

IMPROVING LIFE CHANCES

**Wirral Council
March 2016**

THE WIRRAL PARTNERSHIP

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1.0 FOREWORD

Councillor Tony Smith - Cabinet Member for Children and Families.

Our ambition is to reduce child poverty and its impact on the lives of children, young people and their families in Wirral. We also need to improve life chances for our young people, enabling the cycle of disadvantage to be broken so that it does not continue into adulthood.

There are many examples of positive achievement of children in Wirral, for example, the proportion of young people achieving 5 A* - C including English and Maths, which is above the England average. Unemployment locally is now lower than in previous years.

However, despite all the positive aspects of living in Wirral there is still a high proportion of children and families (21.5%) living in poverty¹. This overall figure masks some very significant disparities within Wirral between more affluent and more deprived wards. Furthermore, these high concentrations of poverty have persisted within some neighbourhoods for many years.

Tackling this is has never been more important to us. Raising aspirations for children, young people and their families, is good not only for them, but is also important for the borough. We know that the relationship between economic growth and poverty is two-way.

If we reduce poverty, it will help us to achieve our ambitions for growth, bringing significant economic and financial benefits to the borough and our residents. Reducing poverty:

- **Harnesses people's skills, knowledge and experience, and boosts productivity;**
- **Raises incomes, increasing spend and demand in the local economy, directly benefiting local businesses;**
- **Reduces welfare spending and demand for public services.**

We know that we have had some successes in the past but we recognise that our approach has not delivered the significant level of change that is needed. We know that we need to do things differently this time, if we want to make lasting change.

This Strategy therefore sets out our new approach; a radical and ambitious framework of targeted activity to – once and for all - tackle the root causes of poverty, as well as to mitigate the impacts on families.

I encourage you to read this strategy and to get involved in ensuring that we take every step we are able to tackle child poverty and improve the life chances of children in Wirral.



Councillor Tony Smith



2.0 INTRODUCTION

As Chair of the Improving Life Chances Steering Group, I was delighted when child poverty/improving life chances was identified as one of the Wirral Plan pledges.

The steering group has been meeting for a number of years to tackle this, but we know that a new and radical approach is required if we are to really address the challenge and make an impact.

Bev Morgan

Chief Executive,
Home start (Wirral), Steering Group Chair

Our Ambition

We will work in partnership with children, young people and their families, residents and local organisations to achieve the following:

Our ambition is to ensure that no child in Wirral lives in poverty. We will start by supporting 1000 Wirral families to move out of poverty by 2018. This would mean we could reduce child poverty to 20.1% in those we currently know fall into our definition of child poverty. In addition to a range of activity across the borough, we will pilot a radical new approach in our communities, where there are particularly high levels of poverty.

The Wirral Plan highlights that in order for the plan to be delivered we must ensure that we work with local residents to understand their needs and use this to inform our work and services. We must also provide leadership for our communities and build on good practice, both nationally and internationally, to drive our work forward.

Who is the strategy for?

The strategy is for local children, young people and their families and any organisations that work with families in their communities. Our aim is to ensure that our children have the best start in life that enables the cycle of disadvantage to be broken and life chances improved.

How has this strategy been developed?

This strategy has been developed in partnership with local families and a range of public, voluntary, community and faith sector organisations. The voices of local families were heard through focus groups and interviews. Local organisations were involved through a stakeholder event and a number of working group meetings.

There was already a steering group in operation before the conception of this plan as each local authority was required to have a child poverty strategy. This group was revised following the launch of the Wirral Plan and the membership extended.

Values and Principles

Our values and principles have been identified by stakeholders as key to both the development and the implementation of this strategy. The strategy will be **empowering** and **informed** through the voice of the community.

Strong leadership will ensure that the strategic vision is communicated and that improving life chances and tackling child poverty becomes 'everyone's business'.

We will work **innovatively** and learn from what works on the ground, ensuring **localism** is at the heart of our efforts.

3.0 WHAT WE KNOW

Child Poverty – the national context

The Child Poverty Act 2010 requires the Government to produce a national strategy every three years to reach an overarching target of eradicating child poverty by 2020. The Act also conveys duties upon local authorities to undertake a needs assessment and to develop a child poverty strategy in consultation with local families.

The National Child Poverty Strategy 2014-17² identifies key family characteristics which make it harder for some families to work their way out of poverty.

The five key factors are:

- Long-term worklessness
- Having low qualifications
- Raising children on your own
- Having 3 or more children to care for
- Experiencing ill health.

We also have good local information that shows the factors which impact on the likelihood of living in poverty as a child include:

- Income and material deprivation
- Worklessness
- Unmanageable debt
- Poor housing
- Parental skill level
- Access to quality education
- Family stability
- Parental health.

The regional context: Liverpool City Region (LCR) Child Poverty and Life Chances Strategy (2015-18)

Wirral is a key player in the Liverpool City Region, and the strategic approach being taken with partners is producing some positive results in reducing levels of child poverty across the City Region since the first Strategy was published in 2011.

The refreshed LCR strategy sets out proposals to maximise opportunities for children and young people based on a dual approach of improving life chances for children and young people and maximising family resources, and proposes a number of ways to boost existing efforts by working together on two aims and five priorities:

Aim 1 Ensure the best start in life for children & young people:

- Birth and school readiness
- School interventions, Pupil Premium and NEETs
- Health inequalities and lifestyle choices

Aim 2 Maximise family income:

- Fair employment
- Transport and accessibility

Wherever appropriate, Wirral's approach, priorities and actions will be aligned with the LCR to achieve maximum impact on tackling child poverty across the City Region.

What works?

There is extensive national and local information and evidence of what works to deliver better outcomes for families and tackling poverty. **We have built on this by incorporating local knowledge and consultation to develop a radical new Community Pilot.** We will pilot this approach initially by targeting specific neighbourhoods. Rigorous evaluation and learning will capture best practice and roll out the approach to effectively tackle poverty.

Best practice suggests a number of critical elements can deliver success, including:

- The need for a range of techniques if targeted parents are to be reached and engaged, and the effectiveness of outreach, including that delivered by parents and advocates from or with similar backgrounds to, targeted communities;
- The effectiveness of packages of support for parents seeking to enter or re-enter employment that are flexible, resourced, and understand them as parents rather than adults who may or may not have children and caring responsibilities;
- The need for flexible, accessible resources that can provide immediate alleviation from the impacts of poverty as well as support progression to more sustainable and long-term outcomes;
- The importance of flexible coordinated approaches that are parent-led and identify the barriers to their and their

families' progression to improved outcomes;

- Address the lack of confidence that many parents have in accessing local provision, and the need for supported signposting that builds self-reliance;
- The demand for money and debt advice and the impact that this can make on individual and family wellbeing;
- The importance of skilled staff, able to support parents and families from a range of backgrounds in an appropriate way through a persistent, relational and trust building approach;
- Community capacity building and co-production approaches are well supported by local stakeholders and can have a transformational impact upon those engaged in delivering provision in their communities.

Case Studies

School Community Hub

The school hubs provide support and a range of activities for both children and their parents. Some of the successes for parents have included, gaining qualifications, such as GCSEs; going on to further education and securing university places.

"I am a local mum, with 3 children attending 3 schools on the Woodchurch estate, nursery, primary and high school. I have never been employed due to health issues as I suffer with anxiety. I was approached by a Community Connector to ask would I like to come to a coffee afternoon in the school, she explained what I could access in the Community Hub.

I was a bit nervous but I went for the coffee afternoon and was given a questionnaire on what would help to improve my life. I disclosed to the Connector that I have never held down a secure job due to the fact I didn't finish school and have no formal qualification and this was holding me back.

The connector had been in contact with the local high school, follow the survey, which said that they would be very willing to offer a year's course of GCSE English to any parent wishing to improve their qualifications. I decided that I would give it a go as the Connector said she would come with us and do it herself.

I started to attend every Monday evening and have done for the past year, and I am now absolutely delighted to say that I am part of a group of 10 who have just sat a GCSE exam last week and this Thursday I will take my GCSE Maths. At 39 I am now ready to start seeking employment and now have the necessary qualifications to start my application for midwifery, a dream of mine since a young age. Through the hub I have grown in confidence and my self-esteem has rocketed.

I now promote the hub to others who lack the confidence, and I say if I can do it, anyone can. The hub has shown me that you should never give up on your dream".

Case Studies

Involve Northwest

“When I was referred to ‘involve’ by the DWP, I was so scared. However, the warmth and enthusiasm of the x (member of involve team) helped to reassure me that I was in the right place. I also met y (another member of the team) on the same day. It was her first day at the office so I think we were both equally nervous. From that day on I knew these were the kind of positive people I needed to take me forward.

That was January 2015. I had been unable to work since 2001 due to a number of chronic and painful health problems. I knew from early on that my health wasn’t going to improve. I had no support network, couldn’t see a future for me and if felt as if my life was over.

I can’t deny that I was resistant to change. It was overwhelming physically and mentally. On occasions my health has prevented me from participating more, but I feel so proud of how far I’ve come.

My positive experiences with “involve’ have helped me re-connect with the world. I have been able to focus on the qualities I possess, re-gain my confidence and learn that it’s ok to try new, different activities. I now know I have value as a person. Although the prospect of working again is a tiny dot on a distant horizon, at least it is visible in my minds’ eye”.

Case Studies

Wirral Fuel Debt Advice Service

Background

A client with fuel debt and health issues presented herself to the Wirral Fuel Debt Advice Service for help and support. The client also has children and the eldest child suffers from a rare illness which requires a lot of extra laundry and therefore additional/ increased use of hot water, washing machine and tumble dryer. This, along with the need for additional baths and showers for the child concerned, subsequently increases the consumption of gas and electricity generating higher fuel bills resulting in debt.

The client herself suffers with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and uses more hot water than one would normally expect when undertaking every day chores such as washing the dishes. The extra use of electrical appliances and gas for heating purposes has led to the point where the client can no longer sustainably afford to keep paying the bills and has generated a debt for both gas and electricity. This debt has added to the already high level of anxiety experienced by the client.

Elimination of these debts, along with the client being placed into a sustainable position by the Fuel Debt Advisor, would enable the client to get back to a level playing field and into a position where she can afford to pay for the energy she uses. This would also contribute to the reduction in stress levels enabling the client to better manage the issues she deals with on a daily basis.

Help Offered

The client engaged with the Wirral Fuel Debt Advice Service to gain help with the fuel debt she had accrued, however the client also received extra help in the way of a Benefit Maximisation check through the welfare rights team at Wirral Council following a referral from the Wirral Fuel Debt Advice Service. The client was also referred to the British Gas Warm Home Discount scheme and evaluated for eligibility for energy efficiency measures available under the Energy Company Obligation.

Outcome

The Wirral Fuel Debt Advisor submitted grant application for both gas and electricity. Both applications were successful with more than £2,330 of fuel debt cleared. The client is now on an affordable, sustainable gas payment plan and is also now in receipt of the £140 Warm Home Discount from her energy supplier. The client has received notification of her eligibility for extra benefits which will increase her annual income by £5,000. Through our Collective Switch project we will keep the client informed when better energy tariffs become available. She has received free loft insulation, saving £285 for installation and a further £135 per year on her heating bills. The energy efficiency advice delivered by the Fuel Debt Advisor will also contribute to more effective use of household appliances resulting in warmer home, reduced energy consumption and lower fuel bills.

Case Studies

Healthy Homes Case Study

Ms A was referred to the Healthy Homes Team by her midwife. At the time of the referral, she was due to give birth. Ms A's midwife was concerned about her worsening mental health, exacerbated by her living conditions in her private rented flat. One of the midwife's main concerns was around a new-born baby living in a poorly heated property with no working central heating or hot water.

Following the Healthy Homes intervention, the landlord installed a new central heating boiler, internal doors were planed so they could close securely (reducing fire hazard), a hole above the front door was repaired, single glazed windows were replaced with new double glazing and an accumulation of rubbish was removed from the front of the property.

The flat had no smoke detectors and so a referral was made to Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service, who subsequently fitted three smoke alarms.

The repairs were carried out and then Ms A gave birth to a baby boy less than 2 weeks after the boiler was installed.

Snapshot Of Child Poverty In Wirral

- **21.5% of children live in low income families, this is a 10.3% improvement since 2011, but there are still 14,945 children affected by poverty in the Borough**¹
- **There are significant differences in the experience of child poverty across the Borough. As an example, the rate of child poverty in Bidston & St James is over 43%, compared to 4% in Heswall**¹
- **Bidston & St James, Birkenhead and Tranmere, Seacombe and Rock Ferry wards account for over 45% of the number of children and families dependent on out of work benefits**¹
- **46.1% of children live in low income families in Bidston & St James, and 40.4% in Seacombe**¹
- **10.6% of households in Wirral experience fuel poverty**³
- **The estimated numbers of people living in fuel poverty are 1,714 (19.5%) in Bidston & St James, and 1,400 families (20%) in Seacombe**³
- **69.5% of children on Wirral have a good level of development at age 5. For those children on free school meals this level of development drops to 54%**⁴
- **4,800 people used the Wirral Foodbank between April and September 2015, this included 1,676 children**⁵
- **Heath related worklessness is a specific issue in parts of Wirral, and current rates exceed the regional/ national averages with nearly 19,000 residents claiming either Employment Support Allowance or Incapacity Benefit**⁶
- **There are significant concentrations within the Parliamentary Constituency of Birkenhead and mental health remains the primary condition**⁶

Defining Child Poverty

There are 4 key definitions of child poverty identified in the national strategy. For simplicity we will work to the definition that children are defined as living in relative poverty if their household income is less than 60% of the median national income (the median income is the middle value between the highest and lowest incomes in the country). This is the most widely accepted definition.

4.0 OUR PRIORITIES

Children who grow up in poverty all too often become the parents of the next generation of children living in poverty. Breaking the cycle of disadvantage is essential. In order to do this we must raise both attainment and aspirations of our children and young people.

We have had some successes in recent years. But this has not had the impact needed to significantly and permanently reduce levels of poverty. A radical new approach is required.

We know that the drivers and outcomes of poverty are complex, cyclical and self-perpetuating. Wirral's understanding of the issues, as well as results from the national pilots⁷ have identified four key 'building blocks' to tackle child poverty, these are:

- Employment and skills; to ensure that more families are in work that pays and have the support they need to progress
- Life chances and families; to ensure that poverty in childhood does not translate into poor experiences and outcomes
- Financial resilience and support; needs to be responsive to families' situations
- Place and delivery; highlights the importance of the local context, local services and the characteristics of the local community

The first three building blocks above underpin the priorities in this local strategy, together with a place-based approach to delivery. We will target a neighbourhoods-based approach to the strategy because we know that there are some significant concentrations of child poverty located in specific parts of the borough.

A co-ordinated and strategic approach

Given the multi-dimensional nature of child and family poverty, we will take a new, more strategic and coordinated approach. This recognises many of the actions required to tackle child poverty and improve life chances cannot be addressed in isolation and will be delivered through a number of other strategies eg Children's; Health; Transport, Housing and Disability.⁸

In particular, it is essential that we integrate this Strategy with Wirral's Growth Plan, which sets out ambitious aims for the economic transformation of the Borough to increase investment and enterprise; to link skills with growth; and to reduce economic inactivity. Improving and increasing the skills of parents and young people will be addressed within the emerging Skills Plan. Job creation is a critical factor in linking economic growth and poverty reduction, and the quality of the jobs created matters as well as the quantity. Poverty does not just affect long-term unemployed people - estimates suggesting that more than half the people in poverty in the UK were part of a working family.

Building on what we know locally and feedback from our residents, **we have therefore developed a new Community Pilot based on four high level priorities** to tackle the causes - as well as the impact - of child and family poverty.

PRIORITY 1:

Support people into sustainable employment

For most people, employment can offer the best route out of poverty. We will focus our efforts on supporting parents into work. But we also need to ensure that work pays - as parents move into work, we need to ensure that poverty has not simply moved from workless to in work families.

PRIORITY 2:

Improve life chances for children and young people

We know that work alone will not eradicate child poverty. We will tackle the underlying causes and factors associated with child poverty – early years development, health, education and skills – to help break the cycle of poverty.

PRIORITY 3:

Help families to become financially resilient

We will help ensure that work pays; as well as support families to tackle problem debt; to maximise their income; and to deal with budgeting and financial independence

PRIORITY 4:

Tackle the immediate impacts of poverty

Our strategy needs to tackle the immediate consequences of poverty as well as the causes, to ensure that those families in poverty or 'just coping' have access to decent, suitable and affordable accommodation, and have enough to feed their families and heat their homes.

Community Pilots

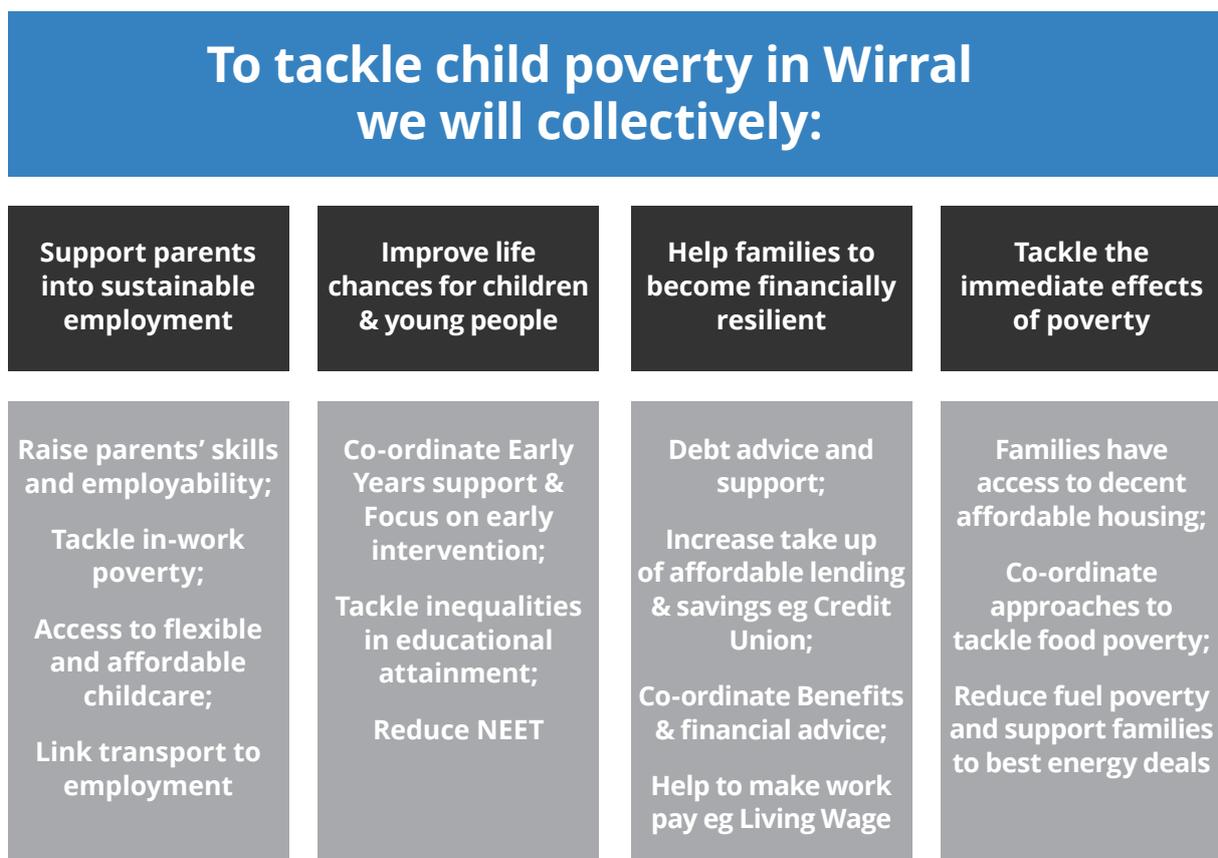
The above priorities will initially be delivered by targeting two communities who are experiencing significant income deprivation. Through consultation and engagement, local residents and partners will identify specific neighbourhoods where we will target the Pilot approach. Increasing parental employment and employability will be at the heart of the new model.

The approach will build on Wirral's recent development of Community Hubs, using an asset based community development approach within local neighbourhoods, in order to:

- Increase family and children's wellbeing;
- Increase capacity in the community to tackle poverty;
- Greater awareness of support available to parents in the local area;
- Increase desire of parents to move into work, and with a clear understanding of how to pursue this goal;
- Increase engagement of parents with existing employment and enterprise;
- Improve aspirations of children due to rising parental aspirations.

Building on the success of the Hubs, as well as other multi-agency initiatives including the Family Intervention Project and Health Related Worklessness, we will bring together different agencies and existing/new neighbourhood based services for disadvantaged parents; addressing gaps in services by linking up the employability offer for parents with childcare support, financial advice and other support that families need.

Fig 1: Improving Life Chances Framework



A young child with light hair is smiling and holding up a drawing. The drawing depicts a house with a chimney, a sun with rays, and a rainbow. The background is a wall with colorful papers pinned to it.

5.0 HOW WE WILL DELIVER THIS STRATEGY

The Improving Life Chances Strategy provides a clear framework for partners to work collectively and make a real difference in each of the areas outlined within the strategy.

We will initially pilot our approach by targeting defined communities through the following actions:

Overarching actions:

Theme Lead: Public Health

Action	By When	Lead Organisation
1. To organise and deliver an annual Child Poverty conference to raise awareness of issues affecting local families, highlight local services and provide a networking opportunity to further develop opportunities and share good practice	October 16	Improving Life Chances Steering Group
2. To provide a comprehensive training programme, both face to face and e-learning	April 2016	Improving Life Chances Steering Group
3. Develop intelligence and performance to understand local needs and what works	July 2016	Public Health Intelligence Team
4a) Establish project steering group to develop and implement Community Pilots	April 2016	New project steering group
4b) Co-design 2 Community Pilots with local residents and partners	September 2016	
4c) Implementation & delivery plan for 2 Community Pilots	September 2016	
The Implementation Plan will set out specific actions and targets for the following priorities		

DETAILED ACTION PLAN

Priority One: Supporting parents into sustainable employment

Within each Community Pilot, we will:	By When	Lead Organisation
4. Increase local volunteering opportunities within communities to build skills and experience through linking up with the asset based community development (ABCD) initiative.	September 2016	CAW and Public Health
5. Embed employability programmes and financial advice within primary health services and early years' intervention activities eg through Community Hubs	September 2016	New Project steering group
6. Co-ordinate and raise awareness of accessible, flexible and affordable childcare to enable parents to return to and/or sustain employment.	September 2016	New Project steering group
7. Provide advice and information on affordable transport schemes to enable parents to access training & employment		Travelwise
8. Ensure that Growth Plan priorities deliver skills; job sustainability and quality in order to provide a long term solution to child and family poverty	2020	Growth Board

Priority Two: Improve life chances for children and young people

Within each Community Pilot, we will:	By When	Lead Organisation
9. Develop a co-ordinated and strategic programme for 0 -19 year olds, including the ante-natal period to deliver the Healthy Child Programme	October 2016	Public Health, Children & Young People's Dept, CCG
10. Close the inequalities gap in attainment between young people in receipt of free school meals and their peers - see action in Children's strategy (9)	July 2017	School improvement team
11. To raise aspirations, engage local employers and develop opportunities for young people through the Young Chamber - see action in Children's strategy (19)	September 2017	Chamber of Commerce

DETAILED ACTION PLAN

Priority One: Supporting families to become financially resilient

Within each Community Pilot, we will:	By When	Lead Organisation
12. Embed local delivery of targeted information, advice and support on debt & financial inclusion	September 2016	New Project Steering Group
13. Develop plan to increase access to (and take up of) affordable savings and loans eg Credit Union	September 2016	New Project steering group

Priority Four: Tackling the immediate effects of poverty

Within each Community Pilot, we will:	By When	Lead Organisation
14. Develop a neighbourhood approach to tackle food poverty	April 2017	Public Health
15. Through targeted work, increase take-up of entitlements such as free nursery places, free school meals and energy efficiency schemes	April 2017	New Project Steering Group
16. Embed a strategic and co-ordinated approach to housing/advice/information and support to low-income families	September 2016	New Project Steering Group
17. Implement a local plan with Healthy Wirral to embed their prevention and early intervention work	September 2016	New Project Steering Group

5.1 HOW WILL WE KNOW IF WE ARE GETTING IT RIGHT

Through increasing awareness we will promote corporate and partnership responsibility to ensure changes to services and policies for children, young people and their families are impact assessed so that the unintended consequences of changes can be mitigated.

Indicator	Current Performance
Priority One - Supporting parents into sustainable employment	
Overall employment rate	70.4%
Priority Two - Improve life chances for children and young people	
Percentage of children achieving a good level of development in Foundation Stage Profiles	69.5%
The achievement gap between pupils eligible for free school meals and their peers achieving 5 or more good GCSEs (including English and maths)	32.2%
Percentage of 16-18 year olds Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)	4.3%
Priority Three - Supporting families to become financially resilient	
Proportion of children in low income families	21.5%
Priority Four - Tackling the immediate effects of poverty	
Take up of 2 year old offer by eligible families as identified by DWP	66%
Percentage of households in fuel poverty in Wirral	10.6%

6.0 CONCLUSION

Child poverty and improving life chances is crucial to tackling inequalities in Wirral. For too long we have had significant and persistent concentrations of poverty in the borough. We are committed to drive forward a new approach to tackle this.

We recognise that this is not something that can be achieved easily and that we cannot underestimate the steps that people need to move through to increase their life chances. Breaking the cycle of disadvantage to improve the life chances of children and young people in Wirral requires clear leadership and the strong joint commitment of agencies, services, residents and communities.

We will harness our collective assets and resources to ensure that we are able to support as many people as possible to move out of poverty.

7.0 STEERING GROUP MEMBERS

- Home Start Wirral/Chair - Bev Morgan
- Cabinet Lead - Councillor Tony Smith
- Councillor Wendy Clements
- Councillor George Davies
- Wirral Council - Fiona Johnstone, Julia Hassall, Deborah Gornik, Julie Graham, Rebecca Mellor, John Highton, Jo Burrell
- Wirral Chamber of Commerce - Paula Bassnett
- Tranmere Community Project - Lynne Cullens
- Jobcentre Plus - Deborah Veevers
- Birkenhead Foundation Years - Zoe Mumby
- Community Member - Mark Johnson

8.0 REFERENCES

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