



Council Extraordinary Meeting

Town Hall
Wallasey

11 March, 2022

Dear Councillor

You are hereby summoned to attend an extraordinary meeting of the Council to be held at **5.30 p.m. (or on the rising of the 5pm meeting, whichever is the later)** on **Monday, 21 March 2022** in the Floral Pavilion, New Brighton to take into consideration and determine upon the following subjects:

Members of the public are encouraged to view the meeting via the webcast (see below), but for anyone who would like to attend in person, seating is limited therefore please contact us in advance of the meeting if you would like to reserve a seat. All those attending will be asked to wear a face covering (unless exempt) and are encouraged to take a Lateral Flow Test before attending. You should not attend if you have tested positive for Coronavirus or if you have any symptoms of Coronavirus.

Wirral Council is fully committed to equalities and our obligations under The Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty. If you have any adjustments that would help you attend or participate at this meeting, please let us know as soon as possible and we would be happy to facilitate where possible. Please contact committeeservices@wirral.gov.uk

This meeting will be webcast at
<https://wirral.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

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AGENDA

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members of the Council are asked to consider whether they have any disclosable pecuniary interests and/or any other relevant interest, in connection with any matter to be debated or determined at this meeting and, if so, to declare it and state the nature of such interest.

2. CIVIC MAYOR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

To receive the Civic Mayor's announcements and any apologies for absence.

3. MOVE TO WHOLE COUNCIL ELECTIONS (Pages 1 - 18)

The Council is requested to consider a report of the Chief Executive (Returning Officer) in respect of a proposed change to the current electoral cycle from elections by thirds to whole Council elections.



Director of Law and Governance

Audio/Visual Recording of Meetings

Everyone is welcome to record meetings of the Council and its Committees using non-disruptive methods. For particular meetings we may identify a 'designated area' for you to record from. If you have any questions about this please contact Committee and Civic Services (members of the press please contact the Press Office). Please note that the Chair of the meeting has the discretion to halt any recording for a number of reasons, including disruption caused by the filming or the nature of the business being conducted.

Persons making recordings are requested not to put undue restrictions on the material produced so that it can be reused and edited by all local people and organisations on a non-commercial basis.



COUNCIL MEETING

21st March 2022

REPORT TITLE:	MOVE TO WHOLE COUNCIL ELECTIONS
REPORT OF:	CHIEF EXECUTIVE (RETURNING OFFICER)

REPORT SUMMARY

A key recommendation of the External Assurance Reviews undertaken on behalf of the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities published on 2nd November 2021, was that the Council should move to implement a four-year, whole council electoral cycle at the earliest opportunity. This report outlines a process to enable that change to take place.

At a special meeting of Policy and Resources Committee held on 30 November 2021, the Committee voted to hold a public consultation process to seek the views of the public on moving to whole council elections in 2023. This report presents, for consideration, the outcomes of that public consultation.

A change to the current Electoral Cycle from elections by thirds to Whole Council Elections requires a decision of the Council and is subject to a two thirds majority.

The proposals within this report support the ambition of Members in delivering on all the objections detailed in the Wirral Plan 2021-2026.

RECOMMENDATION/S

Council is recommended to formally resolve to move to Whole Council Elections commencing at the Local Authority elections scheduled for May 2023.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 The Ministry for Housing and Local Government (MHCLG), now known as the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) and Ada Burns are working with Wirral Council to review the current governance arrangements and budgets. A series of recommendations were proposed in the external assurance review reports, one of which was that the Council should move to Whole Council Elections at the earliest opportunity. As a result, the Policy & Resources Committee resolved to undertake a public consultation on a proposal to move to Whole Council elections from May 2023.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 An alternative option would be to retain the current Elections by-thirds system.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 At the meeting of the Policy & Resources Committee held on 30th November 2022 the Committee were informed that The Secretary of State for the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities had written to the Council on 2nd November 2021 enclosing and publishing the two independent reports that make up the External Assurance Review. The letters requested the Council to set out in writing, within the following month, the steps it is taking in the immediate and longer term to respond to the Review and implement the recommendations. The Council wrote to the Minister explaining that a public consultation would be undertaken with a view to moving to Whole Council Elections in May 2023.
- 3.2 A public consultation ran for ten weeks, from 13th December 2021 to 20th February 2022. The consultation was conducted using offline and online channels and was well promoted within local newspapers and social media. Respondents were able to engage using an online form or by completing a paper form. Paper copies were made available, including an easy read version, at the central libraries and on request. Respondents were invited to submit additional comments via a dedicated email address, which was published on the 'Have your say' website alongside the online tool. A full outcomes report is attached at Appendix A. However, the overall results reveal that 60.9% of the 527 respondents were in favour of moving to whole Council Elections.
- 3.3 A move to whole council elections would mean that the Borough Council elections would be held once every four years, rather than in three out of every four years commencing in 2023. A move to whole council elections would also result in the count for the Local Authority elections being held on the day after the close of poll (a Friday for a typical Thursday poll)

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The annual budget set for Local Elections is £341,400 (2021/2022 figures).

- 4.2 The total 4-year cost for election cycle by thirds is £1,024,200. There is no budget provision for by-elections and includes a fallow year with a nil budget. Whole Council elections would cost £400,000 in year 1. Years 2, 3 and 4 budget proposal for by-elections is £40,000 per year. Total 4-year cost is £520,000.
- 4.3 When the Borough Elections are combined with other scheduled elections, any fixed costs incurred would be reduced by the level of contributions from Central Government and / or the Combined Authority.
- 4.4 Budgetary provision must be made for by-elections. If a seat has been declared vacant by the High Court or the local authority, a by-election must, subject to the six-month rule, be held within 35 working days of the date of the declaration. (Section 89(1) (a), LGA 1972). The estimated cost for a standalone by-election is £20,000. An annual budgetary provision should be provided to allow for two by elections per year in the three fallow years. In the year of whole Borough Elections, it would only be necessary to provide for one by-election.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 enables the Council to change its electoral cycle by way of a resolution at full Council.
- 5.2 If a Council wishes to move from thirds to whole council elections it must in accordance with S33(2) of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, as amended by Schedule 2 of the Localism Act 2011.
- consult such persons as it thinks appropriate on the proposed change.
 - convene a special meeting of the Council.
 - pass a Council resolution to change by a majority of at least two thirds of the elected Members voting on it.
 - publish an explanatory document on the decision and make this available for public inspection; and
 - give notice to the Electoral Commission.
- 5.3 The resolution must specify the year for the first ordinary elections of the Council at which all Councillors are to be elected.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS

- 6.1 Whole council elections are much more complex to administer and staff time would increase significantly with the increased numbers of nomination papers.
- 6.2 Elections staff will be required to administer other types of Elections and Referenda throughout the fallow years; however, they may also be available to support Democratic Services staff as instructed by the Head of Service.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 Voting for all three councillors under whole council elections could potentially cause confusion for voters

- 7.2 It may be difficult to recruit temporary election staff such as Presiding Officers if they are only recruited once every four years.
- 7.3 Some political parties may find it harder to resource the whole council elections process. It may be harder for independent candidates standing on a matter of strong local interest to get elected without an annual poll.
- 7.4 The Count for whole council elections would more than likely take longer due to complex counting procedures to be used. Consequently, it will be held on the Friday immediately after election day.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 A consultation on the proposal has been published between 13 December 2021 and 20 February 2022 using the following:-
 - Website – information about the process placed on the website and the ability for members of the public to complete an online survey
 - Paper copies of the surveys in the central libraries
 - Easy read version of the survey available online and in paper format
 - Leaflets
 - Facebook and Twitter
 - Press Release
 - Consultation with Elected Members, local Members of Parliament, Stakeholders and the public

Following the consultation, responses have been collated and are included in Appendix 1.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no direct equality implications relating to this report.

10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no known environmental or climate implications arising from this report.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 Whole Council Elections will realise a four yearly cost saving of £504,200 which equates to an annual saving of £126,050. The savings achieved by the proposed changes to the electoral arrangements would contribute towards meeting the Council's budgetary challenges.
- 11.2 Local community groups and businesses will lose revenue as those private venues utilised as Polling Places will be hired for one day every four years compared to one day three years out of every four. There will be limited election temporary employment opportunities for the local community.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Election Consultation Report

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Background papers used to prepare this report:

The Cycle of Local Government Elections in England – Consultation Paper Electoral Commission 2003
The Cycle of Local Government Elections in England – Recommendations for change – Electoral Commission 2004
Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 Sections 31-36
Localism Act 2011 Sections 21-24
Representation of The People Act 1983

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

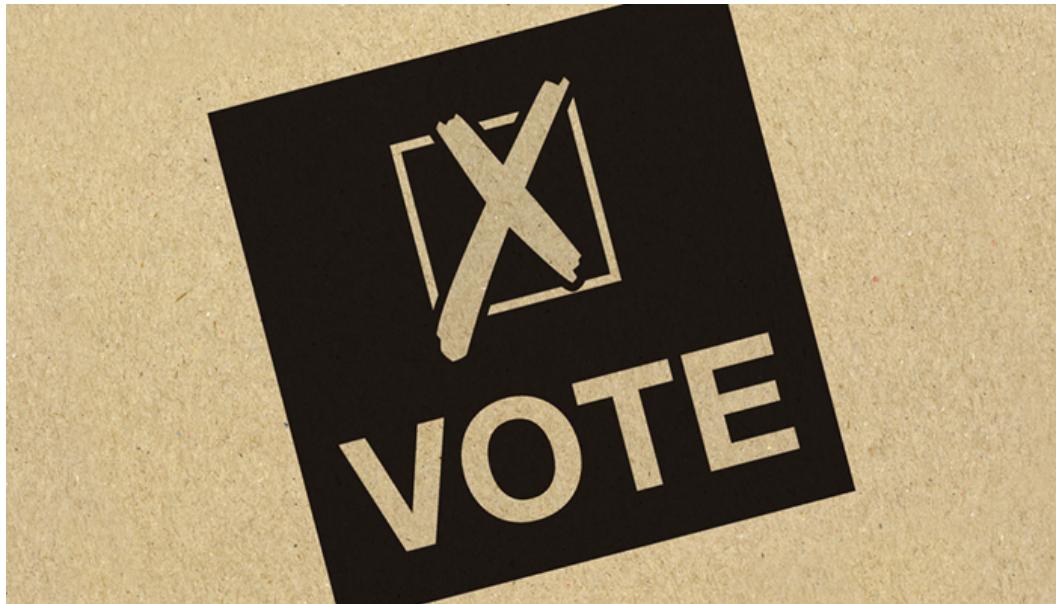
Council Meeting	Date
Children Young People and Education Committee	31 January 2022
Regulatory and General Purposes Committee	20 January 2022
Licensing, Health and Safety and General Purposes Committee	23 January 2019
Licensing Health and Safety and General Purposes Committee	20 November 2019

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Have your say

Wirral Council Local Elections Public Consultation Report



Consultation: 13 December 2021 – 20 February 2022

Report: 21 February 2022

Contents

1.0 Executive Summary	3
2.0 Methodology	5
2.1 The Poll	5
2.2 Analysis of Respondents	5
2.3 Interpretation of Results.....	5
2.4 Communication.....	6
3.0 Results	6
4.0 Demographics and Site Traffic.....	7
4.1 Demographics	7
4.2 Have your say - Site Traffic.....	14

1.0 Executive Summary

Wirral Council consulted the public on whether it should change to 'whole council' elections or continue with the current system of 'elections by thirds'.

The council currently uses a 'by thirds' electoral system. This means that over four years, elections are held in years one, two and three for one of the three councillors in each ward. In the fourth year there are no elections. The change to 'whole council' elections would mean the whole council would be elected at the same time once every four years.

The proposal to move to whole elections came out of a recent independent report into the council's governance arrangements, commissioned by the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities.

This consultation relates only to Wirral Council local elections. No other elections will be affected by any future change in Wirral Council's electoral cycle. Parliamentary elections and police and crime commissioner elections will continue their normal electoral cycle.

Under the Local Government and Public Involvement Health Act 2007, amended by the Localism Act 2011, the council has the power to change its electoral arrangements to whole council elections. This allows the council itself to decide whether to move to whole council elections, or back to elections by thirds. The council cannot move to a 50/50 electoral cycle as it has not elected this way in the past.

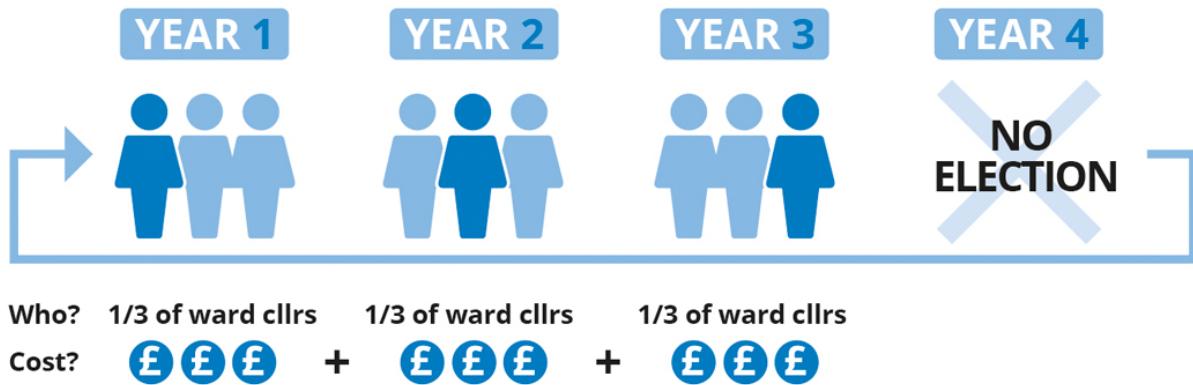
Through this consultation people were asked to provide their view on if the Council should move to an all-out election system, where the whole council would be elected at the same time once every four years.

The findings of the consultation were:

Do you think that Wirral Council should move to an all-out electoral system, where the whole council would be elected at the same time once every four years?

- 60.9% said 'Yes'
- 38.0% said 'No'
- 1.1% had no preference.

HOW WE VOTE NOW: ELECTION BY THIRDS



ANOTHER WAY: WHOLE COUNCIL ELECTIONS

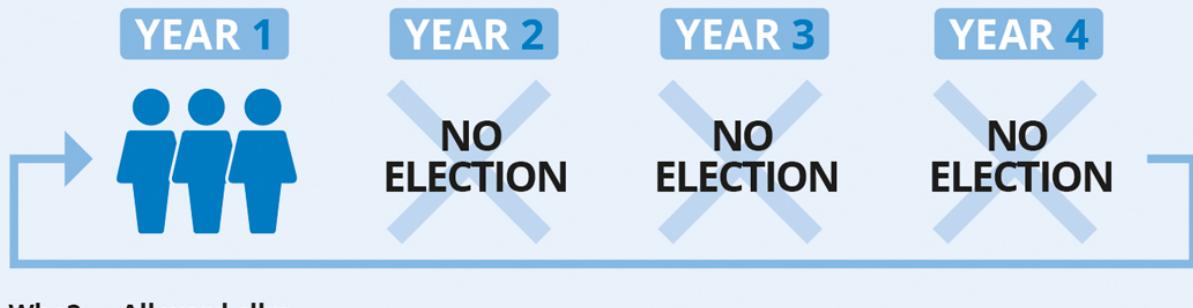


Figure 1: Illustration of Council election systems

2.0 Methodology

Through the elections consultation people were asked to tell us their view on a possible move to an all-out electoral system. A set of background information was provided to enable residents to be informed to answer the question.

The poll question was “Do you think that Wirral Council should move to an all-out electoral system, where the whole council would be elected at the same tie once every four years?” The options were to say Yes, No, or No preference.

Following the consultation, the feedback will be considered at a meeting of the Council on 21 March 2022.

The consultation was carried out between 13 December 2021 20 February 2022. The approach used was an online public consultation through the ‘Have your say’ consultation portal at www.haveyoursay.wirral.gov.uk with a page dedicated to the Elections Consultation

One online poll tool was provided for residents to engage with. Respondents were also able to request paper copies of the survey, including an easy read version, or submit additional comments via a dedicated email address, which was published on the ‘Have your say’ website alongside the online tool.

2.1 The Poll

Following closure of the consultation, the online, paper copy and Easy Read responses were collated and reported as one result.

2.2 Analysis of Respondents

Respondents to the online tools were provided with the option to provide demographic information about themselves. It must be noted that this is an option and that not all respondents included this information. This data allows the demographic results to be included in this report to enable analysis of the scope of responses and representation from different demographic groups.

2.3 Interpretation of Results

In terms of the results, it is important to note that the public consultation is not representative of the overall population but provides information on the opinion of those residents who engaged.

3.0 Results

Do you think that Wirral Council should move to an all-out electoral system, where the whole council would be elected at the same time once every four years?

527 people contributed to the consultation, 504 took the online poll, 16 people responded using a paper copy and 7 people responded using easy read versions of the poll.

Most people (60.9%) thought that the council should move to an all-out electoral system. 38.0% did not think the council should move to this system, and 1.1% had no preference.

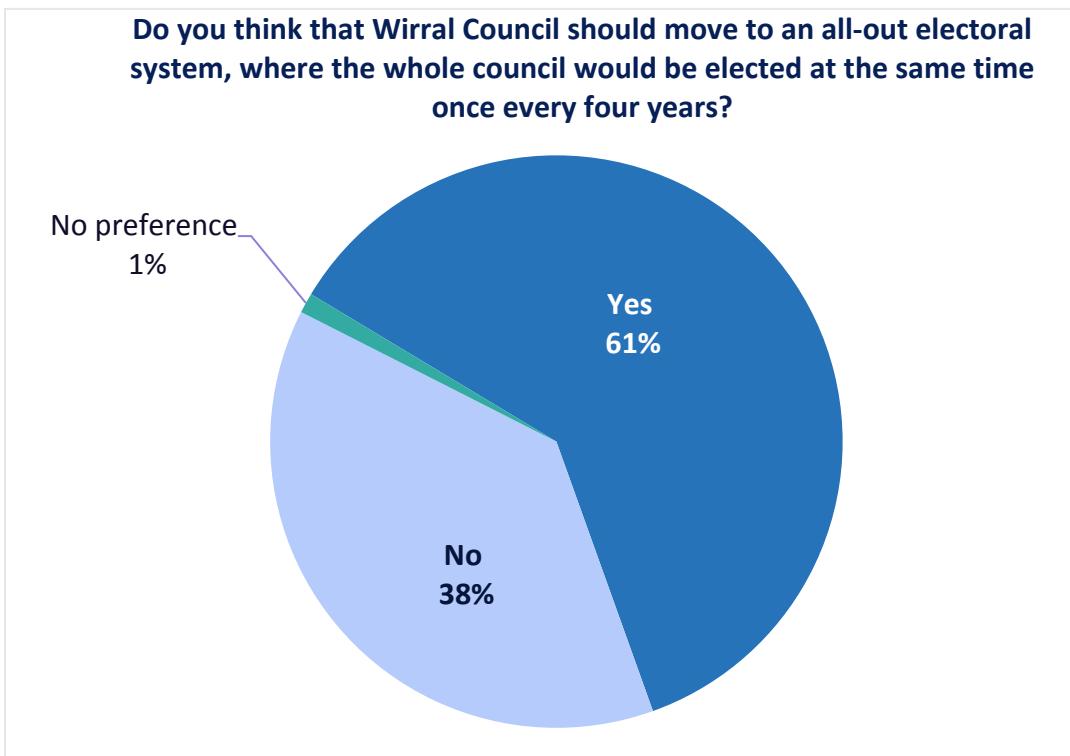


Figure 2: Do you think that Wirral Council should move to an all-out electoral system, where the whole council would be elected at the same time once every four years?

Count of Do you think that Wirral Council should move to an all-out electoral system, where the whole council would be elected at the same time once every four years?

Response	Easy read	Online	Paper	Grand Total	% of total
Yes	3	310	8	317	60.9%
No	1	191	8	199	38.0%
No preference	3	3		6	1.1%
Total	7	504	16	527	100.0%

Table 1: Count of Do you think that Wirral Council should move to an all-out electoral system, where the whole council would be elected at the same time once every four years?

4.0 Demographics and Site Traffic

4.1 Demographics

Registration was required to engage in the online Budget Consultation. The registration form included questions regarding demographics including gender, age group, ethnicity, and sexual orientation, however not all questions in the registration form were compulsory and respondents could choose to select 'prefer not to say' or skip the question. The demographics results are summarised below.

Most of the respondents (82.8%) classed themselves as local residents.



Figure 3: Who are you registering as?

The gender of respondents was 53.6% male, 35.8% female, with 9.8% preferring not to say and 0.8% preferring their own term.

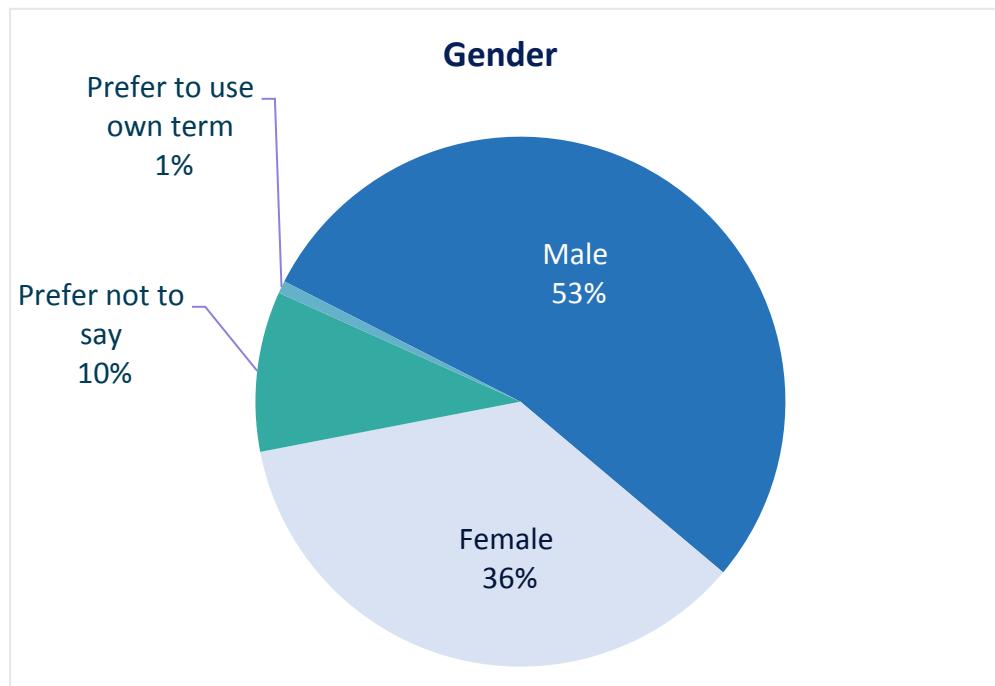


Figure 4: Gender of respondents

The age group profile is illustrated with the most common age groups were 65-74 years (24.7%), followed by 55-64 years (22.7%). The least represented groups were under 16s (0.2%) and 16-24 years (1.1%).

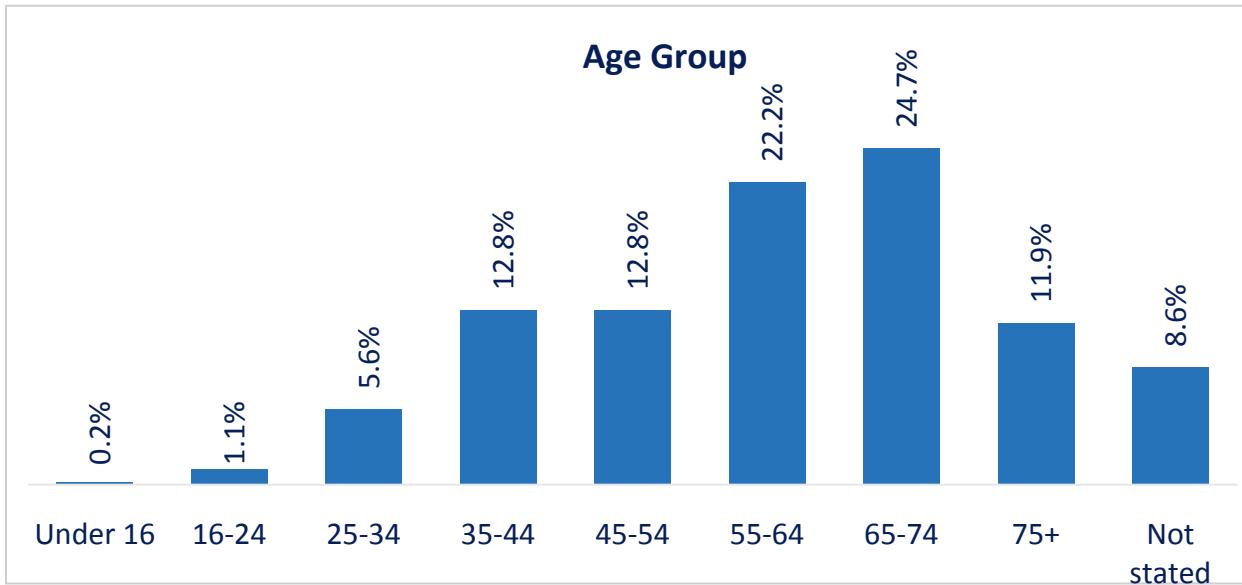


Figure 5: Age group of respondents

84.9% of respondents were white British, with only 1.1% of respondents were of a non-white or other (1.7%) ethnicity.

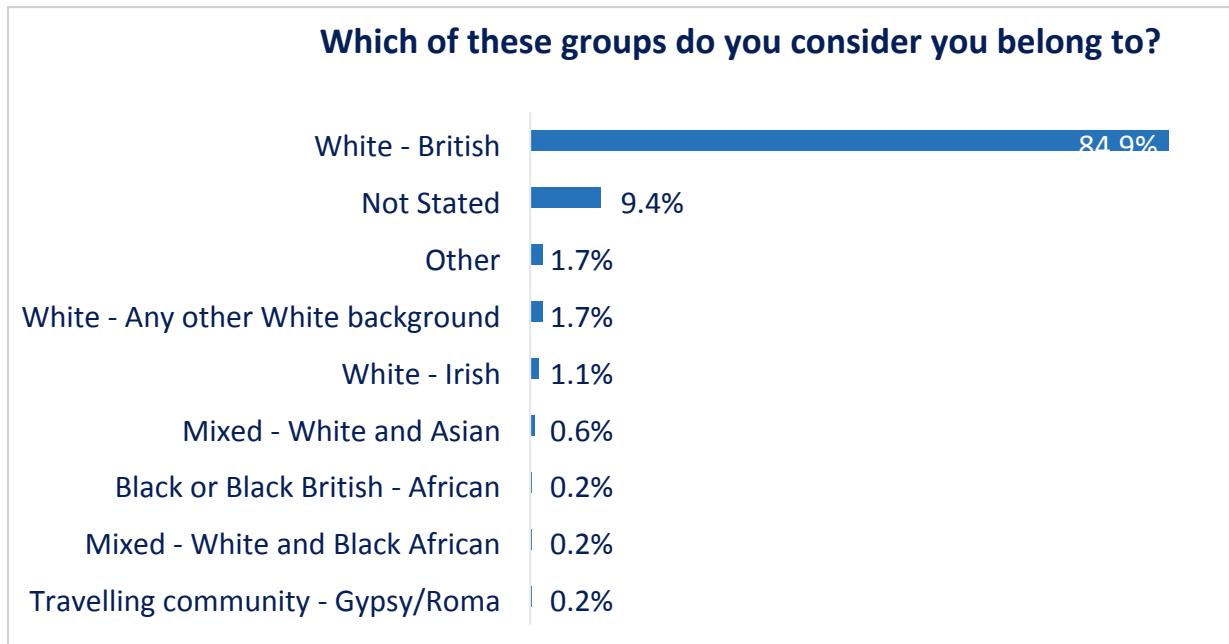


Figure 6: Ethnicity of respondents

72.2% of respondents were heterosexual, 3.8% were gay/ lesbian, 1.5% bisexual and 22.4% preferred not to say.

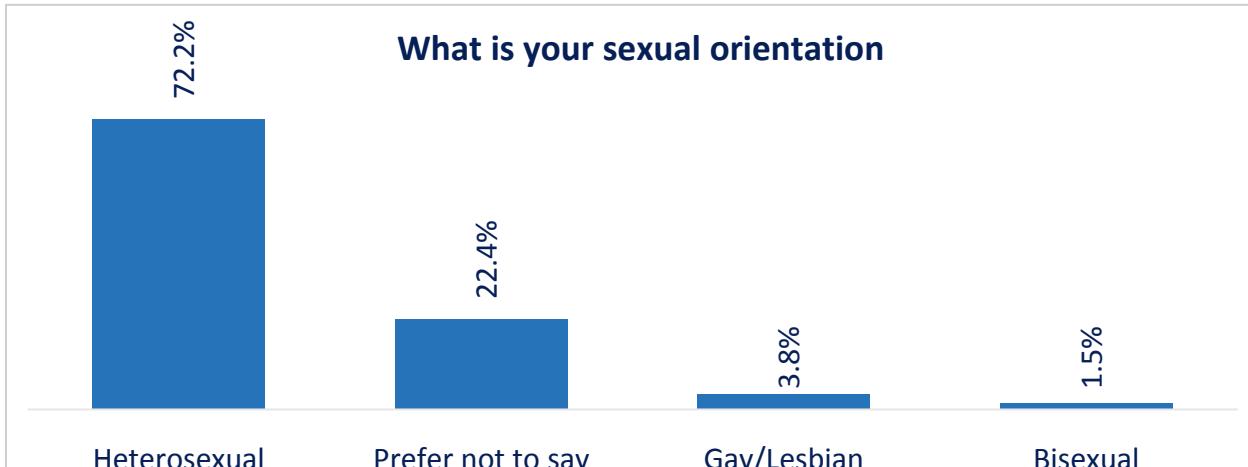


Figure 7: Sexual orientation of respondents

4.2 Have your say - Site Traffic

Reviewing the site activity, visits, and how people visit the site can be useful to evaluate if people are aware of the site, as well as to ensure engagement activities are deployed effectively, and to a wide range of different people – enhancing public engagement in the future.

Site registration allows us to confirm the number of engaged participants through the completion of a quick poll; 504 people completed the Poll online.

2,259 visited the Wirral Council Local Elections Consultation page of the Have Your Say site, of these 50 downloaded a document and 504 people completed the quick poll survey.

These figures cannot be viewed as definitive as they are based on site tracking through ‘cookies’ and there are a number of factors that can impact on this. These include that cookies may be disabled or deleted, individuals may access the site multiple times through different devices or different browsers. However, the figures can be used to gauge how much interest has been generated in individual projects through the rate of engaged participants.

The route that people access the site is known as the traffic source. The ‘Have your say’ portal allows analysis to be carried out on traffic source, and if they lead to engagement in the site tools such as the questionnaire. This analysis allows a greater understanding of which communication and promotional tools to use to optimise engagement.

For this project a range of traffic sources have been reviewed and summarised in the table below. Most visits to the site were either visits via social media posts (710 visits) or direct visits (709) where people have either pasted or typed the URL in to their browser. Direct visits generated a rate of engagement of 25%, meaning 25% of these visits resulted in completion of the poll, and social media visits had an engagement rate of 17.7%

TRAFFIC CHANNEL	AWARE VISITS	INFORMED VISITS (%)	ENGAGED VISITS (%)
SOCIAL	710	139 (19.6%)	126 (17.7%)
DIRECT	709	191 (26.9%)	177 (25%)
EMAIL	325	82 (25.2%)	77 (23.7%)
SEARCH ENGINE	107	32 (29.9%)	24 (22.4%)
.GOV SITES	4	3 (75%)	1 (25%)
REFERRALS	404	103 (25.5%)	99 (24.5%)

Table 2: Site traffic sources

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