



**Number of Councillors
Scrutiny Review**

**A report produced by a Scrutiny Panel of
The Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

November 2016

WIRRAL BOROUGH COUNCIL
NUMBER OF COUNCILLORS SCRUTINY REVIEW
FINAL REPORT

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In light of the current economic climate and changes to council services, the size of Wirral Council (Number of Councillors), was questioned via a Notice of Motion to Council in October 2014, proposing that Wirral reduced its number of councillors from 66 to 44.

This included a request to invite the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (the Commission) to conduct an electoral review in Wirral. An electoral review would consider, amongst other things, the number of councillors.

The Notice of Motion was referred to Coordinating Committee and was considered by committee in September 2015. The following resolution was made by Coordinating Committee:

The Committee considers that factors to be considered when determining what constitutes proper, fair representation of Wirral's population go beyond simply numbers and so proposes that it establishes a Task and Finish Panel to undertake a more in depth examination of the issues and that this be added to the Committee's Work Programme.

Following changes to scrutiny arrangements in 2016, this work programme item was referred to the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee. In September 2016 the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee approved the Committee's Annual Work Programme, which included a Task and Finish review of the Number of Councillors at Wirral Council. A review panel was subsequently convened to explore this issue further.

A cross-party Panel of five Members was established and the review commenced in October 2016. The following objective was agreed by the Panel:

To determine if the number of councillors and councillors per ward in Wirral is appropriate with regard to the Council's stated priorities and key challenges, and if the number of councillors in Wirral is consistent with comparable local and national authorities.

Over a number of weeks a series of sessions were convened to consider the issues surrounding this subject, including the role of the local councillor in Wirral, the role of the Commission and a review of data around the number of councillors in Wirral and other local authorities in England. Panel Members aimed to reach an informed view on whether the Council should actively progress a referral to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to conduct an Electoral Review. This report sets out the findings of the review and the recommendations arising.

2.0 CHAIR'S STATEMENT & REVIEW PANEL

Councillor Phillip Brightmore (Chair)



I believe the findings of this investigation speak broadly for themselves. To speculate further upon those findings here risks undermining the analytical, data-led approach I and others have been careful to maintain.

I note only that the electoral arrangements employed by Wirral Borough Council compare favourably to its statistical neighbours; that those arrangements do not fall foul of any indicators prescribed by the Local Government Boundary Commission for England (the Commission), and therefore do not trigger a Further Electoral Review; and that only the Commission may direct Local Authorities to alter those arrangements.

Local Authorities may not alter electoral arrangements themselves.

I invite careful consideration of this report, and thank those Councillors and Officers who contributed to its creation

Councillor Moira McLaughlin



Councillor Chris Carubia



Councillor Steve Foulkes



Councillor Adam Sykes



3.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & RECOMMENDATIONS

Having reviewed the role of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England and its processes and timescales for Further Electoral Review, the Panel found that preparing for and undergoing a review would be a lengthy and resource-intensive process, with a less than certain outcome.

The Panel were reassured by the benchmarking data reviewed, which suggested that the current number of councillors in Wirral represents a good degree of electoral equality. Ward level data showed that Wirral is within the Commission's criteria for electoral equality across wards and would not trigger their threshold for a Further Electoral Review. The Panel was satisfied that the cost of councillors to Wirral, in comparison with other local and national councils, was among the lowest viewed. This position was shared by the Independent Panel on Members Allowances in its June 2016 Report.

The role of councillors was explored as part of the Review. Whilst the role of councillor was hard to quantify, the Panel was satisfied that the evidence demonstrates a role which is wide ranging and as diverse as the communities which councillors in Wirral represent. Being a councillor also places a considerable time demand on those who undertake the role and it was the Panel's opinion that a reduction in councillors would increase this time demand. A significant reduction in the number of councillors may also affect the ability of the Council to carry out its functions effectively. In the current political and economic climate councils are undergoing significant change and the councillor role is evolving and adapting to meet new challenges presented. In Wirral, perhaps the extent of this is not yet fully understood and this may not be right time to consider a review of the number of councillors.

Based on the findings set out in section 5 of this report, the Panel has developed the following recommendation:

Recommendation: Having regard to the evidence presented, the Panel notes that the number of councillors in Wirral is consistent with comparable local authorities. Consequently, the Panel recommends that the Council does not request the Local Government Boundary Commission for England conduct a review of its electoral arrangements at this time.

4.0 METHODOLOGY

Written Evidence

The Review was informed by written evidence including reports from other local authorities and documents from the Local Government Boundary Commission for England and the Local Government Association. To support the evidence gathering sessions officers prepared a number of briefing papers and presentations.

Evidence Gathering Sessions

In order to further understand the issues, the panel used dedicated sessions to examine a number of documents and data comparing Wirral with other local authorities in England. The timetable of sessions is set out below:

Evidence Gathering Session 1

The Role of Councillors and the Role of the Local Government Boundary Commission for England, Wednesday 9th November 2016

Evidence Gathering Session 2

The Number of Councillors – Data Analysis, Wednesday 16th November 2016

5.0 FINDINGS

5.1 Local Government Boundary Commission for England (the Commission)

In order to assist the Panel in considering if a referral to the Commission should be pursued, the Panel was keen to fully understand the role of the Commission and to establish their statutory obligations, remit, and to identify the circumstances under which a review of councillors would take place.

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England (the Commission) was established by Parliament under the provisions of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009. Independent of central and local government, and political parties, it is directly accountable to Parliament through a committee of MPs chaired by the Speaker of the House of Commons. The Commission's objectives are:

1. To provide electoral arrangements for English principal local authorities that are fair and delivers electoral equality for voters.
2. To keep the map of English local government in good repair and work with principal local authorities to help them deliver effective and convenient local government to citizens.

The Commission is responsible for conducting three main types of review of local government: Electoral Reviews, Principal Area Boundary Reviews and Structural Reviews. For the purposes of this scrutiny review, the Electoral Review is most relevant.

Electoral Reviews

The Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 requires the Commission to conduct Periodic Electoral Reviews (PERs) of every principal local authority in England. Electoral Reviews are reviews of the electoral arrangements of local authorities: the number of councillors, the names, number and boundaries of wards and electoral divisions and the number of councillors to be elected to each. Electoral reviews are initiated primarily to improve electoral equality. This means ensuring, so far as is reasonable, that each councillor elected to a local authority represents the same number of electors. However, electoral reviews can also be carried out at a local authority's request, for example to look at council size (the total number of councillors) or provide for single-member wards or divisions. This is called a Further Electoral Review (FER). The Commission is responsible for putting any changes to electoral arrangements into effect and does this by making a Statutory Instrument or order. The local authority then conducts local elections on the basis of the new arrangements set out in the order. Under current legislation, this is the only mechanism for a council to make changes to its number of councillors.

Wirral Council's electoral arrangements were last reviewed by the Commission in 2003 as part of a programme of PERs of all 386 principal local authority areas in England. The final report and recommendations from this review is available on the Commission website <https://www.lgbce.org.uk/current-reviews/north-west/merseyside/wirral>.

The recommendations are summarised below:

- Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council should have 66 councillors, as at present;
- There should be 22 wards, as at present;
- The boundaries of all of the existing wards should be modified.

The purpose of these proposals is to ensure that, in future, each borough councillor represents approximately the same number of electors, bearing in mind local circumstances.

- In 20 of the proposed 22 wards the number of electors per councillor would vary by no more than 10% from the borough average.
- This improved level of electoral equality is expected to improve further, with the number of electors per councillor in all wards expected to vary by no more than 10% from the average for the borough in 2006.

(LGBCE Final recommendations on the future electoral arrangements for Wirral, Report to The Electoral Commission, March 2003)

The recommendations from the last review of Wirral's electoral arrangements refer to the number of electors per councillor in each ward. This is considered by the Commission as a measure of electoral equality and the Commission's technical guidance states that Council's electors per councillor ratios in each ward should not vary significantly from the council average. A FER will be triggered if this variance exceeds a stated threshold:

When the electoral variances in representation across a local authority become notable, a further electoral review (FER) is required. Our criteria for initiating a FER in those circumstances is as follows:

- More than 30% of a council's wards/divisions having an electoral imbalance of more than 10% from the average ratio for that authority; and/or
- One or more wards/divisions with an electoral imbalance of more than 30%;
- And the imbalance is unlikely to be corrected by foreseeable changes to the electorate within a reasonable period.

We monitor the levels of electoral imbalance across all local authorities in England annually, and those that meet the above-mentioned criteria will, at some point, be included in our review programme.

(LGBCE Electoral Reviews Technical Guidance, April 2014)

As part of this review, the Panel investigated the electoral variance in Wirral currently and this is described in section 5.3.

Although timescales for completion of a Further Electoral Review will vary, the technical guidance provided by the Commission outlines an indicative timescale, which estimates that it would take between 18 to 24 months from the preliminary discussion stage to a Statutory Instrument Order to being made to Parliament.

Councils deciding to commission a Further Electoral Review must make a formal request to the Commission and submit their own evidence based proposals for council size. The Commission will consider these proposals during the preliminary investigation stage. Technical Guidance has been published by the Commission to assist councils with developing their proposal, or 'submissions'. Submissions must include information and evidence to support proposals on how the number of councillors affects three areas: Governance and Decision Making, Scrutiny Functions and the Representational Role of Councillors. The Commission also expects councils to consider and anticipate future changes which may affect the council's structure or services when making proposals on council size.

A FER must take into account the likely changes to electorate over a five year period from the date of the Commission recommendations. To assist with this, the Commission requires all councils undergoing review to prepare and submit electorate forecasts for review alongside their submission documents.

Recent Electoral Reviews

The Notice of Motion which led to this review referred to Knowsley Borough Council's recent FER and the resulting reduction of councillors from 63 to 45. The review of Knowsley Council was conducted in July 2014 following a request by the Council in order to consider council size. Knowsley had high levels of electoral inequality with 29% of wards having a variance of more than 10% from the average for the borough and one ward, Longview, had a variance of 23%. The Commission's final recommendations proposed that Knowsley should reduce its number of councillors from 63 to 45, representing 15 three-member wards. A number of ward boundaries were changed and as a result of these changes, parish council electoral arrangements were also revised.

Further discussion at Coordinating Committee highlighted another local authority, Warrington Borough Council, who's FER in 2015, resulted in an increase in councillors from 57 to 58. This review was triggered by high levels of electoral inequality in Warrington which exceeded the Commission threshold, with 41% of wards having a variance of more than 10% from the average for the borough. The Commission's final recommendations proposed that Warrington Council should comprise 58 councillors (an increase of 1), serving 8 two member wards and 14 three-member wards. Some ward boundaries were changed and as a result of these changes, parish council electoral arrangements were also revised. It should be noted that both of the above

councils have smaller electorates (Knowsley 113,590, Warrington 163,078) than Wirral. Both councils also differ from Wirral in that both have parish and town councils.

A study of these and the most recent reviews published on the Commission website shows that of 19 recent reviews, 10 had resulted in a reduction of councillors, 3 in an increase, and 6 in no change to the number of councillors. Whilst this shows a trend towards a small reduction in Members (average reduction among the ten councils which reduced their number of councillors was 4.2 Members), the Commission does not seek to reduce numbers as one of its aims. It should be noted that in the large majority of these cases the Commission's recommendations matched the councils own proposals. The Panel observed that there is no certainty of outcome with a FER.

Having reviewed the role of the Commission and the procedures and timescale for a Further Electoral Review, the Panel found that the process of preparing for and undertaking a review would require significant resources in terms of officer and councillor time. The Panel also acknowledged that this would not be a quick process, with reviews taking up to two years to complete.

The Panel believe that it would be beyond the scope of this review to attempt to replicate a council submission and formulate proposals regarding council size. The Panel accept that this would take a significant amount of time and resources. Rather, the Panel's scope and focus remained on establishing if there is a case for Wirral to request a FER, using evidence such as Wirral Council electorate data and financial information, benchmarking against other councils, and an exploration of the role and caseload of councillors.

5.2 Data Analysis and Benchmarking

The Panel sought to understand the position of Wirral Council against its neighbours and other similar local authorities in England to help develop an opinion on whether Wirral's number of councillors, levels of electoral equality and costs of councillors were consistent with those of other local authorities. The Panel reviewed a number of pieces of benchmarking data to inform this opinion.

In 2015 the Office for National Statistics estimated Wirral's resident population at approximately 320,300. In December 2014 Wirral's electorate was 235,181. On electorate size, Wirral is the 49th largest of 351 councils in England.

Wirral currently has a council size of 66 councillors across 22 wards with a councillor to elector ratio of **1:3,563**. The average ratio for all English councils is 1 councillor per 2828 electors. Wirral Council ranks as 47th highest number of electors per councillor of 351 English councils. (Source Local Government Boundary Commission for England data set December 2014).

As a recognised indicator of electoral equality used by the Commission, the Panel wanted to compare Wirral with a number of local and statistical neighbours to determine if Wirral had better or worse electoral equality than other comparable local authorities.

The data in Chart 1 below demonstrates that Wirral councillors on average represent more electors than all of its geographical neighbours. The average ratio for the group of councils is 1:2,976.

Chart 1. Data Source: LGBCE Dec 2014

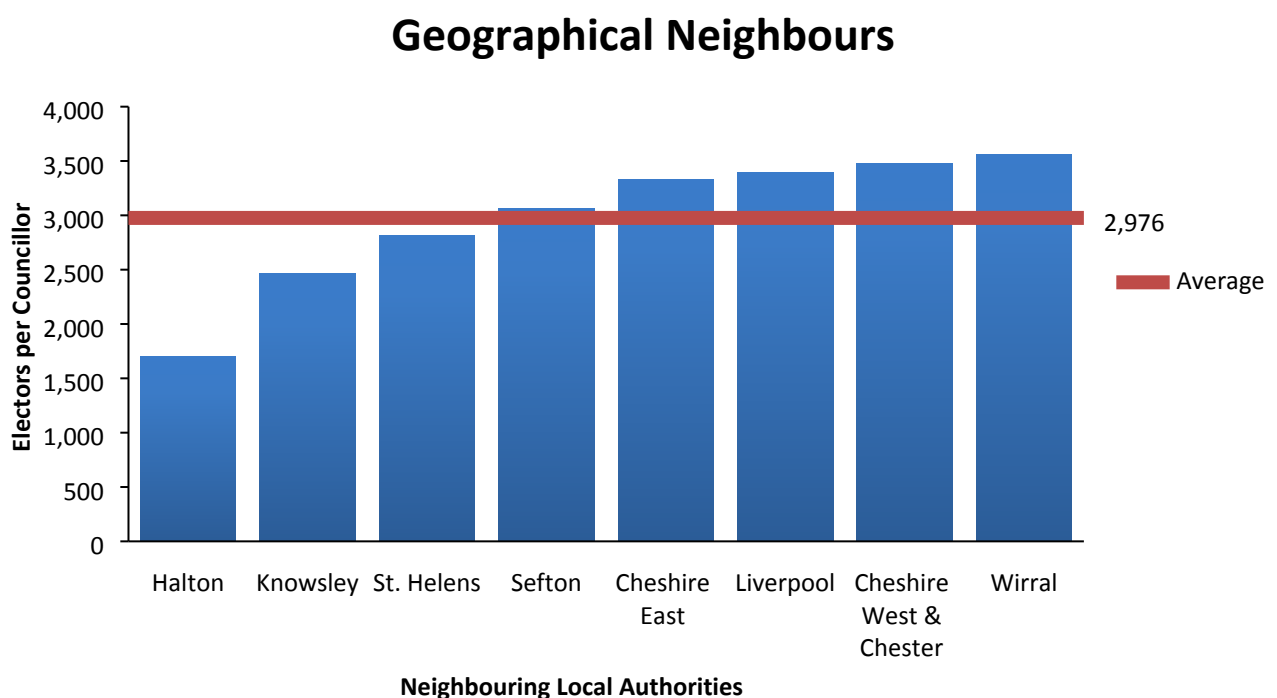
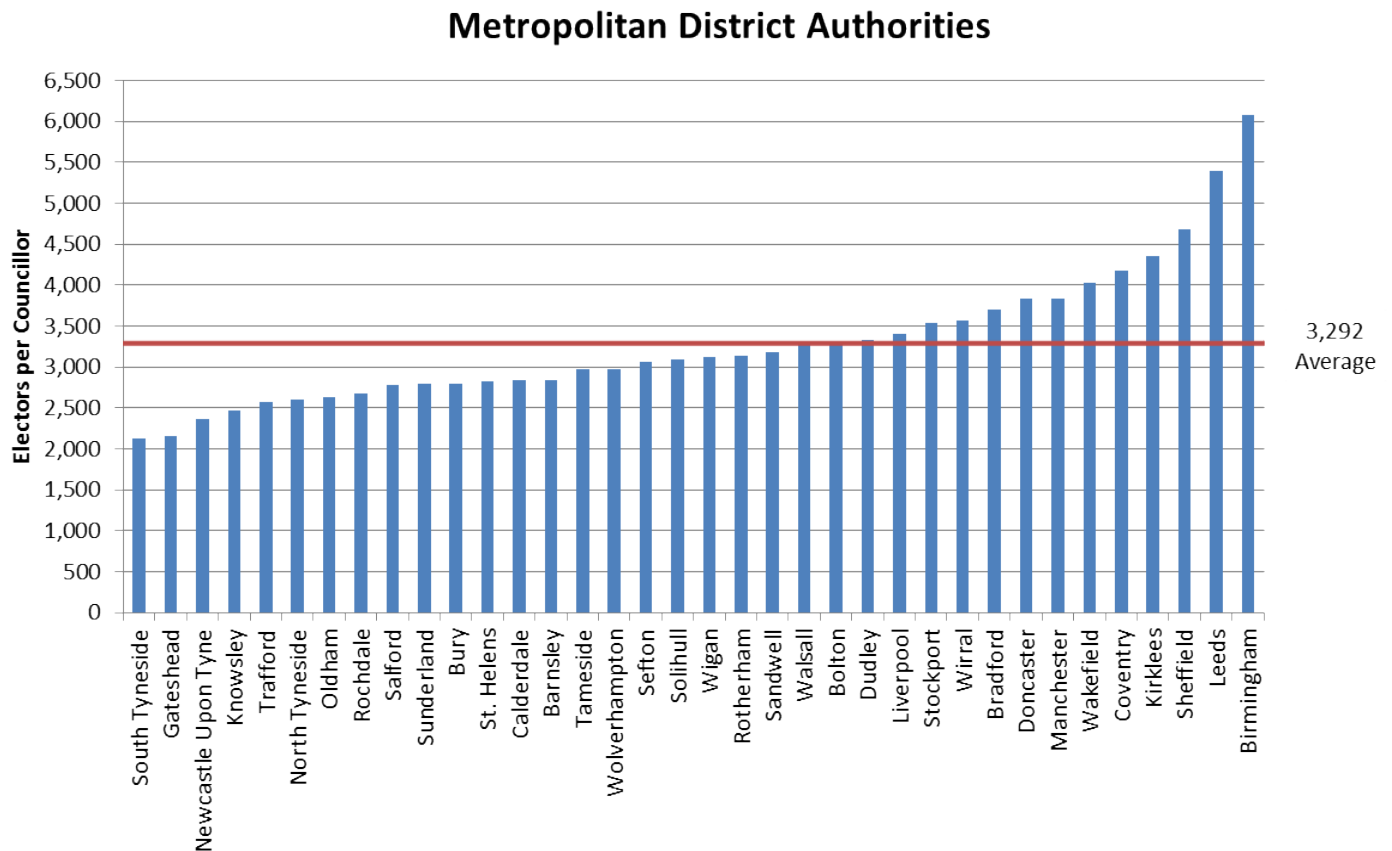


Chart 2 below compares Wirral with other metropolitan district authorities in England. The average councillor to elector ratio for this group of councils is 1:3,292, shown by the red line. Wirral Council is above average in this group, with a ratio of 1:3,563. Wirral ranks as 10th out of this group of 36 councils in terms of the most electors represented by each councillor.

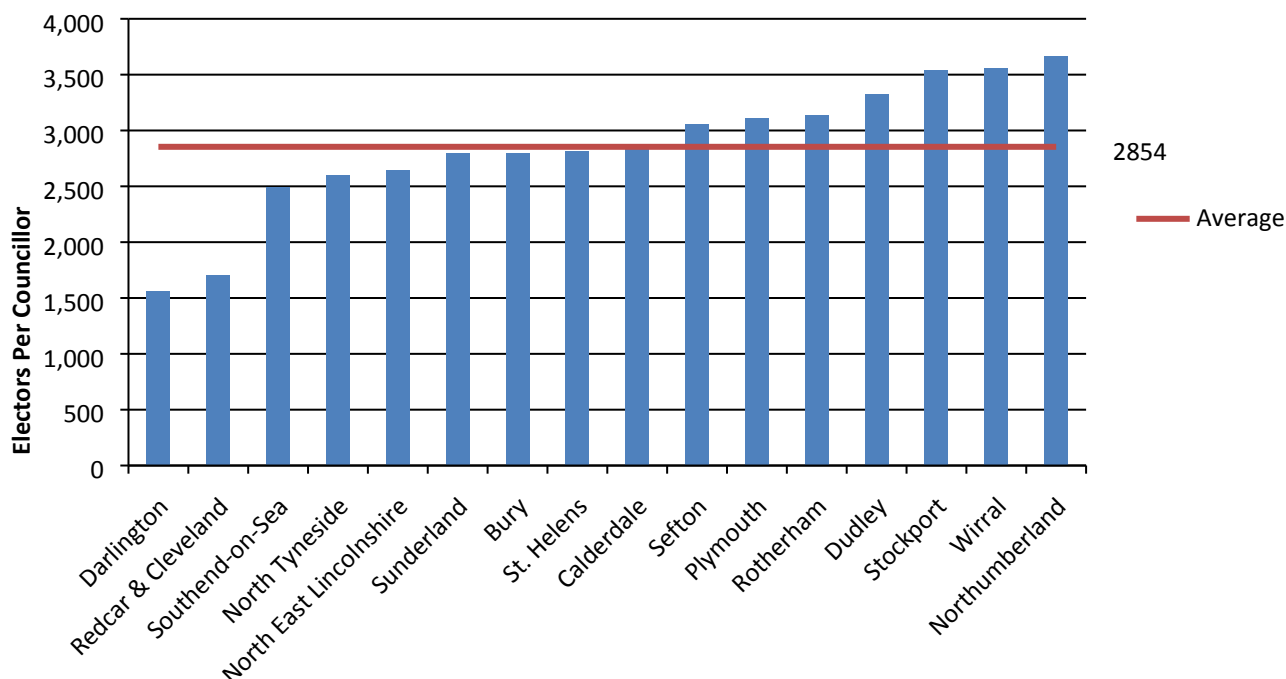
Chart 2. Data Source: LGBCE Dec 2014



The Panel wished to compare Wirral against authorities with similar socio-economic profiles across the country. In order to select a comparison group of councils, the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Nearest Neighbour Model was used. This model groups councils using a number of socio-economic indicators. Chart 3 below compares Wirral with a group of statistical neighbours. The average councillor to elector ratio for this group is 1:2,854. Wirral Council is above average in this group, with a ratio of 1:3,563 and ranks 2nd out of 16 councils in terms of the most electors represented by each councillor.

Chart 3. Data Source: LGBCE Dec 2014

Statistical Neighbours



In reviewing this data, the Panel observed that councillors represent the entire population in their wards and not simply those on the electoral register. In focussing on electorate figures only, the Panel was concerned that this ignored the work that councillors do to represent children and families.

By way of acknowledging the Panel's concerns over the use of electorate figures and not population figures when reviewing council size, the Commission says:

"A local authority provides services to those people who are not registered to vote and a Councillor may represent them, but it is through our consideration of community identities and the convenience and effectiveness of local government that those people come into our reckoning. When we talk about the equality of representation, or electoral equality in a review of a local authority's electoral arrangements, we are therefore referring to those people who are on the electoral register and entitled to vote in local government elections."

(LGBCE Electorate Forecasts– A Guide for Practitioners Guidance, October 2011)

Ward Level Data

Recognising that one of the Commission's triggers for conducting an electoral review is the variation of electoral representation between wards, i.e. the extent to which the numbers of electors represented by councillors in a council differs across its wards, the Panel was keen to explore this further and determine the level of variation across Wirral's 22 wards currently. The

table below shows the total electorate and the electors per councillor figures for each ward in Wirral. The table also shows the percentage variation in each ward from the Wirral average.

Accepting the Commission advice that perfect electoral equality is unlikely to be achieved across any local authority, the Panel was reassured that there is a high level of electoral equality across the borough, with 20 of the 22 wards having a variation of less than 10% from the average and the highest percentage variation being Upton at 12% above the average.

Further analysis of this data shows that the electoral variance between wards in Wirral does not exceed the Commission threshold for undertaking a Further Electoral Review. The Commission criteria for initiating a FER requires that more than 30% of a council's wards have an electoral imbalance of more than 10% from the average ratio for that authority and/or one or more wards has an electoral imbalance of more than 30%.

There are 2 Wards (9% of Wards) in Wirral with an electoral imbalance of more than 10% from the average ratio for the authority. There are no wards in Wirral with an electoral imbalance of more than 30%. Based on this data the Panel was satisfied that the Commission would not initiate a review of Wirral Council on the grounds of electoral inequality.

Table 1. Data Source: Wirral Council Electoral Services September 2016

Ward	Total Electorate	Number of Councillors	Electors per Councillor	% Variance from Average
Bebington	12,181	3	4060	+9
Bidston & St James	10,368	3	3456	-7
Birkenhead & Tranmere	10,085	3	3362	-9
Bromborough	11,728	3	3909	+5
Clatterbridge	11,703	3	3901	+5
Claughton	11,504	3	3835	+3
Eastham	11,296	3	3765	+1
Greasby, Frankby & Irby	11,613	3	3871	+4
Heswall	11,032	3	3677	-1
Hoylake & Meols	10,702	3	3567	-4
Leasowe & Moreton East	10,984	3	3661	-1
Liscard	11,348	3	3783	+2
Moreton West & Saughall Massie	10,921	3	3640	-2
New Brighton	11,355	3	3785	+2
Oxton	11,292	3	3764	+1
Pensby & Thingwall	10,583	3	3528	-5
Prenton	10,985	3	3662	-1
Rock Ferry	9,991	3	3330	-10
Seacombe	10,482	3	3494	-6
Upton	12,467	3	4156	+12
Wallasey	11,994	3	3998	+8
West Kirby & Thurstaston	10,488	3	3496	-6

Total Electorate	245,102			
Average Electors Per Councillor			3714	

Note on data: The ward level data above was collected in September 2016 and therefore shows different total electorate and average number of electors per councillor figures for Wirral Council than data presented in the earlier benchmarking charts. Whilst the ward data is more current, the figures presented earlier were based on LGBCE data sets from Dec 2014. As this data was used to benchmark Wirral against others at a point in time, Wirral's position at that point was used, to allow fair and accurate comparisons.

Cost of Councillors

The Panel recognised that the original Notice of Motion which led to this review included references to reducing the number of councillors as a means of saving money in the current climate. The Panel sought to ascertain the cost of councillors to Wirral, and requested figures on annual Members allowances and other associated costs in order to establish, via benchmarking, if Wirral's councillors provided good value for money and what level of saving could be achieved in the event of a reduction.

Information showing the annual cost of Members to the Council for 2015/16 was presented to the Panel. These figures included Members allowances and other costs and overheads such as admin, buildings, stationery, telephone bills etc. The table is attached as Appendix B. The total figure for 2015/16 is £964,106 and the average cost per councillor is £14,608.

This information included a calculation of the proposed saving which could be achieved if the number of councillors was reduced from 66 to 44. The estimated saving from a reduction in councillors to 44 was £321,369. The Panel acknowledged this annual saving, although it noted that this figure of 44 councillors was arrived at arbitrarily and Wirral would need to determine its own proposals on council size and this along with any Commission review would determine any change in number, and therefore any actual saving. Furthermore, any savings calculation would need to take into account a likely rise in officer costs associated with increased demand on resources as a result of a reduction in councillor numbers. Nonetheless, as an illustrative figure, the Panel acknowledged that this would represent a considerable saving.

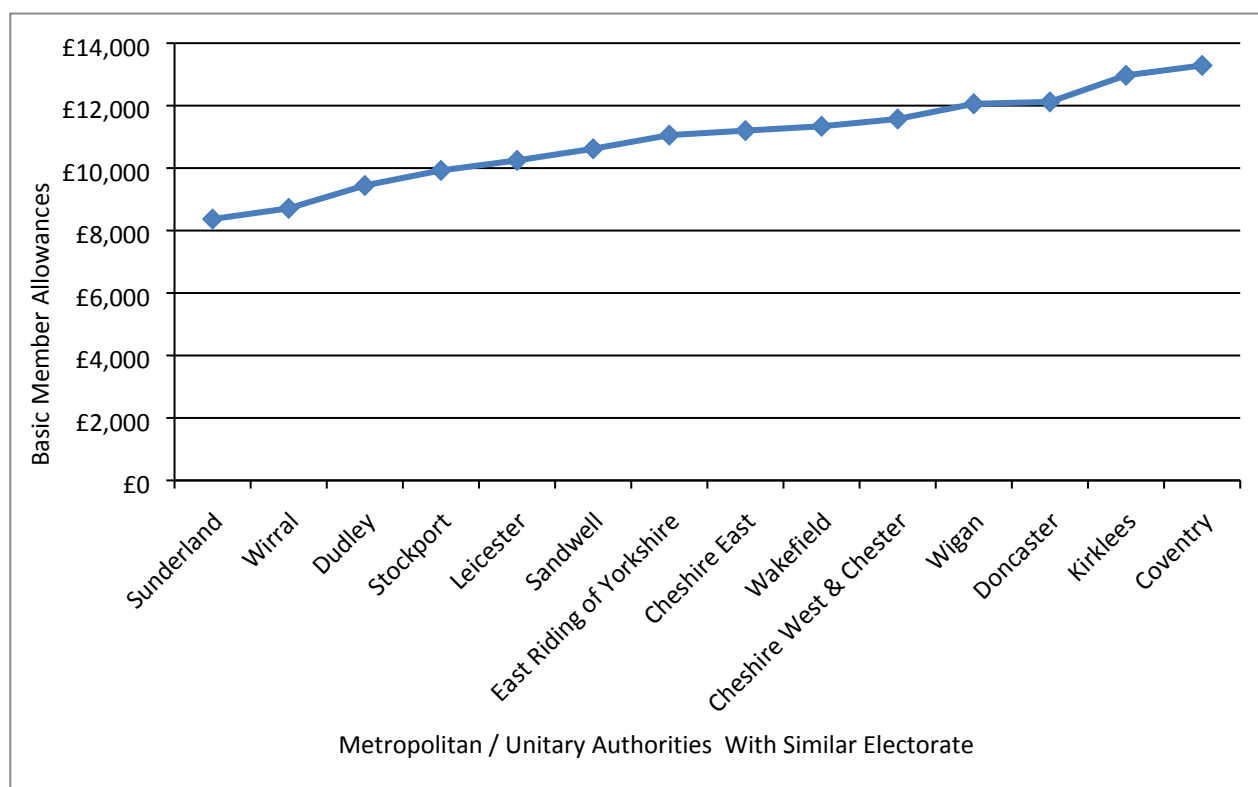
The Panel reviewed data from the Independent Panel on Members Allowances Report, June 2016, Appendix C. The report considered comparisons of Members' allowances with other Merseyside and Cheshire councils and found that allowances paid to Members in Wirral were in the lower quartile. Table 2 provides a summary of basic allowances paid by these councils in 2015/16. The Panel was reassured that Wirral spends less than a number of its geographical neighbours in terms of basic and special responsibility Member allowances.

Table 2. Source: Independent Panel on Members Allowances 2016

Authority	Basic Allowance
St Helens (48)	£7,626
Warrington (58)	£7,911
Halton (56)	£8,262
Wirral (66)	£8,712
Sefton (66)	£8,794
Knowsley (45)	£9,109
Liverpool (90)	£10,077
Cheshire East (82)	£11,200
Cheshire West and Chester (75)	£11,573

To provide wider comparisons regarding Member allowances, the Chart below compares the basic Members' allowances of a number of metropolitan and unitary authorities with a similar electorate size to Wirral. The Panel was further reassured by this data as it illustrates that Wirral has the second lowest basic Member allowance compared with 16 other councils of a similar size and type.

Chart 4. Source: Council Websites



Having reviewed the data on costs of Members in Wirral and comparisons with other local and national councils, the Panel was satisfied with the amount of money that Wirral spends on Members allowances.

5.3 The Role of the Ward Councillor

The Panel recognised that data analysis and benchmarking would only form part of their considerations. It acknowledged that councils and communities have their own unique characteristics and council services and structures should be tailored to the needs of individual areas. A reliance on direct comparisons and statistics alone would not allow the Panel to form a reasoned judgement on the suitability of the current number of councillors in Wirral.

Therefore, the Panel felt that some investigation into the roles and responsibilities of the councillor in Wirral was necessary in order to understand if the current electoral arrangements enable Wirral councillors to provide effective local leadership and representation, and to support the stated vision and aims of Wirral Council.

Defining the Role of the Councillor

The Panel was eager to find a definition of the role of the councillor in general terms as a starting point. The Panel reviewed an interim report from The Councillor Commission, set up by the Local Government Research Unit and The Municipal Journal, October 2016. The aims of this commission were to conduct an independent review of the role and work of the councillor and of the contribution made by councillors to the governance of their communities. The Councillor Commission has sought the views of councillors and those who work with them and has conducted a number of meetings with different councillors around the country and received 147 written submissions so far. The Panel found the Councillor Commission definition of the councillor as a useful reference point and agreed with the report which describes the councillor role under three themes; as a representative of their community, to influence the policies and services of the council, and with an increasing role to interact with external organisations, either as a governor, or to influence, challenge, or scrutinise their services.

Wirral Council defines the role and responsibilities of the councillor in its Constitution through The Members Role Profile and The Members Allowance Scheme List of Approved Duties. The Members Role Profile describes the different councillor roles, duties and entitlements as a Ward Member and Member of Full Council. It also describes the roles and duties as Leader and Cabinet Portfolio Holder as well as a member of scrutiny and other committees. The Members Allowance Scheme List of Approved Duties includes a list of outside bodies which Councillors may be appointed to. The Panel believe that these documents demonstrate the breadth and variety of the roles of the councillor in Wirral.

What is clear to the Panel is the difference between broad 'role' definitions, such as 'local leader' 'champion', 'representative', 'scrutineer' and the more list-like responsibilities in terms of the tasks or obligations that councillors are required to undertake, such as membership of committees, appointments to outside bodies etc. The Panel felt that even with comprehensive definitions such as those above, there are other aspects of the role of the councillor which are not fully captured or quantified.

Quantifying the Role of the Councillor

The Panel believes that it is difficult to quantify exactly the role of the modern councillor. From reviewing evidence such as the Councillor Commission report and other council's submissions in preparation for an electoral review, it is clear that this view is shared widely. As part of their submissions to the Commission, a number of councils listed the roles and responsibilities of councillors as set out in their constitutions, and many listed the committees, panels and sub-groups which members are required to attend. A number of councils conducted surveys and questionnaires to find out councillors views on their workload and responsibilities.

The Panel had sight of the Local Government Association Census of Local Authority Councillors, 2013. Their survey, responded to by 6,902 councillors across England provided a number of findings regarding councillors views of their role and workload. The survey found that councillors reported spending on average 25.1 hours per week on council business and group / party business. In metropolitan authorities this figure was higher still, with councillors among this group reporting that they spend on average 30.9 hours per week on council business and group / party business. The Panel found this information useful in that it reveals the significant time demands on councillors.

The Panel believe that the average weekly hours spent by councillors quoted above is a minimum and it is likely that more hours are spent which are not captured. The role of the councillor is not confined to official council business or limited to attendance at committees and meetings. The Panel commented that the increasing use of social media such as Twitter, Facebook and councillors own websites as tools to communicate with residents means that many councillors consider themselves to be 'on call' or 'on duty' twenty four hours a day, unlike council offices, one stop shops and call-centres which have traditional opening and closing times. When discussing the time demands on councillors, The Councillor Commission interim report refers to councillors describing their role as "a 24 hour a day job, a job which the public, media, party and council itself recognise few if any boundaries."

Whilst traditional methods of engagement with residents such as weekly surgeries are still used by many councillors, it is now accepted that councillors have different methods to engage and communicate with the people they represent. It is further accepted that different councillors will utilise these different methods to a greater or lesser extent depending on circumstances, such as the socio-economic, demographic and geographical make-up of their ward.

The Panel noted that the structure of Wirral Council, with no parish or town councils, would have an impact on councillors caseloads compared with other councils where these structures were in place.

The Panel believed that the surveys conducted by councils, the Councillor Commission and the Census of Local Authority Councillors provide valuable insight into how local councillors view

and evaluate their roles and workloads in a changing landscape and demonstrates the wide variety of roles and responsibilities as well as the variety of ways in which a councillor may carry out his or her work.

The Diversity and Unique Nature of Wirral

The Local Government Boundary Commission for England refers to the unique characteristics of each area when warning against an over-reliance on the use of comparisons with other authorities. The Panel was keen to recognise the unique characteristics of Wirral as a borough and the diversity and differences between its wards and to acknowledge the impact that these differences would have on the type, if not the amount of issues which councillors must deal with. According to the Wirral Joint Strategic Needs Assessment data, Wirral has some of the most deprived and most affluent wards in England, with wards in the highest quintile and wards in the lowest quintile on the national Index of Multiple Deprivation. Wirral also has a mix of rural and urban wards, wards which have a concentration of industrial and business premises, and wards which are primarily residential. The Panel believe that this ward diversity will affect the representational role of the councillor as ward councillors will encounter a wide variety of different issues and concerns. The nature of their work will differ greatly depending on the socio-economic, geographic and demographic profile of the ward which they represent.

The Future - A Changing Role

The Review Panel was conscious that local government was changing significantly. In particular Members considered that the role of Wirral councillors was changing as a result of the financial constraints and new ways of working, with a shift towards a focus on outcomes for residents rather than service delivery via the Wirral Plan and Wirral's new operating model.

Whether as Pledge Champions or more generally, councillors have a role in supporting the delivery of the Wirral Plan and its three key themes of protecting the most vulnerable, driving economic growth and improving the local environment. The Panel see councillors' roles changing as a result of this and moves towards greater commissioning of services. Although the councillor role regarding commissioning will develop over time, this role will require councillors to hold commissioners and providers to account for delivery of the agreed strategic outcomes.

The Panel identified that the councillor of the future would have a vital role as a local leader, in stimulating community initiatives and activity to help new delivery models to accommodate a reduction of public services in areas like culture, leisure and sport, community safety, supporting the vulnerable in the community and looking after the local environment. There would also be a significant role in working with local businesses to support the economy, encourage investment and create jobs.

With the proposed Liverpool City Region Devolution Agreement being considered by all of the City Region local authorities currently, it is hard to predict the impact this will have on the role of Wirral councillors in the coming years.

Taking these things into consideration, and accepting that the full impact and extent of these new ways of working was not yet fully known, the Panel felt that it did not make sense to commission a review of council size at this time. Instead, it may be appropriate to allow time for changes to become embedded and return to this question at a later date following an evaluation of the impact of new ways of working and new roles.

Potential Impact of a Reduction in Councillors

The Panel observed that a significant reduction in the number of councillors, without an accompanying restructure of the Council's governance arrangements could affect the council's ability to carry out its statutory functions. The number, size and frequency of committees, and appointments to bodies would need to be reviewed and reduced significantly. The Panel was concerned about the impact on this would have on Wirral's ability to take decisions effectively, manage the business and responsibilities of the council successfully, and provide effective community leadership and representation. Councillors in Wirral play important roles in holding the executive to account, exercising oversight and monitoring via Overview and Scrutiny Committees, and holding Members and officers to account to ensure effective governance and assurance. The Review Panel was also concerned that a significant reduction in councillor numbers could impact on these roles and may result in less effective oversight, governance and assurance.

Having regard to the 2013 Census of Councillors data which showed the average number of hours spent by councillors on council and party business per week (25.1), the Panel observed that many councillors already balance their role as a councillor with the demands of work, family, and/or caring commitments. The Panel was concerned that a significant reduction in numbers alongside no structural reorganisation of the Council would likely result in a greater demand on councillors time. If the workload and time demand increases further this may have a detrimental effect on councillor retention and recruitment as it may restrict the type of people who are able to take on the role. The 2013 Census of Councillors data showed the average age of councillors in England was 60.2 years old. 46.2% of councillors who responded were retired, 9.5% in part time employment and 8.8% either unemployed or otherwise not working. The Panel believed that should the work demands on councillors increase further, this may lead to the role becoming almost full time and would prevent many working or self-employed people from continuing as, or becoming a councillor. The resulting loss of diversity of representation, experience and skills would be detrimental to any borough, the Panel believed. This view is shared by Warrington Borough Council. Their submission to the Commission states: "Warrington is represented by a diverse range of councillors. The Council values all of its councillors for their different skills and experiences, and believes that it is important that

demands on councillors do not reach levels that restrict the pool of councillors, or limit the opportunities of particular groups to become councillors”.

(Warrington Borough Council Submission to LGBCE Regarding Council Size, February 2015).

The Panel suggested that these types of issues would need to be considered alongside the saving that a reduction in councillors would provide.

The impact of a reduction of councillors on back office and support functions was also acknowledged by the Panel. Whilst this is difficult to quantify, it was agreed that that these functions would have to increase in order to fill the gap left by councillors, so any cost savings identified by reducing councillors would have to take account of any increase in officer workloads.

In summary, the Panel concluded that it is hard to quantify the role of the councillor in absolute terms, but the Panel was satisfied that the evidence clearly demonstrates a significant time demand on councillors and that their role is broad and varied. In the current political and economic climate councils are undergoing significant change and the councillor role is evolving and adapting to meet the new challenges presented. In Wirral, perhaps the extent of this is not yet fully understood and this may not be right time to consider changing the number of councillors. It was suggested that this may be returned to at a later date and that consideration may be given to conducting a survey of councillors to understand their perceptions of the changing role and workload. This may provide a useful insight and inform any future considerations of this issue. There may also be wider benefits of conducting a councillor survey, as it may be used to update the Members’ Role Profile, inform the Member Development Scheme, and used to explain the role of councillors to the public, media and partner organisations.

6. Conclusion and Recommendation

The Panel, having reviewed the Commission's remit, processes and timescales for Further Electoral Review, accepted that the only mechanism to change the number of councillors in Wirral would be via such a review. The Panel concluded that it would take a significant amount of resources to prepare for and undergo a review and the Commission timescales demonstrate that this would be a lengthy process, with a less than certain outcome. Any potential savings are unlikely be realised for up to two years.

The Panel was encouraged by evidence which demonstrates that Wirral Council compares favourably against other councils regarding electoral equality, as a recognised measure of council size. Of particular note was the ward level data on electoral variation which showed that Wirral is within the Commission's parameters on electoral equality across its wards and therefore wouldn't trigger their threshold for a Further Electoral Review.

The Panel are further reassured that the cost of councillors in Wirral is lower than many of its neighbouring and similar sized national authorities, as evidenced by comparisons of Members Allowances Schemes, and acknowledged by the recent Independent Panel on Members Allowances. The Panel noted the potential annual saving which a reduction in councillors could deliver, although the Panel believed that any cost saving identified would need to take into account increased costs associated with a likely rise in demand on officer workloads.

The Panel was conscious that statistical comparisons with other authorities should not be used alone to determine the number of councillors and the Panel recognises the uniqueness of each area and the need for each council to tailor its services to the needs of each community. An understanding of the varied role of the local ward councillors in Wirral was considered by the Panel as equally important when forming their conclusions.

Having reviewed both general and Wirral specific definitions of the role of councillors, considered average hours per week spent on council business, and the variety of factors which affect the ward councillors' workload, the Panel concluded that the role of the councillor in Wirral is wide-ranging and varied and places a significant demand on councillors' time. The panel was concerned about the impact a reduction of councillors may have on councillors ability to fulfil their role effectively.

The Panel is aware of the significant changes facing councils in future and the uncertainty around councillor roles as these adapt to meet new challenges. In this context, the Panel conclude that any review of the number of councillors in Wirral should not take place until the extent of these changes and their impact on roles was better understood. The Panel makes the following recommendation:

Having regard to the evidence presented, the Panel notes that the number of councillors in Wirral is consistent with comparable Local Authorities. Consequently, the Panel recommends that the Council does not request the Local Government Boundary Commission for England conduct a review of its electoral arrangements at this time.

References

Local Government Boundary Commission for England, Electoral Reviews Technical Guidance, April 2014

https://www.lgbce.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/10410/technical-guidance-2014.pdf

Wirral Metropolitan Borough Council Report Of The Independent Panel on Members' Allowances, 7 June 2016

<http://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/documents/s50034712/Panels%20Final%20Report%20v2.pdf>

Appendix:

<http://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/documents/s50034697/First%20Draft%20of%20Panels%20Report%20-%20Appendix%201.pdf>

Interim report of The Councillor Commission, Local Government Research Unit and The Municipal Journal, October 2016

<http://www.dmu.ac.uk/documents/business-and-law-documents/cc-interim-report-oct-16-final-3.pdf>

Wirral Council Members Role Profile

<http://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/documents/s50037593/20161110CouncilConstitutionNovember2016.pdf>

Wirral Council Members Allowance Scheme List of Approved Duties

<http://democracy.wirral.gov.uk/documents/s50037593/20161110CouncilConstitutionNovember2016.pdf>

Local Government Association Census of Local Authority Councillors, 2013

[Publications | Local Government Association](#)

Warrington Borough Council Submission to LGBCE Regarding Council Size, February 2015

https://www.lgbce.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0013/25204/WarringtonBC.pdf

Appendices

Appendix A - Number of Councillors Scrutiny Review Scope Document

Scoping Template

Review Title: Number of Councillors

Date: 31/10/2016

1. Contact Information:	
Panel Members: Cllrs: Phillip Brightmore (Chair) Moira McLaughlin Steve Foulkes Chris Carubia Adam Sykes	Key Officers: Surjit Tour (Assistant Director: Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer) Patrick Torpey (Scrutiny Officer) Other Contacts: Eric Robinson (Returning Officer) Kate Robinson (Electoral Services Manager)
2. Review Aims:	
Wirral Plan Pledge/s: Community Services Are Joined Up And Accessible Review Objective: To determine if the number of Councillors and Councillors per Ward in Wirral is appropriate with regard to the Council's stated priorities and key challenges, and if the number of Councillors in Wirral is consistent with comparable local and national authorities. Scrutiny Outcomes: Members will arrive at an informed and evidence based view on the extent to which Wirral Councillors provide effective community leadership, effective leadership of the Council through strategy/policy development and effective decision making and scrutiny. Members will reach an informed view on whether the Council should actively progress a referral to the Local Government Boundary Commission for England to conduct an Electoral Review.	
3. Review Plan	
Review Approach: Workshop, Evidence Day, Task and Finish? Task and Finish Review Duration: A data-led review comprising two evidence sessions over three weeks. The review will be complete by the end of November 2016. Scheduled Committee Report Date: Environment OSC 30 th November 2016 Scheduled Cabinet Report Date:	

To be confirmed
4. Sources of Evidence:
<p>Key Witnesses:</p> <p>Not applicable for this review</p> <p>Supporting Papers / Documentation:</p> <p>Wirral Council briefing notes and background research Number of Councillors Review September 2016.docx Reports and Submission documents from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Government Association LGA Census of Councillors 2013.pdf Councillors Commission Role of Cllr Interim Report.pdf Local Government Boundary Commission for England LGBCE electoral-review-technical-guidance-august-2012.pdf Other Local Authorities Nottingham CC cover report.pdf NottinghamshireCC-CS-2014-09-08-Appendix-1-inc-Annex-A-to-D_Redacted.pdf ColchesterBC Evidence Base.pdf Warrington BC submission.pdf Wirral Council Wirral Council Constitution Part 5 - Members Role Profiles.pdf Members Allowances Report Jun 16.doc Members Allowances Appendix Jun 16.doc <p>Wirral Council electorate data and comparisons with other Local Authorities: Wirral Electorate by Ward at 01.09.16.xlsx Comparator Councils inc Members Allowances.xlsx</p> <p>Involvement of service users / public:</p> <p>Not applicable</p>
5. Key Communications:
<p>Cabinet Member:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The scope document will be shared with the relevant portfolio holder at the start of the review (Leader, Strategic Economic Development, Finance & Devolution, Cllr Phil Davies). The draft report will also be discussed in advance of being finalised by the task & finish group, before being presented to the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee for approval. <p>Press Office:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The scope document will be sent to the press office on approval. The final report will be referred to the press office for information.

Appendix B - Cost of Members 2015/16

CC + Description	Income/Expense	Classification	Subj + Desc	SubAnalysis1 + Desc	Act YTD
A7000 - Services To Members	NULL	NULL	0000 - Retained Earnings	00000 - Default	0
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E1 Employees	R001 - APT&C	00010 - Basic Pay	81,662
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E1 Employees	R001 - APT&C	00011 - Employers NI Contribution	6,825
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E1 Employees	R001 - APT&C	00012 - Employers Superannuation Contribution	11,204
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E1 Employees	R001 - APT&C	00021 - Employers Fixed Superannuation Contribution	26,600
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E1 Employees	R004 - Other Staff	00019 - Pay not classified elsewhere	70,300
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E1 Employees	R041 - Agency Staff	00200 - Agency Staff	22,075
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E1 Employees	R055 - Disclosure Barring Service - checks	06149 - Disclosure Barring Service - checks	88
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E1 Employees	R056 - Employee Corporate Insurance	04300 - Insurance Employee Related	70
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E1 Employees	R070 - Pension Costs	00916 - Early retirement strain costs	4,064
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E1 Employees	R071 - Redundancy / Severance Pay	00950 - Severance Pay	0
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E2 Premises	R106 - Cleaning & Domestic Supplies	11130 - Cleaning Materials	17
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E2 Premises	R108 - Rents - external	11300 - Rents	5,245
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E3 Transport	R203 - Contract Hire & Operating Leases	23010 - External Fleet and Plant Hire charges	2,974
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E3 Transport	R204 - Public Transport	24211 - Travel - Online Booking Service	2,588
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E3 Transport	R204 - Public Transport	24214 - Passenger Transport	147
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E3 Transport	R205 - Car Allowances	24200 - Car Allowances	1,724
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R301 - Equipment, Furniture & Materials	32000 - Equipment - Office, Tools and materials	9
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R301 - Equipment, Furniture & Materials	32001 - Office equipment	167
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R302 - Printing, Stationery & General Office Expenses	32020 - Printing, Stationery and General Office Materials	0
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R302 - Printing, Stationery & General Office Expenses	32035 - Newspapers, Books and Periodicals	1,705
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R302 - Printing, Stationery & General Office Expenses	34000 - Printing Services	150
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R302 - Printing, Stationery & General Office Expenses	34002 - Photocopying	1,209
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R302 - Printing, Stationery & General Office Expenses	34009 - Purchase Of Paper	116
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R302 - Printing, Stationery & General Office Expenses	34010 - Stationery - General	165
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R302 - Printing, Stationery & General Office Expenses	34025 - Books & Periodicals	0
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R302 - Printing, Stationery & General Office Expenses	34100 - Communication - Telephone	0
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R303 - Communications & Computing	32052 - Computer Equipment	43
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R303 - Communications & Computing	32067 - Communications Equipment	209
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R303 - Communications & Computing	32506 - Computer Stationery	3,694
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R303 - Communications & Computing	34016 - Communication - Postages	6,398
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R303 - Communications & Computing	34100 - Communication - Telephone	17,980
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R303 - Communications & Computing	34117 - Mobile Phone Charges	6,710
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R304 - Catering	32040 - Vending machines	0
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R304 - Catering	32200 - Provisions - Food	32
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R304 - Catering	32230 - Provisions - vending machines	1,752
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R304 - Catering	32240 - Catering-Wall C&Ctte	2,694
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R304 - Catering	32243 - Catering	133
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R304 - Catering	32300 - Clothing, Uniform & Laundry	0

A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R304 - Catering	32400 - Laundry	6,247
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R305 - Clothes, Uniform & Laundry	32400 - Laundry	9,320
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R306 - Services	36266 - Accommodation - Online Booking Service	227
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R308 - Grants & Subscriptions	36000 - Subscriptions	149
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R310 - Expenses	34218 - Subsistence	82
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R310 - Expenses	34220 - Subsistence Members	-30,629
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R310 - Expenses	34229 - Member - other allowances	0
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R314 - Advertising, Publicity & Marketing	34020 - Advertising - Misc	39
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R316 - Members Allowances	34221 - Members N.I.	34,204
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R316 - Members Allowances	34222 - Members Attend Allowance	779,961
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R316 - Members Allowances	34229 - Member - other allowances	0
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R399 - General Supplies and Services	30000 - Unallocated P Card Spend	40
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E4 Supplies	R399 - General Supplies and Services	36280 - Expenditure not classified elsewhere	469
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E5 Third Party	R499 - Other Third Party Payments	42535 - Hired or Contracted services	74
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E5 Third Party	R499 - Other Third Party Payments	45507 - Specialist Contracts & Fees	3,247
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E7 Recharge - Other F	R602 - Schools - Departmental Recharges	64660 - Courier and Transport Recharge	0
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E8 Recharge - Suppor	R604 - Recharge Admin and Other Buildings Charges	64400 - Admin Buildings Recharge	230,405
A7000 - Services To Members	Expense	E8 Recharge - Suppor	R605 - Recharge Support, Management and Admin	64300 - Recharge - Support Services	57,000
A7000 - Services To Members	Income	I1 Income	R802 - Other Grants, Reimbursements and Contributor	88044 - OGRC - Income from external sources	0

				Less Accommodation Overhead	-230,405
				Less Special Responsibility Allowances	-175,074
				Total Cost of Members	964,106
				Average Cost per Member	14,608
				Saving from Reduction in numbers by 1/3 - (i.e. 22)	321,369

Members' Allowances – Comparisons with Merseyside and Cheshire Local Authorities May 2016

Members' Allowances	Wirral	Liverpool City	Sefton	St Helens	Knowsley	Cheshire West and Chester	Cheshire East	Warrington	Halton
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Basic	8,712.45	10,077	8,794.51	7,626	9,109	11,573	11,200	7,911	8,262
Leader of the Council	22,927		26,383.54	33,036	27,328	28,931	27,000	20,014	21,306
Deputy Leader of the Council	11,463			18,426		14,466	16,300	15,012	14,488
Leader of the largest opposition Group	13,756	11,009	4,397.26	4,830	6,832	8,679	7,280	8,506	7,095
Deputy Leader of the largest opposition Group	6,878			1,524			3,640		
Leader of the 2 nd largest opposition Group	9,171	7,200 (x 2)	4,397.26	1,524		3,819	5,600	8,506	
Deputy Leader of the 2 nd largest opposition Group	4,585								

Members' Allowances	Wirral	Liverpool City	Sefton	St Helens	Knowsley	Cheshire West and Chester	Cheshire East Cheshire East £	Warrington	Halton
	£	£	£	£	£	£		£	£
Cabinet Member	9,171	12,628	17,589.03	15,246	13,664	12,730	13,500	10,008	11,931
Elected Mayor		79,500							
Mayor	10,700		13,191.77	7,626	9,349	6,374	14,000	15,012	11,931
Deputy Mayor	1,500	28,620		762		3,100	5,600	5,012	5,965
Policy and Performance Chairs (Scrutiny)	4,585	8,405	4,397.26	7,626 (Commission) 4,830 (Panels)	6,832	7,521	7,280	8,506	7,095
Planning Chair	4,585	8,405	8,794.51	7,626	6,832	8,679	7,280	8,506	7,095
Licensing Chair	4,585	8,405	8,794.51	7,626	6,832	7,521	7,280	8,506	7,095
Standards Chair	1,375							2,002	7,095
Audit Chair	4,585		4,397.26		4,554	7,521	7,280	8,506	7,095
Member of the Waste Disposal Authority	3,688 (£1,834 x 2)			4,830	911				

Members' Allowances	Wirral	Liverpool City	Sefton	St Helens	Knowsley	Cheshire West and Chester	Cheshire East	Warrington	Halton
	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£	£
Co-opted Members on the Standards Committee	25 per meeting	20 per meeting				25.25 per meeting	30 per meeting		
Merseyside Police and Crime Panel									