



**Proposed Re-designation of Selective
Licensing in Wirral to two existing areas
and extension to two further areas
within Wirral Council**

Report of Public and Stakeholder
Consultation

October 2023

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Introduction

Wirral Council's Economy, Regeneration and Housing Committee gave approval on 17th July 2023 for the Council to undertake a 10 week consultation on proposals to re-designate two of the Selective Licensing areas that have been in operation since 2019 and extend the scheme into two further areas, all in East Wirral.

The Selective Licensing areas to be re-designated are:

- Birkenhead West (LSOA E01007127 / Wirral 016B)
- Seacombe St Paul's (LSOA E01007273 / Wirral 008B)

The two new areas will be:

- Bidston & St James West (LSOA E01007123 / Wirral 11D)
- Egremont North (LSOA E01007218 / Wirral 002A)

Individual addresses and maps were made available on the Council's website so that landlords and residents were able to check whether their property lies within the boundaries of these proposed scheme areas.

If a selective licensing scheme is declared in an area, all private rented sector properties (which do not already hold a mandatory HMO licence) will be required to have a licence for 5 years with the aim of improving the management standards, property condition and ultimately the stability in these communities which currently have a high level of transient tenants and empty properties. Landlords who rent a property in the area will be required to be a 'fit and proper person' and will be required to conform to a set of licence conditions which are available to view on the website.

A Selective Licence Business Case was prepared giving the reasons why the Council is looking to re-designate and extend selective licensing. This document also provides the evidence base used to identify proposed areas. This document outlines the results of the consultation exercise and reflects the views expressed by stakeholders.

Various consultation methods were used for different stakeholder groups such as postcard deliveries within the proposed Selective Licensing areas, drop-in sessions and attending local community groups to engage with residents, emails sent to landlords and landlord associations, and drop-in sessions for local landlords and managing agents. In total 548 people and 2 organisations have responded to the consultation, broken down as follows:

- 544 responses received to the on-line questionnaires;
- 2 meetings with landlord groups: National Residential Landlords Association (NRLA) and Wirral Landlord Forum Steering Group;
- 4 landlords and agents attended a landlord drop-in session.

Wirral Council was aware at the outset that there would be strong feelings both for and against these proposals and acknowledges that the critical considerations are the strength

of the arguments and evidence submitted by supporters and critics for their respective positions. It is for this reason that in addition to the on-line questionnaire, the Council invested significant resources in face-to-face consultation and discussion groups where qualitative responses could be recorded.

Throughout this document general responses have been provided to queries raised through the various consultation mechanisms. To avoid repetition, the first response provided to a query (which may be repeated elsewhere in the consultation) should be considered as having answered all subsequent queries of the same nature.

Officers and Elected Members are invited to review the considerations emerging from the wide-ranging consultation which has taken place whilst taking account of other relevant evidence including the Business Case and Evidence Base. Any final decision on the operation of any further scheme will depend on the assessment of the merits of licensing as public policy.

Summary of Key Messages from Consultation Findings

- From the combined landlords and resident's on-line surveys, the majority (84.9%) of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with selective licensing proposals compared to 10.3% who either strongly disagree or disagreed.
- 40 respondents to the on-line questionnaire made comments in support of selective licensing. A common view was that whilst good landlords were already meeting these requirements, selective licensing helps to identify those who are not. Several people suggested selective licensing should be rolled out to a wider area and some respondents had stated that their accommodation had been improved through the existing selective licensing schemes.
- There were 51 comments via the on-line questionnaire which were critical of selective licensing, highlighting concerns that it would discourage landlords to remain in the sector; that it was a money-making scheme for the Council; that the fees were too high or that costs would be passed to tenants.
- 12 respondents made neutral comments through the on-line questionnaire that were neither in support of nor against selective licensing but offered wide-ranging suggestions or observations about how the scheme should operate on a practical level. These suggestions have been considered.
- A detailed analysis of the survey responses can be found on Wirral's Have Your Say website.

Overall conclusions

Opposing opinions on licensing cannot be reconciled in a policy that is equally acceptable to all. Therefore, the scope of this document is to set out all views and it does not seek to make recommendations. All the above responses have informed the proposals and changes to the scheme which have been incorporated in the final Business Case.

Wirral's consultation exercise for selective licensing has been designed to be sufficiently robust and wide ranging to ensure that all affected residents, landlords and other stakeholders had a reasonable opportunity to participate and feedback their views. Overall, more than 7,800 stakeholders were invited to respond to the consultation exercise via direct e-mails, letters and postcards through doors as well as emails to over 21,000 residents' email addresses. In addition, a bespoke Have Your Say campaign page was created, adverts placed in local press, information presented on social media, posters put up in the proposed selective licensing areas, landlord forums and community centres attended by staff as well as door knocking to capture views.

There is a clear mandate for re-designating selective licensing in the two initial areas, and extending it into two further areas, which is supported by the majority of those who completed the on-line questionnaire. Despite this, some landlords oppose the scheme on the basis that they are meeting the requirements already, they consider the existing regulatory powers are adequate or that only poor landlords should have to be licensed through the scheme.

Landlords and Agents Meetings and Drop-In Sessions

Three landlord and agent drop-in sessions were set up to capture views of landlords and agents and provide an opportunity for discussion and engagement about the proposals. To enable as many landlords and agents to attend as possible, the sessions were set over different days and weeks.

Specific notification of the sessions was:

- sent via email to 3,492 landlords on the Council's list, or who have signed up to receive information for landlords from the Council. This will include many landlords who are already licensed;
- Included on the Landlord Link-Up Newsletter;
- Posted on the Council's website (www.wirral.gov.uk/selectivelicensing);
- Tweeted to all those who follow Wirral Council's Twitter account;
- Posted on Facebook.

Four landlords and agents attended the drop-in sessions which were facilitated by staff members from the Council's Housing Services team and points raised during the sessions were noted. In addition, a meeting with NRLA took place via Teams and a further meeting was held with the Wirral Landlord Forum Steering Group. All landlords who wanted to raise issues were accommodated.

The key points and comments landlords and agents made were captured and collated as per the information below. As well as providing views for this report, in order to capture quantitative data, landlords were requested to complete an online survey to express their agreement or disagreement with the different elements of the proposals.

In general, the landlords and agents who attended the drop-in sessions, while concerned about the cost of the licence, were unaware of the support which accompanied it and had come along to gain more information.

The principal concerns of landlords were increased costs and uncertainty around the efficacy of the schemes. Some expressed the view that the Council would be 'loading' landlords with additional costs which will likely find its way to the tenants via rent increases exacerbating the gap between benefits and rising rents.

Specific concerns included:

"What will I get in return for the fee?" "Wirral Council need to demonstrate improvements in first and second schemes before doing it again".

Response:

Officers discussed compliance visits and numbers of hazards removed to demonstrate physical improvements. Landlords suggested that the Local Authority might need to promote the work being done on selective licensing and what it is achieving since many landlords were not aware of what is being done. Officers explained the use of matrix and evidence base used to establish boundary of proposed new areas.

Other points raised in the meetings were a suggestion that the Council promote the scheme as a “£100 per year scheme”, continue with their informal approach to handling minor works but understood that formal letters are required for more serious works where escalation might be needed in the future. Landlords are keen to be kept involved and informed on the results of selective licensing schemes.

They discussed the fact that they feel the ‘dynamic’ has changed and they have seen a reduction in tenants who rely on benefits in selective licensing areas and an increased demand from those who are ‘able to pay’. They also discussed landlords leaving the sector due to increased regulatory measures although they acknowledged that this is happening regardless of selective licensing.

Meeting with National Residential Landlords Association (NRLA)

Attendees – Samantha Watkin (NRLA), Emma Foley, Mike Corcoran and Alan Lipscombe (Wirral Council)

Summary of Issues discussed:

The NRLA expressed concern about Councils who ‘bite off more than they can chew’ and are unable to match the selective licensing scheme proposals with appropriate manpower and resources and therefore believe targeted schemes are better than schemes covering large geographical areas.

Having seen the business case Samantha believes Wirral has a very good scheme, in particular she thought the bulky waste collection offer was a “fantastic idea”. The NRLA put Wirral’s consultation/proposals on their communications bulletin to advise their members.

Samantha asked about fee levels and whether or not we charge for variation to licence, or temporary exemption and staff confirmed that we did not charge. The NRLA agreed that annual monitoring and evaluation, as proposed, is a good approach.

The Council also confirmed that upfront inspection is not carried out prior to issue of licence and unlicensed properties are actively pursued. A discussion also took place on the prosecution and civil penalties.

The Council discussed staffing resources and the issues with recruitment which influenced the scope and coverage of the proposed scheme, tenancy support, Healthy Homes and the involvement of Housing Options where necessary.

When asked if NRLA had any good practice that the Council could be doing/incorporating, the response was that the NRLA uses Wirral as an example of a good case study.

In conclusion, the NRLA were impressed with our targeted approach and were happy with our proposals.

Consultation Questionnaire Feedback from Landlords and Managing Agents

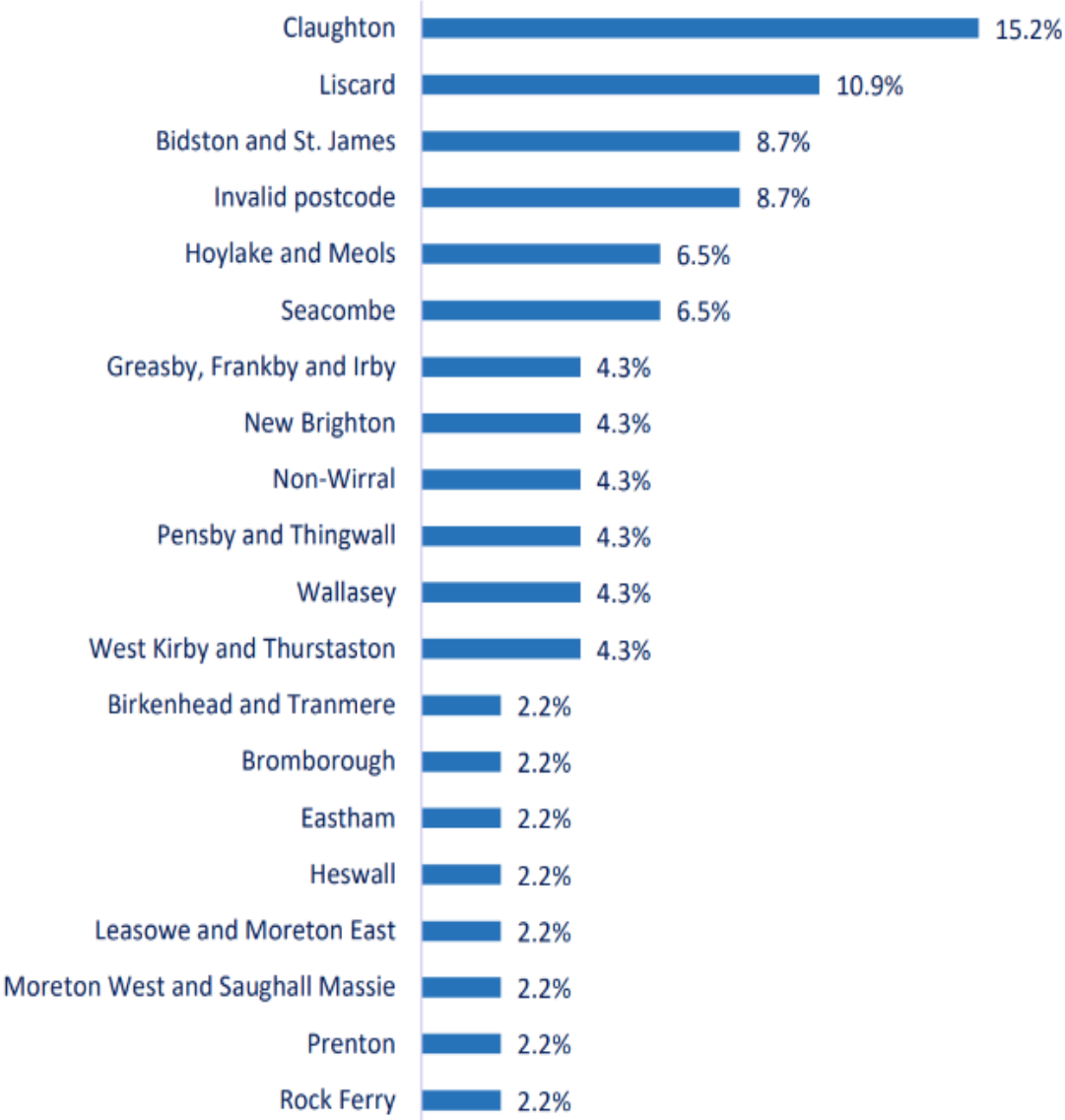
The consultation questionnaire was developed around understanding stakeholder views on the following 4 key areas:

- Their level of agreement to the implementation of the scheme
- Their level of agreement to the level of the selective licensing fee
- Their level of agreement to the proposed reductions to the selective licensing fee
- For landlords, the level of agreement to some of the selective licensing conditions.

To enable further understanding, and in-depth analysis, respondents were invited to provide free-text comments to expand on their ideas or concerns. Following closure of the consultation, the responses to each of the direct questions were collated and the responses included in this report. For the free-text comment questions, a text coding approach was used based on the reoccurring themes. This data was then collated and summarised in the report. The questionnaire was provided online, but paper copies were made available. No paper copies were completed.

In total 46 Landlord online questionnaires were submitted. Responses to Question 1 of the questionnaire "What is your postcode?" is shown below; of the 46 landlords and agents who completed the questionnaire, 40 live in Wirral, 2 live outside Wirral and 4 gave an invalid postcode.

Responses by Wirral ward



Question 2: Which of the following apply to you?

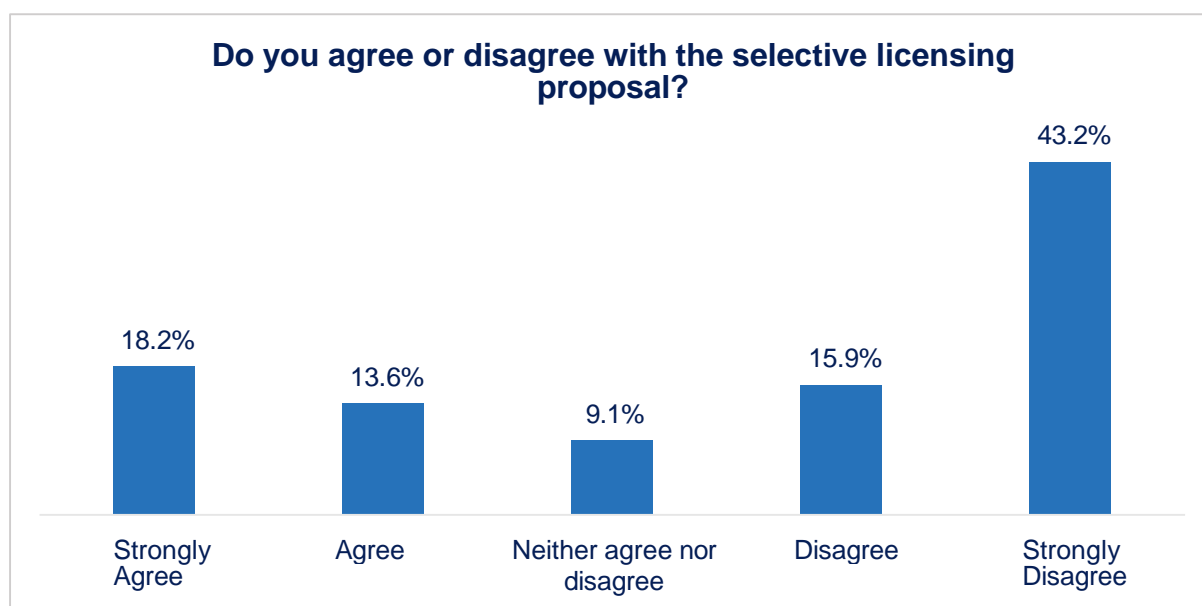
45 people answered this question, and they may have selected more than one option. 77.8% of the respondents said that they live in Wirral, 46.7% said they are a private landlord/agent in one of the proposed selective licensing areas and 44.4% said they are a private landlord/agent with a property elsewhere in Wirral.

Question 3: For landlords and agents, please indicate in which selective licensing area(s) your properties are located.

31 people answered this question, and they may have selected more than one option. 29.0% of the respondents said Egremont North, 29.0% said Other, and 25.8% said Birkenhead West.

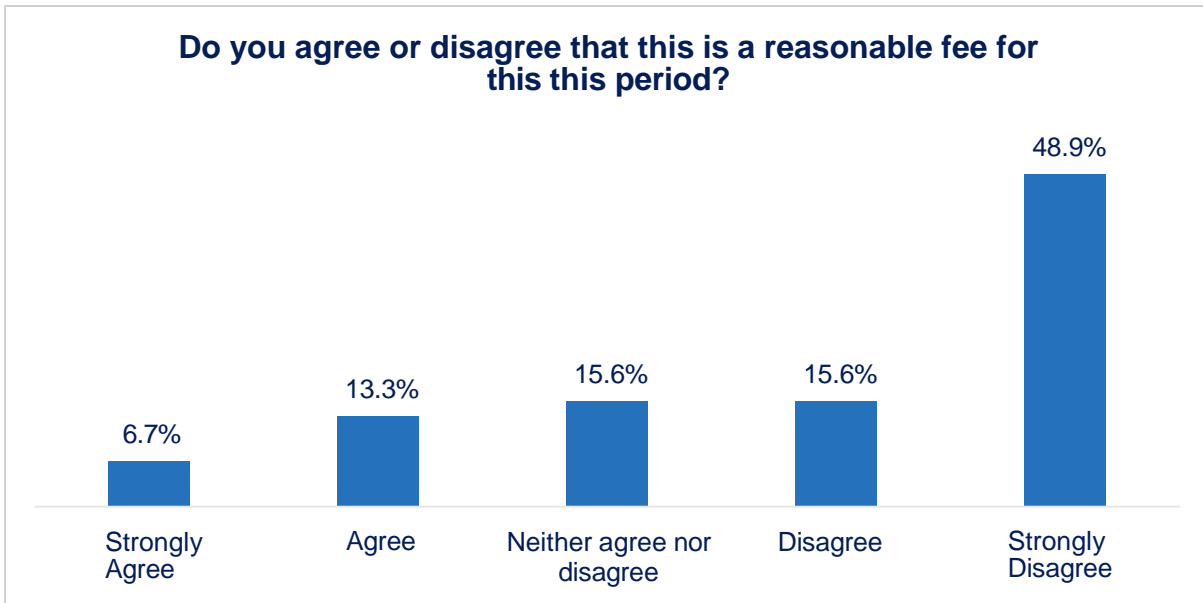
Question 4: Do you agree or disagree with the selective licensing proposal?

44 people responded to 'Do you agree or disagree with the selective licensing proposal?'. 59.1% opposed the proposal and 31.8% supported it. 9.1% stated that they neither agreed nor disagreed.



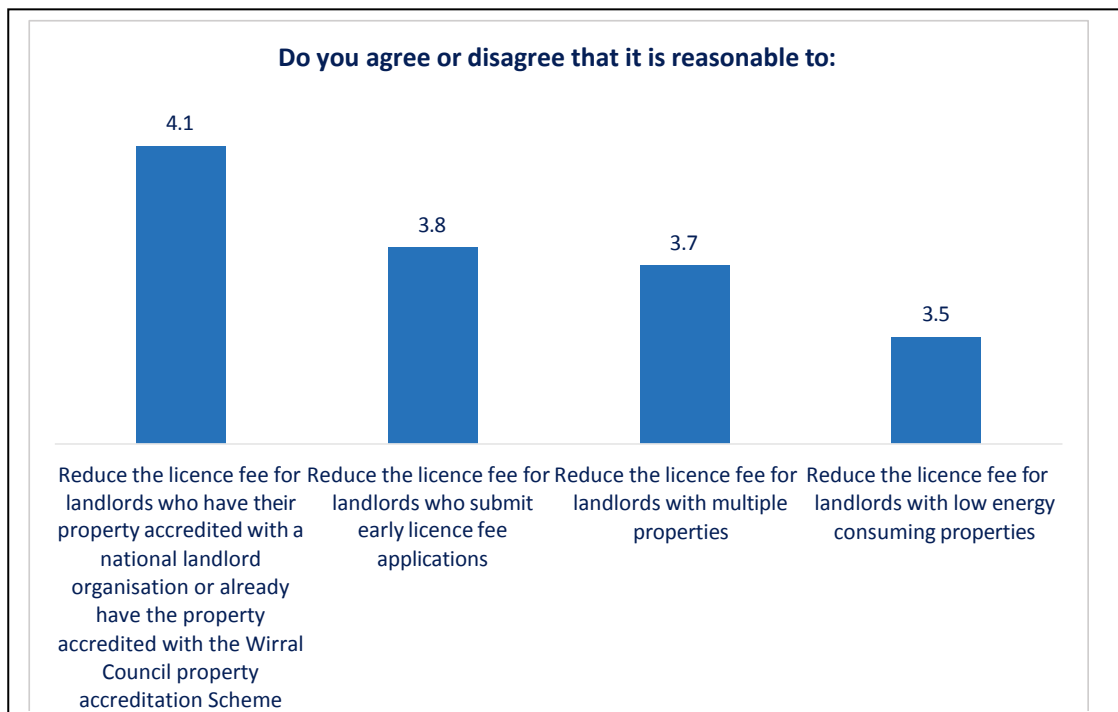
Question 5: Wirral Council currently charges £595 over a 5-year period depending on any discounts that can be applied. This is around £119 per year or £2.29 per week before discounts can be applied. Do you agree or disagree that this is a reasonable fee for this period?

45 people responded to 'Do you agree or disagree that this is a reasonable fee for this period?'. 64.4% overall disagreed that the fee is reasonable and 20.0% agreed. 15.6% stated that they neither agreed nor disagreed.



Question 6: Do you agree or disagree that it is reasonable to:

This question contained multiple conditions under which the selective licensing fee might be reduced, to which respondents indicated their level of agreement. In the results below, a higher number means a higher level of agreement.



Question 7: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the conditions around the following issues and principles about condition of the property?

When asked to give their level of agreement to selective licensing conditions relating to the condition of the property, the conditions that respondents agreed with the most were, “Have

an electrical safety certificate for the property,” and “Fix any faults identified by an electrical inspection,” with scores of 4.6. The condition for which there was the lowest level of agreement was “Keep the outside areas clean and tidy,” with a score of 3.5, however all priorities had overall agreement.

Question 8: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the conditions around the following issues and principles about the relationship with the tenant?

When asked to give their level of agreement to selective licensing conditions relating to issues and principles about the relationship with the tenant, the conditions that respondents agreed with the most were, “Give 24 hours written notice before entering the property, except in an emergency,” and “Provide information about mandatory tenancy deposit protection,” with scores of 4.5. The condition for which there was the lowest level of agreement was “Ensure emergency works necessary to protect the security of the premises are undertaken within 24 hours of notification,” with a score of 4.0, however all priorities had overall agreement.

Question 9: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the conditions around the following issues and principles about the management of the property?

When asked to give their level of agreement to selective licensing conditions relating to the management of the property, the conditions that respondents agreed with the most was, “Carry out an inspection of the premises at least once per year to ensure it is free from disrepair” with a score of 4.4. The statement for which there was the lowest level of agreement was “Make sure that the tenant and their visitors do not cause a nuisance to their neighbours,” with a score of 3.3, however all priorities had overall agreement.

Question 10: Are there any comments that you would like to make about the proposals for selective licensing?

36 people answered this free text question. Below are the top themes that emerged from the free-text comments as a percentage of the number of people who provided an answer to the question. As the percentage reflects the proportion of respondents who made the comment and that respondents may have made more than one comment in their answer, the total percentages may exceed 100%.

- **Disagree with selective licensing (22.2%).** Respondents said that they disagreed with selective licensing.
- **Will discourage landlords (16.7%).** Some respondents felt like the selective licensing will discourage people from being landlords.
- **Target rogue landlords (16.7%).** Most landlords are good landlords and should not be penalised for a few ‘rogue’ landlords. Instead of selective licensing, the council put efforts into targeting the rogue landlords and making sure their properties are up to scratch.
- **Tenants must look after the building (16.7%).** Respondents felt that there should still be some responsibility on the tenants to look after the building.

- **Cost will be passed on to tenants (13.9%).** Landlords said that the cost of the license would be passed onto tenants, making their rent higher.
- **Money making scheme (13.9%).** Some people felt that this is a scheme for the council to make money.

Some landlords felt that the Scheme should be targeting only poor landlords and only these landlords should have to hold a licence, with comments such as:

“Selective licensing should only be imposed upon poor Landlords to make them improve their properties. Selective Licencing is discriminating against good landlords. If this is imposed in this area, we will be forced to sell property. Why are good landlords, doing a really good job being penalized and charged for it?”

“Good landlords are being penalised for rogue landlords who appear to continue renting out properties with little/no action enforced upon them in a sector which is highly regulated”.

Response:

Without a scheme such as selective licensing, it is not possible to identify any landlords who have their property in a poor condition or have poor management practices as many tenants will not complain for fear of eviction, and sometimes the tenant is not aware of their rights. Good landlords will benefit in the longer term if bad landlords are driven out of

Landlords also commented on issues they experience with tenants damaging properties and failing to keep outside areas clean and tidy:

“There is too much here that may well be beyond the reasonable control of landlord, such as tenant causing a nuisance, being antisocial, and 'keeping the outside area(s) clean and tidy' when the tenant causes it to be otherwise. Why is the landlord responsible for tenant failure - except in the sense that the tenant could or should be evicted? If as a tenant, I throw rubbish in communal areas why is my landlord responsible for my unreasonable behaviour. In particular, why is s/he responsible for cleaning it??? Thus, there is too much responsibility under Selective Licensing on the landlord's part and too little on the tenant's....”

Response:

Responsibility of tenants for properties is included within a tenancy agreement, and this, along with tenant referencing would assist other landlords to know whether tenants are likely to cause damage to a property. The Council's Healthy Homes Scheme can help landlords with more challenging tenants if they are engaged early in the tenancy and floating support services can be accessed free of charge if needed and the tenant agrees.

Some landlords expressed concern that the scheme is intended to make money for the Council:

“Personally, do not agree with the scheme. I have always felt it is a money-making scheme more than anything. As an agent we will comply and ensure our landlords do at the same time”.

“Licensing is a waste of landlords money its a stealth tax for the councils having had properties in licensed areas i can genuinely saythere has been absolutely no improvement .you do nothing for the money as far as im concerned as a landlord of 30 years its a joke”.

Response:

The Housing Act 2004 stipulates that local authorities may charge for the introduction and administration of a Selective Licensing Scheme including developing a business case and evidence base, consultation, legal declarations and statutory notices, granting of the licence and compliance inspections. The Council cannot make a profit from such a scheme. The existing Selective Licensing scheme is subsidised by Council funding, however efficiencies gained from the processes of the existing scheme, which are now well established, means a reduction in the amount of funding required by the Council can be achieved while passing on savings where possible to landlords.

The Council has been reluctant to pass on increases in staffing and associated costs to landlords since the first scheme was introduced however the Council is further streamlining the application process to keep the process as efficient as possible.

Residents Views

An integral element of the consultation was to engage with members of the community, specifically those who would be directly affected by the proposed Scheme. Staff members actively visited the proposed selective licensing areas to speak to residents directly. This included:

- Door-to-door visits;
- Attendance at the St James Centre;
- Attendance at the Heart of Egremont drop-in;
- Attendance at Egremont Community Centre;
- Attendance at Gautby Road Childrens Centre;
- Attendance at Seacombe Childrens Centre;
- Attendance at BirkenEd's Place.

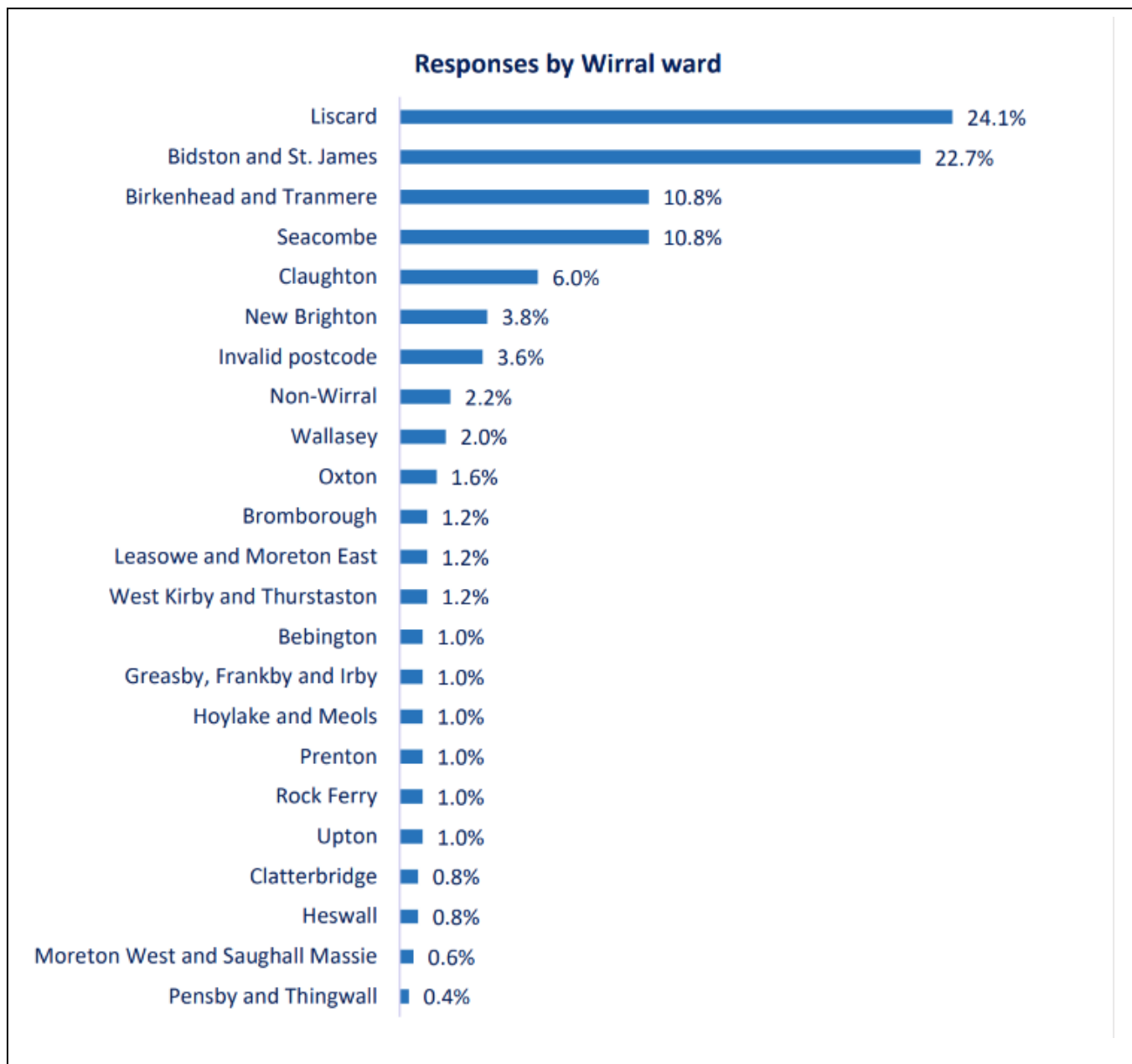
Housing Standards Officers and Healthy Homes Officers also captured opinions when attending pre-arranged visits in the potential and existing Selective Licensing areas.

Paper copies of questionnaires were left with St James Centre and other community groups. Council officers explained the reasons why the proposals had been put forward for consultation, showed the extent of the areas for potential inclusion and responded to any issues or questions about the proposals directly. All those who were spoken to at an event listed above or on the doorstep were invited to complete a questionnaire in order to quantify and record their views.

In total, 498 questionnaires were completed by residents. Of the 498 respondents, 461 responses came through the online portal and 37 paper copies were completed. The only mandatory question was question 1: "What is your postcode?". For all the other questions, respondents could choose whether to answer or not.

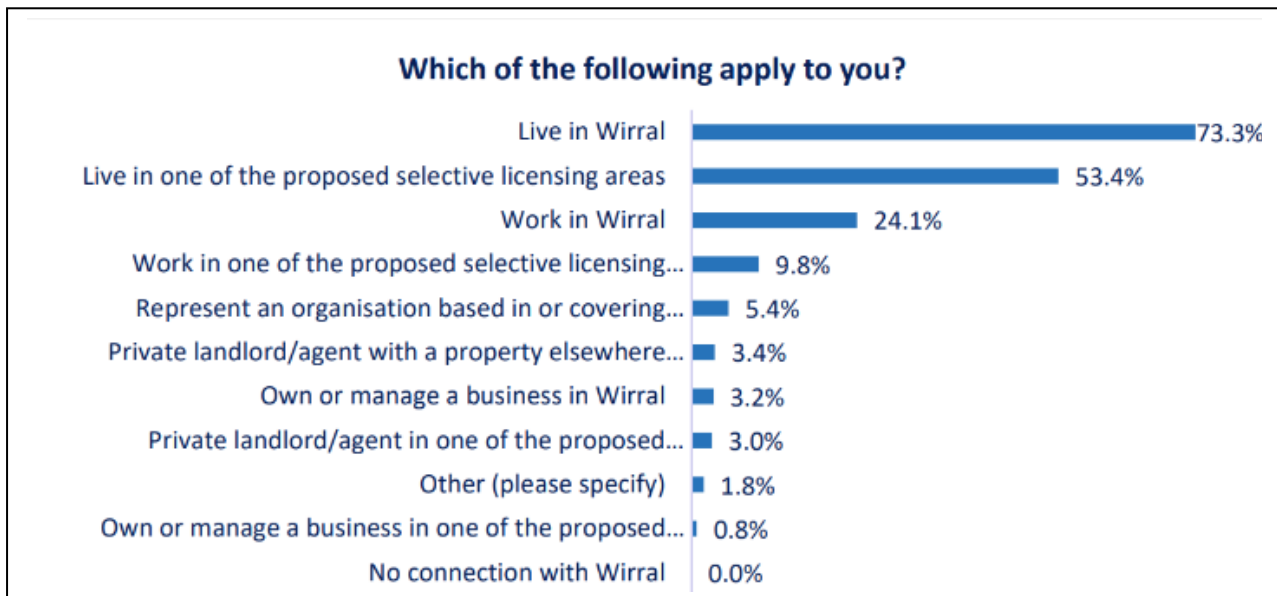
Question 1: What is your postcode?

This question was mandatory, so all 498 respondents gave a postcode however 18 of them were invalid postcodes.



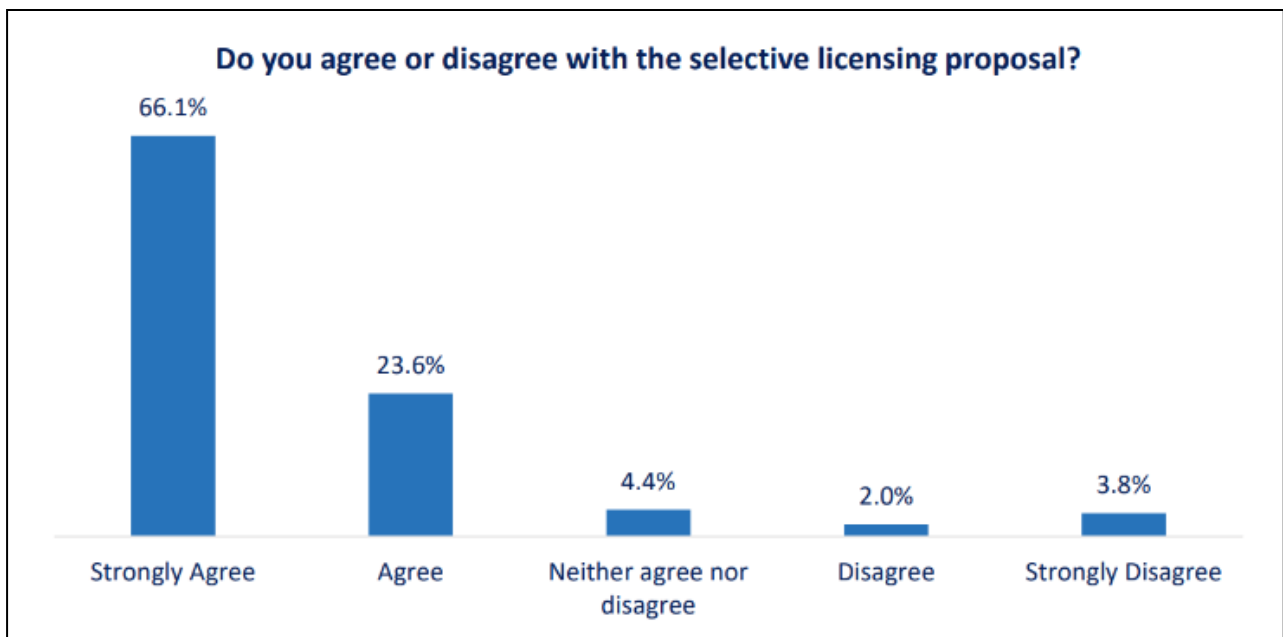
Question 2: Which of the following apply to you?

498 people answered this question, and they may have selected more than one option. 73.3% of the respondents said that they live in Wirral, 53.4% said they live in one of the proposed selective licensing areas and 24.1% said they work in Wirral.



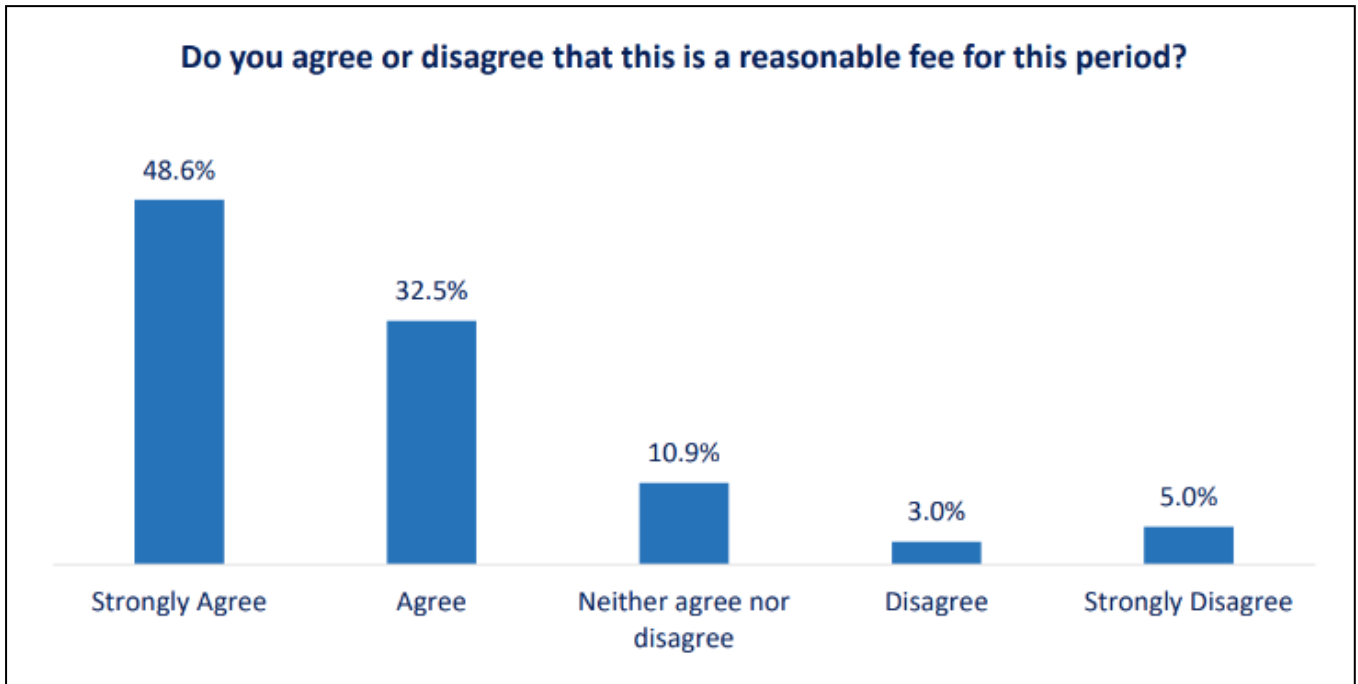
Question 3: Do you agree or disagree with the selective licensing proposal?

496 people responded to 'Do you agree or disagree with the selective licensing proposal?'. 89.7% supported the proposal and 5.8% opposed it. 4.4% stated that they neither agreed nor disagreed.



Question 4: Wirral Council currently charges £595 over a 5-year period depending on any discounts that can be applied. This is around £119 per year or £2.29 per week before discounts can be applied. Do you agree or disagree that this is a reasonable fee for this period?

496 people responded to 'Do you agree or disagree that this is a reasonable fee for this period?'. 81.0% overall agreed that the fee is reasonable and 8.1% overall disagreed. 10.9% stated that they neither agreed nor disagreed.



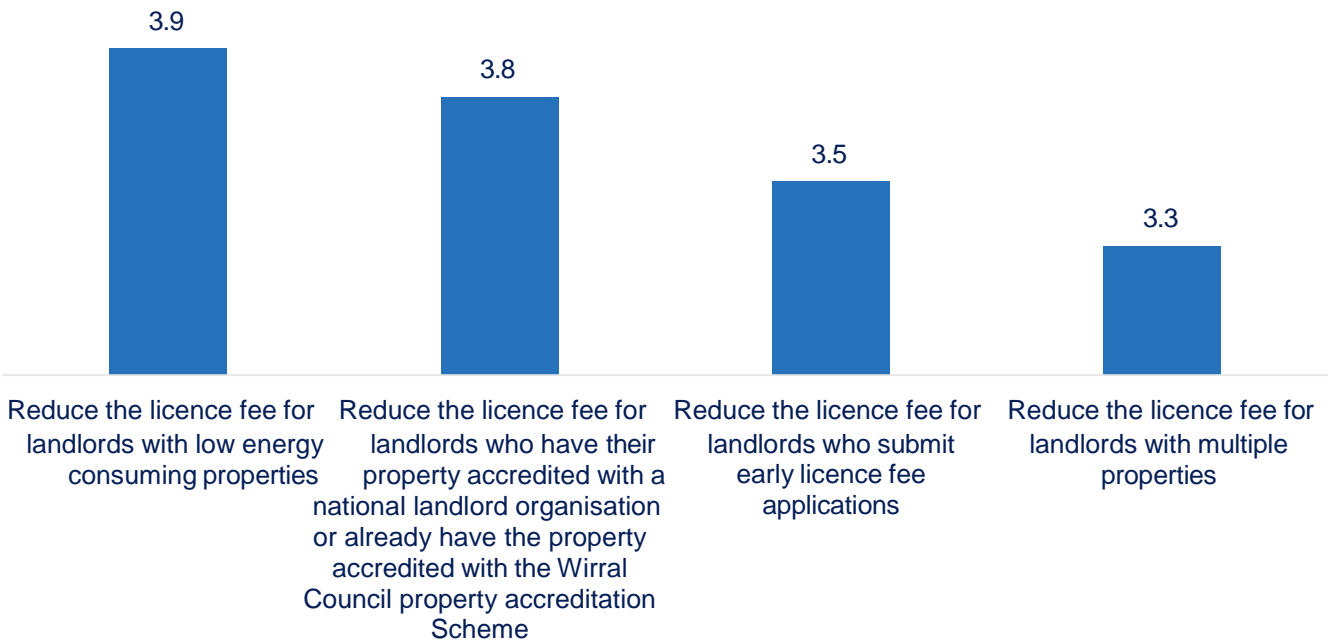
Question 5: Do you agree or disagree that it is reasonable to:

This question contained multiple conditions under which the selective licensing fee might be reduced, to which respondents indicated their level of agreement. In the results below, a higher number means a higher level of agreement.

The condition that respondents agreed with the most was, "Reduce the licence fee for landlords with low energy consuming properties," with a score of 3.9. The condition with the second highest level of agreement was, "Reduce the licence fee for landlords who have their property accredited with a national landlord organisation or already have the property accredited with the Wirral Council property accreditation Scheme," with a score of 3.8.

The statement for which there was the lowest level of agreement was "Reduce the licence fee for landlords with multiple properties," with a score of 3.3. All priorities had overall agreement: the average score was greater than 3 therefore there was more weighting within the response to agreement than disagreement.

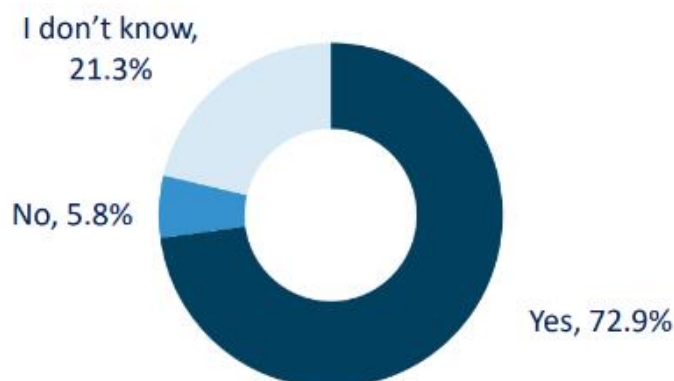
Do you agree or disagree that it is reasonable to:



Question 6: The licence conditions are about the quality of properties, how they are managed and the responsibilities of tenants. Do you think the licence conditions are adequate?

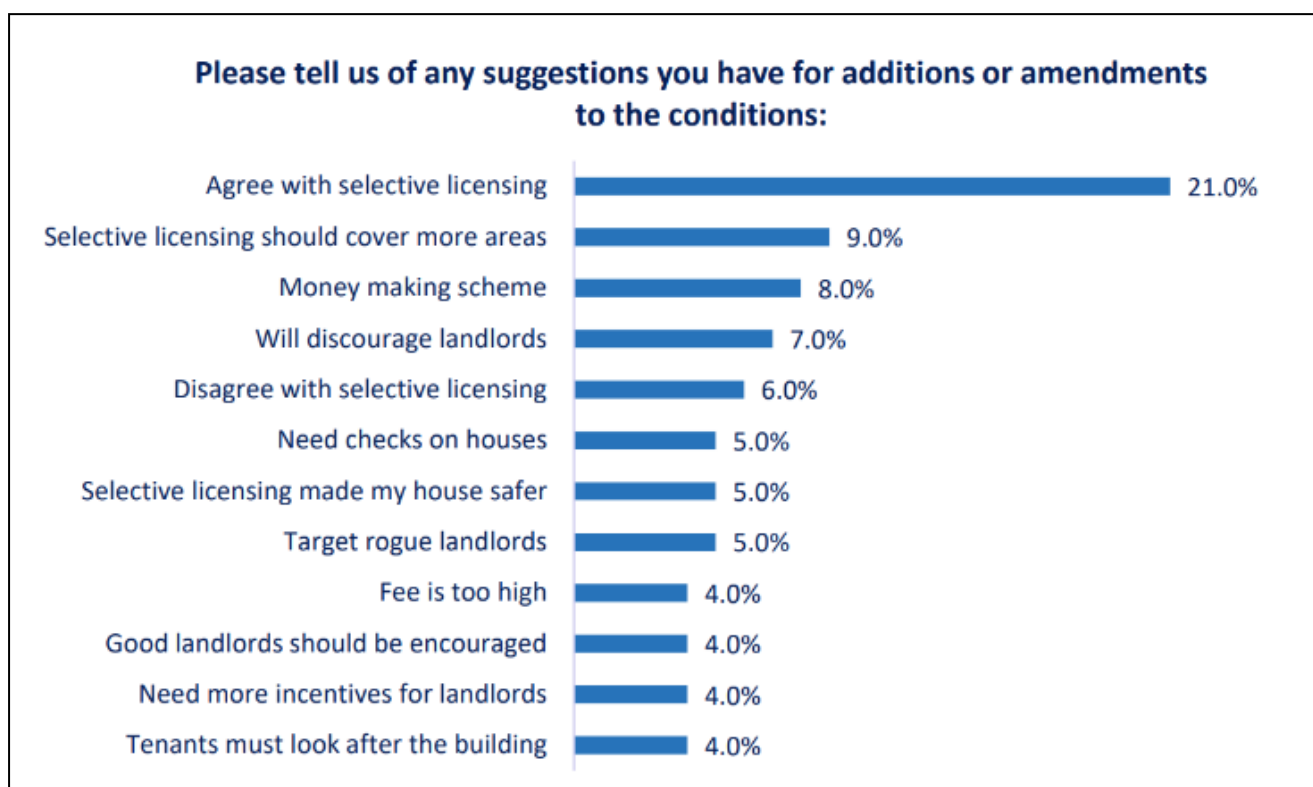
In response to 'The licence conditions are about the quality of properties, how they are managed and the responsibilities of tenants. Do you think the licence conditions are adequate?' The most common answer was 'Yes', receiving 72.9% of the 498 responses. The option 'I don't know' was selected by 21.3% of respondents and option 'No' was selected 5.8% of respondents.

The licence conditions are about the quality of properties, how they are managed and the responsibilities of tenants. Do you think the licence conditions are adequate?



Question 7: Please tell us of any suggestions you have for additions or amendments to the conditions

103 people answered this free text question. Below are the top themes that emerged from the free-text comments as a percentage of the number of people who provided an answer to the question. As the percentage reflects the proportion of respondents who made the comment and that respondents may have made more than one comment in their answer, the total percentages may exceed 100%.



Most respondents who agreed with the proposals provided explanations for their view, including:

"I believe all people who privately rent should all have the support of this service".

"I live in an SL area and without the support of this service my home would be full of hazards as my landlord only cares about the rent".

"I live in an SL area and my property is being brought up to the right standard with the help if the team".

"People who private rent need protection, I lived in my house for 22 years to be left with no boiler when a LL bought my property and now he is trying to evict me. the team offered me protection and support in regaining my heating in the property."

"I would hope that this scheme evolved across Liverpool City Region. I encounter residents who are living in below standard properties, private and social landlords. I do not believe the public are asking too much of a landlord to provide and maintain a decent home to live in".

"I have experience of this through a family member, and I was very impressed with the professional way this was carried out. I think it would be a good idea to extend the coverage to more areas on the Wirral. Tenants need all the help they can get."

"I have lived in a selective licensing area for the last few years and think it has made a big difference to the neighbourhood. it's less messy now".

"Think it's good; my landlord needs it".

"More pressure on Landlords to Look after their properties the better".

"I hope it comes to pass, it's a good thing for the town and Wirral in general, and people who rent deserve to live in adequate properties".

"Hopefully this will get rid of the bad landlords round here".

"I think all areas should have licence conditions and the support from their local council and work together to achieve better outcomes".

From respondents who live in the existing areas, some comments in support of the scheme have been included below:

"Healthy Homes inspected my property and referred to housing standards. This has led to works being done on my house which has made it safer"

"Housing standards helped me because my house had disrepair, she inspected and Healthy Homes helped me move into supported living. They also helped me get PIP and speak to my GP when my meds stopped working. Thank you!!!"

"I have had very good experience of the scheme, ensuring my landlord carried out repairs needed, and I got support from Healthy Homes too".

"Healthy Homes and Housing Standards are helping me to get out of my property, which is dangerous. Thank you!"

There were several comments from those who lived in selective licensing areas with regards to tenant behaviour and the vetting of tenants:

"More tenant checks"

"Hope it goes through, place needs work and kids run riot".

"I have had terrible neighbours who rented and they made a terrible mess of the property and it made living next door to so hard so i think it's a good idea".

"Next door to me is private rented and they're awful. Always throwing their rubbish out the back yard".

"Internal maintenance should be tenant's responsibility. If they break something they should repair it".

"Experience of bad tenants/neighbours. Hope the scheme will be able to avoid that in the future".

"I have considered buying property to rent but have been put off the idea of becoming a landlord because of cases of problematic tenants, rent not being paid, and difficulties in being able to get property back in these cases. Having now learned about the Licensing Scheme, and the advantages and support that can be attached to it, I feel more reassured, and will explore this further and may still go on to become a landlord".

Response:

Encouraging landlords not to take tenants with a poor reference improves the choice for tenants with good references.

72.6% of respondents thought it was reasonable to offer a discount for landlords with low energy consuming properties.

“Solar panels and loft insulation should be made mandatory, even if you’re in Private Rented accommodation”.

“I do think that having a great energy rating is very important to ensure people are warm in the winter and keep fuel costs down which is key to maintaining good health and lowering the environmental impact.”

Response:

Selective Licensing contributes to addressing the need for quality, energy efficient homes which in turn helps driving improvements to quality of life, good health and affordability for tenants and contributes towards a better environment for all our residents.

Petitions

No petitions were received as part of the consultation process.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Points raised at landlord drop-in events

Appendix 2 Householder Questionnaire

Appendix 3 Landlord Questionnaire

Appendix 4 Representation

Appendix 1

Points raised/comments made:

- The group agreed that the discounts for accreditation and early bird were fair.
- The group all agreed that Healthy Homes services were useful
- Asked why redesignation was required if Selective Licensing was intended to improve standards, however accepted that progress had been made when evidence of inspections and actions taken were explained.
- Tenant poverty is a major problem including ability to pay rent and sufficiently heat home
- Landlord highlighted there are good and bad landlords but it shouldn't always fall on landlord for tenant behaviour / damage and this is not taken into consideration enough
- Landlord discussed that sometimes informal is better i.e. email for small amounts of works
- Landlord impressed with services available in selective licensing areas such as bulk collections and Healthy Homes Team.
- Discussed with landlord how we identified selective licensing areas including matrix used.
- Landlord felt that the scheme is a good idea
- Discussed the targeting of problem landlords only
- Needs to be more incentives to improve energy efficiency of stock.
- Bulky service is a good service and that this service along with Healthy Homes Scheme needs to be further advertised to landlords
- Landlord believes that nothing has been achieved since the scheme started. Landlord felt like he is paying for bad landlords to be give chance after chance and that the council should be focusing on the bad ones and not the good ones.
- Landlord asked where the fee money goes and what is it used to pay for?
- Landlord felt that their area would benefit from the scheme

Have Your Say about Selective Landlord Licensing

Wirral Council is proposing to improve living standards by re-designating Selective Licensing in two small areas of the borough and extending the scheme into two further areas.

This means that the landlord or manager of a private rented home in these areas would need to apply for a licence to rent out their property.

The areas are:

📍 Birkenhead West

📍 Bidston and St James West

📍 Seacombe St Paul's

📍 Egremont North

You can view maps and addresses of all the properties affected and tell us what you think about the proposals online at www.wirral.gov.uk/selectivelicensing or ask for a paper or Easy To Read copy of our questionnaire by emailing selectivelicensingsurvey@wirral.gov.uk

For more information:
email: selectivelicensingsurvey@wirral.gov.uk



Background Information

Selective Licensing is a scheme to improve private rented homes within specific designated neighbourhoods by requiring landlords to obtain a licence and comply with certain agreed conditions. Documents relating to the proposal, including detailed maps and address lists are available at wirral.gov.uk/selectivelicensing.

The Scheme has been running in a number of small areas since 2015 and to date officers have issued over 3500 licences in those areas and carried out more than 1500 inspections. Around half of the properties inspected required further action in order to meet standards.

Why is it being re-designated in two existing areas and introduced to two new areas?

Wirral has areas of low housing demand and almost one in three properties in Wirral's private rented sector fails to meet the decent homes standard which can have an impact on the health and welfare of tenants and wider communities. This scheme aims to improve homes in these areas by ensuring private landlords meet satisfactory standards of tenancy and property management.

The four areas were identified using research from the Council's Intelligence Service which identified key areas which had the poorest levels of property condition, higher than average levels of private rented stock, and low housing demand. A full breakdown of the evidence, methodology and findings is included in the Business Case which can be found on the Council's website at wirral.gov.uk/selectivelicensing.

This evidence is supported by a recent survey of residents in the existing Selective Licensing areas which has shown that while there has been an improvement in the property condition, there is still a need for improvement in the external environment to make these areas more attractive.

What benefits will it have?

Poor property management has a very negative effect on areas where the housing market is already weak and contributes to high numbers of empty properties, high turnover of tenants and depressed rental and sale values. It can also have an effect on the health and safety of residents if properties are in a poor condition.

Selective Licensing will tackle poor management and is expected to deliver lots of benefits including:

Benefits for Landlords

- Free tenancy support service

- Free bulky waste collections
- Free healthy homes visits
- Enhanced Empty Property Grants up to £7,000
- Improved confidence in the market and potential growth in property values
- A level playing field where all landlords in the area are required to operate to the same decent standard.
- Improved communications with Council services.
- Better understanding of their statutory responsibilities through training and briefing sessions.
- Improved reputation of private landlords.

Benefits for Tenants

- Improve the quality of housing and management conditions.
- Better understanding of the standards they should expect.
- Better understanding of their responsibilities.
- Written tenancy agreements, inventories and protected deposits.
- Confidence that the Council will help if licence conditions are not met.
- Support to maintain tenancies e.g. budget management, benefit checks, fuel debt advice.

Benefits for the wider community

- Landlords encouraged not to take tenants with poor references.
- Shorter void periods and less tenant turnover.
- Improved quality of life, image and desirability of the area.
- Fewer empty properties and blight.
- Less anti-social behaviour.
- Increase in the length of tenancies resulting in more settled communities.
- Dedicated Healthy Homes Team to improve the health of the wider community.

Will landlords have to pay for a licence?

The Council proposes to recover some costs by charging a Licensing Fee. The cost for a licence has reduced since the initial scheme and the Council will continue to work hard to streamline costs for future designations and keep the fee as low as possible.

The Council also proposes to offer the following discounts on licence fees:

- Applications made within three months of the property becoming licensable.
- Energy efficient properties may be eligible for further discount.
- Landlords with multiple properties.
- Landlords who are accredited with either a national landlord organisation or who are already accredited with the Wirral Council property accreditation scheme.

The following charges are also proposed:

- Charge for yearly direct debits.
- Assisted completion of application forms.
- Completion of a paper application.

Licence Conditions

The licence contains a series of conditions the licence holder would need to comply with, including property management, fire safety and anti-social behaviour. A full copy of the licence conditions can be found at wirral.gov.uk/selectivelicensing.

What would happen to private landlords who let their property without a licence or don't meet the licence conditions?

It is a criminal offence to let a privately rented property in a designated Selective Licensing area without a licence.

Failure to apply for a licence or failure to comply with the conditions of the licence could lead to an unlimited fine on conviction or a Civil Penalty Notice of up to £30,000.

The Council, or tenants (including former tenants), may apply for a Rent Repayment Order (RRO) to reclaim up to 12 months' rent from the landlord where a property is, or was, required to be licensed.

What are the next steps?

If feedback from the consultation supports a Selective Licensing Scheme in the proposed four areas and Members approve a final scheme, it is expected to be operational from 1st April 2024. More information about the consultation process, including how to get involved is available via:

Online wirral.gov.uk/selectivelicensing

Email
selectivelicensingsurvey@wirral.gov.uk

By post Selective Licensing Consultation
Po Box 290, Brighton Street,

Resident & Businesses

Which of the following apply to you? (please tick all boxes that apply)

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| Live in Wirral | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Live in one of the existing Selective Licensing areas | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Work in one of the existing Selective Licensing areas | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Live in one of the proposed Selective Licensing areas | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Work in one of the proposed Selective Licensing areas | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Represent an organisation based in or covering Wirral | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Own or manage a business in Wirral | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Own or manage a business in one of the Selective Licensing Areas | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Work in Wirral | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Private Landlord/agent in one of the existing Selective Licensing areas | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Private Landlord/agent in one of the proposed Selective Licensing areas | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Private Landlord/agent with a property elsewhere in Wirral | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Have another connection with Wirral | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No connection with Wirral | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Wirral Council proposes to continue Wirral's selective licensing scheme through re-designation of two areas that have been in place since 2019 and extending the scheme into two further areas. Selective licensing will require all landlords to have a licence in order to let out homes in these areas between 1st April 2024 until 31st March 2029.

Do you agree or disagree with the selective licensing proposal? (please circle)

- | | | |
|----------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree |
| Disagree | Strongly disagree | Don't know |

Wirral Council currently charges £595 over a 5 year period depending on any discounts that can be applied. This is around £119 per year or £2.29 per week before discounts can be applied.

Do you agree or disagree that this is a reasonable fee for this period?

- | | | |
|----------------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| Strongly agree | Agree | Neither agree nor disagree |
| Disagree | Strongly disagree | Don't know |

Do you agree or disagree that it is reasonable to:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
Reduce the licence fee for landlords who have their property accredited with a national landlord organisation or already have the property accredited with the Wirral Council property accreditation Scheme.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reduce the licence fee for landlords with multiple properties?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reduce the licence fee for landlords who submit early licence fee applications?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reduce the licence fee for landlords with low energy consuming properties?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

A full copy of the selective licensing conditions can be found on the Council's website.
<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/files/licence-conditions-amended-july-2020.pdf/download?inline>

The licence conditions are about the quality of properties, how they are managed and the responsibilities of tenants.

Do you think the licence conditions are adequate?

Yes

No

Don't know

Please tell us of any suggestions you have for additions or amendments to the conditions:

Add comment here

Please return this questionnaire to **Selective Licensing Consultation, P O Box 290, Brighton Street, Wallasey, CH27 9FQ** or hand in to any Wirral Council Library.

Appendix 3

Landlord Questionnaire

Selective Licensing Consultation

* Required

1.

Which of the following apply to you? *

Check all that apply:

- Live in Wirral
- Live in one of the existing selective licensing areas (including the proposed areas for re-designation)
- Work in one of the existing selective licensing areas (including the proposed areas for re-designation)
- Live in one of the proposed selective licensing areas (additional two areas only)
- Work in one of the proposed selective licensing areas (additional two areas only)
- Represent an organisation based in or covering Wirral
- Own or manage a business in Wirral
- Own or manage a business in one of the existing selective licensing areas (Including the proposed areas for re-designation)
- Work in Wirral
- Private landlord/agent in one of the existing selective licensing areas (including the proposed areas for re-designation)
- Private landlord/agent one of the proposed selective licensing areas
- private landlord/agent with a property elsewhere in Wirral
- Have another connection with Wirral
- No connection with Wirral

2.

For landlords and agents, please indicate in which selective licensing area(s) your properties are located)

Check all that apply:

- Birkenhead West
- Seacombe St Paul's
- Bidston & St James West
- Egremont North

maps and address lists are available [here](#)

Wirral Council proposes to continue Wirral's selective licensing scheme through re-designation

of two areas that have been in place since 2019 and extending the scheme into two further areas. Selective licensing will require all landlords to have a licence to let out homes in these areas between 1st April 2024 until 31st March 2029.

3.
Do you agree or disagree with the selective licensing proposal? *

Mark only one:

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

Wirral Council currently charges £595 over a 5-year period depending on any discounts that can be applied. This is around £119 per year or £2.29 per week before discounts can be applied.

4.
Do you agree or disagree that this is a reasonable fee for this period? *

Mark only one:

- Strongly Agree
- Agree
- Neutral
- Disagree
- Strongly Disagree

5.
To what extent do you agree or disagree that it is reasonable to: *

Mark only one per row:

Reduce the licence fee for landlords who have their property accredited with a national landlord organisation or already have the property accredited with the Wirral Council property accreditation Scheme

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

Reduce the licence fee for landlords with multiple properties

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

Reduce the licence fee for landlords who submit early licence fee applications

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

Reduce the licence fee for landlords with low energy consuming properties?

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

*A full copy of the selective Licensing conditions can be found on the Council's website
<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/files/licence-conditions-amended-july-2020.pdf/download?inline>*

Wirral Council would like your views and comments on the proposed licence conditions.

6.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the conditions around the following issues and principles about the property? The licence holder must: *
Check all that apply:

Keep the property in a good state of repair

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

Keep the outside areas clean and tidy

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

Keep the property secure

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

Have an electrical safety certificate for the property

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

Fix any faults identified by an electrical inspection

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

Deal with any pests and infestations

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

Ensure there are adequate kitchen facilities

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

Provide keys for any window locks and instructions on how to use any burglar alarm

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

7.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the conditions around the following issues and principles about the relationship with the tenant? The licence holder must: *

Check all that apply:

Fix any repairs identified when a new tenant moves in

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

Provide information about mandatory tenancy deposit protection

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

Provide information about refuse collection

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

Have arrangements for reporting repairs, including in an emergency

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

Give 24 hours written notice before entering the property, except in an emergency

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

Provide operating instructions for any fixed form of heating, cooking, washing and/or electrical appliances when provided as part of the tenancy

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

Ensure emergency works necessary to protect the security of the premises are undertaken within 24 hours of notification

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

8.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following conditions about the way in which the property is managed? The licence holder must: *

Check all that apply:

Keep a copy of all references received for every occupier

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

Not allow more people to live in the property than specified by the tenancy agreement

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

Make sure that the tenant and their visitors do not cause a nuisance to their neighbours

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

Deal with any complaints of anti-social behaviour in a proper and timely manner

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

Make sure that the tenant complies with other conditions about living in the property

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

Carry out Right to Rent checks in accordance with Home Office requirements prior to agreeing to a tenancy

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

Carry out an inspection of the premises at least once per year to ensure it is free from disrepair

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

Keep records of any complaints received and action taken relating to anti-social behaviour

Strongly agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly disagree Don't know

Are there any other comments that you would like to make about the proposals for selective licensing?

9.

Enter comments here:

Thank you for taking the time to complete the questionnaire.

Appendix 4

Representation

In total, one written submission was received from a landlord organisation, the National Residential Landlord's Association.

RE: Wirral Council Selective Licensing Consultation



Samantha Watkin <samantha.watkin@nrla.org.uk>
To Mcgrady, Justine

Reply

Reply All

Forward



Fri 29/09/2023 15:13

You forwarded this message on 29/09/2023 15:55.

This message is part of a tracked conversation. [Click here to find all related messages or to open the original flagged message.](#)

Hi Justine,

Thank you to you and your colleagues the other week for taking the time to speak to me about the council's proposals. You asked for a statement from the NLRA perspective which is below:

"The NRLA has a shared interest with Wirral council in ensuring a high-quality private rented sector operates within the borough. Over the last decade, the sector has been making substantial improvements to the quality of its housing stock. The number of properties with a category 1 hazard under the HHSRS has declined from 28% to 13% in 2019. Despite this, there are still a small proportion of properties in the PRS where conditions are potentially hazardous and need to be improved. The council has set out their intention within their licensing proposals to improve homes in these areas and to work with landlords to drive up standards of properties which do not meet the standards in question. It is important that there is a cohesive approach should the scheme go ahead, and the council uses the funds raised from selective licensing fees for the benefit of both landlords and tenants".

Again many thanks for taking the time to speak to me about the proposals, and have a lovely weekend.

Kind regards,

Samantha Watkin

Senior Policy Officer

National Residential Landlords Association



W www.nrla.org.uk