Wirral Plan

2021-26

Equity for People and Place

Keeping Wirral Well

Contents

2 Foreword

3 The Place

4 The Borough of Wirral
5 Wirral in a Lifetime

6 The Vision

7 Sustainable Environment
9 Brighter Futures
11 Inclusive Economy
13 Safe and Pleasant Communities
15 Active and Healthy Lives

17 The Plan

18 Working in Partnership
19 Cross Cutting Strategies
20 Underpinning Principles
21 Underpinning Activity

23 Our Commitment

Foreword

Without a doubt, there has been some remarkable changes taking place across Wirral during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The pace and efficacy in which council services have adapted to the challenges presented by the unfolding situation has been astounding and the willingness of people across the borough to work together to protect lives and support each other has been humbling.

Incredible examples of how partners have joined together in community outreach, from new partnerships with local organisations, businesses, and individuals to council employees who have volunteered to undertake radically different roles, providing support where needed most and delivering the critical services required to protect our most vulnerable.

The response has highlighted the importance of emergency planning, clear and honest communication, flexibility of working arrangements, quick thinking, rapid responses, and forward planning. Underpinning all of this has been a robust digital system, which has provided remote connectivity where face to face contact has been extremely restricted. It has enabled the council to maintain essential services and redeploy talent.

However, as well as these positive responses, we know that Covid-19 has accelerated existing inequalities within the borough in terms of both health outcomes and wider socio-economic disparities. Some groups have been, and will be, much more affected through issues such as unemployment, redundancy, loss of income, debt and hardship, with children, families, and young people living in poverty.

There is no doubt that this crisis has also sharply exposed existing unacceptable socio-economic and health inequalities in our borough. We know the unfair impact of the pandemic on those already disadvantaged groups, and the additional burden COVID-19 has placed on areas with already poor health outcomes. That is why is we are committed to building a fairer, more prosperous Wirral, where local people can get good jobs and achieve their aspirations. Community Wealth Building is a key part of how we will achieve this and will help improve the economic, social and health chances for residents. Community Wealth Building is therefore at the heart of our refreshed Wirral Plan, to help drive inclusive economic growth as well improving services for health and social care; families; environment; and housing.

For all of the above reasons, this Wirral Plan will put tackling inequalities at its core. We have a once in a lifetime opportunity to do things differently and make a fairer, more inclusive borough.

J Williamson

Councillor Janette Williamson,
Wirral Council Leader

The Place

Wirral Council touches almost every aspect of residents' lives. That is a huge responsibility. We're expected to do our job, do it well, and help people live better, happier and safer lives. We're committed to reducing inequalities and promoting opportunities for everyone, right across the borough.

The new Wirral Plan focuses on making the borough a more equitable and fairer place to live, work and visit. It is a direct result of what our residents, businesses and partners have told us matter most.

The plan will focus on reducing inequalities across Wirral as we all work to recover from the pandemic, physically, emotionally, financially. We will use this unique point in time to ensure Wirral's recovery is on the right track to create a fairer and more prosperous place for people to live and work; making sure we meet and even exceed our obligations in responding to the Climate Emergency; and tackling inequalities and building a fairer, more prosperous Wirral where anyone can achieve their aspirations and share in the future successes of the borough.

To show how we aim to achieve these things, in October 2019 Council unanimously agreed the Wirral Plan 2025 which set out the Strategic Vision and key priorities for the borough. The Plan was based on what people told us matter. In it we set out our stall and committed to what we will deliver over the next five years.

However, because of Covid-19, there was a need to review the 2025 Plan to make sense of the radically changed world that we find ourselves in.

As the Covid-19 response progresses There is no doubt that the pandemic will continue to have a significant impact on Wirral residents and businesses for some time to come.

The refreshed Wirral Plan 2026 is using this as an opportunity to revisit and reposition the borough's priorities and ambitions and create a more equitable and secure future for everyone in Wirral.

The Borough of Wirral

Wirral is a borough of contrasts, of **incredible community spirit and strong local partnerships**. It is a place where equity and opportunity will provide brighter futures for all.

Wirral is as diverse as it is distinctive. It is a place of disparities, with some of the most affluent and deprived wards in the UK on opposite sides of the motorway, which runs through the middle of the borough.

A peninsula some 15 miles long and 7 miles wide, it is bound by the River Dee to the west, River Mersey to the east, and the Irish Sea to the north.

Named one of the happiest places to live in the UK according to a recent survey, it has a current population of 322,796 (48.4% Male/ 51.6% Female), Wirral is one of the largest metropolitan boroughs in England. This population is set to increase by 3% to 334,500 in 2040.

Wirral has 50 miles of rural walking routes, cycle areas and beaches, 24 miles of coastline and some of the best parks and green spaces in the Country – boasting 30 Green Flags. An untapped built, industrial, maritime and social heritage that is internationally significant whilst also being a very connected and accessible destination – A place to live, work, and to do business.

Compared to Liverpool City Region partners, and England as a whole, the borough also has a diverse make up in terms of age, with a relatively higher older population and a low proportion of people in their twenties and thirties.

The inequalities in life expectancy at birth sees both male and female residents continuing to compare poorly against the England average, with a large gap in life expectancy between wards in the east and west of Wirral. This gap widened for both men and women between 2015-17and 2016-18 from 9.3 to 10.7 years for women, and 9.8 to 12.1 years for men, reflecting the large inequalities in the borough.

In further trying to understand the challenges of our borough's inequalities, the 2019 Indices of Deprivation saw Wirral ranked the 77th most deprived authority (of 317 authorities) in England. The report found that just over 35% of the Wirral population (around 115,500 people) are suggested to live in areas classified as being in the most deprived 20% of areas in England, with over 83,000 of those residents living in the 10% most deprived.

A Wirral lifecourse perspective 2021

The below graphic provides an overview of many key health headlines that may affect Wirral residents at different life stages, when compared to national averages.

The Vision

Our vision is to create equity for people and place and opportunities for all to secure the best possible future for our residents, communities and businesses. The vision has been developed to build on five thematic priorities that focus on improving outcomes for whole population groups.

Sustainable Environment

Working towards a clean-energy, *sustainable borough* that leads the way in its response to the climate emergency and is environmentally friendly.

Brighter Futures

Working together for *brighter futures* for our children, young people and their families by breaking the cycle of poor outcomes for all regardless of their background.

Inclusive Economy

Working for a prosperous, *inclusive economy* - helping businesses to thrive and creating jobs and opportunities for all.

Safe and Pleasant Communities

Working for *safe and pleasant communities* where our residents feel safe, and are proud to live and raise their families.

Active and Healthy Lives

Working to provide happy, *active and healthy lives* for all, with the right care, at the right time to enable residents to live longer and healthier lives.

Sustainable Environment

leading the way in responding to the climate emergency.

Sustainable Environment

Working towards a clean-energy, for a sustainable borough that leads the way in its response to the climate emergency and is environmentally friendly.

The Wirral Picture

- Key environmental concerns for the borough are the impacts of climate change, such as flood risk associated with more extreme weather events. Tidal and river flooding is also an issue in some areas, with parts of the borough having a high surface water flood risk, and some being at risk from rising groundwater levels.
- In response to the Climate Change Emergency the council is committed to achieving net zero carbon by 2041.

Our Key Achievements:

- Highways, streetlights, and roads continuing to improve - 13,500 LED streetlights fitted over last 12 months and £6m structural maintenance programme to support our biggest asset our roads including £15m transport schemes programme (consistent with above).
- Climate Emergency declared and new Action Plan produced to address it.
- Launched the new Wirral Tree Strategy and planting programme.

To achieve a clean, sustainable borough for all, we aim to:

- Respond to the climate change emergency
- Protect our cherished local environment
- Improve street cleanliness
- Support active travel networks

To do this, we will deliver:

- The Climate Emergency action plan and the Cool Wirral 2 strategies
- The major LED replacement scheme
- Implementation of major capital infrastructure investments to support Wirral's highways
- Wirral's cycling and walking programme

Brighter Futures

For our children, young people and their families.

Brighter Futures

Working together for brighter futures for our children, young people and their families by breaking the cycle of poor outcomes for all regardless of their background.

The Wirral Picture

- The rate of children in care per 10,000 population in Wirral remains high at 121.6 compared to a national average of 67.
- Inequalities in education has been highlighted, with lower GCSE attainment of just 11.8% of Looked After Children (LAC) achieving Grades of 4 or above in English and Maths, compared to 24.4% nationally (2020).
- The percentage of pupils in Wirral with an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) is 3.4%, slightly higher than the England average of 3.3% (2020).
- The number of children who are being electively home educated in Wirral has increased by 39% from 181 in March 2020 to 252 in March 2021.
- There has been 16.6% increase in pupils eligible for Free School Meals, from 10,848 in January 2020 to 12,652 in January 2021.

Our Key Achievements:

- We have embedded the improvements made since the 2016 OFSTED inspection to secure the transition of the local authority.
- We have ensured services provide value for money by implementing our prevention strategy through a range of innovation programmes which include Cradle to Career, Social Workers in Schools, First Step for Families, Community Matter, Family Nurse Partnership Extension, PAUSE, DRIVE and our sufficiency strategy.
- We continue to respond effectively to Covid-19 by keeping children safe from abuse and neglect and ensuring that children are able to access education and learning.

To achieve brighter futures for all, we aim to:

- Break the cycle of poor outcomes
- Reduce educational attainment inequalities
- Raise the aspirations of all our children and young people

To do this, we will deliver:

- Targeted prevention and early intervention programmes
- A transformational partnership accommodation programme
- A fit for purpose school improvements and sufficiency strategy
- Priorities and objectives of the SEND strategy

Inclusive Economy

helping businesses to thrive and creating opportunities for all.

Image credit: CGI of the Four Bridges neighbourhood at Peel L&P's Wirral Waters

Inclusive Economy

Working for a prosperous, inclusive economy - helping businesses to thrive and creating jobs and opportunities for all.

The Wirral Picture

- Wirral is home to over 7,400 businesses providing employment for 111,000 people.
- Economic activity rates in Wirral are currently below the national average at 73.9% compared to 79.1% of the working age population of Great Britain.
- Gross weekly pay in Wirral (full time workers) is £561.2 compared to £560.3 in the North West.
- Youth unemployment in Wirral (12%) is currently higher than the England average (9%), although working-age unemployment claimants in Wirral are at similar level to England.
- In Wirral 23,000 people are employed in jobs related to human health and social work activities. This is 22.5% of the jobs available in Wirral. In comparison, 14.2% of people are employed in this sector in the North West, and 13.1% nationally.

Our Key Achievements:

- Local Plan Reg 18 Issues and Option consultation achieved to MHCLG agreed timeline and now focussing on Urban Option Local Plan.
- New comprehensive regeneration strategy produced leading to starts on site for Wirral Waters and the Town Centre (LGA acknowledging that Wirral is on cusp of Regeneration of National Significance).
- Covid-19 led distribution of £50m Business Grants and Strong Economy Plan with Community Wealth Building at its heart.
- Council's response to Homelessness and the Everyone In campaign.
- Safe closedown of operational estate during lockdown and remobilisation of Covid secure operating environments to ensure business continuity.

To achieve a prosperous, inclusive economy for all, we aim to:

- Deliver regeneration, transport and growth ambitions
- Create community wealth and social value
- Create jobs and support local businesses
- Develop quality, affordable sustainable homes
- Prevent and relieve homelessness

To do this, we will deliver:

- The Wirral Local Plan, addressing housing needs
- Wirral's Economic Strategy for 2026
- The Birkenhead 2040 Framework
- Localised transport strategies, including active travel projects
- Community Wealth Building ambitions
- Priorities and objectives of the Homelessness strategy

Safe and Pleasant Communities

where our residents feel safe, and are proud to live.

Safe and Pleasant Communities

Working for safe and pleasant communities where our residents feel safe, and are proud to live and raise their families.

The Wirral Picture

- Wirral sees lower than the average crime levels, compared to England. Between September 2019 and August 2020 Wirral had 97.8 crimes per 1,000 population compared to 102.2 per 1,000 population for England.

Our Key Achievements :

- Highways, streetlights, and roads have improved - 13,500 LED streetlights fitted over last 12 months and £6m structural maintenance programme to support our biggest asset our roads including £15m transport schemes programme.
- Delivered improved resident focused Neighbourhood services.
- Managed services through challenging Covid-19 pandemic, using innovative and collaborative solutions.

To achieve a clean, sustainable borough for all, we aim to :

- Work with our partner agencies to reduce crime and tackle anti-social behaviour
- Tackle rough sleeping and homelessness
- Deliver everyday neighbourhoods services to the best possible standard

To do this, we will deliver :

- The DRIVE Programme
- The design of a new neighbourhoods model
- A new fit for purpose libraries model and strategy
- A community safety strategy

Active and Healthy Lives

for all, with the right care, at the right time.

Active and Healthy Lives

Working to provide happy, active and healthy lives for all, with the right care, at the right time to enable residents to live longer and healthier lives.

The Wirral Picture

- Wirral hospital admission episodes for alcohol-specific conditions are almost double the national average, with prevalence of hypertension (high blood pressure) at around one in six of the Wirral population.
- Other areas of health inequalities locally include a high rate of both diabetes and dementia diagnosis.
- Almost 4% of the working age adults claim some type of Mental Health related benefit.
- Premature mortality (deaths in those aged under 75), with significantly higher rates of mortality from almost all the major causes of death in Wirral compared to England.
- The Covid-19 pandemic has been the most challenging emergency the borough of Wirral and the council has responded to in recent times. The nature of the pandemic saw the council react at speed to implement Government policy and focus on new local priorities to limit the spread of the virus, protect the health of residents and ensure the most vulnerable in our communities are safe and cared for.

Our Key Achievements :

- We have led a boroughwide response to Covid-19 and provided strong public health leadership, advice and action.
- We have supported the social care sector during the pandemic, ensuring providers were able to respond quickly to changes in policy.
- Worked with the regeneration team to improve health outcomes resulting from economic regeneration of the built environment.
- Supported independent living and improved resident's experience of Health and Care through partnerships and integrated services.
- Commitment to encouraging contracted care providers to pay the Real Living Wage.
- During the Pandemic Wirral delivered:

- Over 3 million items of PPE.
- Over 18,000 food hampers
- Free school meals to 12,137 children
- £94.5m of business grants
- 1,064 laptops and 147 routers to children and young people to support learning at home.

To achieve active and healthy lives for all, we aim to :

- Work collaboratively with our partner agencies to improve mental wellbeing
- Encourage active living
- Support people to live independently
- Deliver Public Health services to improve wider detriments of health
- Tackle health inequalities

To do this, we will deliver :

- Wirral's operational Covid-19 Outbreak Management plan
- Targeted Health Inequalities strategy
- A new, fit for purpose leisure offer
- Actions and priorities to meet the objectives of the Prevention Programme

The Plan

Cross cutting strategies and policies, as well as underpinning principles and activities will support and set out how the Wirral Plan will be delivered in practical terms, delivering on our priorities, and providing a fairer and more prosperous place for people to live and work.

Working in Partnership

The need for cooperation and collaboration with our partners has never been greater. Bringing together our policies, resources aims and objectives will provide a greater impact than when activities are carried out on their own.

Cross Cutting Strategies

A number of cross cutting strategies, plans and programmes will be put in place to underpin and provide delivery mechanisms for each of our delivery aims and priorities.

Underpinning Principles

Having a shared set of underpinning principles will define how we work as an organisation, with members, with partners, with residents and how we will go about our daily business to give residents the best possible services.

Underpinning Activity

The Covid-19 pandemic has been the most challenging emergency the Borough of Wirral and the Council has responded to in recent times. The learning from our response has led us to reshape areas of underpinning activity to inform the refreshed Wirral Plan priorities.

Working in Partnership

Working together to develop a shared vision where Wirral residents have the right information and the right support at the right time.

Partnership has a unique strategic role in shaping Wirral as a place.

Ongoing engagement with our partners indicates a strong appetite across the public, private and voluntary sectors for a shared strategic plan that supports collective ambitions. We will continue to review our Partnership arrangements to ensure that we continue to build on our excellent partnerships and networks to support delivery of our refreshed Wirral Plan.

The delivery plan will be a live document that can be updated as and when necessary, to ensure that The Wirral Plan 2021-26 remains agile and is ready to respond to challenges and opportunities as they arise.

Wirral's Partnership arrangements are also being reviewed to reflect national changes for NHS reforms. This includes proposals for local Integrated Care Systems.

New Partnership arrangements will provide strategic vision, shared leadership and coordination of local networks in order to improve Wirral and the population health outcomes of its residents.

To achieve this there are some key pillars of work related to the delivery of the Wirral Plan:

- Ensure that the sustainable regeneration of the Borough, contributes to improved outcomes for residents in line with those set out in the Wirral Plan.
- Ensure that partnership and integrated care arrangements are in place and that they are effective in delivering improved health outcomes and experiences of care for residents of Wirral.
- Understand the needs of the local communities in order to develop and implement a Health & Wellbeing Strategy to tackle inequalities and improve the lives of residents.
- Provide oversight, strategic direction, and coordination of the statutory responsibilities of the Health & Wellbeing Board.

Building on extensive partner engagement and collaborative working with our third sector and communities as part of our joint response to the pandemic, new arrangements will be systemised to ensure that we have a shared commitment to the Wirral Plan 2026, and an effective platform for delivery.

As well as partnership working during Covid-19, Wirral plays a key role within the LCR Combined Authority, working together to drive the devolution of powers and resources to have a real impact on the City Region's communities, in areas such as economic development, education and skills, transport, employment, culture, digital and housing.

To support delivery of the Wirral Plan, we will continue to build on our successful partnership working in the Liverpool City Region including to:

- Ensure Wirral's interests are represented.
- Secure significant funding opportunities to support Wirral's Regeneration ambitions absolutely key to the borough's recovery and generating income for future sustainability and inclusive economic growth.
- Lead Community Wealth Building and Inclusive Economic Growth.
- Continue with joint lobbying for additional resources to support our local communities.

We are a Borough of inequality, but one of great aspirations and strong communities and with that, a desire to work with our partners to deliver a shared goal.

Cross Cutting Strategies

Underpinning and supporting our aims and priorities to improve the lives of Wirral residents to a wider effect.

1. Wirral Local Plan 2021 – 2037
Sets out the vision for how the borough will be developed over the next 15 years, in line with national policy and legislation.

2. Health Inequalities Strategy
Aimed at improving health outcomes for all by a focusing on wider socio-economic factors and tackling health inequalities.

3. Healthy Wirral Plan
The plan places a great emphasis on closer working between health and social care, helping people to stay healthy and preventing people becoming unwell. It will also guide implementation for increased use of digital technology and integrated working to deliver better care to people.

4. Prevention and Early Intervention Programme
Including the Anti-Poverty Strategy, this programme will set out the need for a whole system approach across council and partnerships to meet the needs of our residents earlier, in order to deliver better outcomes and prevent/avoid demand for high-cost statutory services.

5. Community Wealth Building
Aimed at driving Community Wealth Building right across everything we do, to create and maintain local wealth and assets for everyone.

6. Economic Strategy
This strategy sets out our economic vision for the Borough, as well as a number of significant regeneration projects, which will help us to achieve our economic goals.

7. Affordable Housing Plan
There is a need to ensure that the delivery of affordable housing continues to be a priority aligned to both the local plan process and regeneration programme for the borough. The plan will be set out outlining our needs and opportunities for the delivery of affordable housing with our partners.

8. Homelessness Strategy and Rough Sleeping Plan
Sets out the Council's ambition to identify and meet the challenges faced in this area and, through partnership working, deliver better outcomes for our households at risk of homelessness, reduce rough sleeping and deliver lasting change to those at risk of, or currently homeless in Wirral.

9. Active Travel Strategy
This strategy will embed active travel solutions and local cycling and walking infrastructure as part of regeneration projects and ambitions.

10. Neighbourhoods Model
The Covid-19 pandemic has been unprecedented in highlighting the importance and critical role of our communities and the unique ability of our Voluntary, Community and Faith sectors to mobilise and respond to the humanitarian and social needs of local communities. Through this model we will build on our community assets and develop ways in which our residents, neighbourhoods and community sector can be at the heart of our new Plan to see things working differently in their local communities.

11. Climate Emergency Plan
The Climate Emergency Plan will highlight the actions we will take to tackle the climate emergency in our borough, to ensure Wirral is a greener, more sustainable place to live, work and visit.

12. Digital Strategy
The Digital Strategy will focus on doing things differently and tackling digital exclusion.

13. Community Safety Strategy
Community partnership work during the pandemic has achieved real results. The aim is to harness this learning to help build an outcome-rich, more inclusive Community Safety Strategy. The thematic drivers include the following: Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB), Crime and Violence Reduction, Hate Crime, Modern Slavery, Community Safety, Domestic Abuse, Emergency Planning and Road Safety.

Underpinning Principles

Working to local priorities, using local resources to ensure Wirral residents receive the best possible services.

Independence

Enabling individuals, families and communities to help themselves and each other.

No one left behind

Inclusive services which recognise the different needs of residents, families and communities.

Joined up design

Ensuring our services are accessible, person-centric and joined up.

Regeneration

Investing in infrastructure and supporting businesses to provide a thriving economy and opportunities for all.

Prevention

Tackling the root cause of inequalities and demand on council services and ensuring we provide the right support at the right time.

Relationships

Working with residents, partners, businesses and communities for a better Wirral.

Underpinning Activity

Repositioning and reshaping our aims and priorities to meet the needs of Wirral residents.

1 STRATEGIC RECOVERY AND BUILDING ON OUR THIRD SECTOR AND COMMUNITY RESILENCE

The nature of the pandemic saw the council react at speed to implement Government policy and local priorities to limit the spread of the virus, protect the health of all our residents and ensure the most vulnerable in our communities are safe and cared for.

This required a remarkable effort by our staff, partners and residents many of whom have worked tirelessly and acted with compassion to protect, support and care for others. Yet the financial, social and wider economic impact of the pandemic is the great test we now face and the scale of it cannot be underestimated.

As we move from lockdown to a transition period, we as a council must commit to fundamentally transform and collectively work with our partners through the unprecedented challenges, while retaining the behaviours and principles which are at the core of being Wirral. We should take this unique opportunity to refresh our priorities and ambitions and move into a phase of transformation where we can create a fairer and more secure future for all of our residents in Wirral.

- We aim to support all communities, businesses and public services in Wirral to recover following Covid-19.
- We will have to transform as a council to address the significant adverse economic impacts of the crisis.
- We will strive to create a new future through harnessing the innovation and improvements made during the pandemic.
- We will build on the strengths and creativity of our communities and the partnerships we have developed to build a fairer, safer, greener and more secure society, with better health outcomes and a growing and more sustainable local economy.

During 2020 the social, economic, and political landscape in the borough significantly changed. The pandemic sharply exposed existing inequalities. That is why is we are committed to building a fairer, more prosperous Wirral, where local people can get good jobs and achieve their aspirations. Community Wealth Building is a key part of how we will achieve this. It sets out a strong commitment to achieve ambitious growth that also brings benefits for local people, communities, and businesses; and helps to tackle wider social and economic disparities.

That is why it we are putting Community Wealth Building at the heart of our emerging Strategic Recovery Planning. To do this this our Strategic Recovery Plan forms the core of the Wirral Plan 2021 - 2026. Our planning should consider two key phases: Recovery and Renewal.

1.1 Recovery:

Recovery will focus on the safe re-opening and resumption of assets and services, aligned with the government roadmap. It will also support the recovery of local businesses, schools and education, events, and planning for the winter period.

1.2. Renewal:

Renewal will consider new initiatives that will provide better services and experiences for our communities. It also aims to provide stronger resilience across the seven renewal themes:

- Corporate Organisation
- Children and Families
- Economy
- Neighbourhoods and Communities
- Housing and Homelessness
- Inequalities and Well-being
- Improving High Streets and Coastal Areas

2 DELIVERING THE LOCAL PLAN

The Council is currently preparing a new Local Plan for 2020 to 2037. The Plan will set out how the Council will meet the Borough's housing and development needs, and will include policies to tackle climate change, and protect our natural and built environmental assets. The Local Plan's strategic policies will align with the objectives and aims of the Wirral Plan and will have at its heart the comprehensive regeneration of Birkenhead.

Local Plan progress:

- Local Plan preparation now at an advanced stage - Following Urban First Strategy - No Green Belt Release.
- Member engagement on content of the Plan underway.
- Final evidence studies now commissioned.
- Key outstanding evidence relates to viability of key brownfield sites.

3 FINANCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

The Council is striving to deliver the best for residents against a background of challenging circumstances of uncertainty and additional financial pressures. Choices will be available and difficult decisions will have to be made as part of budget setting and the delivery of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and related Plan (MTFP); balancing the impact of short-term decisions in order to align to the financial sustainability of the Council will be key in this process. The Wirral Plan needs to ensure that the MTFS and MTFP are achievable and capable of managing future pressures.

The purpose of the MTFS is to ensure that the Council's available resources are prioritised to the areas of highest need to ensure, amongst other things, that:

- Vulnerable residents can be supported.
- These resources are aligned to the Wirral Plan to enable strategic borough and corporate objectives and priorities to be met.
- Value for money is delivered for the services we provide.
- Financial sustainability is in place via a balanced budget year on year.

3.1 General Fund Balancing and Earmarked Reserves

Maintaining General Fund Balances and Earmarked Reserves at an appropriate level is part of the Council's strategic financial planning and approach to the management of risks it will face in the future. Both need to be maintained at sufficient levels to ensure that unforeseen financial pressures can be met without jeopardising the viability of the Council.

The Council's approach to how it manages its reserves are based on Wirral's local circumstances inclusive of the impact of Covid-19. The amount held is decided by the Council in line with its perceived future local demands. This is particularly important in an environment where future funding remains uncertain.

3.2 General Fund Balances

Wirral Council's risk-based strategy is applied in the context of the current state of the economy, other financial risks facing the Council and the underlying financial assumptions within the MTFS.

The setting and justification of the General Fund Balance, at a minimum of £10m for 2021/22, is part of the MTFS and is consistent with previous years. It is crucial the Council has sufficient contingency in this reserve to maintain financial standing and resilience. For Local Councils there is no statutory minimum level of the General Fund Balance and it is for each Council to take local circumstances into consideration.

The foundations for determining the level of General Fund balances are consideration of risks, available funding and a risk percentage factor.

3.3 Earmarked Reserves

The Council maintains Earmarked Reserves that are set aside for specific purposes, some through internal decision-making others through legal requirements. These reserves are set aside by the Council to meet future expenditure, such as decisions causing anticipated expenditure to be delayed. As such, they are made available to be spent on specific purposes.

The categories for Earmarked Reserves are:

- Insurance & Taxation - Assessed liabilities including potential cost of meeting outstanding Insurance Fund claims.
- Business Rates - To cover potential costs of appeals and retention rate risk.
- Schools Related - Which can only be used by schools and are not available to pay for Council services.
- Support Service Activities and Projects - Includes Government Grant funded schemes; when a grant is received, and the sum of money is earmarked for the completion of programmes across years.

A robust reserves strategy is a key part of the financial resilience of the Council and provides the first line of defence in underpinning the statutory requirement to set an annually balanced budget. Adequate reserve levels help to prevent local authorities from overcommitting themselves financially, mitigate against risk and provide organisational stability in the event of unanticipated, unforeseen, or emergency spending being required. An assessment of the adequacy of reserves is a key statutory requirement to be undertaken at least annually

3.4 Risk

Risk is an integral part of financial resilience and is embedded in all that we do. To enable the Council to monitor its financial resilience it needs to take an assessment of risk across all activities to ensure that where corporate risks have been identified that these are being mitigated and monitored on a regular basis.

Our Commitment to Wirral

The ambitions described in this report are our promise to Wirral residents.

These are the things we will deliver to make this borough a better, fairer, more prosperous place for everyone who lives here.

They are about creating jobs, improving services and making public money work harder for public benefit and community wealth. They're about making sure Wirral residents can continue to live in a place which they are proud of, with modern public services there to support them.

In 2025, when this Wirral Plan is complete and we reflect on our progress, I am keen to be held accountable for delivering the priorities set out in this document.

Now it is time to deliver on our promises.

Paul Satoor
Chief Executive, Wirral Council

WIRRAL