

WIRRAL COUNCIL

CONSULTATION PLAN 2023

PROPOSAL FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF SELECTIVE LICENSING IN DESIGNATED WIRRAL AREAS

1.0 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report sets out Wirral Council's Consultation Plan in relation to the potential to continue to operate a scheme in the two current areas and extend to two further areas.
- 1.2 The consultation programme will be meaningful and comprehensive, providing interested parties with detailed, accessible information on the proposal and offering a choice of methods for providing their views.
- 1.3 Any concerns raised by stakeholders through this consultation process will be accurately reported to Members in order that due regard can be given, and informed decisions can be taken.

2.0 CONSULTATION

- 2.1 Wirral is committed to asking everyone with an interest in the services the Council provides, including residents, community groups, landlords, partners and staff, to assess proposals and share views so that they can be considered by Councillors when they make decisions on the future service delivery.

- 2.2 With particular reference to Selective Licensing, Part 3, Section 80 (9) of the Housing Act 2004 states that before considering making a designation for Selective Licensing the local housing authority must:
- a) Take reasonable steps to consult persons who are likely to be affected by the designation; and
 - b) Consider any representations made in accordance with the consultation and not withdrawn.
- 2.3 The Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities has a procedural document regarding selective licensing: *Selective Licensing in the private rented sector. A guide for local authorities (published March 2015, with minor updates published June 2022).*
- 2.4 This guide stipulates that local authorities are required to conduct a full consultation when considering designation of selective licensing. Consultation should include *“local residents, including tenants, landlords and where appropriate their managing agents and other members of the community who live or operate businesses or provide services within the proposed designation. It should also include local residents and those who operate businesses or provide services in the **surrounding area** outside the proposed designation that will be affected.”*
- 2.5 The minimum statutory consultation period on any proposed Selective Licensing Scheme, required by DLUHC is ten weeks. If approved by Members, Wirral’s Selective Licensing proposed dates are to commence consultation on 24th July 2023 and to end on 1st October 2023.

3.0 COMMUNICATIONS

- 3.1 Consultation should be appropriate to the scale, scope and nature of the project being completed. Effective consultation that is meaningful and genuine depends on all stakeholders being sufficiently well-informed about the project, having clear, concise information, the opportunity to convey their perspectives and their concerns, and developing confidence that their perspectives are being reflected in the design.
- 3.2 It is common for consultation processes to result in changes to the project and to its design. Engagement therefore needs to commence early and continue throughout the consultation period.
- 3.3 This is at the heart of Wirral’s consultation plan which has been set out for the proposed Selective Licensing Scheme and we will achieve this via:-
- publishing a draft business case outlining the reasons for the proposal, the method used to identify the proposed licensing areas, the components of the fee structure.
 - priming of discussions by providing some initial information about the project;

- making sure there is ongoing dialogue with consultees throughout the consultation process;
- participation of those tenants and residents affected or likely to be effected by the proposed implementation in the designated areas;
- facilitated interactions among participants;
- making sure that there is sufficient diversity among those groups or individuals being consulted, to ensure that all relevant perspectives are represented, and all relevant information is gathered;
- making sure that each group has the opportunity to provide information;
- making sure that the method of consultation suits the consultation group, for example using workshops or focus groups as an alternative to, or even as well as, formal written consultation;
- making sure that the information provided and the perspectives, concerns and issues raised during the consultation process are analysed and duly considered in the final design and implementation of any scheme taken forward.

3.4 Consultation will be taking place using a survey, which will be promoted through the following methods:

- Wirral Council website:www.wirral.gov.uk/selective licensing and other social media.
- Email-out to landlords and managing/letting agents.
- Engagement sessions with managing/letting agents.
- Contact residents via a Mail drop to all residents and businesses or services or door to door within the selected areas.
- Email to known local community groups such as tenant or resident groups in the areas and any other community group that may have an interest in Selective Licensing (this includes seldom heard groups) and which may involve officers attending meetings to talk about Selective Licensing.
- Press releases to local media/press.
- Posters erected in local venues such as cafes, pub etc as appropriate in each area.
- Drop-in sessions planned for stakeholders directly affected across the proposed areas.
- Written papers and presentations where appropriate.
- Interviews with stakeholders.

3.5 The Council will also ensure a copy of the business case will be available on the Council's website or provided in written format if requested. A questionnaire will also be produced, which will be used to gather views from all stakeholders to the proposal.

3.6 All documents will be published on the Council website and promoted to key groups through the methods outlined in Section 4 below.

4.0 STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

4.1 To ensure a true reflection of the views of affected groups related to this consultation, it is important that all groups of stakeholders are effectively targeted with communications about the proposal and given every opportunity to share their views.

4.2 The following groups will receive direct communications about the proposal to request their views:

- **All residents in the proposed Selective Licensing area**
Notification of the consultation will be sent direct to the home address of all residents living within the proposed selective licensing areas, inviting them to participate in the consultation. Some of the residents in the existing and proposed Selective Licensing areas may be interviewed on their doorstep to reach and gather the views of as many affected residents as possible.
- **Elected Members and local Members of Parliament**
The Business case and Consultation plan will be submitted to Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee for approval to go out to consultation. Following this, the two Members of Parliament and fifteen Councillors representing the proposed areas and three Councillors for a Ward immediately neighbouring one of the areas will be e-mailed detailing the key aspects of the proposal. This e-mail will invite any feedback or comments regarding the proposal. The same will be sent to the Leader of each of the political parties to cascade to their colleagues.
- **Businesses/services within the proposed designation areas in Wirral and in the immediately surrounding areas**
Mail drop - All properties within the proposed streets within the designated areas and in the immediately surrounding areas will be mail dropped information on the proposals and an invitation to participate. It will be designed to encourage businesses and stakeholders to visit the website to obtain further information and complete the questionnaire online. A paper copy can be requested if required.
- **Social Landlords**
All social landlords who operate in the designated areas or who could manage stock will be contacted directly by e-mail and advised of the consultation process, business case and will be invited to complete a questionnaire.
- **Private Landlords, Letting Agents/Estate Agents and National and Local Landlord Associations**

All known landlords, letting agents and Estate Agents will be sent an email explaining what the proposal is and how it will affect them as landlords. The email will include links to the website where the full consultation document is available and will invite them to complete the questionnaire.

The National Residential Landlords Association, the Guild of Residential Landlords and the North West Property Owners Association will be contacted directly by email.

A separate invitation will be sent regarding a number of landlord sessions to be held at various venues and various times of the day. These sessions will be aimed predominately at those who are directly affected or are likely to be affected and will be informal so landlords or the public can call in at any time. The sessions will be held so that landlords can find out more about the proposal, ask any questions and provide any comments/feedback. Council staff will be on hand to answer any questions.

- **Landlords recorded on Housing Benefit Records**

An email will be sent to all landlords who have properties where Housing Benefit is being claimed, directing them to the Council's website.

- **Stakeholders, Partners & Community Groups in the proposed Designated areas**

Community groups will be contacted by e-mail with details of the proposal. They will be advised of the information available on the website and that information sessions will be held with details to be made available on the Council website.

Stakeholders and interested parties such as Merseyside Police, Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service and Wirral Citizens' Advice Bureau.

Whilst direct consultation will attempt to be as exhaustive as possible, any interested groups not already identified and consulted directly will also encouraged to complete the questionnaire or make comments. Groups not consulted directly are considered likely to hear about the proposal through mediums such as the website, posters and local press releases.

- **Wirral Council Staff**

An e-mail will be sent to relevant Departments/Teams to advise them of the proposal seeking comments. Relevant areas include but are not limited to – Housing Benefits, Community Patrol, Supported Housing and Homelessness, Environmental Health, Strategic Planning and Development Control. For any team who may experience a significant impact from the proposal, a meeting can be arranged to discuss the implications and to provide an

opportunity for Council officers to provide suggestions and feedback on the proposal. Information will be sent through to all staff via the Chief Executive's regular staff e-mail bulletin.

- **All Other Residents in Wirral**

Press releases will be issued to local media to promote the consultation. Posters will be placed around the proposed Selective Licensing areas advertising the consultation. The Council will create a page within the Have Your Say website where all information regarding the proposal will be posted. Some key local venues (shops/cafes/pubs) will be asked to display poster/leaflets.

Information will be available on the council website so any people with internet access will be able to find out more about the proposal as well as completing an online questionnaire which also enables the opportunity to add comments. Details will be made available on the website and posters, once they are confirmed, of the number of information sessions to be held in public places to make them as accessible as possible.

- **Landlords who operate in neighbouring Local Authority areas**

An email will be sent to all neighbouring authorities inviting them to contact the landlords on their contact lists to participate in the consultation by answering the questionnaire.

4.3 Further communication will be included in Wirral Council's Wirral View e-newsletter to residents with information related to the proposal and a direct link to the consultation questionnaire.

5.0 How issues raised will be dealt with as part of the consultation

5.1 Throughout the consultation process a record of each consultation event or period that has been undertaken and what issues were raised from these will be formally logged. This will detail the date of the consultation, what form the consultation took place, who was consulted and what were the results/issues raised. Different methods of communications will be used as part of the consultation process and a separate consultation report will be produced for each event to enable a 'portfolio' to be produced as one document at the end, with each element represented as a section.

5.2 Wirral is committed to ensuring all comments received are recorded and there is a clear audit trail of all decisions made and how consultation responses were taken into consideration and balanced with any evidence and specific information gathered. The consultation report will be published and placed on the website.

6.0 TIMESCALES AND REPORTING

6.1 The timetable for component elements of the consultation is in the project plan attached.

Appendix 1 – Wirral Consultation Plan methods of Consultation and Timetable

| Method | Target Audience | How | When |
|------------------------------|--|--|------------------------------|
| Devise questionnaires | All stakeholders and members of the public | Devise questionnaires, Set up on-line Prepare for going-live include telephone, email, on-line and post as options to complete the questionnaire. | June 2023 |
| Questionnaires and leaflets | Tenants, Residents, Accredited landlords, as well as letting/ managing agents and businesses/service providers in the area | Questionnaire highlighted to all local residents, stakeholders and businesses. Referral to full business case on website if required. | Duration of the consultation |
| Committee report | Committee Members | Committee report on Business Case and Consultation Plan for Approval to consult. | July 2023 |
| E-mail/Letter Correspondence | Councillors, Leaders of Political Parties, Members of Parliament | E-mail/Letters sent detailing aspects of proposal and inviting feedback/comments. | July 2023 |

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| Registered Providers of Social Housing | Registered providers in proposed area and across Wirral | E-mail sent to all Registered Providers in Wirral who form the strategic Housing Partnership advising of the proposal and seeking views | July 2023 |
| Landlord Working Group | Accredited Landlords and letting/managing agents | The landlord working group will be invited to comment specifically on licensing conditions, proposed component fee structure and operation of the scheme via regular working group meetings. | August / September 2023 |
| Wirral Council staff/Teams | All staff but particular emphasis on: - Housing Benefits Community Patrol Supported Housing and Homelessness Environmental Health Strategic Planning and Development Management | E-mails sent direct to relevant staff and Project Officer, with one-to-one meetings to take place if requested and Q & A session. | July/August 2023 |
| National and Regional Landlord Agencies | National Residential Landlord Association, Guild of Residential Landlords North West Property Owners Association | Direct letters to all associations advising of proposal and ability to complete questionnaire and invites for meetings with Council officers to discuss partnership working. | July 2023 |
| Landlords Briefing | All known landlords | Email invitation sent to all known landlords | July/August 2023 |

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| Community Groups | Local community groups in the affected areas | Specific email sent to known community groups operating in the affected areas, attendance of meetings if required. | July to September 2023 |
| Press release and Posters | All Wirral stakeholders | Posters to be placed in service providers i.e., doctors, local venues (cafes/pubs) Press releases to be issue to local media. | July & beg Sept 2023 |
| Partner agencies | Eg CAB, Merseyside Fire & Rescue, WMO, Wirral Change, Merseyside Police | Direct e-mails to advise of proposal and signpost to complete questionnaires and feedback. One to one meeting to be held if requested and Q & A session. | July 2023 |
| Website | Residents Landlords Tenants and residents across the borough Community Groups Service providers in the area | Information on Wirral's Have Your Say website with contact details Information distributed and obtained via social media | Duration of the consultation |
| Landlord reminder email | Landlords | Reminder sent to Landlords who have not responded as a reminder that consultation would be ending soon | August 2023 |
| Open forum sessions | Landlords, tenants and business within proposed designated area or likely to be affected | Sessions (daytime and evening) for all stakeholders in the area to attend, included Q & A Sessions | August & September 2023 |

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| Unknown landlords in affected areas | Landlords Landlords of neighbouring boroughs | Ask Landlord Association / Letting Agents to advise their members, including those which may not be known to the Council. Email neighbouring boroughs and ask to contact their known landlords to invite to participate in the consultation via questionnaire. | August – September 2023 |
| Interviews with stakeholders | Landlords, residents | Telephone/MS Teams interviews with landlords where the questionnaire can be completed with comments to ensure the most people possible will complete the questionnaire. Door to door interviews with residents. | August – September 2023 |