

THE WIRRAL PLAN: A 2020 VISION

WIRRAL'S HOUSING STRATEGY

Wirral Council
July 2016

THE WIRRAL PARTNERSHIP

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1.0 FOREWORD

Councillor George Davies - Cabinet Member – Housing and Community Safety

We are committed to driving growth in our economy: creating jobs, attracting new businesses and making sure that existing employers within the borough have every opportunity to expand and succeed.

Ensuring Wirral has a fantastic range of housing, at the right quality, is a fundamental factor in ensuring our plans for growth are successful. We must and will be ambitious, for our residents now and the Wirral of the future.

Through the work described in this Strategy I am confident and proud to announce we will build at least 3,500 new homes by 2020.

The importance of high quality, affordable homes cannot be underestimated. Our homes provide us with a safe and secure environment from which our communities grow and people build their confidence. It is clear that the impact a good home has on a family is almost immeasurable; in terms of health, wellbeing, social mobility and general quality of life.

Making sure living in Wirral means living in a good home is one of our most important pledges but more than that, it is a vital legacy this generation must pass on to the next. Building thousands of new homes is a key challenge for us: reversing a trend of under-building can help kick start our economy, encourage more people to live and work in our borough and transform the lives of our residents.

We have made commitments about how many houses we will build and how many houses we will improve. We will keep those promises, and we will go further; focussing on homebuilding as a key aspect of our strategy to grow our local economy and create jobs.

This Housing Strategy provides the blueprint for how we will succeed, alongside ensuring existing stock is improved where conditions fall below the required minimum standard and the most vulnerable people are protected.

We know our financial situation is challenging, and in times of continued austerity we must focus our attention and resources on those issues that bring the biggest impact on residents' lives. We must focus on what matters most to local people, on what brings the biggest improvements to their health, to their wellbeing and to their quality of life.

Housing is too complex an issue to be addressed by a single organisation. I thank all of our partners who have played such a key role in developing this innovative Strategy to transform our housing landscape. If we work together to deliver the ambitions of this strategy then we will also achieve many other Wirral Plan pledges: more people will live in Wirral, more businesses will move and thrive here, homes will be safer, people will be healthier and our borough will be more attractive.

It is clear to me that we have no bigger priority for the next five years: we must achieve substantive, transformational improvement in the level and quality of housing in Wirral.

The scale of the positive impact, on this generation and the next, means nothing else is acceptable.



A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "George Davies". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Councillor George Davies

The importance of high quality, affordable homes cannot be underestimated. Our homes provide us with a safe and secure environment from which our communities grow and people build their confidence.

2.0 INTRODUCTION

The Wirral Plan 2020 sets out a commitment to work together over the next five years and beyond to achieve the 20 Pledges. Our Wirral Plan pledge states:

Good quality housing which meets the needs of residents:

A safe and secure home is vital to all Wirral residents. We are working to improve the quality and supply of Wirral's housing stock, providing more affordable homes and specialist housing solutions, including extra care homes and supported living accommodation.

Access to good quality housing is a foundation upon which people can build happy and successful lives, and a crucial component of strong and sustainable communities. It is important that our residents are able to find the right home in the right place so they and their families are able to live their lives to the full and achieve their potential.

More than 320,000 people live in Wirral, in more than 140,000 households. Ours is a borough of sharp contrasts; with many affluent and attractive residential areas alongside areas of high deprivation, particularly in specific areas of the borough.

It is our job to close this gap and work towards making sure residents in every one of Wirral's communities are able to live in a good, safe and attractive home.

This Housing Strategy sets out our long term strategic housing direction for Wirral. It sets out how we will work in partnership to deliver the ambitions of the Wirral Plan and our housing priorities.

We will work with a wide range of partners and stakeholders to improve the quality, quantity and access to housing, and deliver on what matters to local people, to ensure Wirral is a great place to live, work and invest.

Our housing priorities over the next five years:

This strategy has been developed based on ongoing consultation and discussion with key partners and stakeholders; helping us to identify key areas of focus which will deliver major housing improvements in Wirral.

We have carried out detailed research and analysed key statistics and data from a range of sources to identify new and emerging issues, and ensure our priorities for housing in Wirral are supported by a strong evidence base. Consultation has also taken place with registered housing providers, the Homes and Communities Agency and private developers to inform the priorities within this strategy.

The priorities to be achieved through this strategy and associated plans are:

- **Building more homes to meet our economic growth ambitions.**
- **Improving the quality of housing available to our residents.**
- **Meeting the housing and support needs of our most vulnerable people to enable them to live independently.**

Key to delivering our housing strategy will be its alignment with both the borough's planning framework, which will set out an overall housing requirement for Wirral; and Wirral's Growth Plan which recognises the borough has a significant number of opportunities for growth which we need to build and capitalise on to transform Wirral's economy in the future.

To deliver the priorities outlined above we are committed to working in partnership to achieve our ambitions and ensure Wirral's housing offer provides good quality housing that meets the needs of our residents.

Snap shot of housing in Wirral

Building more houses to meet our economic growth ambitions.

- Wirral's population is expected to increase by 2.6 % by 2037.
- Wirral has seen the second largest (7%) increase in GVA nationally.
- Housing sales have increased by 40% in Wirral since 2013/14.
- Almost 2,000 homes have been built in Wirral since 2010, of which more than 1,100 were affordable.

Improving the quality of housing available to our residents

- 1 in 3 homes fail to meet decent homes standard.
- 16% of households in Wirral experience difficulty in heating their homes.
- Almost 1,200 empty properties were brought back into use since 2010.
- Since 2015, 1,100 private sector homes have been licensed through our selective licensing scheme.

Meeting the housing and support needs of our most vulnerable people to enable them to live independently

- We have helped over 3,500 people access a home with 70% of those applicants assessed as having a priority housing need.
- Since 2010, we have worked in partnership to prevent over 2,800 families and individuals from becoming homeless.
- 200 extra care units currently in Wirral with demand for more.

A photograph of a construction site with three workers. One worker in a red hard hat and high-visibility vest points towards the camera. Another worker in a white hard hat and red jacket holds a rolled-up document. A third worker in a blue hard hat and high-visibility vest is measuring a wall. The background shows a building under construction with grey concrete blocks and a brick chimney.

3.0 BUILDING MORE HOMES TO MEET OUR ECONOMIC GROWTH AMBITIONS

To meet our ambitions to grow the local economy and create more businesses and jobs in Wirral, we know we will need to build significantly more homes over the next five years than have been built over the last decade.

We are ambitious about growing our local economy, and have plans in place to make those ambitions a reality. Our vision over the next five years is for sustainable, accelerated growth based on a more connected Wirral; creating a place where all residents are able to enjoy a good quality of life in a high-quality borough.

Wirral is a location that is made for business. It is at the heart of the UK, close to Liverpool, Cheshire, North Wales and Greater Manchester and is an international gateway that's full of opportunity. It is clear that few places can match Wirral's connectivity for businesses.

We are perfectly positioned to become the most desirable postcode in the developing Northern Powerhouse. To meet our ambitions, we need to ensure investors and developers are aware of what Wirral has to offer, and we need to regularly work with them to help attract new residents and businesses to Wirral.

There is an intrinsic link between better housing and economic growth, and we know for every home we build, more jobs will be generated. The quality of the borough's housing offer is therefore critical to realising our growth ambition and delivering our investment priorities.

Housing also plays an essential role in the physical regeneration of an area, defining local places and helping us to make the most of Wirral's offer as a place to work, live and enjoy.

We have submitted a Housing Zone application and if we are successful we will be able to access government investment and support to accelerate house building. A strategic housing market assessment has been finalised which sets out the number of homes that will be needed over the next 15 years and beyond, and a review has been completed to identify available land and sites for new housing development in order to meet the borough's future housing needs.

We now need to actively market Wirral for housing development, and where appropriate, review and strengthen both our policies and delivery arrangements to encourage and enable housing growth in the borough. We will work with housing developers and investors to realise our ambitions, and where the housing market needs additional support to build new homes, then we will take action to proactively intervene and put in place measures to accelerate growth in the market. We will create a dedicated team to make this happen and provide the necessary leadership, expertise and investment to deliver the thousands of homes that we want to see built in the borough over the next five years and beyond.

We have already established the One Public Sector Estate Board through the Wirral Partnership to effectively manage public sector assets across the borough. This will also provide significant opportunities to ensure these assets are aligned to our economic and housing growth plans.

We want to ensure housing in Wirral is affordable for households in the owner-occupied, social and private rented sectors and will therefore explore housing development opportunities for a range of different housing tenures and requirements, including affordable and starter homes.

Wirral plays an important role in the Liverpool City Region, which is fundamental to the borough's economic growth and housing plans. As many as four in ten of our residents work in the Liverpool City Region or Chester, so ensuring our approach to housing and development is appropriate for both the borough and the wider region is vital.

As part of the recent Devolution Agreement, the Liverpool City Region will have greater flexibilities, allowing strategic planning powers to be used to help speed up economic growth, housing development and deliver the ambitions set out within this strategy.

The delivery of this Housing Strategy will therefore need to be flexible enough to respond to the opportunities and challenges which are likely to arise from the Growth Plan, the outcome of the Wirral and Liverpool City Region Strategic Housing Market Assessments and the future development of Wirral's planning framework.

What do we already know?

- By 2037, Wirral's population is estimated to increase by 2.6% with the number of households forecast to increase by 9.34%.ⁱ
- There is a shortage of identified housing sites in Wirral which will need to be addressed to meet our housing growth requirements.ⁱⁱ
- In 2014/15, 322 affordable homes were delivered in Wirral, 7.3% above our target.ⁱⁱⁱ

How are we going to get there?

- We will deliver at least 3,500 new homes, including 1,000 new homes at Wirral Waters by 2020.
- We will actively review the availability of land for housing development, and work collectively to unlock potential sites to build new homes.
- We will establish a dedicated housing growth team including housing, planning, economic development and asset management expertise to deliver our housing growth plans. This will provide the opportunity to set up a separate Housing Company in the future to proactively market and manage housing development opportunities in Wirral.
- We will establish a Housing Growth Board to oversee and govern the delivery of our housing growth ambitions and will work to ensure these are fully aligned to our broader economic growth plans.

- We will actively market Wirral for housing growth, and engage with housing developers, investors and other key stakeholders to develop packages of support to assist in the delivery of new homes.
- We will work as part of the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority Devolution Agreement to commission a joint housing and employment land study, and develop a Single Statutory City Region Framework supporting the delivery of strategic housing and employment sites.
- We will establish a single approach to strategically manage our public sector assets across Wirral through our One Public Sector Estate Board.

How will we measure if we're getting this right?

- 3,500 new homes will be built by 2020.
- 300 new extra care units will be developed by 2020.

There is an intrinsic link between better housing and economic growth, and we know for every home we build, more jobs will be generated. The quality of the borough's housing offer is therefore critical to realising our growth ambition and delivering our investment priorities

A woman with curly hair, wearing safety glasses and a high-visibility yellow vest over a grey shirt, is kneeling on a wooden floor. She is focused on working on a white radiator, using a pair of yellow-handled pliers. A blue heat gun is placed on the floor next to her. The background shows a room with a window and some tools on a surface.

4.0 IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF WIRRAL'S HOUSING OFFER FOR OUR RESIDENTS

A good quality home provides comfort and security for people regardless of their health, disability or age. It provides a solid foundation for residents to lead fulfilling and independent lives to earn a good living, raise a family and be an active participant in their local community.

Well maintained homes are an essential part of creating attractive and desirable neighbourhoods where people choose to live. Our ambition is to improve housing standards across Wirral, focussing on those areas most in need.

There is a clear link between the quality of a person's living conditions and their social, emotional and economic wellbeing. A key priority for this strategy will be to support residents who experience unacceptable living conditions, such as substandard housing and fuel poverty meaning they cannot afford to heat their homes. We will work to reduce the number of serious health conditions which are linked to living in cold homes across the borough.

Significant improvements have been made to the borough's social housing, however there is still further work to be done and we will ensure improvements continue, particularly for those homes which are hard to let or where there is no longer a demand from particular groups.

We are clear the responsibility for maintaining private housing standards rests first and foremost with the homeowner; however the Council and its partners have a key role to support our most vulnerable residents where serious hazards have been identified in the home that affect an individual's health and wellbeing. We have seen a positive impact following the introduction of our selective licensing scheme to improve housing standards in private rented accommodation, and we will continue to support all residents particularly those who are vulnerable, to ensure they are not living in an unsafe, cold or damp home.

What do we already know?

- Almost 1 in 4 private properties (23%) fails the decent homes standard with this figure significantly worse (32%) in the private rented sector.^{iv}
- Wirral has over 4,400 private empty homes (short and long term).^v
- 16% of households in Wirral experience difficulty in heating their home, with 7.1% of households only able to heat some or one room in winter.^{vi}
- It is estimated that 22 excess winter deaths in Wirral each year could be attributed to fuel poverty.^{vii}

How are we going to get there?

- We will work with landlords, residents and tenants to improve housing conditions, and where this fails we will take enforcement action or target financial assistance to the most vulnerable households to enable residents to remain in their homes.
- We will work to promote energy efficiency improvements in the poorest housing stock and facilitate initiatives which enable people to stay safe and warm in their homes and reduce fuel poverty.
- We will work with social housing providers to make the best use of stock, meet local housing need and attract people in employment, from within and outside the Borough, who need accommodation.
- We will work with our partners to target empty property interventions and bring long term empty properties back into use, improve neighbourhoods and the housing offer in Wirral.
- We will continue to implement our selective licensing scheme to improve housing standards in private rented accommodation.

How will we measure if we're getting this right?

- 2,250 private sector homes are improved by 2020.
- 1,250 empty homes are brought back into use by 2020.
- 1,200 homes requiring mandatory or additional licenses will be inspected by 2020.



5.0 MEETING THE HOUSING AND SUPPORT NEEDS OF OUR MOST VULNERABLE PEOPLE TO ENABLE THEM TO LIVE INDEPENDENTLY

We are determined to build strong and sustainable communities for all residents, ensuring we meet the housing and support needs of vulnerable people. We will ensure vulnerable people are able to live independently, and are provided with specialist support as and when they need it.

We want every resident to be able to make a valuable contribution to their communities. It is therefore vital vulnerable people are supported to live independently and empowered to play an active part in society through having the right choice and availability of housing.

We know the number of older people living in Wirral is increasing and we need to explore specialist housing provision to meet their expectations and extra demand. We know some residents in the borough want and would benefit from extra care housing, and will meet this need through developing new schemes across Wirral.

Early intervention and support for vulnerable people (e.g. older people, people who are homeless, those who have physical and learning difficulties, families who are in crisis and children who are looked after by the local authority), to improve their housing, can have a positive impact on a person's life and independence, helping them to succeed. This consequently can reduce the requirement for more substantial, specialist services such as residential care or hospital treatment.

The needs of homeless people are becoming increasingly complex, with high incidences of unresolved mental health problems, alcohol and substance misuse, anti-social and offending behaviour. We will continue to support our homeless residents to address these challenges in order that they can access both temporary homeless services and future accommodation.

We know welfare reform changes are impacting on many groups including disabled people, lone parents, families and young people. We will continue to review the impact of welfare reform on our residents and consider packages of support required.

What do we already know?

- By 2037, residents aged over 65 years are projected to make up 42% of all households and there is likely to be an increase in the number of households containing a resident with a disability to 67% by 2037. ^{viii}
- Over 4,000 older people in Wirral receive sheltered housing services. ^{ix}
- In 2015/16, an average of 335 households were prevented from becoming homeless every three months, through either assisting residents to remain in their own homes, or assisting them to access alternative accommodation. ^x
- Between 2013 and 2015, over 6000 households sought housing advice and assistance. In 30% of these cases, the potential loss of accommodation was as a direct consequence of affordability issues linked to welfare reforms. ^{xi}
- Between 2013/14 and 2015/16, the adaptations service saw an increase of 56.1% in the number of applications for people requiring minor works, to enable them to leave hospital and other social care settings and to also avoid admission to hospital. ^{xii}
- Over 2,000 home adaptations are completed each year to enable disabled people to remain in their own homes. ^{xiii}

How are we going to get there?

- We will complete a review of housing support services for older people to develop new models of delivering accommodation and support, including new extra care housing schemes and sheltered accommodation.
- We will complete a strategic review of all supported accommodation services for people experiencing social exclusion, to identify whether the current supported housing services offer meets the diverse needs of the Borough.

- We will continue to monitor and respond to the impacts of welfare reforms on vulnerable households; in particular we will examine the consequences of welfare reforms on Wirral's younger population so we can work in partnership to mitigate the impact.
- We will work to meet the multiple and complex needs of vulnerable homeless people and commission new support services to engage those who use our services.
- We will work to ensure housing is accessible through adaptations and other mechanisms to support residents' needs and keep them in their homes where possible.

How will we measure if we're getting this right?

- An increase in the number of people over 50 living in appropriate housing, that meets their needs (2015 Wirral Residents Survey).
- 300 new extra care housing units to be completed by 2020.
- 2,000 home adaptations to be delivered each year.
- Complete 2,000 Disabled Facilities Grants assessment each year.
- Each year, 5,500 vulnerable residents will be supported in their accommodation to maintain their independence.
- Reduce homelessness through prevention.

We will ensure vulnerable people are able to live independently, and are provided with specialist support as and when they need it.

6.0 ACTION PLAN

Action	By When	Organisation
6.1 Building more homes in Wirral to meet our economic growth ambitions		
Finalise Wirral's new Strategic Housing Market Assessment.	July 2016	Wirral Council
Approval of Core Strategy Local Plan including affordable housing policy approach.	March 2017	Wirral Council
Work with partners to facilitate solutions to ensure the delivery of new affordable homes in the Borough.	March 2020	Wirral Council, Strategic Housing Partnership
Identify opportunities to unlock sites and identify resources required to kick-start both stalled and new housing sites in the Borough.	March 2017	Wirral Council
Support stalled sites and marginal housing schemes through the Council's Phase 1 Affordable Housing Programme.	March 2018	Wirral Council
Identify pipe-line housing sites to support the delivery of new homes in the Borough including potential use of Public Sector owned assets.	March 2017	Wirral's One Public Sector Estate Board
Work with private sector partners to ensure our housing growth plan reflects market demand.	March 2020	Wirral Council
Identify wider strategic and financial support in the delivery of new homes.	March 2020	Homes and Communities Agency
Complete Liverpool City Region Strategic Housing & Employment Market Assessment.	December 2016	Liverpool City Region Authorities
Undertake a feasibility review of the opportunity to develop a local housing company at either a Liverpool City Region or local authority level.	March 2017	Liverpool City Region Authorities
Establish a City Region Land Commission to support the better co-ordination and release of public assets with the aim of increasing sites for economic growth, housing and improved communities.	March 2020	Liverpool City Region Authorities
Develop a housing marketing plan as part of wider Liverpool City Region housing offer and Economic Growth Strategy.	March 2017	Liverpool City Region Authorities
Develop Wirral's Marketing and Communication strategy to promote the Borough housing offer alongside Wirral's Growth Plan.	August 2016	Wirral Council
Identify required resources to deliver housing growth in Wirral	October 2016	Wirral Council

Action	By When	Organisation
6.2 Improving the quality of Wirral's housing offer for our residents		
Develop targeted campaigns to address poor quality housing and fuel poverty through advice and assistance.	March 2020	Wirral Partnership
Deliver solid wall insulation programme in Selective Licensing areas.	March 2017	Wessex EAC
Deliver awareness raising programme of fuel poverty alleviation assistance and energy efficiency in Wirral.	March 2018	Energy Projects Plus
Maximise funding opportunities to facilitate initiatives which enable people to stay safe and warm in their homes.	March 2020	Wirral Council
Inspect all homes requiring mandatory or additional licensing for compliance.	March 2020	Wirral Council
Reduce the number of homes with a Category 1 or Category 2 Hazard under the Housing Health and Safety Rating System.	March 2020	Wirral Council
Refresh Wirral's empty homes delivery plan.	March 2017	Wirral Council
Undertake a survey to identify barriers preventing long term empty properties being brought back into use and what incentives would encourage owners of empty properties to bring them back into use.	September 2016	Wirral Council

Action	By When	Organisation
6.3 Meeting the housing and support needs of our most vulnerable people to enable them to live independently		
Review the adaptations programme to focus on health and social care priorities, including preventing hospital admissions and supporting hospital discharge	October 2016	Wirral Council
Explore opportunities to introduce smart home technology to support independent living	March 2017	Merseyside Fire & Rescue Services / Wirral Council
Complete a strategic review of supported Housing Services for homelessness and socially excluded groups	September 2016	Wirral Council
Develop and finalise a Housing Support Commissioning plan	October 2016	Wirral Council
Develop a Young Persons Housing Plan to address the housing requirements of this client profile	October 2016	Young Persons Strategic Housing Group
Increase the availability of accessible homes requiring adaptations by assessing 2,000 Disabled Facilities Grants per annum	March 2020	Wirral Council
Review the process route for people with disabilities and mobility problems who require access to re-housing	March 2017	Wirral Council
Establish a Learning Disabilities Housing Steering Group to ensure the current and future housing needs of people with Learning Disabilities are addressed	September 2016	Wirral Council
Establish an Older Person Housing Steering Group to ensure the current and future housing needs of people with Older People are addressed	September 2016	Wirral Council
Develop Supported Housing Strategy for all vulnerable client groups	March 2018	Wirral Council
Work with Private Rented Sector to enable opportunities to access suitable tenancies to discharge homelessness statutory duty e.g. agree minimum twelve month tenancy	March 2017	Wirral Council

Action	By When	Organisation
Commence homelessness review to inform the development of the 2018-2023 Homelessness Strategy	August 2017	Wirral Council
Deliver the Liverpool City Region Asylum Seeker Dispersal programme	March 2017	SERCO
Co-ordinate Wirral contribution to the Liverpool City Region response to Syrian Person Resettlement Programme	January 2017	Liverpool City Region Asylum & Syrian Refugee Lead Officers Group
Work with all partners to monitor the range and cumulative impact of welfare reforms, co-ordinate an impact assessment and develop effective responses	Ongoing from June 2016	Wirral Strategic Welfare Reform Working Group
Work with Registered Providers and private companies to deliver 300 additional Extra care homes	March 2018	Wirral Council
Undertake procurement framework and appoint delivery partners for Extra Care provision in Wirral	October 2016	Wirral Council
Complete strategic review of sheltered housing services for older people and agree scheme proposals	March 2017	Wirral Council

7.0 CONCLUSION

The provision of good quality homes which meet the needs of Wirral's existing and future residents is vital in providing people with a safe and secure environment in which to thrive. Wirral Council will work with partners to continue to collectively identify how new and existing initiatives should be maximised, focussing resources and ensuring initiatives are targeted to achieve our outcomes.

To support this process, this strategy has been developed based on a robust evidence base which will be continually reviewed and updated and as a result will clearly focus our three overarching priorities throughout the life of the strategy, ensuring they remain responsive to the changing housing environment.

We have set out our approach to working with a range of partners to respond to these priorities and ultimately meet our Wirral Plan pledge of 'good quality housing that meets the needs of residents'.

8.0 REFERENCES

ⁱOffice for National Statistics (2015): 2012-based Household Projections: England 2012-2037;. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-household-projections>

ⁱⁱWirral Annual Monitoring Report, 2015

ⁱⁱⁱAffordable Housing Performance Indicator, final for 2015/16, April 2016

^{iv}Wirral Council and David Adamson & Partners, Wirral Private Sector House Condition Survey 2013

^vWirral Council, Council Tax Records, 1st April 2016

^{vi}Wirral Council and David Adamson & Partners, Wirral Private Sector House Condition Survey 2013

^{vii}Department of Energy & Climate Change (2012): Getting the Measure of Fuel Poverty; (<http://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/datasets/excesswintermortalityinenglandandwalesreferencetables>).

^{viii}Office for National Statistics (2015): 2012-based Household Projections: England 2012-2037;. <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/live-tables-on-household-projections>

^{ix}Wirral Council Supported Housing Services

^xDepartment of Communities & Local Government (2015): Homelessness Statistics; <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/homelessness-statistics>

^{xi}Department of Communities & Local Government (2015): Homelessness Statistics; <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/homelessness-statistics>

^{xii}Wirral Council Supported Housing Services

^{xiii}Wirral Council Supported Housing Services

To find out more:



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