the journey and highlights the effective strategies to help keep people in work. The role of employers, including large employers and anchor organisations, is explored alongside the work currently underway in some of our local anchor organisations.

Introduction

Our Public Health Annual Report in 2020/21 set out the need to focus on addressing specific root causes of poor health and inequalities in Wirral and established the groundwork for developing the Wirral Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2022-2027).

That Annual Report highlighted how the COVID-19 pandemic had disproportionately affected people who were already experiencing inequalities. The Health and Wellbeing Strategy turned the report's recommendations into a system-wide commitment to addressing the differences in health that occur because of the social, economic, and environmental conditions in which people live.

The Health and Wellbeing Strategy focuses on the high-level, system-wide priorities for Wirral, and on those resources and assets that will make the biggest difference to improving the health of the local population.

Significant work is underway to implement this strategy, the first priority of which is to “create opportunities to get the best health outcomes from the [Council's] economy and regeneration programmes”. This year's Annual Report helps to support the next steps in that journey, looking in depth at employment and what we can do as a Wirral system to help address the long-standing challenges of unemployment and health-related worklessness in our borough.

Wirral Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-2027 : Overarching Priorities

- 1 Create opportunities to get the best health outcomes from the economy and regeneration programme**
- 2 Strengthen health and care action to address differences in health outcomes**
- 3 Ensure the best start in life for all children and young people**
- 4 Create safe and healthy places for people to live that protect health and promote a good standard of living**
- 5 Create a culture of health and wellbeing, listening to residents and working together**

Why focus on employment?

The evidence is clear that quality employment impacts positively on health and wellbeing, protects against social exclusion and improves quality of life. 'Good employment' includes a safe, secure job with good working conditions, good line management, and opportunities for development. There is also clear evidence that unemployment has an adverse impact on health and is associated with an increasing risk of long-term illnesses, poor mental health, and health-harming behaviours.

For this reason, there has been considerable emphasis placed on the issue of employment and health over recent years, and the national and international evidence continues to build on the most effective policies and interventions. In 2016, the Local Government Association produced a guide for local authorities: Health, Work and Health Related Worklessness. This provided a strong rationale for the need to address health-related worklessness and promote workplace health. It drew on the evidence-base and case studies to provide guidance for local authorities on tangible ways that we, as system and place leaders, can drive forward this agenda.

This Public Health Annual Report draws on some of that guidance and the work of others to set out and describe what we are doing locally, and to help inform recommendations for where we can do more.

A two-way relationship

The relationship between employment and health works both ways, as ill-health, long-term conditions, disability, and poor mental health often present barriers to gaining and retaining employment. Addressing this is key, not just for the health of individuals and the population, but also because it impacts adversely on productivity and prosperity.

Lots of work has taken place locally and across the Liverpool City Region (LCR) to highlight the cyclical relationship between health and work. The Wealth and Wellbeing Programme, established in 2018, aimed to 'put population health and wellbeing at the heart of the economic and industrial strategy for the region'. This work highlighted the extent to which poor health contributes to the economic productivity gap in the region and helped to demonstrate that a healthy population is essential for a prosperous economy.

This report

In addition to looking at the national and international evidence-base, this report looks at the lived experiences of Wirral residents and considers some of the barriers and challenges faced by some in our communities, in both accessing and staying in quality employment. It sets out some of the evidence and makes recommendations on what we can do as a Wirral system to address these barriers.

The stories and lived experiences that are included throughout the report really illustrate the challenges and barriers faced and highlight the life-changing impact that securing a good job can have.

Sarah's Story



Sarah's Story highlights that people are often dealing with multiple issues and are faced with numerous barriers when looking for work

Sarah, a 51-year-old single parent, relocated to Wirral due to an abusive relationship. Despite having extensive work experience in education and law, she had experienced challenges with self-confidence. As a parent to a high school-aged child with Special Educational Needs, she had difficulty finding a job with the flexibility that would enable her to support her daughter. Sarah also struggled to undertake further training, being unable to attend specific courses due to her family situation. With support, Sarah was able to find an employment opportunity that balanced her caring responsibilities and other commitments. This has boosted Sarah's confidence significantly, and she still plans to take advantage of the support and guidance she has received, and her long term plan is to start her own business.

Wirral Worklessness Support Service case study

A woman with blonde hair, smiling, wearing a light blue nurse's uniform. A blue-to-orange gradient is overlaid on the image. The number '1' is in the top left corner.

1

Inequalities and Employment

Why is employment important to health and wellbeing?

Good employment is a key determinant of health, and evidence shows that good work improves health and wellbeing across people's lives. In a direct sense, good work provides income and the financial security to support an adequate standard of living. However, the jobs we do also have a direct effect on our health through the day-to-day structure, sense of purpose, and social interactions that they provide. Our jobs are often linked to our identity, self-esteem, and feelings of self-worth – all powerful influences on mental health and wellbeing.

Conversely, evidence shows that being unemployed is associated with poor physical and mental health across all age groups, with impacts felt across families and communities. Unemployment is also associated with an increased risk of mortality and morbidity, with higher rates of various limiting long-term illnesses, cardiovascular diseases, poor mental health and suicide, and health harming behaviours.

What is 'good' employment?

The evidence is clear that it is **good** employment that has a positive impact on health. Poor quality employment can cause a range of physical and mental or emotional issues including stress, musculoskeletal conditions, and injuries.

What constitutes good employment? Public Health England (2019) suggest that '**a safe and secure job with good working hours and conditions, supportive management and opportunities for training and development**' are critical factors.

Barriers to accessing employment

There can be many barriers to accessing good employment across the life course, and different people experience these barriers differently, with some facing multiple barriers and challenges.



Source: Adapted from PHE Health Matters: Health and Work

Barriers to Employment experienced by specific groups

Education and Skills



Outdated skills
Scarce experience
Low levels of English
Gaps in employment
Undeveloped digital skills

Employers



Employer perceptions
Low pay
Workplace discrimination
Non regular qualification
Employer uncertainty

Outside Lives



Care responsibility
State pension age
Circumstance change
Breastfeeding
Being female
Cultural difference
Low digital access
No ID
Job readiness

Infrastructure



Affordability of care
Accessible transport
Legal restrictions
Unfamiliar job market
Interview cost

Health



Health condition
Disability
Undiagnosed condition

Society



Stigma
Social isolation

Young people

The evidence is clear that being unemployed can have a detrimental impact across the life course. However, there are particular risks associated with being unemployed at a young age. Young people are more likely to be in temporary employment and have low quality, insecure jobs with zero-hour contracts. This can have a negative impact on health and wellbeing.

Long-term unemployment at a younger age also has a direct effect on health. Research has shown that being unemployed under the age of 23 has a longer term 'scarring effect', with lower life satisfaction, health status, job satisfaction, and wages more than twenty years later. It also significantly reduces the chances of being employed in a good career later in life, particularly for those not in education, employment, or training (NEET) for a long period of time.

Youth unemployment in Wirral is slightly higher than the England average and is particularly high in areas in the east of the borough, in keeping with the pattern of deprivation. In recent years, there has been ongoing work locally and across the Liverpool City Region (LCR) to look at this issue and at what can be done effectively to address it.

In 2013, a Youth Unemployment Task Force was convened across the LCR, bringing together a cross section of young people and local businesses. Although this was ten years ago, many of the issues raised persist and are not exclusive to young people.

Many of the employers on the Task Force were already working with a range of employment and skills providers and were actively engaged in pre-recruitment programmes.

A local retailer is happy to recruit people who are eager.

"Product knowledge is important, but we look for somebody who is eager. Somebody who wants to have a job and to progress. You know, being keen to work and having a can-do attitude can stand out more than what's on someone's CV. We won't dismiss someone because they don't have qualifications. If we see that they've got a good attitude, we'll give them a chance. Everyone has to start somewhere. You hope that makes them stay longer because you've given them a chance, and for us, we know we've got someone that wants to work".

Employers expressed that the most important attributes in potential employees were the right commitment, enthusiasm, and attitude for the job. However, the standard application processes, with complex job descriptions and essential qualifications, skills, and experience, exclude many from an initial sift which is done against skills and experience. Often, it is only during the final selection at interview stage, that personal attributes and softer skills are considered.

Young people highlighted the barriers they faced, and it was evident that more could have been done.

9.6%

Aged 16-24 unemployed in Wirral
compared to England 9.4%

Source: Census 2021

4.5%

335 NEET
compared to England 5.2%

Source: Department for Education 2023

The views of young people on employment and unemployment

“Getting turned down for work experience really knocks your confidence. It’s even more demoralising than getting turned down for a job.”

"I’m not a tick box, I’m a person. Talk to me, listen to me, help me.”

“My academic success was recognised at school; however, my brother’s practical skills were not.”

“I have found unemployment lonely and disheartening. Some mornings I have struggled to get out of bed and would be lost without my family.”

Care Leavers

The barriers faced by young people are often exacerbated for care leavers, and a much larger proportion of those who leave care are NEET. This group may have lower educational achievement that was hindered by disruption to schooling, negative or discouraging attitudes of peers, care staff and teachers, and lack motivation and confidence arising as a result of this lower achievement. Research conducted by the Employment Related Services Association and Education Development Trust also found that neurological conditions and learning difficulties in those with experience of care, which may present additional barriers to employment, are often misdiagnosed as mental health issues.

Care leavers may face the challenge of moving to independent living without any family safety nets and many do not understand their unique entitlement to benefits. Supporting care leavers through this transition and into employment is important in raising their aspirations and giving them the tools to move on with life.

242

19 to 21 year old care leavers were in contact with Wirral Council in 2023

58.9%

known to be in education, employment, or training compared to 55.9% in England

40.7%

known to be NEET compared to 37.7% in England

Source: Department for Education 2023

Unpaid carers

In the UK, caring responsibilities are the primary reason for people aged 25-49 being out of work. Until the age of 75, these responsibilities fall disproportionately on women. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) data show that women aged 55-59 are most likely to provide unpaid care in Wirral, with over 10% providing up to 19 hours of care per week and 8.5% providing at least 20 hours per week. According to The Children's Society, approximately 1 in 5 children and young people in the UK are caring for someone in their household on a regular basis. This may have a significant impact on their education and skills development and could hinder future employment opportunities.

Caring responsibilities, which are often for relatives or friends who are older, disabled, or seriously ill, can have a significant impact on people's capacity to work and earn a full-time wage. According to Carers UK, 75% of carers in employment worry about continuing to juggle work and care, resulting in carers reducing their working hours or, more likely, giving up work. The longer that carers are out of work, the harder it is to re-engage.

Research by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) shows that unpaid carers who are most likely to leave employment include:

- Those approaching state pension age.
- Those who are 'sandwich carers' – looking after dependent children as well as older parents.
- Those struggling to access formal care.
- Those transitioning into becoming a carer.

1 in 9

workers in Wirral provide some level of unpaid care. 14.1% women, 9.5% men



Source: Census 2021

Ben's Story

Creating Opportunities

Ben, a care leaver, joins Morgan Sindall's Wirral site team as a trainee steel worker



Families with dependent children

Parents with young children who are seeking employment can face additional issues including childcare. The cost of childcare has continued to rise steadily across the country, and although there has been a recent extension to the provision of free nursery places, access to affordable childcare can be a barrier to parents being able to work, study and train.

Average full-time nursery fees for a child aged under 2 in Wirral are equivalent to almost half of a woman's average full-time salary. These averages mask real variation within the borough and, in many cases, especially for single parents, the cost of pre-school childcare outweighs their wages. This makes it financially restrictive to return to work and can force some parents, particularly mothers, out of the workforce entirely.

Add to this the rise in inflation and the current cost of living crisis, and even two-income families are now facing economic hardship. The latest nationally available data on 'relative low-income families' suggest that 19% of children in Wirral were living in poverty in 2021/22.

This is an increase on previous years and equates to an estimated 11,000 children affected by poverty in the borough. These figures will not capture the full impact of the current cost of living crisis, and the picture is likely to have worsened substantially.

This overall figure also masks huge differences across wards, with just four wards accounting for 42.5% of the total number of children living in relative low-income families across the borough (Seacombe, Birkenhead and Tranmere, Bidston and St. James, Rock Ferry).

£257.15

**Average childcare fees per week
at a day nursery or pre-school**
£51.43 per day

£560.20

**Female Full-Time Workers
average weekly earnings in Wirral**

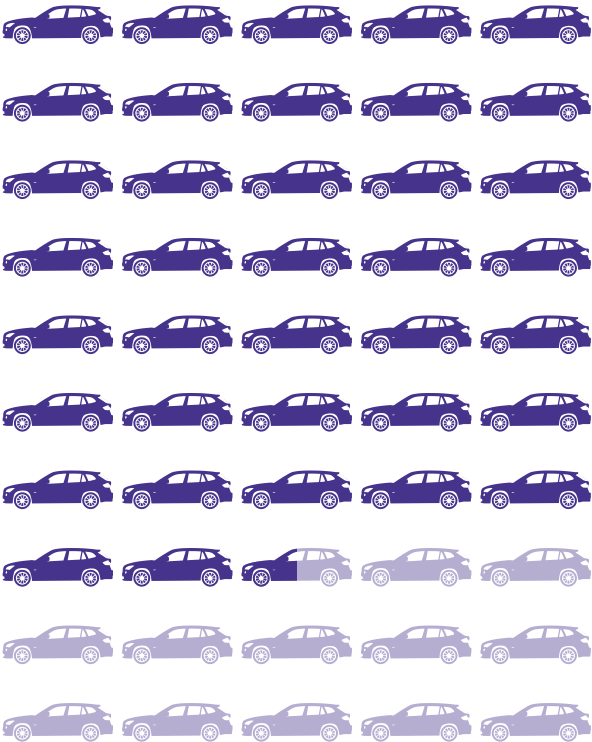
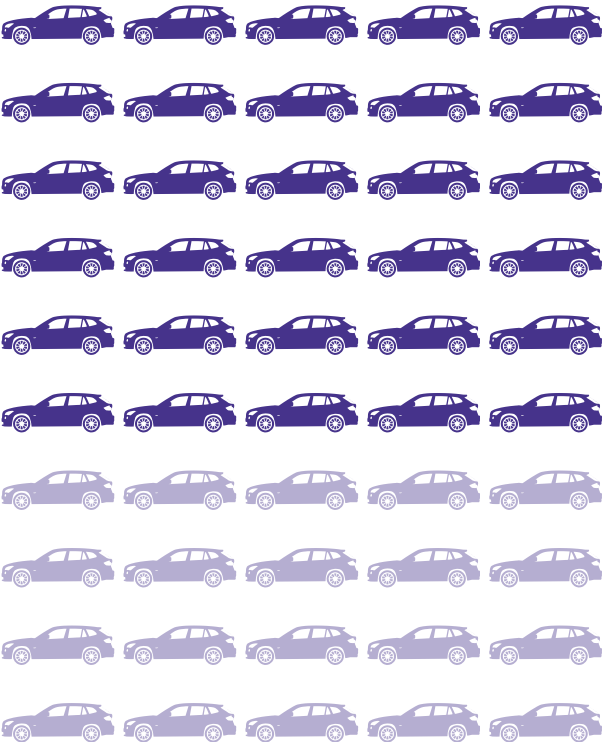


Sources: Childcare figures – Wirral Annual Childcare Sufficiency Report, Wirral Early Years Business Support and Performance Team. Average weekly earnings: NOMIS 2023.

Access to childcare may also be a barrier for some, particularly those who need a greater degree of flexibility. Although there is a range of provision in Wirral, there has been a decrease in the number of providers over recent years, and occupancy rates are high in all settings. However, this varies at different times of the year and for different age-groups.

Lack of transport associated with getting to and from childcare and work is another barrier, particularly as some wards in Wirral have very low levels of car ownership, and public transport is unaffordable for some. Additional time required to travel to childcare location can also increase the cost.

In addition to financial and childcare aspects, many who have been absent from the job market for an extended period may lack the confidence, skills and/or knowledge to re-enter it. Another key issue is the potential misperceptions or misunderstandings about the advantages and disadvantages of staying on benefits compared to going into paid employment.



Source: Census 2021

Becky's Story



Becky's story highlights some of the issues facing local families dealing with the on-going cost of living crisis and trying to improve their employment prospects.

Becky is a 30-year-old single parent who is not currently working due to her son's ill-health. She lives in social housing in Tranmere and is in receipt of housing benefit.

As a single mother and carer not in formal employment, she feels money just doesn't go as far as it used to, and she struggles with financial and fuel insecurity. She often turns off the heating at night and sometimes deprives her children of TV during the day. This is affecting her health and wellbeing.

To improve her employment prospects, Becky attends college, but she has found it difficult to get childcare. She is still passionate about volunteering at the local community centre, which she feels improves her emotional wellbeing, but she doesn't drive and has had to limit her use of public transport to save money, which means having to stay more local.

Becky is currently receiving help from Involve Northwest on a payment plan for her debt and is optimistic about her college education and volunteering. However, she is still very apprehensive about future cost of living rises. She thinks there is a need to 'normalise' asking for help and feels a lot of help travels by 'word of mouth'. Becky also feels that signposting for financial assistance or messages presented by government and media need to be clearer.

Involve Northwest case study

People with long-term illness or additional needs

Long-term sickness has become one of the most common reasons for economic inactivity in the UK, reflecting a key driver of health-related barriers to employment.

In Wirral, 20% of people who are of a working age have a long-term health condition. Employment rates are lowest amongst people with learning disabilities, with only 3% in work.

Helping disabled people and people with mental and physical health conditions to start, stay and succeed in work is a crucial part of the economic success and wellbeing of every community, and will help address health inequalities. Some of the barriers to gaining employment and retaining a job are:

- Lack of open, inclusive and supportive culture that encourages employees to disclose their health conditions and access necessary support.
- Lack of in-work support for health and wellbeing (including emotional support) of the employee e.g. mentorship.
- A physical and technological environment that is not accessible or adapted to their needs.
- Services, systems, policies, and practices that are non-existent or hindering and do not provide the necessary support.

Without practical support and reasonable adjustments, a period of ill health or disability can be a reason for many people leaving the workforce and can stop people from obtaining employment altogether. This can exacerbate poor health and have an impact on people's mental health.

3%

of population with a learning disability in paid employment

(2021/22; England: 4.8%) Source: NHS Digital 2023

50%

of Employment and Support Allowance claims are for mental and behavioural conditions

(March–May 2023). Source: Nomis 2023



Source: Census 2021

Older People

Wirral has an ageing population, and the over 65 population is expected to increase by a third over the next 20 years. This matches the national trend of an ageing workforce at a time when the state pension age is rising – currently, the state pension age is 66, but it is set to rise to 67 by the end of 2028 and potentially again to 68 after that.

While many people are working later in life, being sick, injured or disabled is the main reason why people aged 50-64 years are economically inactive. However, the situation is complex and linked to deprivation, with higher rates of ill-health and long-term conditions amongst older people living in more deprived areas. This often drives older people from more deprived areas out of work.

Retirement closely follows health as a reason for this age group being economically inactive. However, this further highlights inequalities as those in higher income jobs are more able to afford to retire or choose to work less as they get older. Some also have caring responsibilities that may push them out of work or require flexible working. As a result of these reasons, older adults are more likely to be long-term unemployed or earn less, and by the time they are 65, the Centre for Ageing Better estimates that less than half of men and less than a third of women are still in employment.

For those wanting employment, some struggle with outdated training and underdeveloped digital skills, and with issues around stigma and workplace discrimination. Facing challenges like these, it is perhaps not surprising that those approaching state pension age, and can afford to, decide to retire instead of continuing to work.

Ex-military personnel

After leaving the Forces, veterans can face a number of barriers to employment in the civilian world. Some join the UK Armed Forces at a young age, often as an alternative to pursuing higher education or gaining civilian employment experience. Moreover, the Army tends to recruit for the infantry from more deprived areas. These

people are therefore reliant on the training and skills provided through the Forces to be able to enter the civilian job market.

However, Armed Forces recruits below the age of 18 are not subject to the same statutory minimum educational standards as young people in the civilian education sector. As a result, as highlighted by the Royal British Legion (2016), up to 50% of Army recruits have been found to have literacy and numeracy skills below that expected of primary school leavers at age 11. They are also half as likely as civilians to hold a degree level qualification. In addition to this, military qualifications and experience are not always recognised by civilian workplaces.

Wirral Council and other organisations in the borough have signed up to the Armed Forces Covenant for businesses. This includes the Defence Employer Recognition Scheme (ERS), which encourages employers to support defence and the armed forces community and inspire other organisations to do the same.

Cheshire and Wirral Partnership NHS Foundation Trust (CWP) showcases successful Wirral veterans employment project

A ground-breaking programme has given GPs and mental health teams the opportunity to prescribe career coaching for ex-Forces patients. The specialist service, delivered by employment consultants embedded within CWP, was developed by The Poppy Factory charity, in partnership with CWP. It is based at the Stein Centre in Wirral and aims to support veterans with physical and mental health conditions to find work.

Veterans reported a boost to their overall mental wellbeing. One commented: “Just having someone to talk to - someone who understood my situation and didn’t judge - helped a lot.”

Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers

The employment of migrants is a mixed picture. Some, particularly refugees and asylum seekers, face specific barriers to employment, despite wanting to work. Many face difficulties in having their qualifications and experience recognised by employers, and some experience negative stereotyping, public misconceptions, and discrimination.

Refugees and asylum seekers will almost always face language barriers and cultural differences, as well as gaps in employment history and no access to references. Additional barriers include employers' uncertainty over their right to work and confusion around the different types of immigration status, as well as employer perceptions that refugee candidates are over- or under-qualified for a job. Refugees and asylum seekers are also more likely to have poor mental and/or physical health and low confidence that affects their labour market performance.

All of this means that some migrants, particularly refugees and asylum seekers are more likely to work part-time, on zero-hour or other unstable contracts, or take up shift work. They are also at higher risk of labour exploitation and are likely to earn less than UK-born citizens.

People who are homeless

Well-paid and secure employment for people who are able to work is an important route out of homelessness, alongside access to secure and affordable housing. Research by Crisis has found that 88% of people who are homeless have previously had a job, and the vast majority of homeless people want to work. However, this group often face complex barriers to finding and staying in employment. Many of these are structural, as government support to access employment programmes often does not account for homeless people's circumstances or provide housing support.

With unstable contracts and the combined pressures of low pay and high living and housing costs, some people are working whilst experiencing homelessness. This means that everyday activities like eating, commuting, sleeping and personal hygiene are very difficult, causing anxiety and putting pressure on people's ability to work and stay in work. This also makes it difficult to find the energy and motivation to keep looking for a better paid or more secure job.

The stigma and shame associated with homelessness often forces people to conceal their situation, impacting further on their health, wellbeing, and relationships. Crisis has also found indications that some employers are unsure of how to support employees who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, leading to some losing their jobs.

Ex-offenders

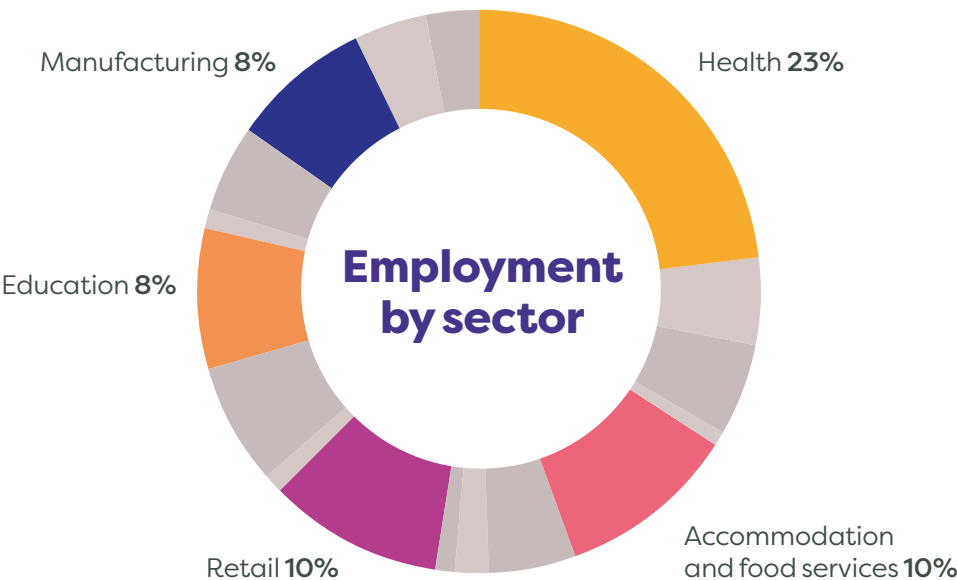
Getting ex-offenders into work is crucial in preventing the cycle of crime and re-entering the criminal justice system. However, ex-offenders are particularly likely to be unemployed, and those who are unemployed are likely to be long-term unemployed. This is likely to be because many have limited skills and education, and scarce work experience. They also face additional barriers related to legal restrictions, misconceptions, workplace discrimination and the challenges of stigma and social isolation.



2

Employment and Skills in Wirral

Employment and Businesses in Wirral by sector and size



Number of employees	Micro (0-9)	Small (10-49)	Med (50-249)	Large (250+)
Number of businesses	8,755	1,420	280	30

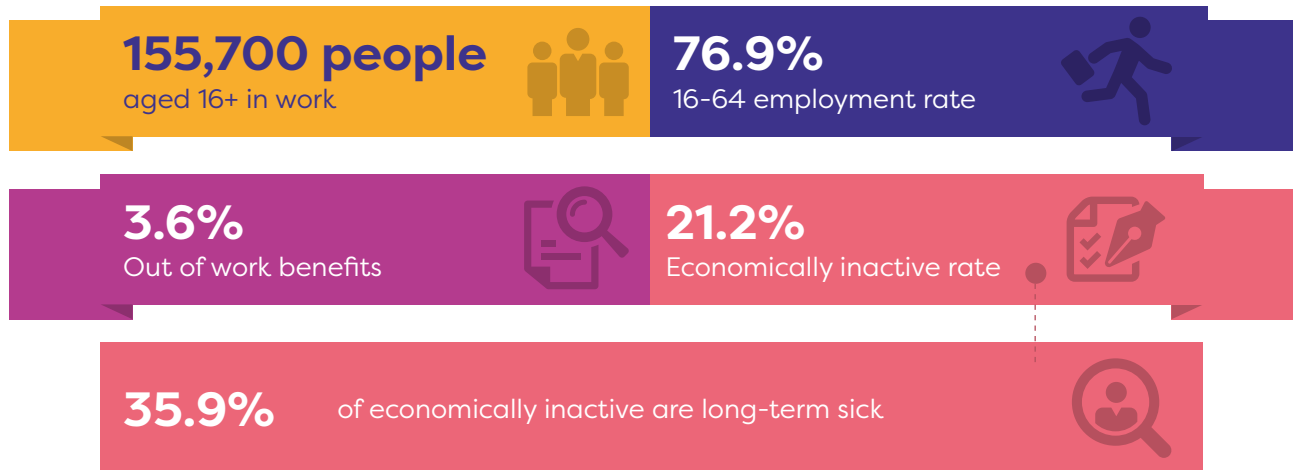
Productivity Growth

over last 10 years (%)



Source: NOMIS 2023

Wirral employment, unemployment and economic inactivity



Out of work benefits:

Those who declare they are out of work, capable of, available for and actively seeking work

Economically inactive:

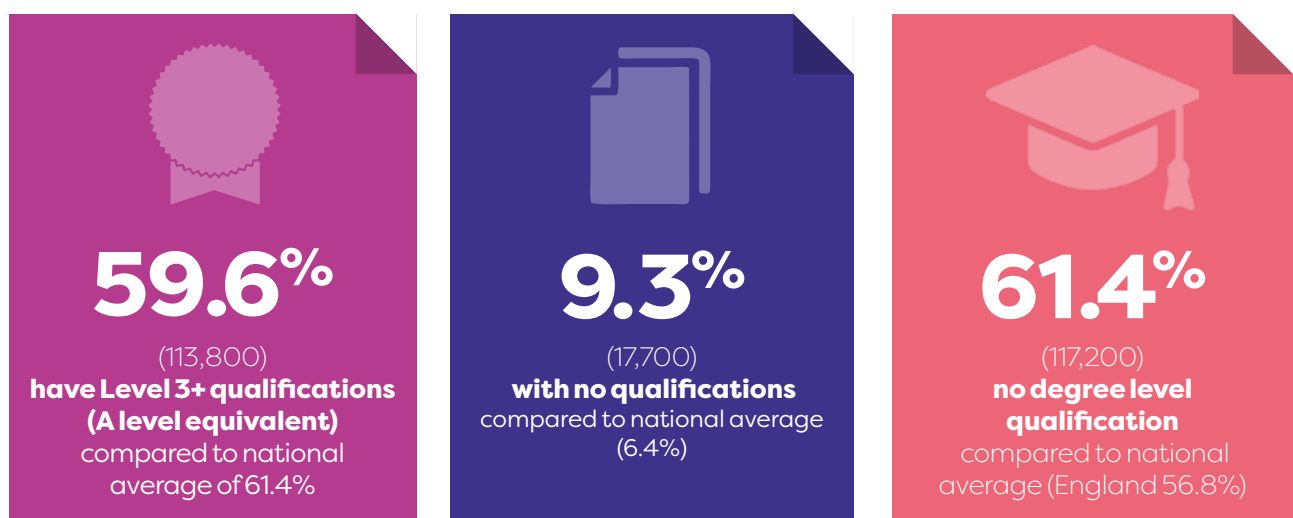
Economically inactive people are those who are neither employed nor seeking work

Health-related worklessness:

Those unable to work as a result of a long-term health condition

Education and Skills

Working Age (16-64)



Source: NOMIS 2023



3

Creating an Inclusive Economy in Wirral

Addressing Inequalities

There are lots of assets in Wirral, but parts of the borough experience high levels of deprivation that are compounded by long-standing economic challenges and high rates of worklessness. These contribute to some of the poorer health outcomes and inequalities that are experienced in Wirral. The council and its partners recognise that tackling this requires a collective and focused effort. This is reflected in a number of key council strategies, including the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, the Wirral Plan 2023-2027, and the Wirral Economic Strategy 2021-2026, which build on recommendations from our 2020-2021 Public Health Annual Report.

The Wirral Health and Care Plan describes how the health and care organisations across Wirral will work together, and with other partners, to address the differences in health outcomes experienced by different population groups. The plan feeds directly into the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and has a key ambition to establish an effective workforce strategy that recognises the health and wellbeing benefits of employment, has a good understanding of local population need, and seeks to address the associated workforce challenges.

In our most deprived areas, many residents face multiple barriers to gaining and sustaining employment. In addition, job density data show that the ratio of jobs (whether vacant or filled) to working aged residents is low in Wirral.

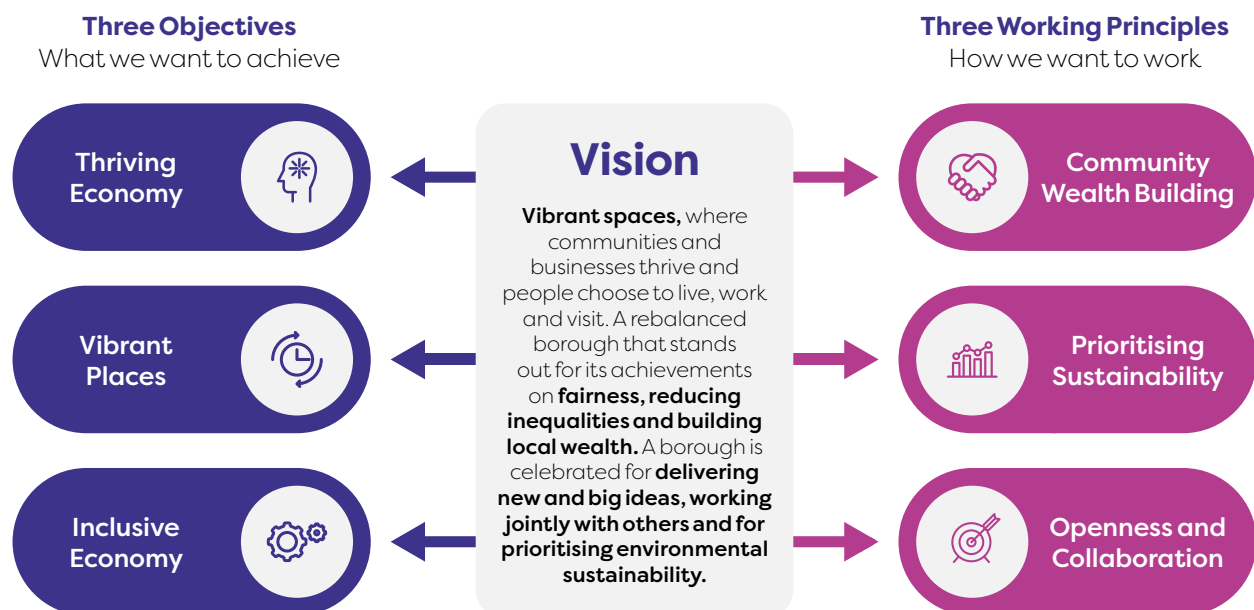


for every 10 working age residents

(16-64 years). Source: NOMIS 2023

Many of the more deprived areas in Wirral have potential for significant place-based regeneration. Large scale regeneration provides real opportunity to address many of the long-standing, underlying causes of ill-health and inequalities. Recognising this, the Wirral Economic Strategy sets out a clear vision for vibrant places where communities and businesses thrive and people choose to live, work and visit; with an underpinning aim of reducing inequalities across Wirral.

Wirral Economic Strategy's Vision



Source: Adapted from Wirral Economic Strategy 2021-26

Enabling social regeneration

Wirral has embarked on a transformational regeneration programme along the 'Left Bank' of the River Mersey, stretching from New Brighton to Bromborough. It is one of the UK's largest regeneration programmes and capitalises on Wirral's significant brownfield land assets and opportunities for town centre renewal, while protecting the green belt.

Community wealth building is at the heart of Wirral's plans, ensuring we invest in communities and provide social value that has positive impacts on health and aims to prevent displacement of local people and businesses. That is why Wirral Council is committed to providing both affordable housing and suitable employment locations across the borough to meet local needs. There are also plans to address the lack of 'last mile' sustainable transport options that currently act as a barrier to employment and education in the borough.

These plans are underpinned by local strategies and backed by recent national and Liverpool City Region (LCR) policy frameworks.

Local strategies

- Community Wealth Building (2020-25)
- Wirral Plan (2023-27)
- Wirral Economic (2021-26)
- Wirral Local Plan (2021-37)
- Health and Wellbeing (2022-27)
- Birkenhead 2040 Framework

National and city-region frameworks

- Build Back Better Growth Strategy
- Social Mobility Commission's national recommendations
- LCR Corporate Plan 2021-2024
- LCR Local Skills Action Plan 2022-23
- LCR Combined Authority Transport Plan
- LCR Plan for Prosperity

Supporting growth

Wirral's plans aim to support growth and skill up local people to get good jobs and achieve their aspirations, and the Office for National Statistics (ONS) data show we are closing the productivity gap with the North West. However, business confidence within Wirral is reportedly lower than normal because of the current inflationary pressures and the long-standing impact of Brexit. This is reflected nationally.

Before the pandemic, Wirral's largest employment sectors were health, social care, retail, and wholesale. Now, in addition to the significant workforce challenges in health and social care, local businesses across all sectors are reporting challenges in attracting and retaining talent. This view has been reinforced by a small qualitative insights focus group held in November 2023, where businesses in Wirral's manufacturing and digital sectors described recruitment as 'an uphill battle' because sector-specific skills aren't readily available.

This has been reportedly caused by multiple factors:

- Early retirees from work post-pandemic
- Higher rates of long-term sickness
- Increased workforce mobility through flexible working arrangements
- Competition from large businesses
- A reduction in European workforce post-pandemic and Brexit

Engagement with a small group of local businesses suggests that some sectors are also experiencing additional challenges specific to them.

Challenges local employers face:

"My employees are in their 60's. Once they leave, there's nobody out there who knows how to operate the machinery."

"I've hired 3 people for one role in 3 years ... People don't want to work in a dirty environment."

Qualitative insights focus group,
November 2023

Sector specific challenges

Sector	Challenges
Manufacturing/ Innovation	Skills gap around digitisation.
Visitor Economy	Potential employees no longer considering hospitality a viable career. Having to reduce opening hours, closing for lunch, or opening later.
Built environment	Shortfall in the next generation of young people entering the industry, from engineers and installers to estimators, bid managers and writers.
Clean Growth	Require extensive and time-consuming training for some positions Potential employees choosing to leave or opt for freelance positions after receiving extensive and time-consuming training. Having to recruit from outside the UK. Gap between education/training and what is being taught/practised in the workplace.
Health and Life Sciences	Difficulty keeping up with growth and therefore turning down work. Huge and regular turnover of employees.
Professional Business Services	Employers from more extensive businesses headhunting staff in smaller businesses and SMEs struggling to backfill positions.
Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise Sector	Cessation of many government grants and schemes. Considerable lack of willing and able volunteers, so having to review wage structure to find permanent employees.

To combat the challenges of recruitment, local businesses have reportedly adopted various strategies to meet their staffing needs, from upskilling existing staff to increasing salaries, offering flexible working arrangements, and recruiting from a broader geographical market. However, it is hard for local businesses to compete with larger national and international businesses.

To increase productivity, some businesses are reducing office space to more appealing, multi-occupancy business environments to align with more flexible working when their leases become due for renewal. Wirral's regeneration plans reflect this newer way of working, including a commitment to embed sustainability into regeneration. As such, all new development should be 'zero carbon ready by design'.

Small industrial units are a gap in the market, especially new, sustainable ones. There are plans to bring forward new sites at the Marine, Energy and Automotive Park at Wirral Waters, and elsewhere within the Freeport.

Businesses would like to see more eco-friendly industrial units in Wirral.

"I do think on the Wirral as a whole, there's a lack of industrial space for small to medium-size businesses, especially 6-10 thousand square foot units. Nobody wants to move out of them because of how popular they are... So, if we are going to invest in buildings, they need to be energy efficient. If they've already got solar panels on, if they're well insulated, it's obviously going to be attractive to a business."

Qualitative Insights focus group,
November 2023

Growth sectors in Wirral

The council's Business Support Service, provided by the Wirral Chamber of Commerce, is enabling new business to grow locally, and in 2021 Wirral saw a net total of 185 new businesses. The service will continue to deliver support to all Wirral businesses and will target more intense support to growth opportunities in the borough, in the context of the City Region's Growth Platform and the local place-based offer.

To support these growth opportunities, we need to ensure that we make best use of the land allocated to employment in the Local Plan. The allocated land aims to meet assessed needs from a combination of sources – vacant land, under-utilised sites, and redevelopment/intensification of existing employment uses. For example, as set out in the Birkenhead 2040 Framework, much of our regeneration is focused around Birkenhead. This is linked to the creation of a sustainable, waterfront urban garden community that maximises underutilised brownfield sites and invests in new sustainable offices with health and wellbeing built into design.

Cleveland Street Masterplan

The key driver behind this development is the ambition to create a new, high quality family neighbourhood located near all the services and facilities that residents need. The Local Plan sets out the aspirations to build approximately 1,025 homes and create "a new high-quality residential led mixed use neighbourhood with new public open space, a primary school and various public realm and building improvements."



The Local Plan also identifies wider 'Primarily Employment Areas', occupied by existing businesses, but also includes additional sites that may come forward in the future to meet employment needs. Mixed use and masterplan areas may also accommodate new employment development, for example Cleveland Street Neighbourhood.

Wirral's regeneration programme is already making progress in many priority and growth sectors, with impressive strides in the creative sector through targeting government funds. This has been focused on the 'Left Bank' with an emerging cluster in Birkenhead.

Progress is being made in other sectors, including:

- The freeport designation at Wirral Waters will attract inward investment and create more well-paid, highly skilled jobs for local people.
- Regeneration itself is supporting modern methods of construction and advanced manufacturing.
- Local shipbuilding business, Cammell Laird, has recently been contracted to build a new Mersey Ferry wholly in the Liverpool City Region.
- Investments in local biotech and pharmaceuticals are delivering global innovations and creating local jobs, e.g. Holiferm and Bristol-Myers Squibb.
- The UK's first Green Automotive Manufacturing Hub has opened at QEII Dock at Eastham creating new jobs.
- Two new grade A office blocks with health and wellbeing designed in.
- The recent £12m Eureka! Science and Discovery attraction is integrating learning, play and the world of work.
- The Borough of Culture programme seeks to enhance the visitor economy by working alongside and investing in local cultural organisations that underpin the visitor economy.

Regeneration Case Studies



Start Yard: A place for businesses to start the first steps on their journey or to grow. Start-Yard is an exciting creative space at the centre of Birkenhead's waterfront, providing a modern solution for people in the formative stages of their business development. It is housed in Cammell Laird's old transport depot, with shipping container spaces, shared seating areas and office pods. Offering easy in and out terms and affordable rents, on site café bar, meeting rooms, cycle park and shower.



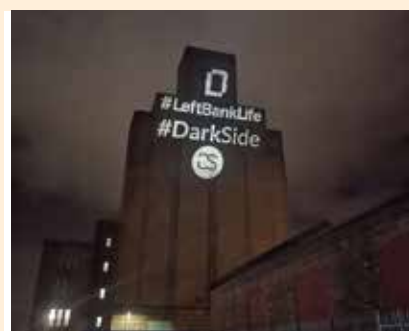
Make CIC: a social enterprise with a vision 'to see people turn their passions into prosperity'.

In 2019, Make CIC worked with Wirral Council to open a community creative hub in Hamilton Square Birkenhead, called Make Hamilton Square. What was an overgrown concrete jungle is now a vibrant urban growing space, with an in-house cafe and space for over 50 businesses and makers, alongside a programme of activities.



Eureka! Science + Discovery: Boosting engagement with STEM subjects and aspiration in science-based careers.

Eureka! Science + Discovery is designed for children and young people up to 14 years to discover how Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) influence and shape their lives. Through connecting the everyday with the extraordinary, they ignite curiosities and present possibilities.



Dark Side Collective: a technological collaborative.

Dark Side Collective is a collaborative group of Wirral-based tech companies with specialisms in games and immersive technologies including augmented and virtual realities.

Increasing skills

Wirral's approach to regeneration has community wealth building principles at its heart. The aim is to stop wealth flowing out of local communities, and to place control of this wealth into the hands of local people, communities, businesses, and organisations. The regeneration projects and Economic Strategy therefore plan to support the existing small business base that drives wider economic growth. However, this requires greater job opportunities within the borough and workforce skills that match business needs.

One of the key ambitions of the Economic Strategy and Wirral Plan is to create the workforce needed to deliver planned regeneration projects, using the projects as a catalyst for appropriate training and skills. The borough has contributed to Liverpool City Region's Skills Strategy 2018-2023, which sets out a vision for an improved skills system across the area, resulting in the ability to better respond to changing global and local conditions.

Following the government's Skills for Jobs White Paper, Liverpool City Region's five Chambers of Commerce are working together to develop a Department for Education-directed Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP). The LSIP presents an opportunity for a new way of approaching skills improvement in the Liverpool City Region, placing employers at the centre of the skills system and ensuring that local residents can maximise job opportunities across the wider city region footprint.

The LSIP aims to reflect the needs of local employers and will be used to inform the level 3 and higher skills curriculum for Further Education Colleges and training providers.

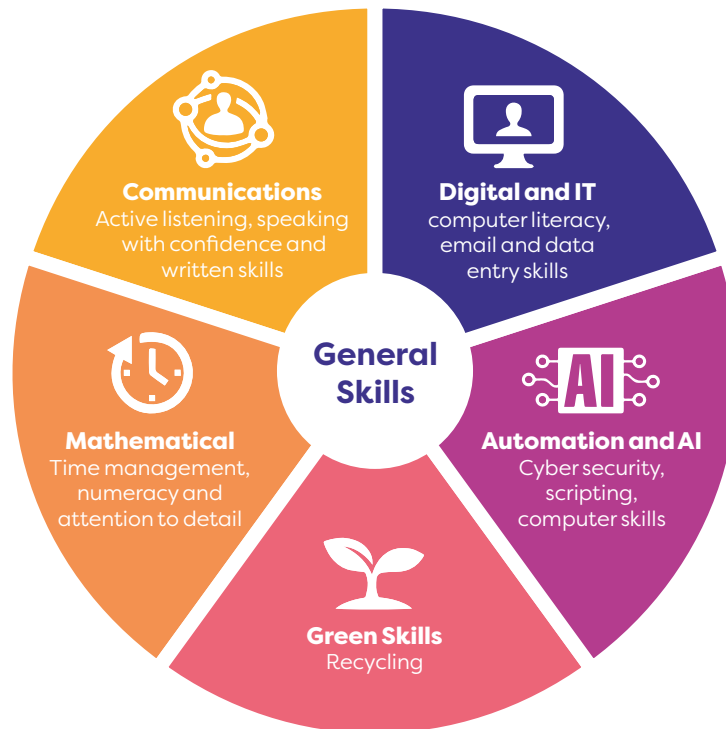
In order to support colleges and training providers, the LSIP has identified five priority sectors for action across the LCR. In addition, work is planned to address the more specific skills employers are looking for in the next five years.

Priority sectors and sector-specific skills requirements



General skills requirements

The LSIP identifies some general skills requirements that priority sectors feel are important in their employees.



To build young people's interest in manufacturing, digital and technology sectors, local business owners who took part in a small focus group in November 2023 suggested that more course options, teacher training, work experience opportunities, and careers awareness relating to these sectors is needed. They also felt that Wirral could lean on its industry experts to entice more talent, such as giving talks in schools.

For adults aged 19 or over, the Wirral Lifelong Learning Service also offers a range of courses to improve skills, qualifications, and job prospects. The courses are free for those who are unemployed, in receipt of benefits, or earn less than £21,225 per year, and include English, Maths, ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages), Family Learning, and Essential Digital Skills. In 2022/2023 over 65% of individual learners were unemployed.

Further work is needed with partners across Wirral to ensure that local residents have the necessary skills to increase their employability and that local people are supported into good jobs across the Liverpool City Region. To set out how everybody can benefit from growth, work is continuing to develop and enhance partnerships in health, education, and skills, as well as with investors and developers. Developing these skills in our priority groups will help to raise aspirations and enable social mobility.

Matching workforce skills to business needs

"The idea of pushing what jobs can be available. I think all schools, colleges miss that. Because they don't know. They're too busy teaching."

"Opening the portfolio for young people to make a better choice, or have more choice."

"We should be investing more in teaching teachers the skills to deliver more courses."

"A digital business also emphasised the need to build out the narrative of 'what is digital?' for different industries on the Wirral."

Qualitative insights focus group, November 2023



4

Helping people find good jobs and stay in work

Helping people find good jobs and stay in work

Helping people to find and stay in good jobs is a priority for Wirral. The Wirral Economic Strategy recognises that a healthy workforce is fundamental to economic growth. Supporting residents to find employment in stable, well-paid jobs is a strategic objective of Wirral's Community Wealth Building Strategy. Working for a prosperous, inclusive economy, helping businesses to thrive, and creating jobs and opportunities for all is a key vision for Wirral.

Supporting people to find work

National schemes/programmes

The government has several schemes and programmes that support people in developing skills, accessing training, finding employment and staying in work. A summary of the recruitment support and advice service can be found online, please see further reading for website link.

National schemes include, but are not limited to:

- **National Careers Service** for people aged 19 or over (18 or over if a Jobcentre Plus customer).
- **Sector-Based Work Academy Programme** (SWAP) can help to provide alternative routes to employment for those with limited work experience or skills, traineeships, apprenticeships.
- **Work experience employer guide** supporting people to build their skillset.
- **Work trials** to see if potential employees are suited to working in a role and company.
- Employers can also get support from the government to provide reasonable adjustments for those who need them through **Access to Work**. This scheme helps employees to stay in work if they have a physical health condition, a mental health condition or learning disability.
- **Households into Work** is delivered by the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority and supports long-term unemployed people who have difficulty finding and sustaining work due to any emotional, practical or financial issues. An employment advocate will provide one to one support and help with skills and resilience development.

NHS SWAP



Eight candidates from a range of different backgrounds took part in a ten-week SWAP at a Hospital Trust. Support from DWP included having a single point of contact and one-to-one support available. The SWAP consisted of an initial two weeks of training, which the candidates found very useful in developing their teamwork and interview skills, followed by eight weeks of work placement.

The SWAP team worked with the managers at the hospital to ensure the placement was the right environment for individuals. One candidate recounted how welcomed she felt both by the SWAP team and whilst on the wards; this included being ‘buddied up’ with a staff member who could support them on the job.

This sort of hands-on experience allows candidates to start developing their skills and to find out if they're suited to certain roles. It also helps employers ensure they recruit the right people for the role, who understand what it will involve.

There was a positive end to this programme. All six candidates who completed the SWAP were offered work with the bank staffing department, and two candidates secured interviews for permanent work.

Department for Work and Pensions case study

Local Support

There is a range of services and support available in Wirral to help people find work.

‘Ways to Work’ service programme is designed to provide a range of services to residents across the Liverpool City Region to enhance their employability skills and to assist them in gaining employment.

The Wirral ‘Ways to Work’ programme is tailored to meet the needs of Wirral residents. It engages eligible workless young people and adults and supports them into education, employment, and training via a suite of flexible, individualised employment support services. This not only supports a more inclusive Wirral economy, but also improves the health and wellbeing and life chances of individuals and their families through increased household incomes, improved mental and physical health, personal confidence, social networks, and aspirations.

‘Wirral Ways to Work’ programme offers the following services:

1. Wirral’s Worklessness Support Service

is delivered by Involve Northwest and is branded ‘ReachOut’. The service offers intensive outreach and engagement to assist unemployed and economically inactive residents over the age of 16 through a series of 20 weekly work clubs. The work clubs are located across the borough in community locations.

Wirral Worklessness Support Service case study on [page 37](#).

Wirral’s **‘HelpOut’** service supports the Wirral Worklessness Support Service, with the aim of improving the health and wellbeing outcomes of eligible participants under the Wirral Worklessness Support Service by removing wellbeing barriers to work and supporting sustainable employment.

2. Information Advice and Guidance Service

delivered by Career Connect aims to raise the aspirations of young people who are not in education and support them into employment or learning.

Career Connect case study on [page 38](#).

3. Intermediate Labour Market (ILM)

The ILM programme offers employment grants to businesses who can demonstrate business growth to support the recruitment and employment of young people who are NEET. This service is delivered in-house by Wirral Council’s Children and Young People’s 14-19 team.

Council 14-19 team case study on [page 39](#).

Positive Inclusion Programme (PIP)

Positive Inclusion Programme (PIP) is an ethos focused on offering one-to-one advisor support to vulnerable young people on an individualised basis, many of which have significant barriers such as SEND, mental health, care leavers and other health and wellbeing issues. Bespoke support allows for pathways to be tailored to the young person based on their personal situation. In turn, this allowed for a pathway to be developed at the young person’s pace with a step-by-step approach to mentorship and guidance.

Peter's Story



Peter is a 58-year-old Wirral resident who lives alone and, due to receiving his pension, is unable to claim Universal Credit. Having previously been in employment all his life, Peter had to leave work in 2019 following two heart attacks. He felt frustrated and low in mood due to a lack of routine without work and felt his mental health was impacted by this.

He was also worried about how he would pay his mortgage and other bills. Living alone meant he had nobody else to fall back on, so he cashed in his pension to pay off the remainder of his mortgage, his biggest monthly bill. He was then unable to claim benefits, leaving him with financial worry as going back to work again was an uncertainty given his health.

When Peter first met with ReachOut, he lacked IT skills, did not have a CV, and was unable to navigate job sites effectively. Only being able to work part-time and in specific roles meant finding the correct job was more difficult.

With ReachOut's advice and guidance, Peter was able to build a CV, improve his IT skills, and attend work clubs for assistance with job searching. He also received health and wellbeing support. He subsequently gained employment as a cleaner, which suited him perfectly. This gave him back his routine and financial stability, and he now feels more certain about the future again.

Wirral Worklessness Support Service case study

J's Story



Career Connect supported a young person with additional needs to get closer to his dream job.

J, aged 22, has ADHD and mild autism. When J came to Careers Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG), he wanted to be a clinical trainee psychologist within the NHS but was struggling to find employment through Jobcentre Plus.

CIAGs supported a review of J's CV and identified a gap in practical experience with clients with mental health support needs. J was provided with information about agencies he could potentially volunteer with as a support worker and was offered help with his application.

After volunteering to help young people with suicidal thoughts, J applied for a bank position within the NHS, but was unsuccessful. This indicated that he might need some specific help with interview skills. The team offered to support him further, setting up an account for him with their toolkit - ConnectMyCareer - to review his applications and CV and do mock interviews.

J now works full time within the NHS as a Band 4 Child and Adolescent Emergency Response Support Worker and is hoping to find a trainee clinical psychologist role in due course.

Career Connect case study

L's Story



L is a care leaver with low basic skills and additional needs. L lives independently but has been unemployed for over 6 months. L struggles with low motivation. L wanted to engage with the Positive Inclusion Programme but did not respond to initial contacts from the service.

Over a period of time L slowly started to engage and complete actions that helped address several barriers like accessing the programme.

L was referred to a Level 1 construction skills course. With the support of an adviser, L was provided with travel expenses, travel plan and encouragement, links to supporting agencies, updating CV etc.

L completed the course and obtained a Level 1 Construction Skills Certificate and then moved into employment funded via the Intermediate Labour Market grant. Subsequent follow up via the Council's 14-19 Team provided further information on onward destination. L completed further courses and maintained employment.

Council 14-19 team case study

A Military Veteran's Story



Wirral Social Prescribing Scheme supported a military veteran to overcome their issues and get back into employment.

A military veteran living in Wirral had been struggling with anxiety due to PTSD. This caused difficulties with work over a 12-month period and the client was referred by their GP to a social prescribing link worker. They said, "I really didn't know what to expect from it when it was suggested by my GP. However, having reached a point where I would sell body parts to make some positive changes in my life, I approached it with an open mind."

The client was able to explore their social, practical, and emotional issues and take proactive steps in managing their anxiety. They were linked into local services, including Wirral Lifelong Learning, Wirral Mind and Spider Project. They said, "You get so overwhelmed by information when searching online for services and support. To have someone like you who is able to give me signposting to local trusted services has been amazing."

The client then attended the Spider Project and felt it improved their confidence, along with the ability to separate daily challenges whilst managing their anxieties. Eventually, the client gained the confidence to apply for work and attended several job interviews, which led to a return to employment – a fantastic outcome. They said, "All that's really left for me to say is thank you. Thank you for your support, for having an ear available for me to talk to and for reminding me that I'm human and worth more than I thought I was."

Citizen's Advice Wirral case study

Further Local Support

There are many other options of local support across Wirral that are not commissioned by the council, and it is not possible to cover all within this report. An example is the social prescribing link workers scheme found in GP surgeries across Wirral. Social prescribing link workers help patients identify and link with activities, groups, and services in their community to meet the practical, social and emotional needs that affect their health and wellbeing.

Wirral InfoBank provides a directory of community groups, services and activities that support health and wellbeing.

Wirral InfoBank

As a major anchor employer in the area and a 'place leader' for diversity, 'fairness' and inclusion, Wirral Council has been working with local partners using innovative and modern approaches to target sustainable employment opportunities to those furthest removed from employment in Wirral and attract this potential talent into the organisation.

A range of talent pipelines are being introduced into a number of key areas that support, foster and help grow a diverse, talented and inclusive workforce that include, but is not exclusive to:

- Care leavers.
- Young people who are not in education, employment, or training (NEET).
- Clients of Wirral's worklessness support service.
- People with additional needs, for example those with a learning disability and/or those who are neurodiverse.

The initial pilot involved a small number of council vacancies offered directly, via Wirral's Care Leavers Service and Wirral's Worklessness Support Service, to these groups of people before being advertised more widely. Preparation work included a joint review of the current job descriptions to ensure they were fit for purpose.

Early successes have seen the appointment of two external candidates to Wirral's Lifelong Learning Service and Wirral Council's resources directorate.

Apprenticeships for anyone aged 16 and above and enable a person to earn whilst they learn, providing valuable workplace and industry experience whilst gaining a qualification.

Volunteering is also an important tool in getting relevant experience that can develop confidence and transferrable skills. It is also good for people who want to be on the pathway into employment and/or develop new skills whilst gaining experience. There are common misconceptions about volunteering and benefits, such as a 16-hour per week limit to volunteering and that claimants can only volunteer in registered charities. However, these are not true. People can volunteer while claiming benefits, as long as they continue to meet all the conditions of their benefit.

Wirral's Council for Voluntary Service (CVS) has a volunteering portal that helps those looking for suitable volunteering opportunities and for local organisations to advertise their roles. Please see further reading list for link to website.

Volunteering can provide the flexibility that work cannot.

One woman from Oxtown discussed that she has **"a lot to juggle"** She has a disability, spinal issues, PTSD, and children who have symptoms of ADHD. She explained that volunteering part-time provides her with the flexibility in managing these different circumstances.

Wirral Neighbourhood's Model pilot,
November 2023

Supporting people to stay in work

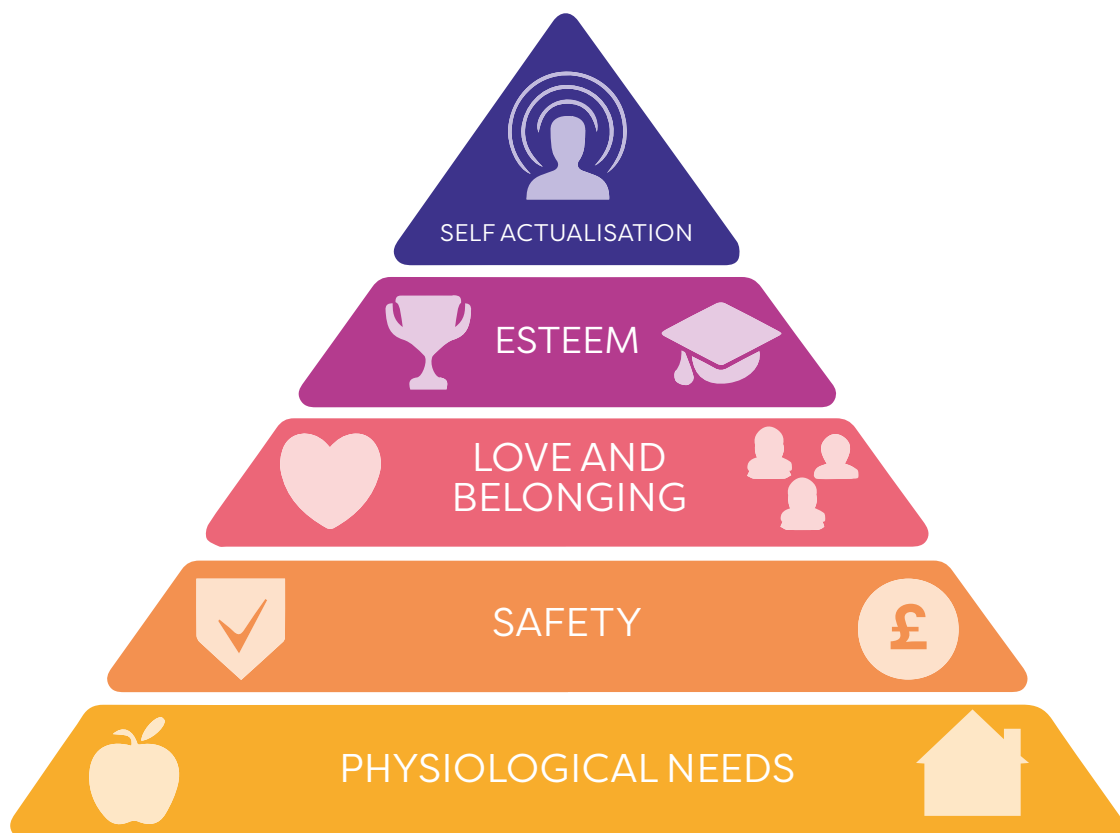
As recognised in Wirral's Economic Strategy, a healthy workforce is fundamental to economic growth. There is evidence to show that healthier, active, and engaged employees are more productive and have lower levels of sickness absence and presenteeism. Therefore, workplaces are a key setting for improving the public's health and wellbeing, and employers have a key role to play.

Once people are in work, we have an opportunity to raise aspirations and increase social mobility through career progression. However, in applying Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to the workplace, it is difficult to raise anyone's aspirations until the more basic needs of secure jobs, pay, and housing are met.

Being in insecure work can impact health and wellbeing

For some, access to flexible employment is crucial to managing a health condition, but for too many in insecure work, flexibility is one-sided and can impact workers' wellbeing. According to the Work Foundation, insecure workers were twice as likely as secure workers to experience job related stress 4-6 days a week (26% compared with 13%). In particular, uncertainty over earnings can be a significant driver of stress and anxiety. Analysis undertaken by the Work Foundation highlighted that **Wirral has the lowest rate of secure work and the highest rate of severely insecure work in the Liverpool City Region.**

Applying Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to the Workplace



Source: Adapted from Indeed.com.

Decent and Fair Employment

The Liverpool City Region has established a Fair Employment Charter. This celebrates fair employment practices when they are in place and drives up standards elsewhere. The intention is to recognise good quality and effective practice in fair employment and build the broader case amongst other employers for them to consider changing their practices. It is also about promoting good employers who do the right things, like paying the Real Living Wage, and take steps to reduce insecure work or zero-hour contracts, and giving staff opportunities to progress and thrive.

Health and Wellbeing in the Workplace

Evidence shows that it is good for business to keep employees happy and engaged. However, self-reported ill-health has been rising in the UK across the working-age population, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, bringing with it a large economic cost to society.

£43bn

Earnings loss associated with onset of long-term conditions was estimated to have cost the UK economy £43bn in 2021 (equivalent to around 2% of GDP) (IPPR)

£50bn

The **costs of ill health** to the UK government were estimated to be around £50bn a year, as a result of benefit payments, additional health costs, taxes and National Insurance (PHE, 2019)

36%

More working-age people in the UK are self-reporting long-term health conditions and 36% say they had **at least one long-term health condition** in 2023 (ONS)

2.5m

Overall economic inactivity has decreased in the UK since May to July 2022, but **inactivity due to long-term sickness** continued to increase to over 2.5m people in 2023 (ONS)

£100bn

The total economic **cost of lost output and extra health costs** among working age people in the UK is estimated to be around £100bn a year (LGA, 2023)

£18.8bn

Annual cost to UK society in **workplace injuries and ill health** (LGA, 2023)

£53-56bn

Annual cost of poor mental health to UK employers (LGA, 2023)

185.6m

Estimated working days were lost in the UK because of sickness or injury in 2022, equivalent to 5.7 days per worker (ONS, 2023)

Actions employers can take to ensure the health and wellbeing of their workforce is looked after



Source: Adapted from PHE Health Matters: Health and Work.

There is a range of actions employers can take to improve and maintain the health and wellbeing of their employees, regardless of the size of their organisation.

These actions range from ensuring workplace health is prioritised at a strategic level, to enabling healthy behaviours in the workplace, through health and wellbeing activities and encouraging people to take regular breaks, exercise, and eat well.

Workplace Policies

The right workplace policies can also go a long way to helping people overcome barriers to staying in work. They also demonstrate an employer's awareness of specific issues and their commitment to supporting people to be well and maintain a work-life balance. These policies should be regularly reviewed and informed by the best available evidence. Key policies may include those listed below.

- Health and Safety policies that prevent accidents and injuries – e.g. DSE, manual handling, risk assessment, fire safety.
- HR policies to ensure employees' rights are met e.g. annual leave, absence, bullying and harassment.
- Reasonable adjustments that support people with health conditions and additional needs e.g. access considerations, specialist equipment, agile working (e.g. 'Access To Work').
- Health-related policies to support people with health issues e.g. stress, drugs and alcohol, menopause, etc.
- Family-friendly policies that support families with dependent children to stay in work e.g. parental leave, breastfeeding facilities, agile working.
- Equality, inclusion and diversity policies to eliminate discrimination in the workplace and ensure everyone feels safe and content at work.
- Learning and development policies to ensure people can maintain standards and progress in their careers.

Wirral Council provides an impartial, independent, confidential Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) that is available to all employees who may be experiencing issues outside of work. This provides access to information and support for a variety of issues, as well as telephone, online and face to face counselling.

Employers looking after their employees is not a new idea. Wirral has a proud history of meeting employees' needs and supporting their health, wellbeing, and aspirations, as demonstrated by the village of Port Sunlight.

Historical highlight: Port Sunlight

The village represents one man's vision to provide industrial workers with decent, sanitary housing in a considered architectural and picturesque form. However, rather than a philanthropic venture, Lever claimed it was all part of a business model he termed '**prosperity-sharing**'. Rather than sharing the profits of the company directly with his employees, Lever provided them with decent and affordable houses, amenities and welfare provisions that made their lives secure and comfortable and enabled them to flourish as people.

Source: Port Sunlight Village Trust.



Harnessing the Power of Anchor Organisations

Anchor organisations are well established in their communities. Through their size and scale, they can positively contribute to their area and make a difference to the lives of local people. Anchor organisations include health and care, local government, education, Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise organisations (VCFSE) and private businesses.

As anchor organisations, there is a lot that local employers can do to support the area in which they are based, including:

- **Widening access to quality work:** Being a good employer, paying people the real living wage and creating opportunities for local communities to develop skills and access quality jobs.
- **‘Purchasing local’:** Purchasing supplies and services from organisations which consider their local environmental, social, and economic impacts.

The role of Anchor Organisations



Sources: Adapted from The Health Foundation and Pro Bono Australia.

Maisy's Story



NHS cadets helped Maisy gain experience to support her application to study medicine at university.

Maisy is an 18-year-old Wirral resident who volunteered with Wirral Community Health and Care Foundation Trust at the Miriam COVID clinic for five months as part of the NHS Cadets programme. She helped to safely deliver vaccinations to the local population and recounts busy shifts, working as a team to ensure the service was able to cope with an influx of demand. "Working with the NHS during the pandemic was a privilege I'm extremely proud of."

Maisy was also chosen to write and deliver a speech to The Hive's Patrons, detailing her experience as an NHS Cadet, discussing the volunteering placement and the benefits of the Hive to the local community. As an aspiring medicine applicant, she found the NHS Cadets programme to be valuable and rewarding, saying: "The consistent support and encouragement gave me a huge confidence boost in that I could do whatever I put my mind to." As well as directly helping the local community, the programme helped Maisy to develop transferrable skills and prepare her for university applications.

Wirral Community NHS Health and Care Foundation Trust case study

Supporting Offenders into Work



Merseyside's Integrated Offender Management Unit supported an individual into construction work.

Merseyside Police has an integrated offender management unit that consists of staff from the National Probation Service and Merseyside Police. The team look at building relationships with offenders to find pathways away from offending and into employment and education. The team has built networks and relationships with employment agencies to enable encouragement and opportunity; this includes working with Involve Northwest and Wirral's Growth Company.

Wirral Probation is a key partner, as is Wirral Ways (Wirral's drug and alcohol service), who look to support stability for the individual to enable them to maintain engagement. The unit has had success in this, including an individual who was supported with construction (CSCF) qualifications and has now been in employment for some time labouring. The individual is engaging with support services and is no longer offending – a great outcome and positive reflection of the support the unit provides.

Merseyside Police case study

Supporting Young People into Work



The Prince's Trust helps young people understand what the working environment is like.

The Prince's Trust is aimed at individuals who are aged 18-25 and are NEET. This includes young people with complex and chaotic lives, including those with disabilities, victims of domestic abuse, drug and alcohol issues, anxiety and depression, ADHD and autism.

The individuals are supported mainly by team leaders and programme support workers from the Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (MFRS), with local partner agencies providing advice and support around healthy relationships, sexual health, drugs and alcohol, and employment advice.

The 12-week programme offers routine, support, and stability, including preparation of what the working environment will be like. The end goal is gaining employment, including MFRS apprenticeships, or further education and volunteering.

Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service case study

Afterword

In finalising this report, I was keen that we didn't sum it up into a 'conclusion'. The title of the report very much says it all - it is a **'work in progress'**. We set out to draw together an overview of the work already underway across Wirral, and across the Liverpool City Region, and also to challenge ourselves, our system partners, our voluntary sectors, our local leaders, our businesses, our schools and education settings and our residents to achieve even more.

We have described and highlighted examples of really good practice and of successful outcomes. The ask is, can we and our partners do more? Can we review and revise organisational policies and practices so that it is the norm to recruit on softer skills for example? Can we collaborate more across sectors so that best practice is shared, and solutions found to address obstacles in a collaborative way?

As a borough, we are on the threshold of a new era in our economic history, and we want to ensure we maximise the significant opportunities provided by our regeneration programme. Whilst there are challenges in the current economic landscape, we are committed to increasing skills and job opportunities for all in our borough.

In implementing the Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and galvanising whole system support around Priority One, our 'work in progress' will continue. The recommendations made here reflect this.

Recommendations

Overarching recommendation: For system partners and local leaders to reaffirm and strengthen their commitment to addressing the longstanding challenges of unemployment and health-related worklessness in our borough by embedding the priority within their organisation and raising awareness at all levels.

1	Organisations across Wirral to work collaboratively to join up and strengthen approaches to removing barriers to employment: challenging the status quo, testing new concepts, and sharing best practice, to ensure that recruitment practices and processes are as simple and inclusive as possible.
2	Wirral Council to build on the Liverpool City Region Skills Strategy, to ensure there is a clear strategy and action plan for Wirral which makes best use of local business insight and intelligence to better understand the needs of the labour market, and meet the needs of local employers .
3	Local employers to ensure optimum use of the apprenticeship levy to maximise the potential that quality apprenticeships have to address some of the training and recruitment challenges .
4	Local employers and skills providers to come together to share opportunities, challenges and local intelligence in an effective and systematic way to address skills gaps .
5	Local employers to ensure accurate and accessible information about specific sector careers is available to young people, and to schools and colleges to inform career planning and improve work readiness, ambition, and aspirations .
6	Wirral Council to ensure that we make best use of the land allocated to employment in the Local Plan to create quality and accessible employment opportunities .
7	Wirral Council to develop a clear overview of the range of local and national employment support available to assist employers and to help front-line services to signpost appropriately .
8	Local employers to embed anchor organisation principles and establish strong connections and visibility within their local community in order to maximise social value .
9	Local employers to build on recent collaborations, sharing best practice on policies and initiatives to support retention and improve workforce health .
10	Local employers to apply to be members of the LCR Fair Employment Charter to embed fair employment across the borough .

Further reading

Bell D, Blanchflower D:

[UK Unemployment in the Great Recession](#)

Breaking Barriers:

[Facts about refugees in the UK](#)

Career Connect:

[Careers Information Advice and Guidance](#)

Carers UK:

[Key facts and figures about caring](#)

[Carers' employment rights today, tomorrow and in the future](#)

Centre for Ageing Better:

[Work | State of Ageing in 2020](#)

Crisis:

[‘Barely breaking even’: the experiences and impact of in-work homelessness across Britain](#)

[Benefits and employment](#)

[Dashed hopes, lives on hold](#)

Education Development Trust:

[Entry and Retention in the labour market: Narratives and solutions for NEET and care leaver employment support](#)

Health Foundation:

[Our priorities for 2023](#)

Institute for Public Policy Research:

[Healthy People, Prosperous Lives](#)

Involve Northwest:

[ReachOut](#)

Iriss:

[Care experience and employment](#)

Jobcentre Guide:

[Overcoming Employment Barriers for Ex-Offenders in the United Kingdom](#)

[How Jobcentre Plus can help employers](#)

Joseph Rowntree Foundation:

[Factors that influence young people leaving care](#)

Learning & Work:

[Employer guide to supporting care leavers in the workplace](#)

Liverpool City Region:

[Combined Authority Transport Plan](#)

[Corporate Plan 2021-2024](#)

[Fair Employment Charter](#)

[Growth Platform](#)

[Households into Work](#)

[Local Skills Action Plan 2022-23](#)

[Plan for Prosperity](#)

[Skills Strategy 2018-2023](#)

[Wealth and Wellbeing Programme 2018-2020](#)

Local Government Association:

[Health, work and health related worklessness: A guide for local authorities](#)

[Work, health and growth: A guide for local councils](#)

NHS Cheshire and Merseyside:

[Anchor Framework Guide](#)

Office for National Statistics:

[Economic labour market status of individuals aged 50 and over, trends over time: September 2023](#)

[Rising ill-health and economic inactivity because of long-term sickness, UK: 2019 to 2023](#)

[Sickness absence in the UK labour market: 2022](#)

[Unpaid care by age, sex and deprivation, England](#)

Public Health England:

[Health matters: health and work](#)

Port Sunlight Village Trust:

[A brief history of Port Sunlight](#)

Single Homeless Project:

[Why is it hard for someone who is homeless to get a job?](#)

Stringhini S et al:

[Association of socioeconomic position with health behaviors and mortality. The Whitehall II study](#)

The Children's Society:

[Children's mental health statistics](#)

The Migration Observatory at the University of Oxford:

[Migrants in the UK Labour Market: An Overview](#)

The Royal British Legion:

[Deployment to Employment:](#)

[Exploring the veteran employment gap in the UK](#)

UK government:

[Access to Work](#)

[Build Back Better Growth Strategy](#)

[Informal carers and employment: summary report of a systematic review](#)

[National Careers Service](#)

[Sector-based work academy programme](#)

[Social Mobility Commission's national recommendations](#)

[State Pension Age Review](#)

[Work and Health Programme](#)

[Work and Health Programme Pioneer](#)

University of Oxford:

[Refugees and the UK Labour Market](#)

University of York:

[Care leavers face 'acute challenges' in transition to adulthood](#)

Wirral Council:

[Annual Report of the Director of Public Health for Wirral 2020-2021](#)

[Birkenhead 2040 Framework](#)

[Community Wealth Building Strategy 2020-2025](#)

[Economic Strategy 2021-2026](#)

[Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2022-27](#)

[Have Your Say](#)

[Council Plan: Wirral Working Together 2023-2027](#)

Wirral Council for Voluntary Service:

[Volunteer Portal Wirral Info Bank](#)

Work Foundation:

[Liverpool City Region employment profile](#)

Acknowledgements

Editorial Team:

Sophie Baird, Tracy Flute, Jane Harvey, Sarah Kinsella, Becky Mellor, Beverley Murray and Tessa Woodhouse.

Thanks go to the following people who supported the production of this report:

Helen Carney, Sarah Dodd, Jasmine Douglas, Suzanne Ellis, John Entwistle, Jack Font, Zoe Hough, Gareth Jones, Louise Jones, Ryder Jones, Ben Lavell, Katriona Lloyd, Kate Pierce, Emma Pottle, Owen Randles, Matthew Ray, Paul Smith and Beverley Staniford.

Career Connect, Involve Northwest, Job Centre Plus, Merseyside Fire and Rescue Merseyside Police, Wirral Community NHS Health and Care Foundation Trust Wirral Social Prescribing Team.

Communications and Marketing:

Paul Jones, Suzanne Knipe and Kate Menear.

For more information:

Wirral Intelligence Service

www.wirralintelligenceservice.org/local-inequalities/public-health-annual-reports/

Publication date: March 2024