

Wirral Supported Employment Strategy 2024 - 2029



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Foreword

The health and wellbeing benefits for individuals deriving from being meaningfully employed can be enormous. Not only is there the obvious economic benefit, but there is also the benefit to the individual's health, self-esteem, social connectedness, and the sense of purpose which comes with meaningful activity.

These benefits can be particularly important for people who are otherwise at risk of being excluded. Residents who have learning disabilities, mental health conditions and those who have autistic spectrum conditions face the greatest barriers to being in work.

It is also clear that there is a lack of support available to those with an Educational Health Care Plan once they reach the age of 25, and, as a result, many individuals with a learning disability and / or autism find themselves without hope of ever going into paid employment. Often the only option for them is volunteering or jobs offering minimal work with no progression, thus promoting a lack of self-worth, depression, continued dependency, as well as health and financial issues. As well as the benefits to the individual there are, of course, benefits of employment to families and the wider community.

In recognition of this, the **Council and its partners** will adopt an organised approach to **maximising the employment opportunities for people** who would otherwise **struggle to participate** in the job market. It is also right that this should be ambitious. It is not sufficient that people should be busy; the aspiration should be that wherever possible people should be in (or working towards) 'good' jobs that confer the health and wellbeing benefits of work.

There is naturally a need for realism. Available jobs may not meet all our wishes, whether in terms of job satisfaction or financial reward. We should be ambitious, without being unrealistic.

The development of this strategy comes at a challenging time, the impact of the global Covid-19 pandemic on the job market are still emerging and not quite fully understood. Factors already known suggest that the most vulnerable residents will be most adversely affected.



Supported Employment Charter

The purpose of this charter is to establish a simple framework outlining the commitments, principles, values, and standards that Wirral Council, providers and partners collectively agree. It should serve as a guide to outline priorities, ensure consistency and quality.

Commitment One:

Empowerment & Early Intervention

- Empower Individuals in Wirral with care and support needs to secure and maintain gainful employment through direct and tailored assistance.
- Emphasise earlier intervention by providing person-centred planning and clearer pathways to supported employment, implementing new checklists and practice standards in 2024/2025 ongoing.
- Implement new aspiration checklists in schools to ensure there is consistency and standards for young people.
- Provide vocational profiling from the age of 14 in schools to provide an accurate selection and matching service as early as possible in line with best practice.

Commitment Two:

A Person-Centred Approach

- Create a fair and unbiased engagement with potential employers and supported employment facilitators, to ensure equitable and consistent offers.
- Commitment to person-centred approaches with a focus on supporting individuals to develop their personal aspirations, and work with them to identify support in line with these.
- Ensure all tools and practice standards focus on embedding person-centred approach.

Commitment Three:

Employer Support

- Offer a high-quality service of individualised specialist support, training, advice, and guidance for a mutually agreed duration to ensure a successful outcome.
- Provide on-the-job support, problem-solving, and mediation as necessary, taking a proactive lead in engaging with partner agencies to access additional services and financial resources.
- Further build Wirral Council as a 'model employer' for supported employment
- Build an information and resource hub for local employers about the benefits and opportunities of supported employment.

Commitment Four:

Performance Monitoring & Reporting

- For Wirral Council, Supported Employment Facilitators and Employers to continue to deliver a professional service that is flexible, reliable, responsive, caring and trusted.
- Ensure feedback is always gathered from individuals and employers at key points during their support and that this is fed into impact monitoring and used to support future planning.
- Create a shared outcomes framework and commit to recording and reporting impact metrics against each agreed measure.
- Commit to assess the progress of the 6 commitments in this charter on an annual basis.

Our Aspirations

Our vision to enable individuals to gain employment or work in the open labour market that is paid the prevailing wage or self-employment

Our primary focus is to support **care leavers and adults with care and support needs** who are eligible for social care and want to work. We will also signpost young people and adults who have additional needs (but are not reliant on specialist services) to organisations that can support them into employment.

Our Ambitions

This strategy outlines six ambitions to help more young people and adults with care and support needs to gain and retain paid employment in the open market, or gain another meaningful employment related activity* by:

1. Creating a climate of **high expectation and aspiration** for achieving and sustaining paid employment for Wirral residents with care and support needs and young people leaving care, **through shared corporate ownership** and action from a **range of key players** from across the local authority and its partners.
2. Ensuring there is **effective transition from education** (between 14-25 years) into employment and that **young people are well prepared for work** and have the **appropriate support to sustain** their employment.

3. Ensuring there is a **robust outcome focused approach to commissioning** education, training, housing and support services that address the current barriers to employment and **leads to increased independence** and improved employment outcomes.
4. Engaging with the **local business community to ensure that employment opportunities** are available for Wirral residents **with care and support needs** and care leavers across a range of employment sectors, and **employers have access to the support needed** to ensure employees are successful.
5. Ensuring residents and the workforce have **good quality up to date information** on the **employment services and support available**, and that there are **well understood pathways into employment** in place.
6. Ensuring the provision of **sustainable supported employment solutions** which aligns to the Council priorities and maximises opportunities to use external and funding resources more creatively to deliver best value in terms of cost and the best outcomes.

* Such as training, education, volunteering or work experience may be essential elements for driving this aim if they are part of a genuine pathway to real work



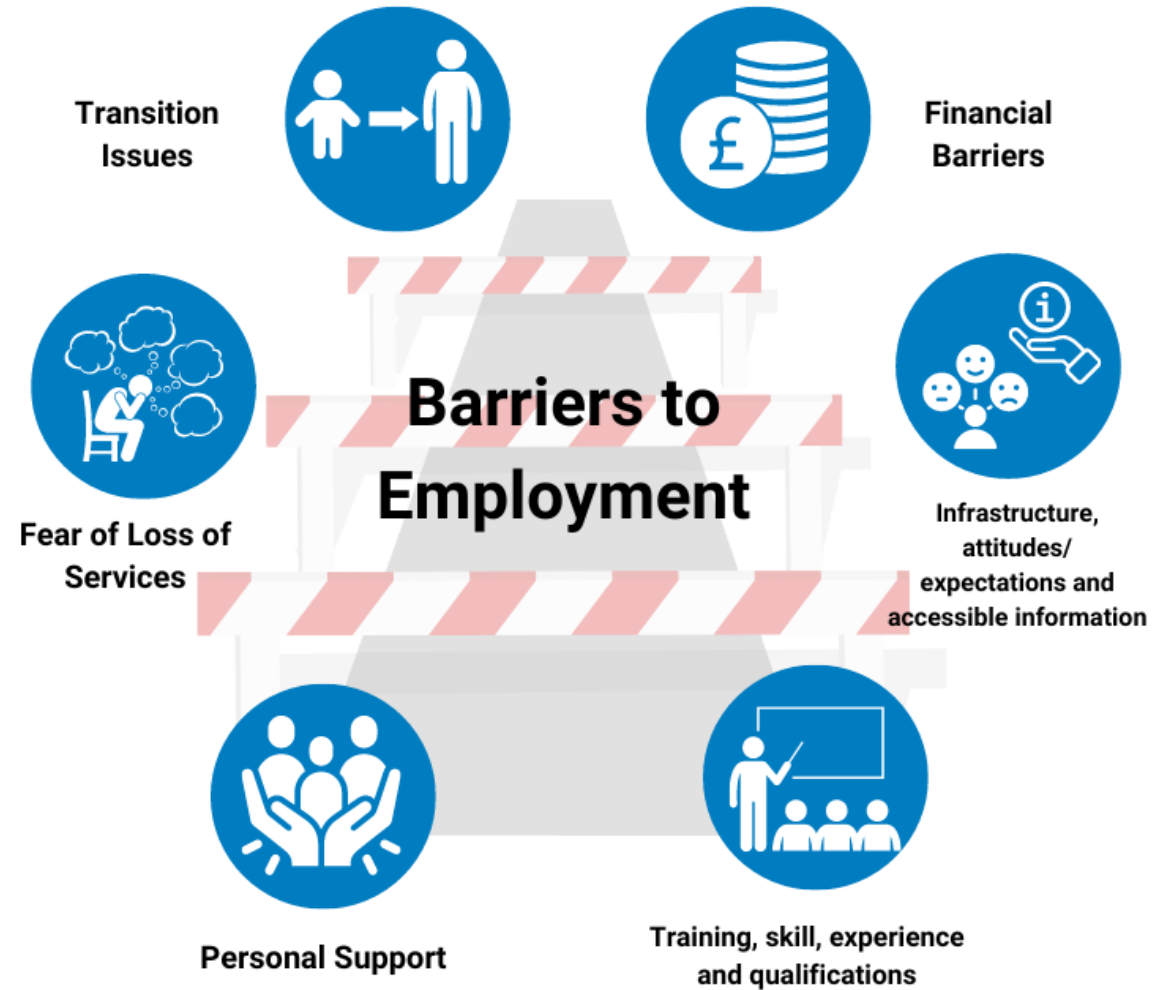
Why this Strategy is Important

In 2020-21, the proportion of adults with a learning disability in paid employment in England was 5.1%. In North-West England that figure lowers to 4.5%. In Wirral that figure lowers further still to 3.1%. In 2022/23, Wirral reported a marginal improvement of 4.4% against national average of 5.1% with best performing authorities achieving 21.5%, and the best performing authorities in the Northwest achieving 10.5%.¹

- ❖ Mapping identified 21 project operating across Wirral
- ❖ Only 5 did not define an age range under 30
- ❖ Only 6 identify supporting people with learning disability, social care or health need.

In addition to the statistical information, qualitative feedback indicates whilst there are pockets of good practice across Wirral, there remains employment barriers for care leavers, people with support and care needs. – these are illustrated in diagram adjacent.

Through continual collaboration with people with lived experience and key stakeholders, the objectives listed on pages 9 – 13 aims to address these barriers over the next five years.

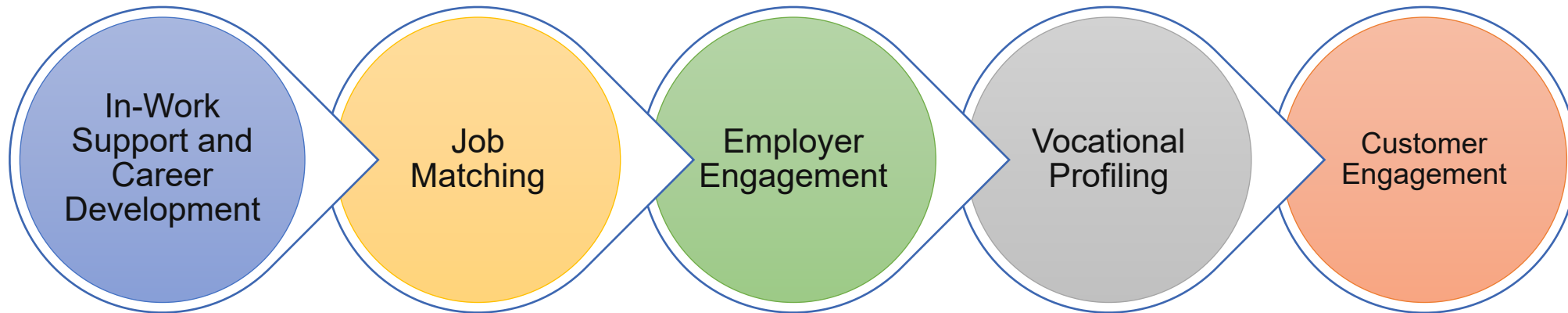


1. <https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/lgastandard?mod-metric=10672&mod-area=E08000015&mod-group=ADASSRegions&mod-type=comparisonGroupTypeee>

Our Approach

Supported Employment model* is well recognised and focuses on enhancing individuals' skills, confidence, work experience and general employability, leading to job outcomes. **Place, Train and Maintain** is at the heart of the model. It means placing people in work at the earliest opportunity, training them to do the job in the way the employer wants it done, and providing ongoing support to maintain them in the job.

Where possible, we will follow this model which has been effective in supported employment programmes and encourages employers, advisors and individuals to work together to enable the best outcomes for care leavers and adults with care and support needs across Wirral.



*The Five Stages of the [Supported Employment Model](#) model

Our Collective Offer

We will:

- ✓ Primarily target care leavers and individuals with care and support needs who are eligible for support from social care.
- ✓ Deliver evidenced based outcomes so the individual's journey towards employment can be tracked, progress measured, and services continually improved to meet needs.
- ✓ Provide or support access for the individual to become work ready, access employment and sustain their job.
- ✓ Provide or support access to a range of innovative employment options and meaningful activities to meet the employment needs of the individual, enabling them to live independently and support themselves as appropriate.
- ✓ Deliver a sustainable supported employment service that levers in alternative funding streams and minimises any duplication to services available in the community.
- ✓ Apply good practice models of supported employment e.g. individual Placement Support and Supported Employment Models to suit the needs of the individual.
- ✓ Provide a service which is organised and located to facilitate maximum referrals from relevant professionals and easily accessed by people who need support.
- ✓ Forge effective operational partnerships with other internal and external employment support services to ensure individuals access appropriate and available resources and services to meet their employment needs.
- ✓ Offer support that is holistic and flexible and enables individuals a choice from a range of activities or support (e.g. one to one, online advice) that suits their personal needs.
- ✓ Support volunteering as useful route for some individuals towards work and helping people to get their 'foot in the door' whilst creating a culture that recognises that volunteering is a stepping stone, not an end goal to ensure individuals are encouraged to progress further where possible.

Key Objectives and Actions

Objective 1: Ensure people with care and support needs have direct support to gain and sustain employment, and clearly outline the role of Wirral Borough Council and its key partners to deliver this

Headline priority outcomes:

- To review and cost delivery models for a specialist employment support service and identify the preferred option for launching in 2025. This will include the review of the role of Wirral Borough Council and the contribution of other stakeholders.
- Review and create effective referral pathways and ensure all professionals can make quick and easy referrals.
- Ensure individuals are assessed and that they are referred to the most appropriate service to meet their needs, with appropriate signposting to other services where necessary.
- Establish protocol to ensure that all eligible young people and adults have a clear route to access professional support if required.
- To ensure the supported employment service has staff with the right training and skills required for delivering customised employment support and welfare advice, as recommended by BASE.
- Consolidate employment pathways for care leavers and adults with health and social care needs and maximise access to these pathways for individuals to achieve employment outcomes.
- Ensure availability of more intensive one-to-one support for those individuals further away from the labour market to help them look for and apply for jobs.
- Providing good financial assessment of the benefits of an individual moving into work, raising awareness of options such as part-time and flexible working through DWP partners



Key Objectives and Actions

Objective 2: Ensure job seekers are confident, prepared and motivated to find work

It is evident that people supported, and professionals lack an awareness of the organisations providing employment support and advice and a lack of understanding between organisations of the roles each play and what they could offer. To create confident job-seekers we need to **offer people correct, timely and tailored information so they can pro-actively consider employment and plan their career**. We also need to ensure people progress to meaningful employment.

Headline priority outcomes:

- Improve information on the Council's website so we have updated information and advice on employment support, finding jobs, volunteering, work experience opportunities and apprenticeships.
- Embed employment aspirations and experience of the world of work into care pathways and plans (e.g. Early Help Records and Plans; Care Management Plans; Education, Health and Care Plans) so individuals are appropriately guided and supported to access training and employment to meet their needs.
- Inform, encourage and support social care and education workforce to understand employment as a viable option for young people and adults with care and support needs
- For Assessments, Education Health and Care Plans, Support and Care Plans to include specific goals for supporting progression to employment from an early age.
- (Conduct 'travel to work' risk assessments and support eligible individuals to receive travel training where appropriate so they can travel to work independently.
- Support activities that develop relevant skills for employment (e.g. training or education and volunteering opportunities) with appropriate support to ensure progression.
- Signpost to advisers, job coaches and support workers to help individuals liaise with employers as well as help prepare CV's, job applications and covering letters.



Key Objectives and Actions

Objective 3: Ensure employers are confident to employ people with care and support needs

The Council will work with all partners and stakeholders, in particular local employers, to promote the benefits that employing people with care and support needs bring to the business and to understand any barriers to recruiting and retaining people such needs as employees.

Headline priority outcomes:

- Work with DWP and other stakeholders such as existing employer networks to raise employers' awareness of the benefits of employing young people and adults with care and support needs with a particular focus on learning disability
- Raise awareness of the support services that are available to employers such as Access to Work
- Create case studies that demonstrate the benefits for employers and the support they can access
- Identify and share good practice from 'supportive' employers
- Encourage employers to adopt recruitment and selection approaches that support individuals with additional needs, e.g. use working interviews and work trials rather than interviews. Consider 'job carving'
- Ensure that Supported Employment Services commissioned and used have good employer engagement resources and specialist in-work support staff so that sustainable employment can be achieved



Key Objectives and Actions

Objective 4: Ensure the transition process from age 14 fosters a culture of high expectations and provides high-quality person-centred planning with clear pathways to employment

The Council will work with partners to help young people aspire to and explore employment as a way of improving their quality of life as they prepare for adulthood.

Headline priority outcomes:

- To ensure robust and effective personalised transition planning is in place to encourage and support young people to move from education to employment
- To ensure employment features strongly in information provided to young people and families/carers when they are planning their post-school future.
- Provide more opportunities for open work experience and apprenticeships for care leavers and school and college students with health and social care needs
- Support care leavers and young people with special educational needs to understand and realise their aspirations and ensure the right support is put in place for them
- Join the transition strategic group that includes key stakeholder from departments, service and schools to agree set of principles and protocols for all to agree and work too. Ensure equality of opportunity for all.



Key Objectives and Actions

Objective 5: Ensure the workforce has the skills, knowledge and competencies to effectively deliver the supported employment offer

Headline priority outcomes:

- Ensure that the providers and services that are funded to delivery of the supported employment strategy will have well trained people who are knowledgeable, aspirational and skilled to make progression into paid employment a reality.
- Explain and promote understanding about what Supported Employment means, what support is available, and the established referral and employment pathways.
- Develop staff to ensure people have the right skills and knowledge and the right tools available to deliver the Supported Employment Offer.
- Support staff to work collaboratively with partners to understand each other's roles in making employment an achievable goal for both people with disabilities and young people leaving care.
- Provide people with skilled and compassionate job coaches, advisers or support workers.
- Work to build good trusting relationships between individual and the advisers and staff supporting them, ensuring good understanding of the person's condition or disability.

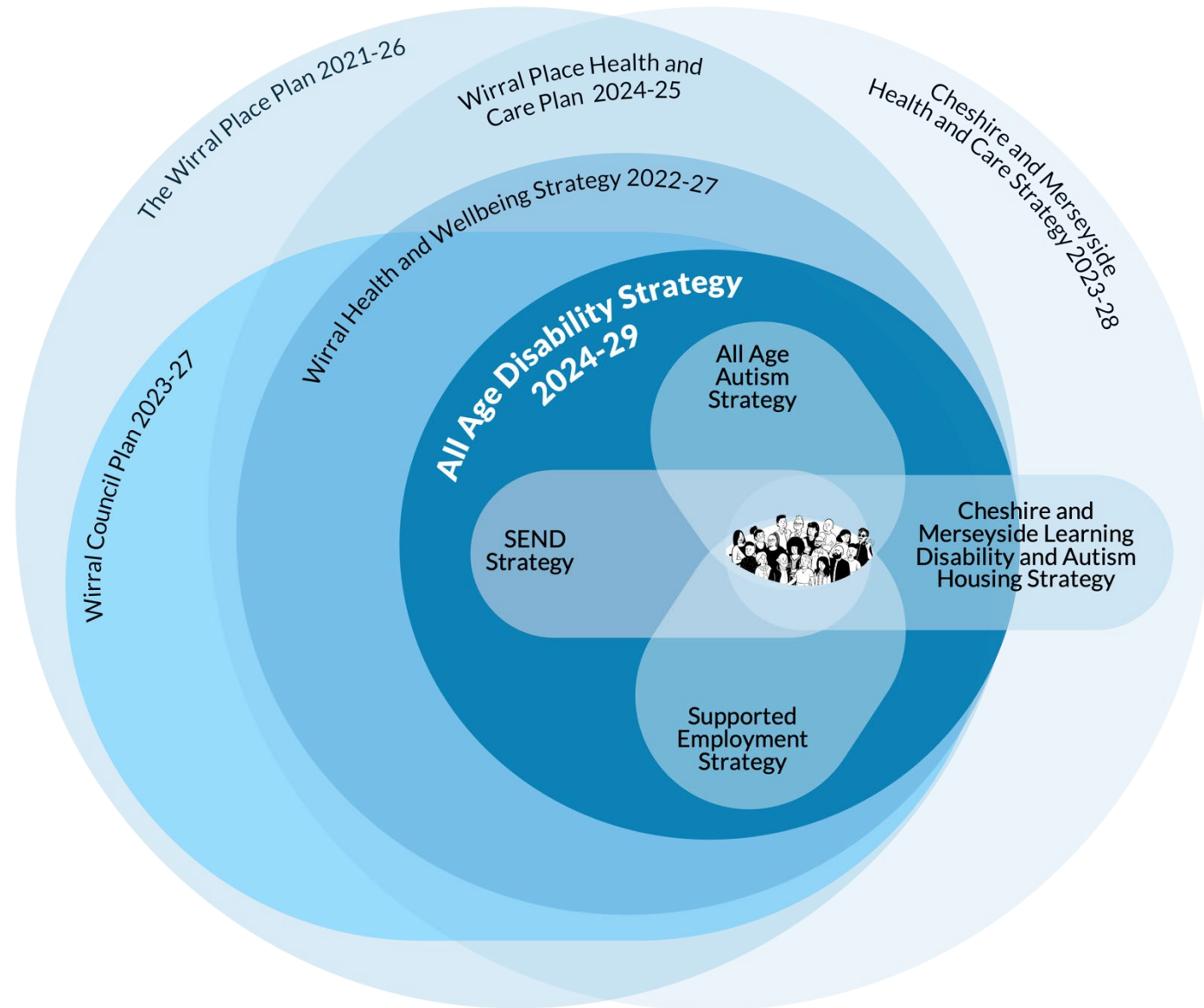


How this Strategy Links with Other Strategies

There are lots of other strategies in place across Wirral as well as across Cheshire, Merseyside and the Liverpool City Region.

This Diagram shows how these strategies and plans overlap, and where this **Supported Employment Strategy** fits among this.

This is not an exhaustive list but shows how this strategy contributes to other strategies and plans that centre around Wirral residents.



How will we know we have made a difference?

A robust performance framework will be developed and implemented by all providers.

Progress against all key performance indicators will be monitored by the Supported Employment Strategy Group and reported to the All-Age Disability Partnership Board, Adult Health Social Care and Public Health Committee and Wirral Place Board as appropriate.



Next Steps

A detailed measurable and realistic action plan will be coproduced to sit alongside this strategy setting out how we will work in partnership with our key stakeholder to ensure successful implementation of the five key objectives outlined on 9 – 13.

Document produced 2024 by Wirral Adult Social Care, All Age Independence and Provider Services

In Partnership With

