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Council Size Submission

This report is the submission of Wirral Borough Council (the Council) to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (LGBCE) on its proposals for Council Size.

JUNE 2024



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A. INTRODUCTION

- i. The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (Commission) informed Wirral Council in 2022 that a review of the Council's warding pattern would be undertaken. Given that the Council had resolved in February 2022 to move to Whole Council Elections (which were subsequently held in May 2023) it was agreed that the review would commence in 2024. The outcome of the review would then be communicated to the Council in the summer of 2025 and recommendations would be implemented in readiness for the Local Authority Election scheduled for May 2027. The review covers the entire Borough of Wirral.
- ii. The review consists of a number of stages. The first stage is the consideration of the existing Council Size, with a view to ensuring an efficient and effective structure is in place. In making its proposals, the Commission will apply the following statutory criteria:
 - The need to secure electoral equality (a consistent number of electors per Councillor)
 - Community identity (strong ward boundaries that reflect communities); and
 - Securing effective and convenient local government (coherent wards)
- iii. The Commission's decision on Council Size will be used to inform the second stage of the review, which will consider the size and number of Wards, Ward names, Ward boundaries and the number of Councillors to represent each Ward.
- iv. This Council Size submission is presented on behalf of the four political groups represented on the Council: Labour, Conservative, Greens, and Liberal Democrats. The submission is accompanied by a letter signed by all four group leaders.

SUBMISSION SUMMARY

Members of the Council were fully briefed and engaged in preparing the Council Size submission. The four political Group Leaders of Wirral Council are of the view that there **should not be a reduction** in the number of Members who sit on Wirral Council. The best interests of the Council and the residents of Wirral can be served by **66** Members of the Council.

B. LOCAL AUTHORITY PROFILE

- i. The Metropolitan Borough of Wirral in its present form was established in 1974 as part of the re-organisation of Local Government in England and Wales. The area is

one of strong contrasts, housing 323,200 people covering the northern sixty square miles of the peninsula between the Dee and Mersey estuaries and the Irish Sea to the north. There has been a 0.1% growth in population from 2011 where the population of the borough was 319,783. The City of Liverpool sits across the Mersey to the east, as do the southern parts of the Metropolitan Borough of Sefton. The County of Flintshire in North Wales is across the Dee to the west and inland to the south lies the district of Cheshire West and Chester Council. The setting of the Borough is distinctive, as a peninsula surrounded by sites of national and international importance for nature conservation which extend to the estuaries, foreshore and coastal waters.

- ii. The urban core of the east, towns of the north and west, and villages of the central belt sit within this unique backdrop of the waterfront and countryside that define the sense of place as much as the settlements themselves and provide many breathtaking viewpoints. The Borough's suburban towns and villages are surrounded by stunning beaches and open countryside with areas of special landscape value and varied wildlife, with many beautiful and iconic views. There is strong contrast between the older, highly urbanised areas of the east, in particular Birkenhead which contains some of the poorest communities in England, and the wealthier commuter settlements in the west.
- iii. The Borough is home to over 7,400 businesses providing employment for 111,000 people. However, economically the Borough displays some disadvantage. Whilst economic activity rates are currently above the National average at 80.6% compared to 78.9% of the working age population, GVA per head is comparatively low against the UK, and average wages also lower than surrounding areas. Less than two thirds of residents living in the Borough also work here. The largest outward flow of people to work is from the western and southern fringes of the Borough and the majority of residents travel to work by car.
- iv. The population projections, produced by the Office for National Statistics, show that the population of Wirral is projected to increase by 4% from 323,200 to 336,300 by 2043. The overall increase hides the large variations between age groups. For example, the number of people aged 90+ is estimated to increase from 3,400 in 2018 to 6,700 in 2043. This will have profound implications for health and social care services.
- v. The proportion of people of working age, particularly younger adults, is at its highest in the central and inner areas of Wirral where housing is more affordable and jobs and services more accessible. The proportion of children is also higher in east Wirral. The proportion of older age groups is generally higher in the west.
- vi. The majority of the housing stock is aged with 30% of homes built prior to 1929, 41% between 1930 – 1966, 19% between 1967 and 1982 and only 10% have been built since 1983. The housing stock is mostly privately owned with 15% social housing. Vacancy is a problem with over 3% of the total housing stock vacant at the time of writing. Whilst the efforts of many regeneration initiatives have improved the housing stock over time, 8.7% of households are estimated to be in housing need.
- vii. Wirral is as diverse as it is distinctive. It is a place of disparities. Some of the most affluent wards sit side by side with some of the most deprived wards, both nationally and on Wirral. There are significant inequalities in income and life expectancy

depending on your Wirral postcode. The Indices of Deprivation (also known as the Index of Multiple Deprivation or IMD) is a measure of relative deprivation at a small area level covering all 32,844 Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) in England. It measures how deprived an area is compared to all other areas of England. It is an important tool to identify disadvantaged areas. Areas are usually referred to as deprived if they fall into among the most deprived quintile (20%) of areas in England. Deprivation covers a broad range of issues and refers to unmet need caused by a lack of resources of all kinds, not just financial resources.

- viii. In 2019, Wirral was ranked the 77th most deprived authority (of 317 authorities) in England (1 the being most deprived, 317 the least deprived). Wirral is not in the 20% most deprived of authorities in 2019 overall, although there are many areas of severe deprivation in certain areas of Wirral (largely in the East of the borough). The population of those Wirral LSOAs (n=72) classified as being amongst the 20% most deprived nationally is around 115,500, just over 35% of the Wirral population. Approximately 83,000 of those residents live in the 10% most deprived area nationally.

Deprivation is concentrated in the east of the Borough in Birkenhead, Bidston, Seacombe and Rock Ferry. Notable pockets of deprivation in the south and west of Wirral include the Mill Park area of Eastham, the Acre Lane area of Bromborough, Prenton Dell in Prenton, Woodchurch, Overchurch, Moreton, Leasowe and the Greenbank Road area of West Kirby.

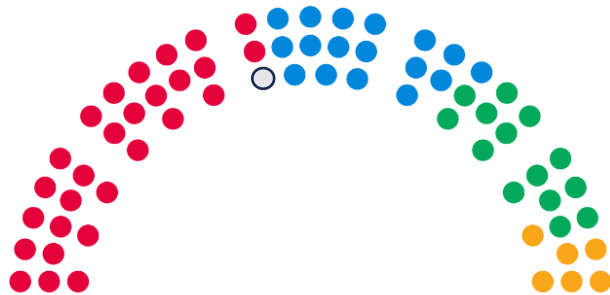
- ix. As with many other Authorities, the Council has faced significant financial challenges in recent years as well as the demands associated with the Covid pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, the Council had commenced its improvement journey in 2019 with a new Chief Executive and Council Plan, alongside an ambition to transform the Borough's economic position through bold plans for investment and regeneration. Politically, the Council changed its governance arrangements in September 2020 moving from a Leader/Cabinet model to a Committee system.
- x. The Council has taken pivotal steps to become an organisation that despite all the social and economic challenges it faces, is in a better position to best serve its residents through developing a programme to bring about transformational change and by setting a budget that removes the budget deficit, establishing a strong foundation for achieving financial stability. Wirral now stands at a pivotal moment, presented with difficult decisions, but also an opportunity to define an exciting and ambitious future. Political Groups have worked together under the new political arrangements adopting a new Council Plan 2023-2027 in December 2023 and setting a balanced budget in February 2024 directly linking the medium-term financial plan to the desired outcomes of the Council Plan.
- xi. Delivery of the Council Plan 2023-2027 focuses on the Council being well-led with good collaboration and cooperation between Political Group Leaders and Chief Officers. This will ensure there is collective responsibility for taking the right decisions for the long-term financial stability of the Council with improved accountability for members and officers implementing those decisions. The Council Plan is reliant on elected members being empowered, confident decision makers and all staff having the understanding and skills to help deliver it. The Council's Member Learning & Development Strategy and the People Strategy will support this goal. Crucially,

oversight on the delivery of the Council Plan objectives is embedded in the governance arrangements of performance reporting to Committees.

POLITICAL COMPOSITION AND ELECTORAL CYCLE

- i. The Council is made up of 66 Members with 22 Wards. Three Councillors represent each of the wards. The Council held Whole Council Elections in May 2023. The current composition of the Council is summarised below:

- Labour – 28 seats
- Conservative – 17 seats
- The Green Party – 14 seats
- Liberal Democrats – 6 seats
- Vacancy - 1 seat.



- ii. Wirral MBC is a Council with **no overall control** (NOC). The next scheduled election is due to be held in **May 2027**.

C. GOVERNANCE & DECISION MAKING

THE COMMITTEE SYSTEM

- i. The Council established a committee form of governance through the adoption of a new constitution at the Council's Annual Meeting in September 2020. Under its governance arrangements decisions are made by full Council, Policy & Services

Committees or by Regulatory Committees. The Council has resolved to not establish any Overview and Scrutiny Committees. It is worth noting that the Council undertook a further review of its governance arrangement following a peer challenge co-ordinated by the Local Government Association. The current committee structure was agreed at the Annual Council Meeting in May 2022 and saw a reduction in the number of Committees compared to what was adopted in September 2020. There are currently six Committees responsible for the Council's policy making and the management of its resources, known as executive functions, and these are referred to as the Policy & Services Committees:

- Policy & Resources Committee
- Adult Social Care & Public Health Committee
- Children, Young People and Education Committee
- Economy, Regeneration & Housing Committee
- Environment, Climate Emergency & Transport Committee
- Tourism, Communities, Culture & Leisure Committee

There are a number of other Committees that make decisions in respect to regulatory and quasi-judicial matters. These include:

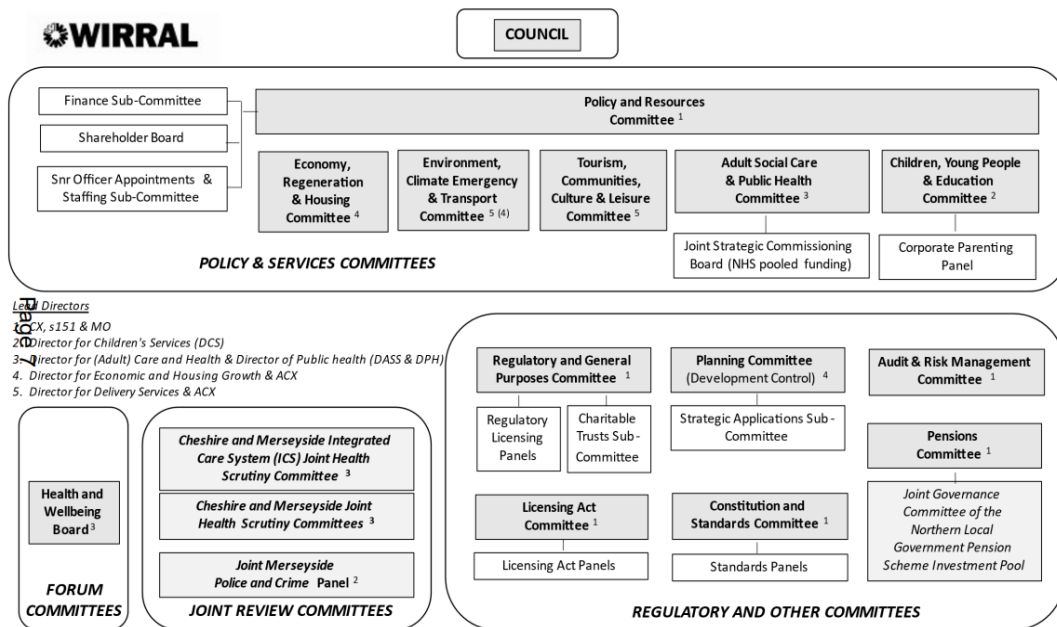
- Audit & Risk Management Committee
- Constitution & Standards Committee
- Health & Wellbeing Board
- Pensions Committee
- Place Based Partnership Board
- Planning Committee
- Regulatory and General Purposes Committee

- ii. The Committee meeting programme is approved each year at Annual Council. The number of Committee meetings is listed below but it should be noted that on occasion additional Committee meetings are inserted into the programme to deal with urgent issues or to help with agenda management. Notably, Members make significant contributions to Working Groups and Task & Finish Groups which are not captured in the formal meeting calendar below. The six Policy and Services Committees collectively held **63** working group/task& finish groups in 2023/2024.

Council/Committee	No of meetings in municipal year 2023/2024
Full Council	7
Policy & Resources	8
Adult Social Care and Public Health	7
Children, Young People and Education	7
Economy, Regeneration and Housing	7
Environment, Climate Emergency & Transport	8
Tourism, Communities, Culture and Leisure	7

Audit and Risk management	5
Constitution and Standards	4
Licensing Act Committee	2
Regulatory and General Purposes	4
Pensions Committee	4
Planning Committee	11
Health and Wellbeing Board	4
Place Based Partnership Board	9
Finance Sub Committee	7
Senior Officer and Appointments Staffing Sub-Committee	5
Strategic Applications	0
Shareholder Board	1
Corporate Parenting Panel	1
Charitable Trusts Sub-Committee	1
Licensing Act Sub Committee	11
Licensing Panel	16
Total	136

iii. The Council committee structure can be seen below:



THE SCHEME OF DELEGATION

iv. All matters which have not been reserved to Council or a Committee are delegated to Officers. Each Chief Officer, in consultation with Committees of the Council as may

be required, must develop and maintain a Scheme of Authorisation for their Directorate, which is published on the Council's website as required by Section 100G of the Local Government Act 1972.

- v. Policy and Resources Committee is the principal committee of the Council and is made up of the Leader as Chair, the Deputy Leader as Vice-Chair and the Chairs of the other Policy & Services Committees as members of the Committee, together with other Members of the Council as determined by the Council and as may be required to achieve political balance. The other Policy & Services Committees are made up of a Chair, Vice-Chair and other councillors as determined by the Council.
- vi. Each of the Committees is empowered to create Panels, Forums, Working Groups, Liaison and Task & Finish Groups to undertake in-depth policy work. Their purpose of these working groups is to examine in detail specific issues or aspects of policy, procedure or service, according to their remit. These groups do not take any decisions but inform the deliberations of the committees. Notably, their membership may include councillors from each party, non-councillors by invitation and, occasionally, employees.

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

- vii. The Council has a number of statutory scrutiny functions, and these are incorporated into the Policy & Services Committees' functions or delegated to joint committees where these functions are shared with other authorities in the region. The Council has delegated specific statutory external scrutiny functions, in respect of health, crime and disorder, and flood prevention, to individual Committees as follows:
 - For those overview and scrutiny functions in respect of the Health and Social Care Act 2006 – Adult Social Care & Public Health Committee
 - In respect to the Police and Justice Act 2006 – Tourism, Communities, Culture & Leisure Committee
 - For flood risk management and coastal erosion management functions – Environment, Climate Emergency & Transport Committee
- viii. Wirral Members also play a full part in scrutiny at a Liverpool City Region level, in accordance with the established joint arrangements across the Liverpool City Region, or the Liverpool City Region and Cheshire as the case may be.
- ix. All Policy Committees have conferred upon them overview and scrutiny powers. The Committees may undertake enquiries and investigate the available options for future direction in policy development and may appoint advisors and assessors to assist them in this process. They may go on site visits, conduct public surveys, hold public meetings, commission research and do all other things that they reasonably consider necessary to inform their deliberations.
- x. The Committees hold responsibility for scrutinising and reviewing decisions made or actions taken by the Authority in so far as they have an impact on the role or functions of the Committee, its policies, budget and service delivery.

OTHER COMMITTEES

- xi. There are a number of *other* Committees with decision making powers who carry out a mixture of regulatory, statutory and administrative functions. These include the

Planning Committee, the Regulatory and Licensing Committees, Audit & Risk Management Committee, Pensions Committee and the Constitution & Standards Committee.

- xii. The Health and Wellbeing Board is also a Committee of the Council made up of Councillors, but also officers of the Council and representatives from local health based or related organisations. It is a statutory forum required for discussing shared health and wellbeing issues and concerns.
- xiii. The Planning Committee acts as the administrative committee responsible for making decisions as local planning authority on planning applications, development control and similar regulatory matters, which are more particularly described as functions relating to town and country planning and development control and related matters as set out at Schedule 1 of the Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 (as amended). The Committee typically meets 11-12 times per municipal year. Furthermore, a Strategic Applications Sub Committee has been established with membership drawn from the parent Committee. The subcommittee considers applications on large scale developments and significant applications by Wirral Borough Council to develop any land owned by the Council.
- xiv. The Regulatory & General Purposes Committee is responsible for making decisions as the licensing and registration authority on all regulatory matters not otherwise delegated to the Planning Committee or reserved to the Licensing Act Committee. A subcommittee of Regulatory & General Purposes Committee is Licensing Act Sub-Committee which meets on average 11 times per year and also a Licensing Panel which meets on average 14 times per year. Licensing Sub Committee averages half a day per application and Licensing Panel usually sits for a full day. These Panels are arranged on an ad hoc basis as and when applications require determination. Members of the Panel and Sub-Committee are derived from the parent Committee and 3-5 members will sit each time, varying dependent upon availability.
- xv. The Audit and Risk Management Committee is a key component of Wirral Council's corporate governance. It provides an independent and high-level focus on the audit, assurance and reporting arrangements that underpin good governance and financial standards. The Committee provides independent assurance on the adequacy of the risk management framework and the associated control environment, independent scrutiny of the Council's financial and non-financial performance to the extent that it affects the Council's exposure to risk and weakens the control environment, and to oversee the financial reporting process. It oversees internal audit and external audit, helping to ensure efficient and effective assurance arrangements are in place. The Committee meets 4 times per year.
- xvi. The Pensions Committee is responsible for exercise on behalf of the Council all of the powers and duties of the Council in relation to its functions as Administering Authority of the Merseyside Pension Fund. The Committee meets 4 times per year.
- xvii. The Constitution and Standards Committee is responsible for overseeing the operation of the Council's Constitution and for promoting and maintaining high standards of ethical conduct and probity within the Council, including the exercise of all functions of the Authority in relation to ethical standards and, in particular, those

under Chapter 7 of the Localism Act 2011. It comprises of 7 Councillors and meets 4 times per year.

MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

- i. As the Council operates a Committee System, no formal legal powers and duties are vested in the Leader, Deputy Leader or any other Member of the Council under the Local Government Act 1972 or the Local Government Act 2000. In effect all 66 Members of the Council are decision makers. Who makes the decisions and how is determined by the Council Scheme of Delegation. However, there are a number of key positions which members occupy within the Council structure which are significant both in respect to leadership but also influence. These include:

THE LEADER

- ii. The Leader still has a pivotal role to play. All local authorities need to appoint a councillor to hold the most significant elected Member role within the Council, to be seen as the political head of the Council and to provide a focal point for political leadership and strategic direction for the Council, both within the Authority but also to outside organisations, partners, governmental bodies and the community at large.
- iii. In Wirral, the Leader is also the Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee and the Council's representative Member to the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority. The Leader provides a focal point for political leadership and strategic direction for the Council and ensures effective Corporate Governance and ethical conduct throughout the Council.
- iv. Key Responsibilities of the Leader include being the key contact for outside organisations such as including Central Government, Local Authority Associations and Council partners and internally for the Council's Chief Officers. The Leader promotes the long-term financial, business and economic stability of the Council and the Borough and meets regularly with the Chief Officers, Group Leaders, partner organisations, stakeholders, community representatives, government representatives, local Members of Parliament. A key element of the role is to promote high standards of corporate governance and ethical conduct throughout the Council including working with all political groups to seek to achieve, where possible, cross-party co-operation.

THE DEPUTY LEADER

- v. The Deputy Leader is the Council appointed Vice-Chair of the Policy and Resources Committee and is the substitute Constituent Council Member of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (unless another Member of the Council is so appointed) .The Deputy Leader assists the Leader of the Council in representing the Council to its citizens, stakeholders and partners and in providing political leadership for the Council and the Borough and assists the Leader in carrying out the key

responsibilities associated with the role of Leader. Ultimately, the Deputy undertakes the powers, functions and responsibilities of the Leader in their absence.

POLITICAL GROUP LEADERS

- vi. Political groups, and the leader (and any deputy group leader) of a political group, have a formal role under the provisions of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and The Local Government (Committees and Political Groups) Regulations 1990 in respect of political balance of committees and appointments of the Council.
- vii. The Council acknowledges the key leadership role played by the leaders of all political groups on the Council and the importance of their commitment to cross-party working. The role and responsibilities of Political Group Leaders include providing the leadership of a political group, acting as the principal political spokesperson for the political group, nominating members of their Group to serve on Committees, Working Groups, outside bodies, etc. Political Group Leaders also act as a representative voice in dealings with government agencies, local authority associations and similar to the Leader of the Council, they have a responsibility to encourage the highest standards of conduct by members of the group. They also maintain effective liaison with the other group leaders, including being a member of an informal Group Leaders' meeting, attending Group Leaders' briefings and have effective working relationships with the Chief Officers and other senior officers.
- viii. Chairs of Committees lead the work of the committee and make sure it carries out its business effectively and efficiently, lawfully and within its terms of reference. They chair meetings of the committee impartially and in such a way as to facilitate open discussion, obtain valid contributions from members and produce sound decisions and assist the public and press in terms of their rights of access. The Chair of a Committee leads on the agenda management process for the Committee in association with the Vice-Chair and Group Spokespersons and acts as consultee and spokesperson for their committee in instances of exercise of delegated authority by an officer.
- ix. In order to fulfil their role effectively, Chairs are required to have a working knowledge of the functions, policies, practices, procedures, services and budgets of the Committee which they chair. Also, to lead in the development of the work of the Committee which includes the review of service delivery, policy development and in the implementation of policies. The Chair acts as the Council's lead spokesperson in respect of the Committee's activities and act in liaison with the Leader and Deputy Leader in matters of Council policy. As with the Leader and Group Leaders, Committee Chairs are expected to promote and uphold high standards of ethical conduct by the Council's Members and officers. They are supported by Vice Chairs and Political Group Spoke persons.

THE MEMBER ALLOWANCES SCHEME

- i. The Council in exercise of the powers conferred by the Local Authorities (Members' Allowances) (England) Regulations 2003, following the recommendations of the

Independent Remuneration Panel adopted a scheme which made a basic allowance provision of £9684.22 which is one of the lowest allowances compared to Council's across the city region and notably when compared against statistical neighbours. Remuneration for Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA) is detailed below.

Role	SRA - £
Leader of the Council (Chair of P&R)	24,969.60
Deputy Leader of the Council (Vice Chair of P&R)	12,484.80
Leader of the Largest Group (if not Leader of the Council)	14,981.76
Leader of the Second Largest Group (Comprising of at least 4 members and if not Leader of the Council)	14,981.76
Leader of the Third Largest Group (Comprising of at least 4 members and if not Leader of the Council)	7,490.88
Leader of the Fourth Largest Group (Comprising of at least 4 members and if not leader of the Council)	4,993.92
Leader of Other Groups (Comprising of at least 4 members and if not Leader of the Council)	1,248.48
Deputy Leader of the Largest group (if not Deputy Leader of the Council)	12,484.80
Deputy Leader of the Second Largest group (Comprising of at least 6 members and if not Deputy Leader of the Council)	7,490.88
Deputy Leader of the third largest group (Comprising at least 6 members and if not Deputy Leader of the Council)	3,745.44
Deputy Leader of the fourth largest group (comprising of at least 6 members and if not Deputy Leader of the Council)	2,496.96
Deputy Leader of Other Groups (Comprising of at least 6 Members and if not Deputy Leader of the Council)	624.24
Mayor of Wirral	12,484.80
Deputy Mayor of Wirral	2,496.96
Chairs of the Policy and Services Committees (x5)	9,987.84
Finance Sub Chair	4,993.92
Chair of Planning Committee	4,993.92
Chair of Regulatory and General Purposes Committee / Licensing Act Committee (combined Chair role)	4,993.92
Chair of Audit and Risk Management Committee	4,993.92
Chair of Constitution and Standards Committee	4,993.92
Chair of Pensions Committee	3,745.44
Merseyside Recycling and Waste Authority representative (x2)	1,908.09
Liverpool City Region Transport Committee*(x4) *Increase this SRA by 4,612.09 if also made a Lead Member OR increase this SRA by 2,767.46 if made Opposition Spokesperson	5,904.27

- ii. Currently 29 members of the Council are in receipt of a Special Responsibility Allowance. Members are also able to claim an allowance for Carers responsibilities as well as for travel and subsistence when on council approved duties.

D. COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP & MEMBERS' CASEWORK

- i. Community leadership sits at the heart of modern local government as Council's work in partnership with communities and organisations. Councillors have a lead role in developing a vision for their local area, working collaboratively with partners to improve services and the quality of life for the residents they serve and represent.

The primary role of a Councillor is to represent their ward and provide a bridge between the community and the council. Residents expect Councillors to:

- Respond to their queries and investigate their concerns (casework)
 - Communicate council decisions that affect them.
 - Know their local area and be aware of any problems.
 - Know and work with representatives of local organisations, interest groups and businesses.
 - Represent resident's views at council meetings.
 - Lead local campaigns on resident's behalf.
- ii. The community leadership role for Members of Wirral Council is significant. Casework is complex and substantial in number and the communities are diverse. Councillors themselves have identified this workload as substantial in the Councillor Survey (see analysis below). Whilst technology assists in the quick resolution of casework, it also means that Councillors are much easier to access and can result in more rather than less workload.
- iii. Wirral Council has undertaken a significant amount of work in respect to Member Welfare. It has a Member Support Steering Group which oversees the welfare of Councillors. The Group is of the view that the ratio of electors to councillors should be such that there is easy access to elected representatives, but that Councillors should also have adequate time to devote to their duties without adversely impacting on their private lives. The actual time commitment will vary between councillors, dependent on their responsibilities and the area they are elected to represent. It should be noted that a significant number of Councillors hold full or part time employment.
- iv. Wirral Councillors also direct a small, discretionary community fund – *Individual Ward Member Budgets* – promoted externally as *Wirral Together Fund*. There is a £1000 allocation, per Member, to support activities which benefit local communities. Successful applications must meet either of the following criteria:
- improve the well-being of the local community in the Borough or its environment or economy.
 - a one-off expenditure with consideration given to future sustainability.
- v. Members are responsible for promoting the fund by engaging with community groups, organisations and /or individuals, to encourage them to apply to the Fund and determining applications. Council Officers support the administration processes of the Fund – criteria checks, processing and payment requests. In 2022/23 the Fund received 175 online applications, 128 of these were successful from 102 separate organisations.
- vi. Councillors frequently engage with community groups and civic society organisations in their role as political representatives and community champions. A number of Councillors are appointed to outside bodies which serve the communities across the Borough. There are in excess of 19 Conservation Area advisory Committees, multiple Community Centre joint managements Committees, multi-cultural

organisations, community safety partnerships and sixth form governing bodies of which Wirral Council appoints members at the Annual General Meeting.

Infographics produced from various member surveys.

Member Engagement Survey

To assist in providing a considered response, a survey of members was undertaken.

Survey Period: Feb 2024

Way of Collection: Survey link

Response Rate: 58%

Number of Councillors: 66



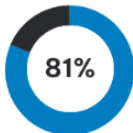
Total councillor responses received **38/66**



Put Simply - Wirral Councillors are busy Individuals!



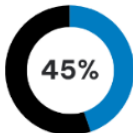
- 84% of respondents said they undertook supplementary Council roles, in addition to serving on a committee..



- 81% of respondents serve on two or more Council committees.



- 68% of respondents serve on a working party / panel or sub-group drawn from the parent committee.



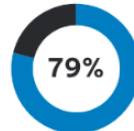
- 45% of respondents serve on Council appointed external bodies (e.g.: City Region Boards)



- 53% of respondents said they spend more time on Council business than they expected prior to being elected.



Shifting Community Engagement: Analyses of the member survey revealed



- 79% of respondents said their workload had increased since they were first elected.



- 53% of respondents said their workload was what they expected it to be, prior to being elected.



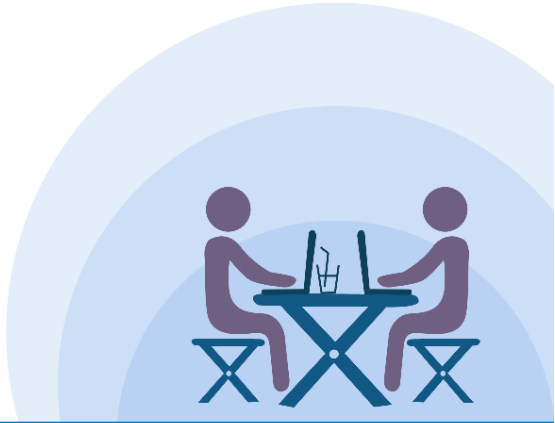
- 47% of respondents said their workload was more than they expected, prior to being elected.



- Zero respondents said their workload was less than they expected, prior to being elected.

Community engagement continues to form a significant element of the overall role of a councillor in Wirral. However, how councillors engage with residents has changed substantially significantly in recent years, primarily because of advances in technology and the emergence of social media.

WIRRAL



Casework Statistics

In 2022, Wirral Council created a Member Portal through which Councillors are able to manage their casework

The statistics drawn from the portal demonstrate the considerable work undertaken by Councillors.

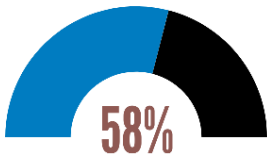


Reporting period
5th May 2023 – 21st March 2024
revealed:

8,642 Pieces of
Casework Logged

131 Per Councillor

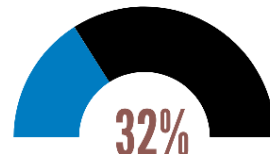
The hard work undertaken by Councillors was further reflected in the survey results:



58%
of respondents spent in excess of 5 hours a month attending surgeries.



ALL
Members indicated that they spent considerable time on political group activities with each month with 39% of respondents spending in excess of 10 hours per month.



32%
of respondents confirmed that they spent in excess of 20 hours per month on resident's enquiries and casework.

All 66 Members are appointed to a Committee of the Council

All Respondents

Indicated that they spent considerable time on political group activities with each month with **39%** of respondents spending in excess of 10 hours per month.



Understanding Members roles in Wirral Council.

Previous surveys of Members undertaken to assist in the development of a Member Learning & Development Strategy 2023-2027 provided useful further insights into the role of Councillors at Wirral.



Key findings included:



1

Experience Range

Whilst a significant number of members had over 8 years' experience as members of the Council, 50% of respondents had been Councillors for less than 2 years.



2

Diverse Roles

All Members who responded sat on a Council Committee and over 50% held the position of group spokes, vice chair or Chair of a Committee.



3

Employment Status

Over 50% of respondents indicated that they were either in Full time or part time employment.



4

Development Desire

There was a strong appetite amongst all Members for continued professional and personal development.



5

Technology Adoption

The survey showed that many Members were using technology to undertake casework and engage with residents but that many were keen to continue to develop their skill set.





(Image) – Mangan, Catherine; Needham, Catherine; Bottom, Karin and Parker, Steven (2016). The 21st Century Councillor. University of Birmingham.

EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS

- i. Service delivery has changed for councils over time, and many authorities now have a range of delivery partners to work with and hold to account. Political Group Leaders are responsible for nominating members of their Group to serve on Committees, Working Groups and Outside Bodies. The Council's Leader, Group Leaders and Committee Chairs therefore take on a number of these roles representing Wirral at External Partnerships and Outside Bodies. These range from decision-making, advisory, governing and representing the interests of Wirral/ the local authority type of roles at a borough, sub-regional, regional and national level. Workload varies based on the type of role held by the Member.
- ii. A total of 45 Councillors at Wirral Council are part of an external partnership or outside body. The majority of these roles are ward-level governing or advisory type roles that are undertaken by Members Elected from that Ward. External Partnerships that are at a strategic level at the Liverpool City Region are led by the Leader of the Council and relevant Committee Chairs/Members. Other national, regional and sub-regional partnerships, or outside bodies tend to have cross-party representation (usually attended by Group Leaders).
- iii. A comprehensive list and those Members appointed to them can be found on the Council Website. Members are appointed at the Annual Council Meeting.

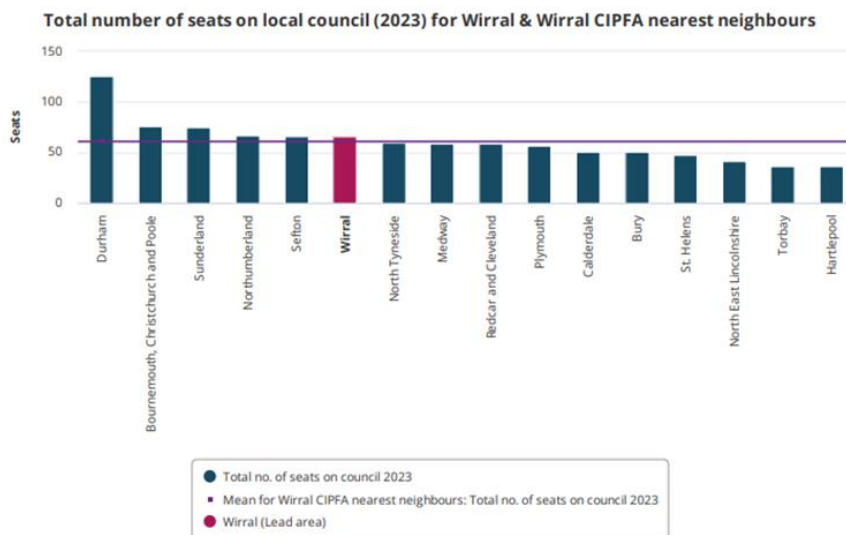
E. ELECTORAL FORECAST/ DEMOGRAPHICS

Comparative data with *statistical* neighbours and other Metropolitan Authorities

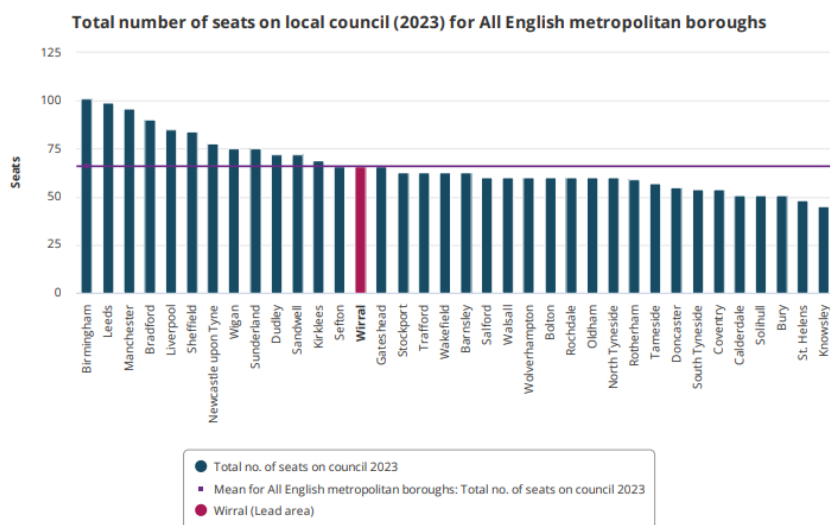
- i. The tables and the graph below taken from the Electoral Statistics for the UK (data is supplied by the ONS for Electoral registrations for parliamentary and local government elections as recorded in electoral registers for England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) reveals that when compared to statistical Local Authority neighbours, the number of residents represented by a Wirral Councillor is considerably higher than that of a Councillor at a statistically similar authority. Councillors elected to a number the Local Authorities listed represent between 1,500-2,500 residents. A Wirral Councillor represents 3,638 residents. It should be further noted that from the Councils listed below, only Hartlepool operate a committee system form of governance like Wirral.

Code	Local Government Areas	Electoral registrations December 2022	Council Seats	Registration / Seats
E0600004	County Durham	390,322	126	3,098
E0600005	Northumberland	251,575	67	3,755
E0600000	Hartlepool	70,465	36	1,957
E0600000	Redcar and Cleveland	101,576	59	1,722
E0600001	North East Lincolnshire	116,205	42	2,767
E0600002	Plymouth	194,965	57	3,420
E0600002	Torbay	104,100	36	2,892
E0600003	Medway	201,078	55	3,656
E0600005	Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole	297,772	76	3,918
E0800000	Bury	145,258	51	2,848
E0800001	St Helens	138,293	48	2,881
E0800001	Sefton	211,916	66	3,211
E0800001	Wirral	240,107	66	3,638
E0800002	North Tyneside	155,347	60	2,589
E0800002	Sunderland	206,916	75	2,759
E0800000	Calderdale	150,880	51	2,958

Further – the number of Council seats when compared to statistical neighbours is as follows:



And the number of Council seats when compared to other Metropolitan boroughs is as follows:



Source:
The Elections Centre

ELECTORAL FORECAST

- ii. The Local Authority is required to complete the Polling District Forecasting tool as part of the submission of LA data. A factor in the tool is the Office for National Statistics (ONS) population projections which is utilised alongside polling district data to generate the forecast.
- iii. Wirral Council officers reviewed the information included in the forecasting tool and highlighted some potential issues with the ONS data. The LGBC reviewed the evidence provided by Wirral and through an assessment of the effectiveness of the variants in the forecasting tool, provided a second version of the tool with updated ONS population projections. The tool was utilised with the **ONS annual Population estimates – local authority based by single year of age** (28th Nov 2023) and from this dataset a forecast of the 18+ population of Wirral was possible.
- iv. Comparisons of new variants of the Polling District forecast data and ONS mid-2018 based population estimates for 2022, 2023 and 2024, Wirral, Population Aged 18+ is detailed below:

Dataset	2022	2023	2024
New Forecasting Tool Polling District Forecast Data variant 1	256,763	257,150	257,537
New Forecasting Tool Polling District Forecast Data variant 2	256,763	257,276	257,789
ONS mid-2018 based populations	259,262	260,070	260,872

- v. Applying this to forecasting methodology to ascertain the 2030 electorate figure, in terms of testing both the variants using the sample data provided the headline figure for the

2030 electorate is as follows (note for the purpose of the calculation, the starting **total 2024 electorate is 243,694**):

- Variant 1 produced a final total electorate of 244,587 in 2030 or an increase of 894 electors (+0.37%)
- Variant 2 produced a final total electorate of 245,416 in 2030 or an increase of 1,723 electors (+0.71%)

As advised by the LGBCE, the use of variant 2 would be prudent. Consideration is given to the impact of housing developments in the next section; however, natural electorate population growth suggests an electorate in 2030 for Wirral to be **245,416 electors**.

HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

- vi. Crucial to identifying an accurate electorate figure for 2030 is to have regard to potential housing developments. The Council’s draft local plan forecast housing delivery through the production of a five-year housing land supply approximation. Through analysis of the allocated local sites in the Local Plan and approved planning applications it is possible to project the growth in specific polling districts and ascertain an estimated figure for 2030. In order to estimate the population, yield from new housing developments, following conversations and advice from the LGBC a ratio of x1.7 electors has been applied for each proposed dwelling. It should be further noted that only sites capable of deliver 18+ units have been included in the assessment.

The table below reflects the projection by polling district:

Housing Allocations and Committed Residential Sites

Polling Districts	Planning Allocations	Committed Residential Sites	Total	increase in Electors - Total X 1.7	Site Development
AD	0	23	23	39	Cleared Site, Beaufort Road, Birkenhead
AE	137	0	137	233	Vittoria Studios and Sky City, Duke Street, Birkenhead
AF	563	0	563	957	Vittoria Studios and Sky City, Duke Street, Birkenhead
BA	651	0	651	1107	WGC Town Centre, Plot E, Hemingworth Street, Birkenhead WGC Town Centre, Plot G, South of Conway Park Station, Birkenhead WGC Town Centre, Plot I and J, North of Conway Park Station, Birkenhead Land at Hind Street, Tranmere

BB	293	183	476	809	Rose Brae, Church Street, Woodside WGC Town Centre, Plot I and J, North of Conway Park Station, Birkenhead Land at Hind Street, Tranmere Atlantic House, Hamilton Street, Birkenhead, Wirral Lord Street & Cleveland Street, Birkenhead, CH41 6BL 76 Hamilton Street, Birkenhead, Wirral
BD	370	0	370	629	Land at Hind Street, Tranmere
BF	31	0	31	53	Former Gladstone Liberals, Dial Road, Tranmere
CC	0	42	42	71	The Open Arms, Bidston Avenue, Claughton, CH41 0BR
CE	0	47	47	80	Former Cole Street Primary School, Cole Street, Birkenhead
DD	30	0	30	51	Redcourt School, 7 Devonshire Place, Oxton
EB	0	29	29	49	Holt Road, Tranmere, CH41 9HQ
EC	43	19	62	105	55 Rock Lane West, Rock Ferry Sevenoaks, Phase 2B, Chatham Road, Rock Ferry
ED	0	135	135	230	Rock Station Hotel, Highfield Road, Rock Ferry, CH42 2BU Land at the former Rock Ferry High School and Ravenswood, Highfield South, Rock Ferry, CH42 4RQ
GD	60	0	60	102	Land at Civic Way, Bebington
HA	57	0	57	97	43 Bebington Road, New Ferry Woodhead Street Car Park, New Ferry
HB	27	0	27	46	Former Croda, Prices Way, Bromborough Pool
HC	679	0	679	1154	Former Croda, Prices Way, Bromborough Pool Former D1 Oils, Dock Road South, Bromborough
HD	19	0	19	32	Former D1 Oils, Dock Road South, Bromborough
HE	466	0	466	792	Former MOD, Old Hall Road, Bromborough Riverside Office Park, Riverwood Road, Bromborough
JA	0	65	65	111	Land at Acre Lane and Meadowside Road, Bromborough, CH62 7BX
KA	120	0	120	204	Unilever Research, Quarry Road East, Bebington

NB	0	40	40	68	The Old Town Hall, 4 Albert Road, Hoylake, CH47 2AB
PA	0	24	24	41	Wirral Business Park, Arroe Brook Road, Upton, CH49 1QZ
PB	0	35	35	60	Wirral Business Park, Arroe Brook Road, Upton, CH49 1QZ
QB	35	0	35	60	Land at Grange Hill Farm, Grange Old Road, West Kirby
QC	0	38	38	65	Brookfield Care (West Kirby) Limited, Brookfield Nursing Home Grange Road, CH48 4EQ Land at Grange Hill Farm, Grange Old Road, West Kirby
RC	23	0	23	39	Former Heswall Gospel Hall, Pensby Road, Heswall
SA	0	28	28	48	Seacombe Ferry Hotel, Victoria Place, Seacombe
SC	821	0	821	1396	Northbank East 1, Dock Road, Seacombe Northbank West 2, Dock Road, Seacombe Northbank East 3, Dock Road, Seacombe Northbank West 1, Dock Road, Seacombe Northbank East 2, Dock Road, Seacombe
SD	127	0	127	216	Northbank West 1, Dock Road, Seacombe
TA	15	139	154	262	Burtens Foods, Pasture Road, Moreton, CH46 8SE East of Typhoo, Reeds Lane, Leasowe
TC	202	0	202	343	Moreton Family Centre, Pasture Road East of Typhoo, Reeds Lane, Leasowe Land at Knutsford Road, Moreton
UB	40	0	40	68	New Palace Amusements, Marine Promenade, New Brighton
WB	0	146	146	248	52-54 Greenheys Road, Liscard, CH44 5UP Land Fronting Love Lane to the Rear of Mill Lane, Liscard Dominick House, St Albans Road, Liscard, CH44 5XS
WD	100	0	100	170	Former Municipal Buildings, Seaview Road, Liscard

WE	87	27	114	194	Nautilus Welfare Fund, Mariners Park Care Home Royden Avenue, Egremont, Wallasey, Wirral, CH44 0HN Rear of Gibson House, Maddock Road, Egremont
YC	65	0	65	111	Former Foxfield School, Douglas Drive, Moreton
Total	5061	1,020	6081	10,340*	<i>*Rounded to tens place.</i>

Having regard to the expected housing developments in the Borough, the expected electorate figure for 2030 is **255,756 electors**.

F. RECOMMENDATION ON COUNCIL SIZE

- i. In giving consideration to what size Wirral Council should be in the future, it is noted that the Commission's technical guidance provides no mathematical criteria for Council Size or a national formula for its calculation. The key issue in reaching any decision is the need to have in place a structure which provides residents with easy access to elected representatives, enables effective decision making to be undertaken and does not place excessive demands on the time of those who stand for political office.
- ii. The Political Group Leaders at Wirral Council agree that the Council should not increase in size. Members are very mindful of the cost of the Members Allowances scheme and do not wish to place any additional financial burden on the Council. Furthermore, Members were of the opinion that the number of Councillors should be 66 and should not reduce in number. This is based on a number of factors which have been considered as part of the response. To highlight a number as part of the conclusion:
 - Governance Arrangements – As a Committee system Council with no plans in the near future to change, the demands on Councillor time preparing for and attending formal committee meetings is considerable. **All 66 Members of Wirral Council are decision makers.** Whilst the Council's scheme of delegation affords considerable decision-making powers to officers, a significant number of decisions are made by Members who also have responsibility for statutory scrutiny and policy development. there is a full Committee programme supplemented by a significant number of Working and Task & Finish Groups.
 - When comparing Wirral to statistically similar authorities, only Hartlepool operates under a Committee system. A member at that authority represents 1,957 electors. By comparison a member at Wirral represents 3,638 (per member). Any reduction in the number of Members on Wirral Council would likely result in an individual member representing nearly 4,000 electors or more.

Wirral Council has been on a significant journey of improvement following an external assurance review in November 2021. Members have been at the heart of and have played an integral role in that process. In acknowledgement of the improvement made since 2021, the Independent Assurance Panel (IAP) who had worked alongside and advised the Council, wrote to the Council and the Department of Levelling Up, Housing & Communities in April 2024 advising that their support to Wirral Council had come to an immediate end, citing 'significant improvements in the council over the period of the panel's involvement' and 'significant changes in how the council operates'. This period was a particularly demanding time for members. The ongoing management of the financial pressures, delivering on the Council's regeneration ambitions and increasing demand associated with both Children and Adult Social Care will continue to challenge Members in the future.

- The demand on Member time continuities to increase. The Member survey revealed that whilst technological advancements have enabled Members to be more productive in respect to casework, they are more accessible to their residents than ever before. The survey also revealed the extent to which Members are Community Champions who play a significant role in the thriving Community Groups across the Borough.
 - Wirral Council is the second largest Authority in the Liverpool City Region and Wirral Members play a significant role in contributing to and participating in the Combined Authority Committees. 16 Wirral Councillors sit on Combined Authority Committees and related regional authorities or bodies with many others representing the Council on local partnership groups.
 - Comparisons to Wirral's statistical neighbours and Liverpool City Region Authorities reveal that each Wirral Member represents 3,638 residents (Source: The Elections Centre - 2022). By way of comparison, a Member in a neighbouring borough Sefton will represent 3,211 residents. A Member at a fellow Liverpool City Region Authority, St. Helen's, represents 2,881 residents. Members at those authorities do not have to cope with the additional demands associated with being a committee system council.
- iii. Councils need the ability to attract a wide variety of applicants to the role of Member. The issue of capacity and balance have been considered in terms of the various options for Council size. It remains important that Members are able to exercise their roles as decision makers along with their ability to interact effectively with their constituents, and still carry on with their day-to-day activities or responsibilities.
- iv. Therefore, for all the reasons outlined above, the four political Group Leaders of Wirral Council are of the view that there **should not be a reduction** in the number of Members who sit on Wirral Council. The best interests of the Council and the residents of Wirral can be served by **66** Members of the Council.