



**WIRRAL
INTELLIGENCE
SERVICE**

This is Wirral

Housing

**Wirral Intelligence Service
(December 2019)**

This is Wirral

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Wirral Intelligence Service

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Background to This is Wirral

This is Wirral is a collected set of evidence about Wirral.

It includes information about the Wirral population including their current and future health and wellbeing needs and the borough including information about the economy, housing, environment and transport.

The insight is collected into a number of sections to allow ease of access for the reader.

Each section contains detailed content including the key messages from the analysis and insight on main issues and is underpinned by detailed information.

The information forms our Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) providing a detailed picture of the borough.

It is used to enable effective strategic planning to determine what actions local authorities and other partners need to take to meet resident needs and to address the wider determinants that impact on health and wellbeing.

How can you help?

If you have ideas or any suggestions about these issues or topics then please email us at wirralintelligenceservice@wirral.gov.uk or go to <https://www.wirralintelligenceservice.org/>

Version Number	Date	Authors
1.0	December 2019	Sue Hooper & Lisa Newman Housing Delivery Services

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This is Wirral: Housing

Contents-

Background to This is Wirral	2
Acknowledgements	2
Key Messages	4
Local Facts and Figures	4
Homelessness / Rough Sleeping.....	5
Availability and Accessibility of Accommodation.....	6
Quality of Accommodation.....	6
Infographics.....	7
What do we know?.....	8
Introduction.....	8
Overview - Housing and related information.....	8
Household Income	8
House Prices.....	10
Housing Affordability	11
Housing Tenure	12
Vacant Housing.....	13
Housing Projections	14
Dwellings Completed and Started.....	14
Overview - Homelessness / rough sleeping.....	17
Homelessness / rough sleeping.....	18
Overview - Availability and accessibility of accommodation	20
Availability and accessibility of accommodation	20
Overview - Quality of accommodation	23
Quality of accommodation	24
What are we doing and why?	25
Homelessness / Rough Sleeping.....	25
Availability and Accessibility of Accommodation.....	27
Quality of Accommodation.....	28
Local View.....	30
Homelessness / Rough Sleeping.....	30
Availability of Accommodation	30
Quality of Accommodation.....	31
Related sources	31
Underpinning and supporting evidence.....	31
Contact details	32

Local Facts and Figures

- Gross Domestic Household Income Growth for Wirral has declined dramatically from 2015 to 2016, in line with national and regional trends. As at 2016, Wirral has the lowest growth rate at -0.6% compared to Liverpool City Region (LCR) average (-0.2%), Northwest (0.5%) and National (1.5%) with the gap between Wirral and the National more than doubling, from 1% in 2012 to 2.1%. Wirral's position of -0.6% is also the lowest reported within each LCR Authority.
- Wirral saw the highest house price increase in the LCR (More than 15% since 2009); average price now £155,000 as of March 2018, just below the Northwest average of £155,788. There is a difference of £295,377 between the median house price in the most affluent area which is £379,050 and £83,673 for houses in the least affluent areas.
- In 2018 the average house price in Wirral was 5.64 times annual earnings of Wirral residents, this ratio increased sharply from 5.05 the previous year, suggesting that affordable housing in Wirral is becoming more of an issue. Despite this however, Wirral's affordability ratio is still below the Northwest (5.79) and England (7.91).
- Wirral has one of the higher levels of vacant housing within the Liverpool City Region, with 4,955 vacant properties, only Liverpool and Sefton have more. However, a concerted effort has been made to tackle this within Wirral and numbers of vacant houses have been steadily declining with a reduction of 22.1% since 2009.
- At a national level, Wirral ranks in the top ten for length of time that vacant dwellings remain empty (9 out of 92 Metropolitan and Unitary Local Authorities for long term vacant dwellings) with 2,097 long term vacant dwellings as of December 2018. Wirral stands at 13th for national comparison for the total number of vacant dwellings (4,955).
- Wirral are the second highest performer within the Liverpool City Region for dwellings completed (built) although Wirral rank lowest with St. Helens for dwellings started (in progress). Nationally Wirral ranks a lowly 67 out of 92 Metropolitan Boroughs and Unitary Authorities for dwellings started (320 dwellings started) and 57 of 92 for dwellings completed, (390 dwellings completed) as of December 2018.
- Wirral has the second highest number of net taxable properties in the Liverpool City Region, (148,466); despite this however, Wirral has seen the lowest growth in taxable properties from 2010 to 2019 at just 4.8%.
- In 2018 Wirral had a total of 152,540 homes of which 15.2% (23,183) were affordable social homes. The number of affordable homes varies in each Wirral ward and can be up to 15% of the housing stock and as low as only 1% of local housing stock.
- Empty properties provide a potential housing resource. Between 2004 and 2018 the number of empty properties has reduced by 14.9% from 5,825 in 2004 to 4,955 in 2018. Over the same period the number of long-term empty properties (*empty for 6 months or over*) has reduced by 30.1% to 903. Active intervention by the Council results in at least 250 empty properties per annum being brought back into use.

Homelessness / Rough Sleeping

- There is a clear commitment in Wirral to the provision of supported housing for homeless people – Council has commissioned nine organisations, delivering 15 distinct services providing 391 bed spaces for both young people and adults.
- Funding has been secured to develop an assertive outreach service for Rough Sleepers attached to the YMCA's night shelter. The service will proactively seek out, verify and engage with rough sleepers across the borough and co-ordinate action to bring them off the streets.
- The health of people experiencing homeless is significantly worse than that of the general population, with the cost of homelessness experienced by single people to the NHS and social care being considerable. 41% of homeless people report a long term physical health problem and 45% had a diagnosed mental health problem compared to 28% and 25% respectively in the general population.
- Wirral Clinical Commissioning Group, in collaboration with homeless accommodation services, commissioned a number of initiatives to reduce the health inequalities experienced by homeless people and facilitate access to primary and secondary health services which include a Homeless Nurse Practitioner and a Homeless Mental Health Nurse Practitioner.
- Homeless legislation and services are undergoing significant change, following the implementation of the Homeless Reduction Act. A full review of Wirral's Homelessness Strategy services will be completed in 2019 and will determine needs, gaps in current service provision and inform future service delivery and direct resources going forward.
- Funding has been secured to help tackle homelessness across the Liverpool City Region, through the implementation of the 'Housing First' model. This model operates on the principal that housing is a basic human right and should not be used as a 'carrot' to ensure engagement with support, but rather that other support needs are easier to address when someone has secured stable housing. This will commence as a first phase test and learn approach, providing services for up to 60 clients.
- The Council has completed a procurement exercise of supported housing provision in the borough for people experiencing or at risk of social exclusion. More flexible and responsive services which deliver interventions enabling homeless people with multiple complex needs have been commissioned.
- Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) 'Trailblazer' funding has been awarded to the Liverpool City region to enable the enhancement of Housing Options teams within the LCR to proactively target those households that have been assessed as being at an increased risk of homelessness at an earlier stage that current resources allow. This should positively impact on the number of households who become homeless.

Availability and Accessibility of Accommodation

- The Council is currently updating its Strategic Housing Market Assessment which will enable it to reflect the needs, in planning terms of different household groups such as first time buyers and older people. It will also determine how much new housing including affordable housing is required in the borough.
- Registered Providers who have affordable homes in the borough are strategically supported regarding a wide range of matters including their existing affordable social housing stock profiles and future development of new stock.
- Engagement with agencies such as Homes England continues to take place to ensure funding opportunities are maximised in relation to potential development of new homes in the borough.
- A range of opportunities such as utilising existing Council land and / or building assets, development partnerships with private developers to regenerate neighbours and the provision of affordable housing through the planning system continue to be reviewed, considered and taken forward to provide new affordable housing in the borough.
- Since the beginning of 2015, then 1,154 affordable homes have been built in the borough of which 591 were funded through grant provided by either Wirral Council Capital Programme or Homes England funding. This represents 49% of the total homes built in the borough since 2015.
- The Property Pool Plus policy was amended to take into account the new statutory provision within the Homeless Reduction Act. In addition, the policy is in the early stages of a more detailed review to ensure it supports strategic aspiration around access to housing for Wirral Council and the City Region.

Quality of Accommodation

- Tackling empty residential properties is a priority for Wirral Council and forms part of the Corporate Plan with a clear target to bring 1,250 empty properties back into use between 2015 and 2020.
- Proactive work continues to take place to assist property owners return their property to use through schemes developed to enable owners to decide which option is the most suitable for their circumstances (advice and support, financial assistance, dispose of properties through the Developers List)
- Legislation enabling Councils to charge a council tax premium to owners of empty properties in order to encourage owners to return their properties into use has been introduced by Wirral Council. From 1st April 2019 Wirral Council charges an additional 100% council tax on properties which have been empty for two years or more.
- In 2015 Selective Licensing of private rented properties commenced in four small areas in Wirral. The scheme is designed to reduce low housing demand by driving up standards within the worst tenure of housing for property condition. 1,300 properties have now been licensed. An additional scheme commenced in April 2019 focusing on a further four small areas has since been introduced.

- Fuel Poverty and Energy efficiency remains a priority for Wirral Council to address. A contract is in place with Energy Projects Plus to focus on improving heating and insulation standards within properties linking in with a range of other schemes such a Heating and renovation loans.

Infographics

HOUSING



NUMBER OF NEW AFFORDABLE HOMES SINCE THE BEGINNING OF 2015

1,154



BETWEEN 2004 - 2018 THE NUMBER OF EMPTY PROPERTIES HAS REDUCED BY

14.9%

From 5,825 in 2004 to 4,955 in 2018



NUMBER OF HOMES PROVIDED WITH EITHER A MINOR OR MAJOR ADAPTATION

2,732

ensuring some residents can maintain their independence and/or reduce hospital re-admissions

152,540

HOMES IN WIRRAL



23,183

ARE CONSIDERED AFFORDABLE 2018

AVERAGE HOUSE PRICES IN 2018 WERE

5.64x
WIRRAL

5.79x
NORTH WEST

7.91x
ENGLAND

THE LEVEL OF AVERAGE ANNUAL EARNINGS

£155,000
2018

15%
INCREASE SINCE 2009
HIGHEST HOUSE PRICE INCREASE
IN LIVERPOOL CITY REGION

Introduction

- More than 320,000 people live in Wirral in more than 140,000 households.
- A safe and secure home is vital to all Wirral residents. We are working to improve the quality and supply of Wirral's housing stock, providing more affordable homes and specialist housing solutions, including extra care homes and supported living accommodation.
- Access to good quality housing is a foundation upon which people can build happy and successful lives and a crucial component of strong and sustainable communities. It is important that residents are able to find the right home in the right place, so they and their families are able to live their lives to the full and achieve their potential.
- The majority of homes in the borough are in the private sector accounting for more than 84% (18% of this is within the private rented sector). This is in stark contrast to just over 15% of homes in the social housing sector so there is a need to continue to work towards offering a range of housing options to create a flexible housing offer in the borough.
- Wirral is a borough of sharp contrast with many affluent and attractive residential areas along-side areas of high deprivation, particularly in specific areas of the borough and it is important to continue to work towards making sure residents in every one of Wirral's communities are able to live in a good, safe and attractive home.

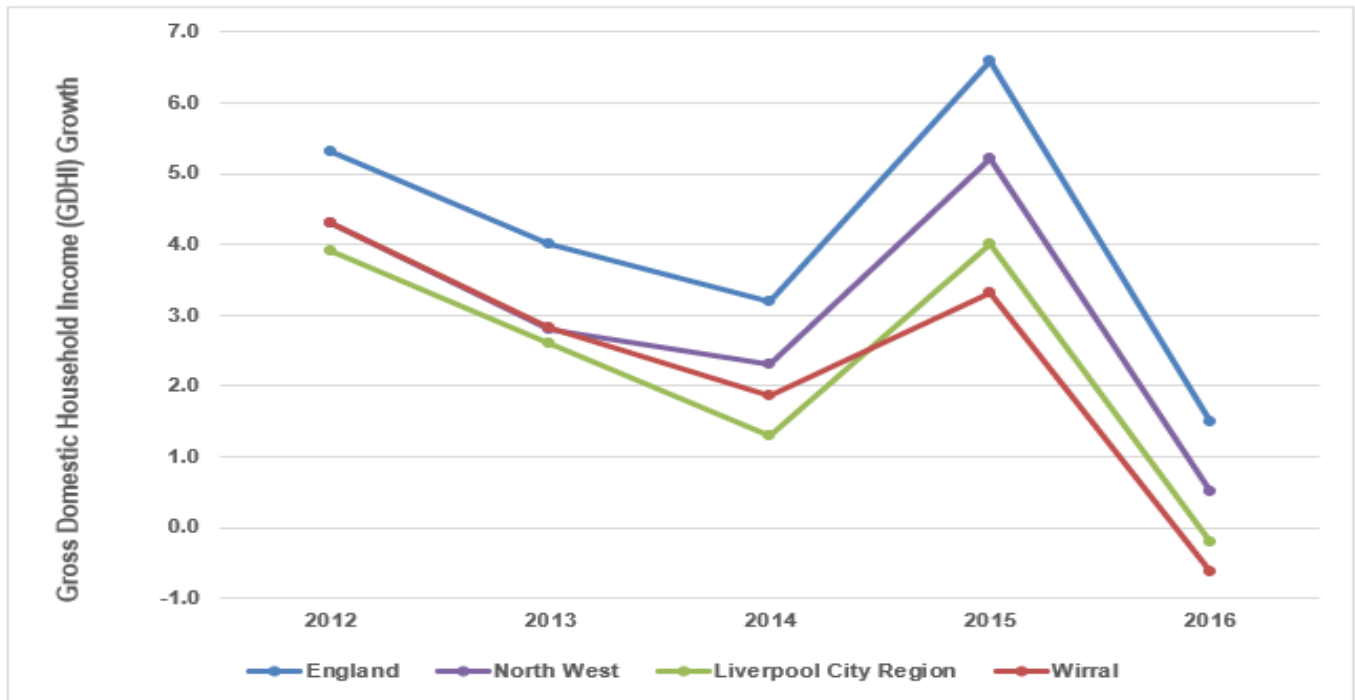
Overview - Housing and related information

Household Income

Gross disposable household income (GDHI) is the amount of money that all of the individuals have available for spending or saving after they have paid direct and indirect taxes and received any direct benefits. GDHI is an indicator set to reflect the welfare of a region.

Figure 1 below looks at levels of GDHI from 2012 to 2016 for Wirral in comparison to national, Northwest and Liverpool City Region figures.

Figure 1: Gross Domestic Household Income Growth for Wirral compared to Liverpool City Region and North West and England between 2012 – 2016



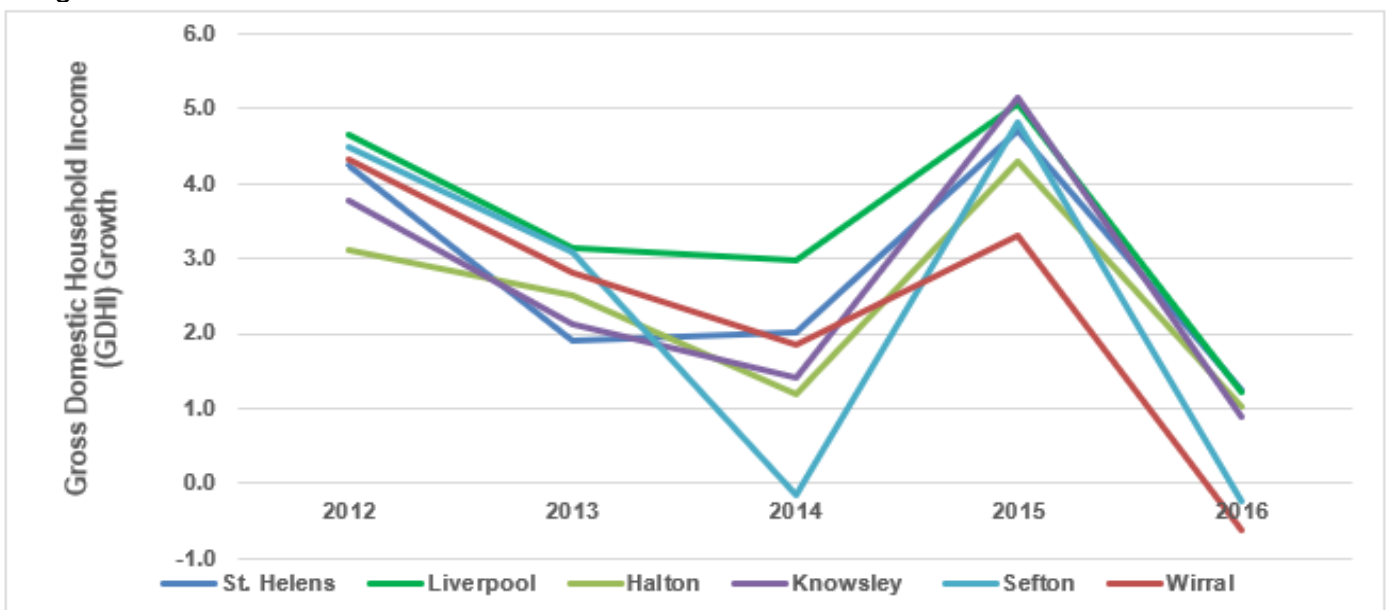
Source: [ONS Regional Gross disposable Household income \(GDHI\). Growth in \(GDHI\)](#)

In **figure 1** above the GDHI trends are parallel across each of the comparison groups with sharp falls across the Liverpool City Region (LCR), Northwest and England between 2015 and 2016. Since 2012, Wirral has moved from 4.3% growth, in line with Northwest and above the LCR average rate of 3.9%, to a negative position of -0.6% in 2016.

The gap between the National figure and Wirral has also increased from 1% to 2.1% during this time.

Figure 2 below makes the comparison for GDHI across LCR Districts. This shows Wirral having the lowest GDHI for the LCR.

Figure 2: Gross Domestic Household Income Growth for Wirral compared to Liverpool City Region districts between 2012 – 2016



Source: [ONS Regional Gross disposable Household income \(GDHI\). Growth in \(GDHI\)](#)

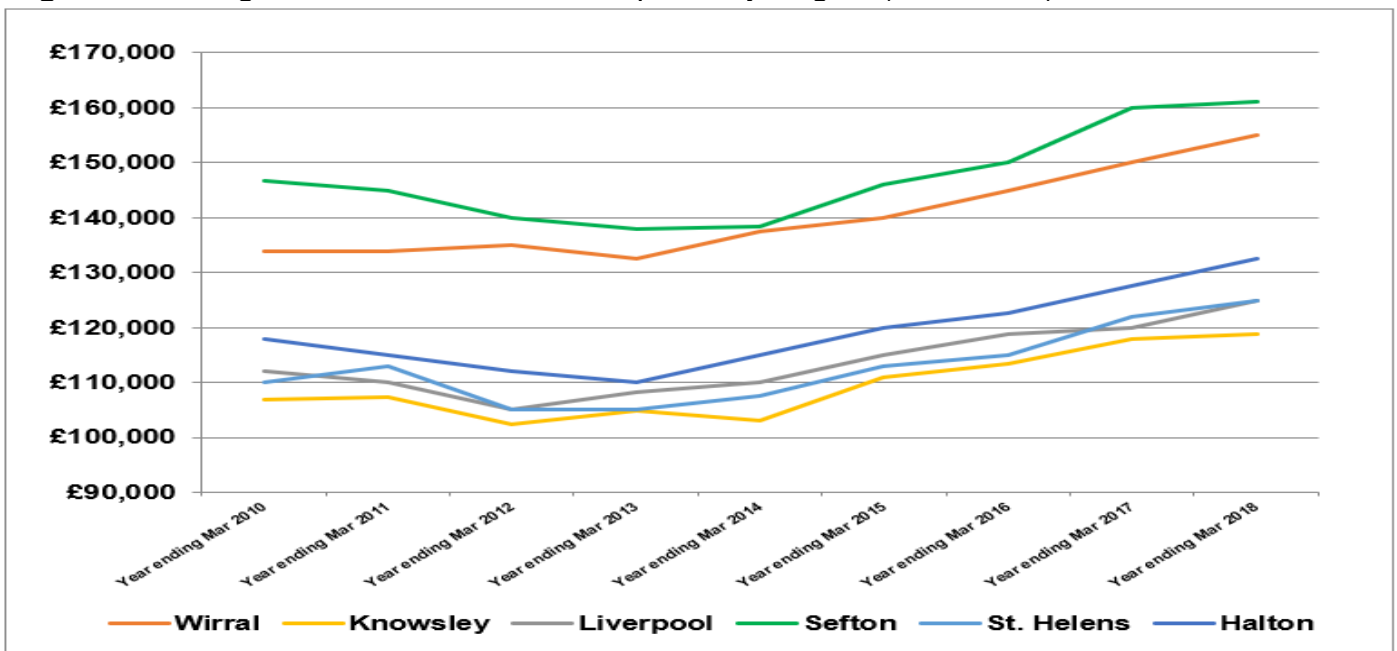
House Prices

[See section Availability and accessibility of accommodation in this document for more details](#)

House prices offer an indication of desirability for residing within the area which is of course linked to having a successful economic picture within the area. The higher the house price the more desirable the area.

House Prices in Wirral have increased by over 15% since 2009 (**Figure 3**) with the average price standing at £155,000 as of March 2018, this is the highest increase in the Liverpool City Region during this period and the second highest average house price behind Sefton which stands at £161,000.

Figure 3: Average House Price across Liverpool City Region (2010-2018)

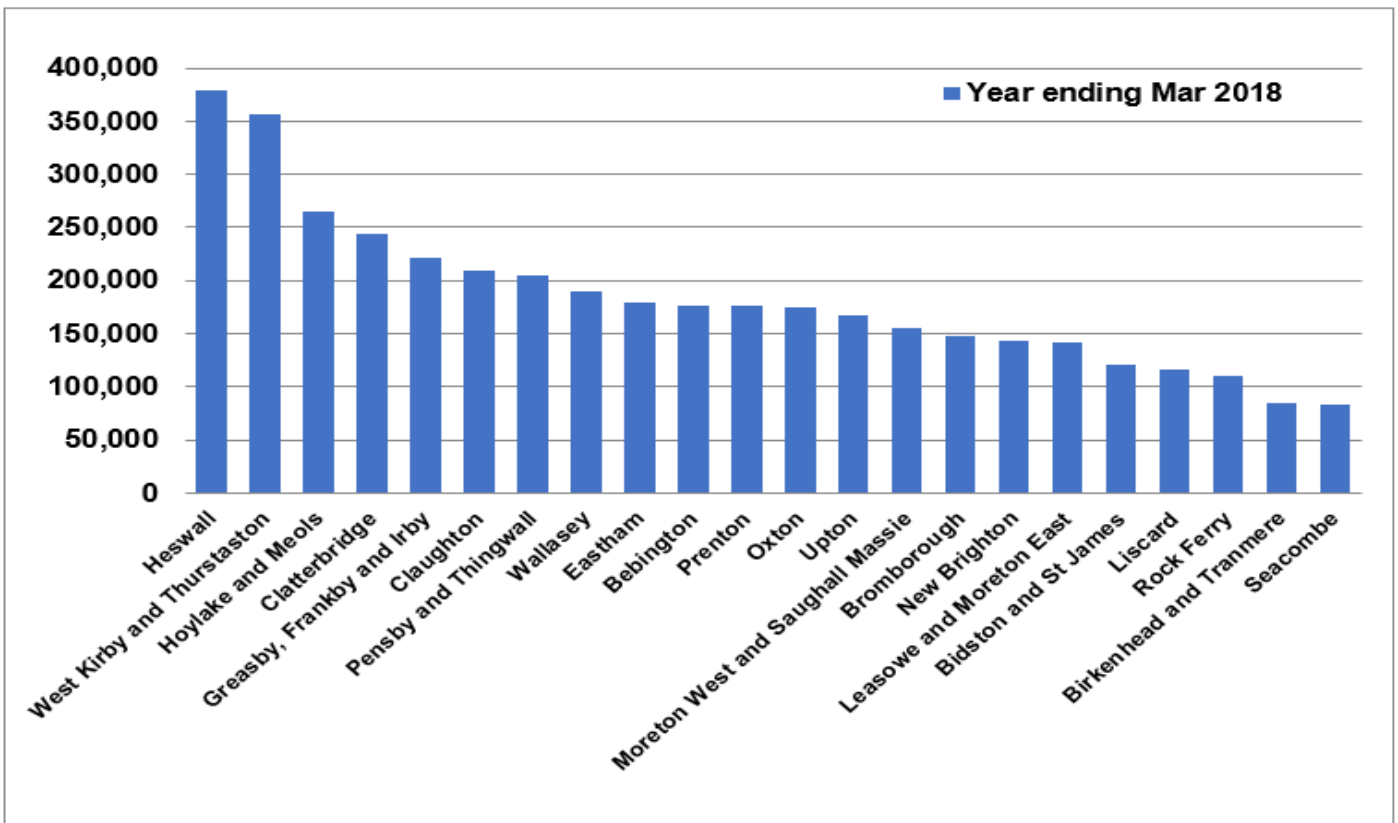


Source: [ONS People, Population and Community, Median House Prices](#)

When considering at house prices by Ward (**Figure 4 below**), there are considerable differentials that exist between the most and least deprived areas of Wirral.

There is a difference of £295,377 in the median house price in the most affluent area (£379,050) and the least affluent areas (£83,673).

Figure 4: Median House Price by Wards in Wirral (as at March 2018)



Source: [ONS People, Population and Community, Median House Prices](#)

Housing Affordability

[See section Availability and accessibility of accommodation in this document for more details](#)

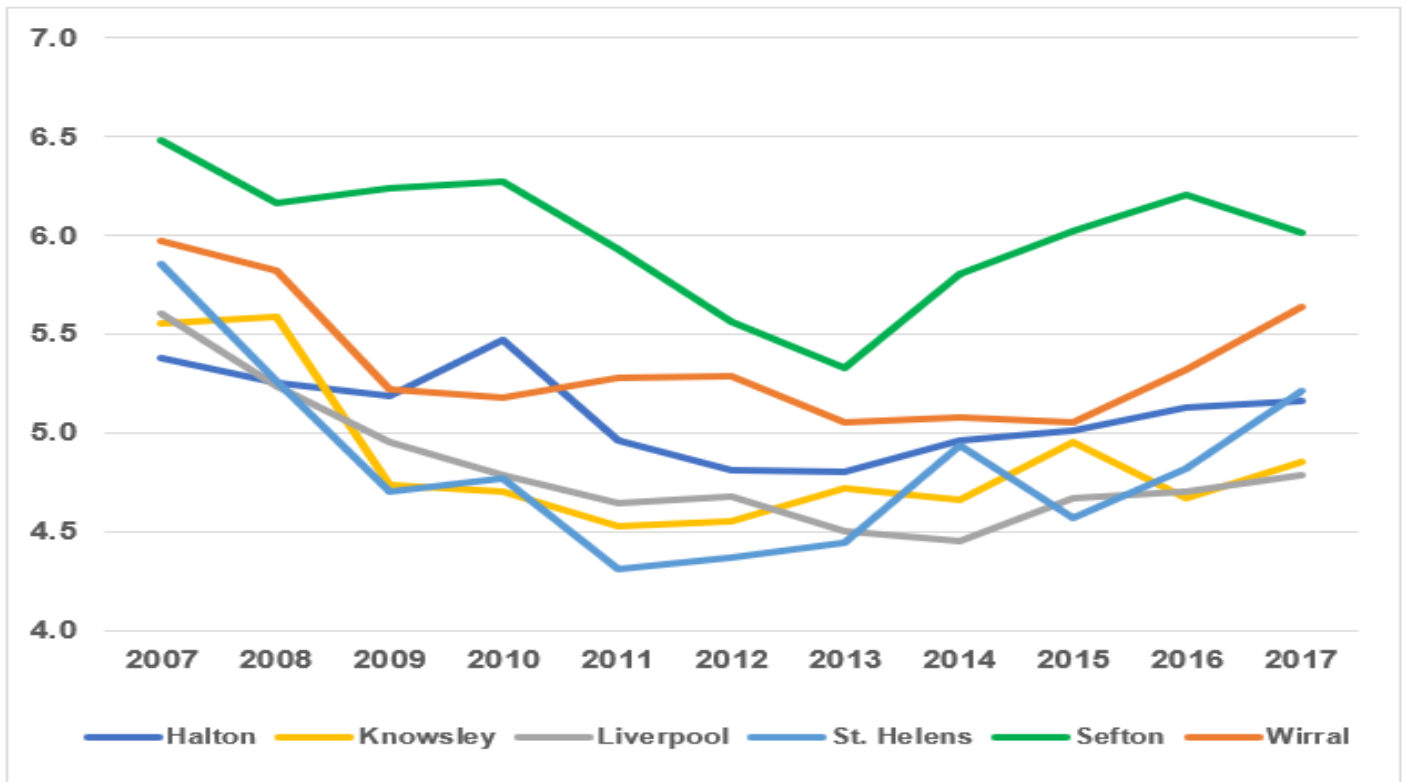
The Office for National Statistics produce the housing affordability ratio which compares average annual earnings to average annual house prices. The lower the ratio, equates to a more affordable housing offer.

In considering this ratio (**see figure 5 below**), it suggests that Wirral has the second highest earnings to house price ratio at 5.64, (meaning that the average house would be 5.64 times annual earnings), therefore Wirral’s housing offer is the second least affordable in the Liverpool City Region (LCR) after Sefton (6.01).

This figure for Wirral peaked at 5.97 during the housing boom in 2007 then subsequently reduced over a number of years, reaching a low between 2013 and 2015. However, over the past three years this ratio has begun to slowly rise, suggesting that affordable housing is becoming a greater issue for Wirral residents and housing providers.

It is also worth noting that houses in Wirral are more affordable than those in the North West (5.79) and England (7.91).

Figure 5: House Price Affordability Ratios for Liverpool City Region districts (2007-2017)



Source: [ONS: People, Population and Community, House price \(existing dwellings\) to workplace-based earnings ratio](#)

Housing Tenure

The 2011 Census remains a useful dataset that allows for housing tenure comparison of the proportion of private rented, owner occupied and social rented with other Local Authority areas.

In **table 1** below it suggests that Wirral (67.5%) has a slightly higher proportion of owner-occupied properties than that of England (63.3%), North West (64.5%) and other Merseyside Local Authorities (60.4%). There is a more marked difference with that of Merseyside due to the high proportion of social rented (26.4%) and private rented (23.4%) properties in Liverpool. The proportion of private rented sector properties in Wirral almost doubled between 2001 and 2011, a similar rate of growth to that nationally.

The trend in recent years is the growth of the private rented sector and whilst the proportion of social properties has remained stagnant.

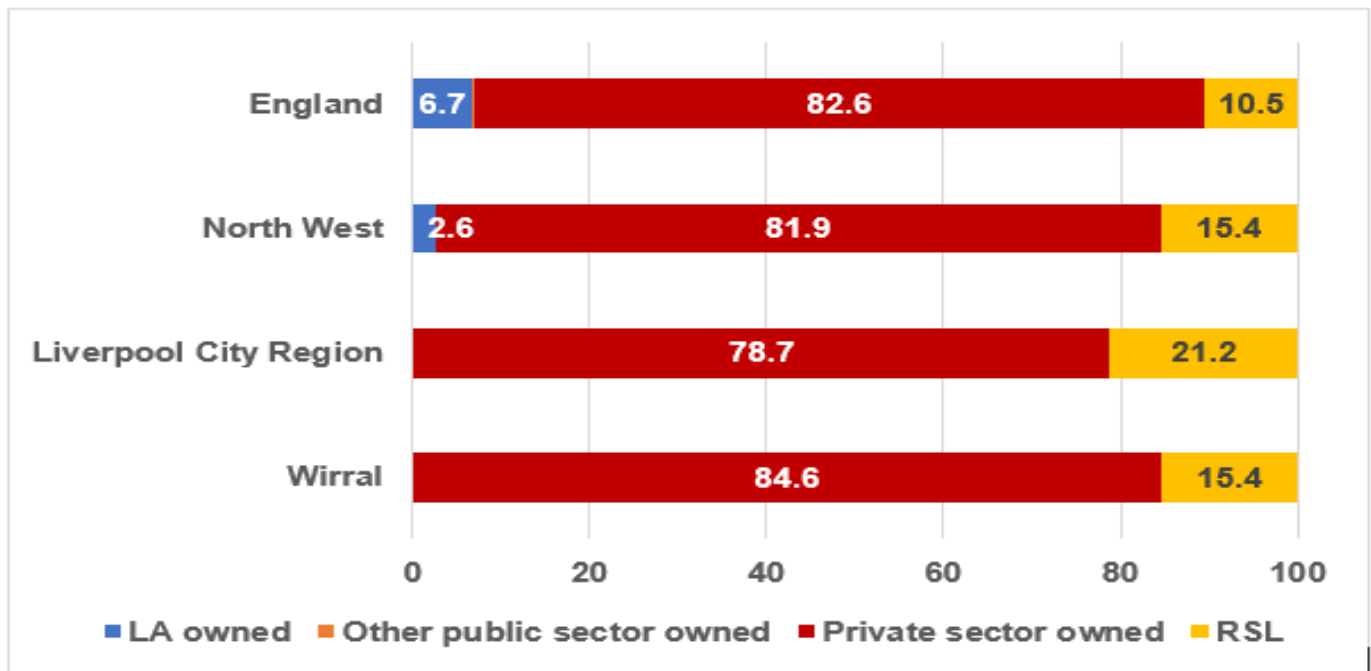
Table 1: Proportions of types of tenure compared to England, North West & Merseyside (2011)

	Social rented	Owner occupied	Private rented
England	17.7%	63.3%	18.2%
North West	18.3%	64.5%	16.7%
Merseyside	21.2%	60.4%	17.8%
Wirral	15.1%	67.5%	16.9%

Source: [2011 Census: Accommodation & Tenure](#)

Figure 6 below combines the privately owned and privately rented properties so somewhat masks the growth in private rented sector between the 2011 and 2001 census. Local intelligence of the private sector reveals that overall the sector has grown slightly to 84.6%, with a subsequent reduction to 15.4% of public owned properties.

Figure 6: Percentage of Dwellings by Tenure, Wirral and other comparator areas (2016/2017)



Source: [Gov.UK, Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government: Dwelling stock: Number of Dwellings by Tenure and district: England: 2017](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/dwelling-stock-number-of-dwellings-by-tenure-and-district-england-2017)

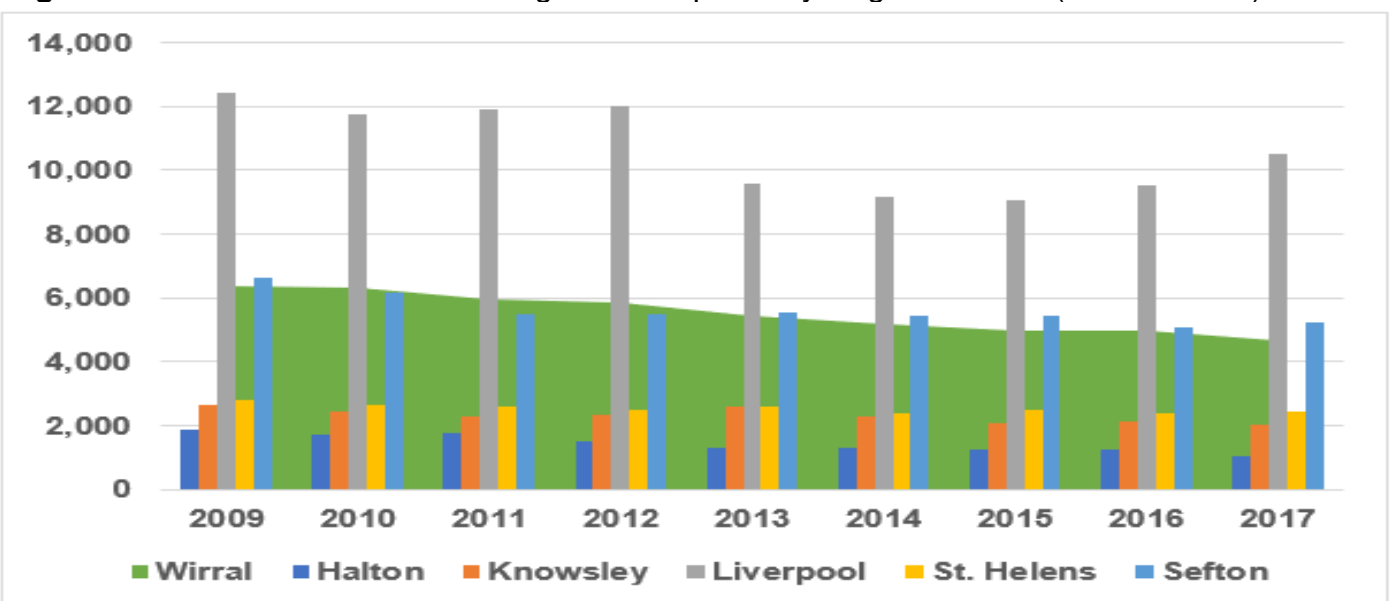
Notes: RSL – Registered Social Landlord

Vacant Housing

Appropriate housing supply is an important factor within any local economy and housing that is left vacant will impact upon housing supply. Lower numbers of vacant housing are a positive indicator of economic health. By looking at vacancy rates over time it is possible to identify to what extent the number of vacant properties is being tackled.

Wirral has one of the higher levels of vacant housing within the Liverpool City Region, with 4,955 vacant properties, only Liverpool and Sefton have more (**figure 7**). However, a concerted effort has been made to tackle this within Wirral and numbers of vacant houses have been steadily declining with a reduction of 22.1% since 2009.

Figure 7: Numbers of Vacant Dwellings for Liverpool City Region districts (2009 to 2017)



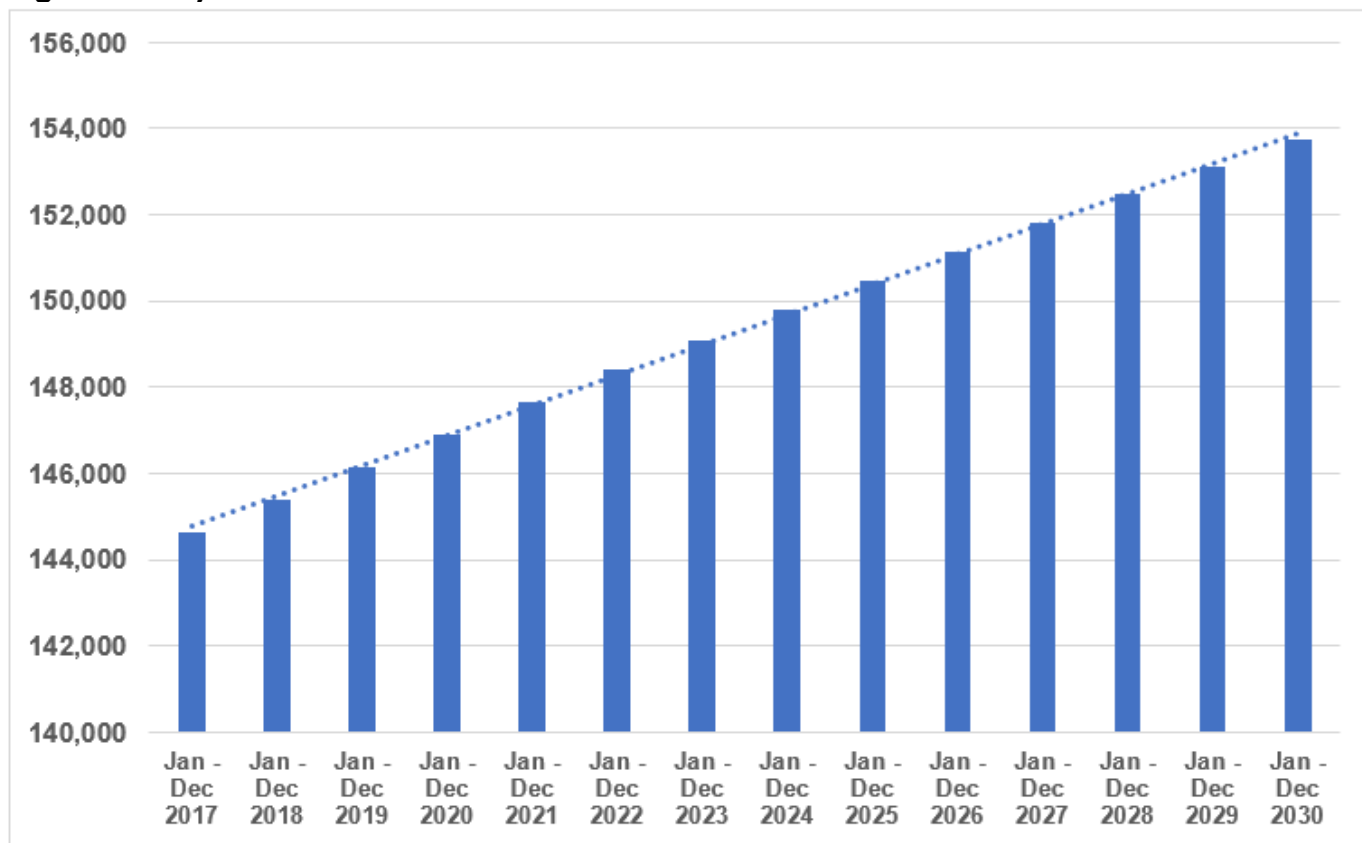
Source: [Gov.uk: Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Table 615 Vacant Dwellings by Local Authority District.](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/table-615-vacant-dwellings-by-local-authority-district)

At a national level, Wirral ranks in the top ten for long term vacant dwellings (9 out of 92 Metropolitan and Unitary Local Authorities) with 2,097 vacant dwellings as of December 2018 and 13 of 92 for total number of vacant dwellings (4,955).

Housing Projections

The number of households in Wirral is projected to increase (**figure 8**) by 6.3% by 2030, from 144,651 in 2017 to 153,738.

Figure 8: Projected number of Wirral households between 2017 and 2030



Source: [ONS, People, Population and Community, House price \(existing dwellings\) to workplace-based earnings ratio](#)

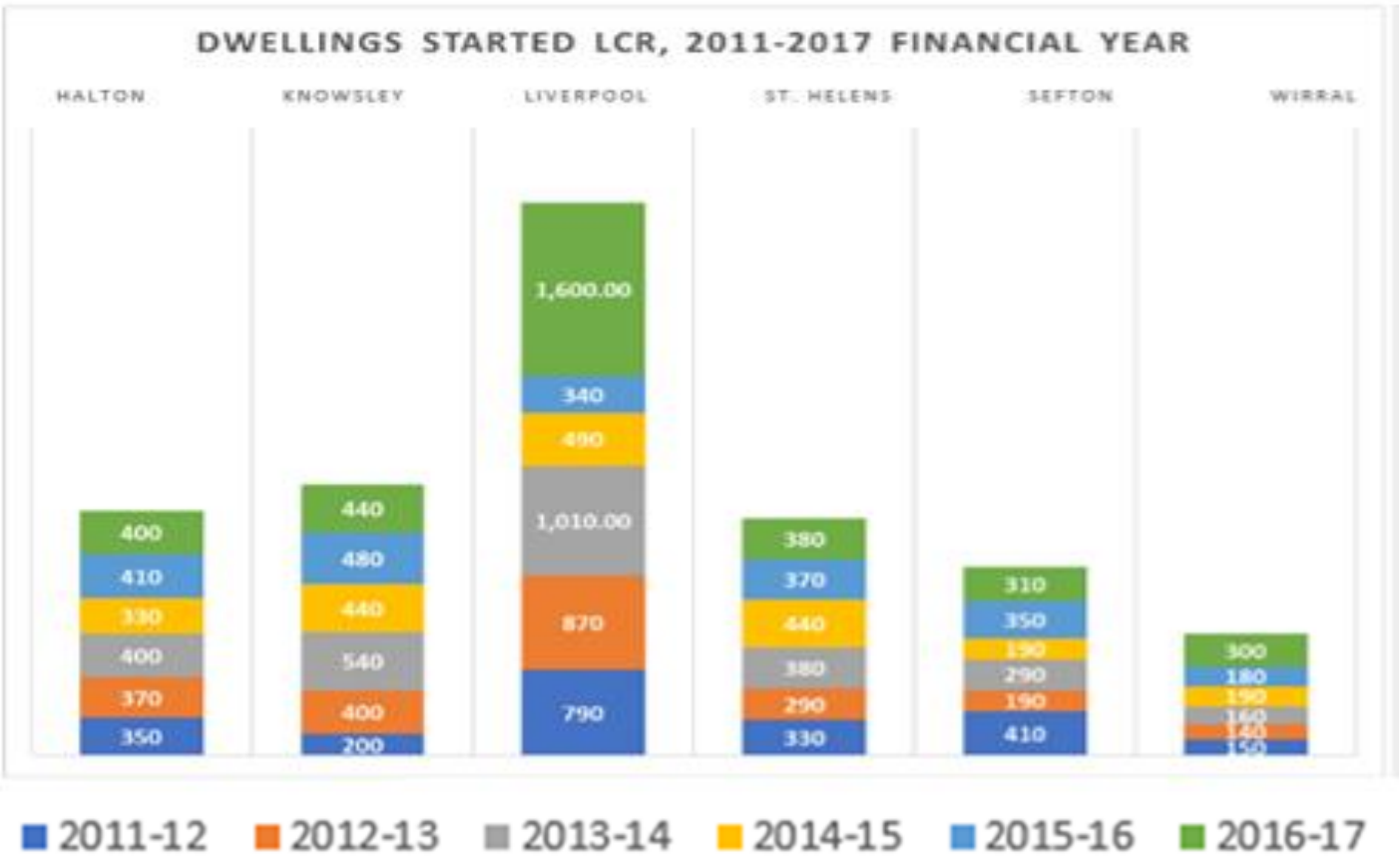
Dwellings Completed and Started

By considering the number of dwellings started and completed, we can gather a picture of the areas housing development plans. Housing Supply is scarce, and it is important for an Authority to have a fluid development pipeline to meet the needs of its residents, so to accommodate population growth

As described in **Figures 9a and 9b** below it suggests that Wirral is the second highest performing Local Authority within the Liverpool City Region (LCR) for dwellings completed although Wirral ranks lowest with St. Helens for the number of dwellings being started.

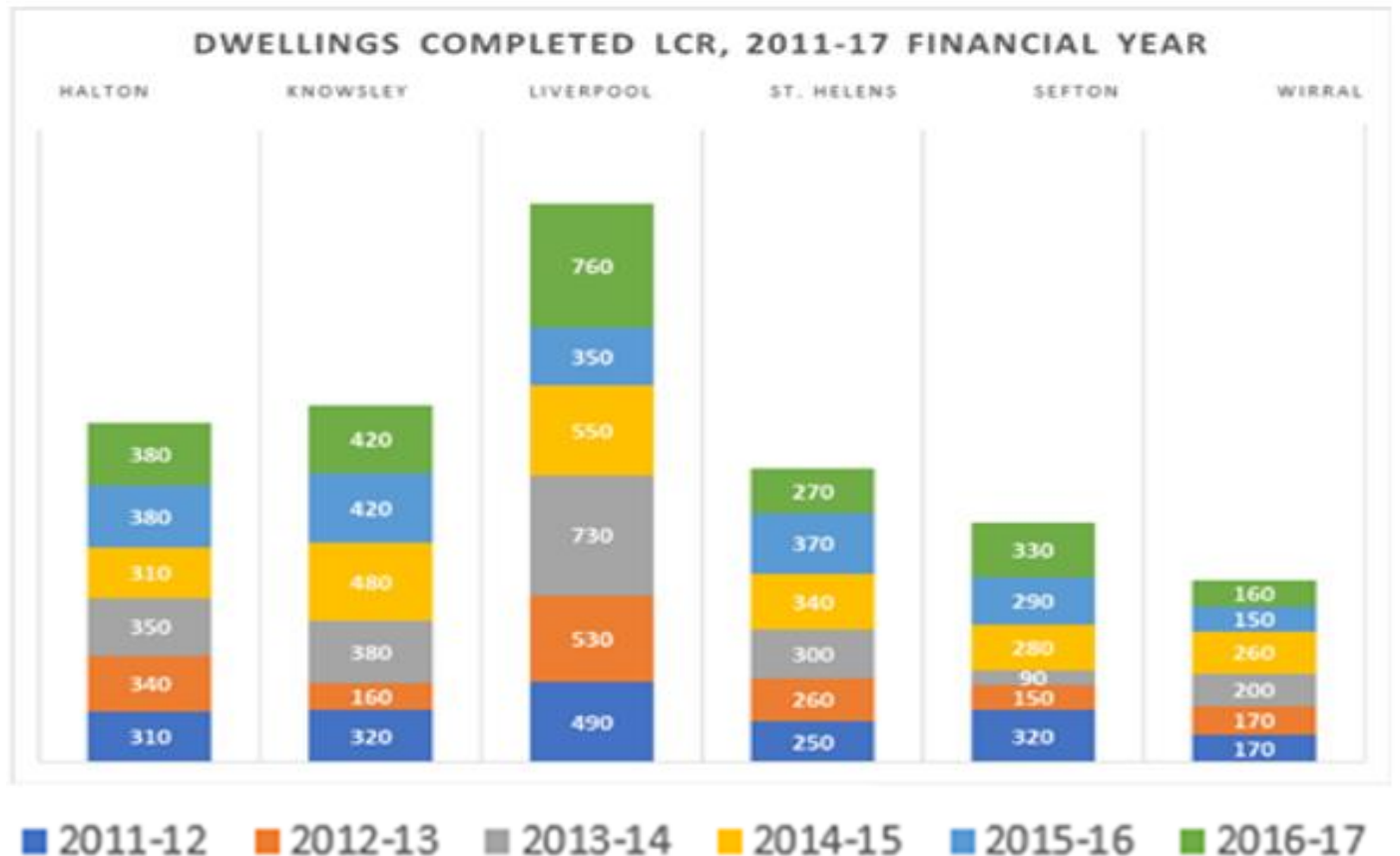
Nationally Wirral ranks 67 of 92 Metropolitan Boroughs and Unitary Authorities for dwellings started (320 dwellings started) and 57 of 92 for dwellings completed, with 390 dwellings completed as of December 2018.

Figure 9a: Numbers of dwellings started in Liverpool City Region districts for financial years 2011/12 to 2016/17



Source: Gov.UK, Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government: Towns & Cities

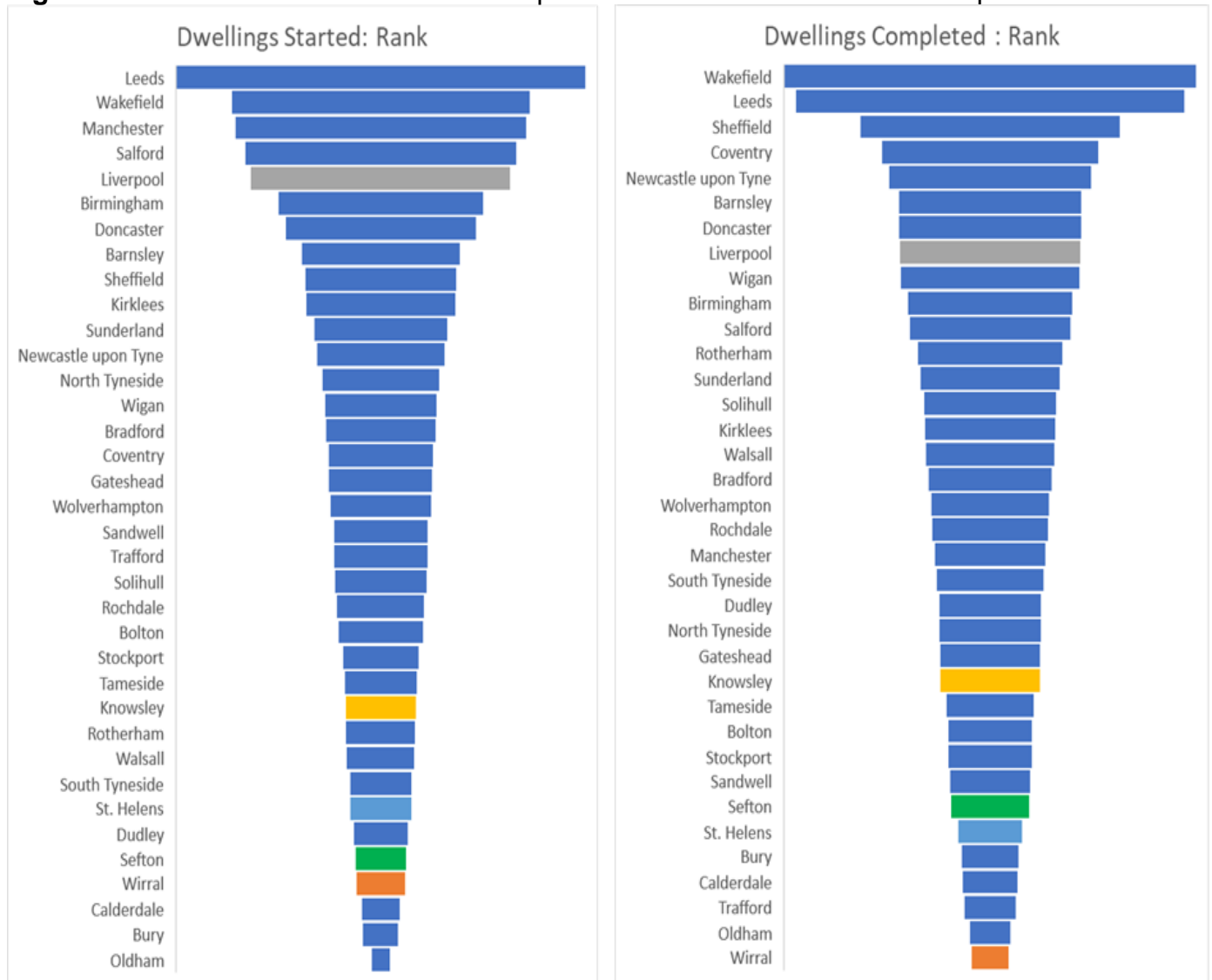
Figure 9b: Numbers of dwellings completed in Liverpool City Region districts for financial years 2011/12 to 2016/17



Source: Gov.UK, Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government: Towns & Cities

Figure 10 below shows Wirral's position for developments started and completed in comparison to all Metropolitan Borough Authorities (36), Wirral ranked low at 33 of 36 for starts and 36 of 36 for completions.

Figure 10: Wirral Rank within the 36 Metropolitan Authorities Started and Completed in 2018

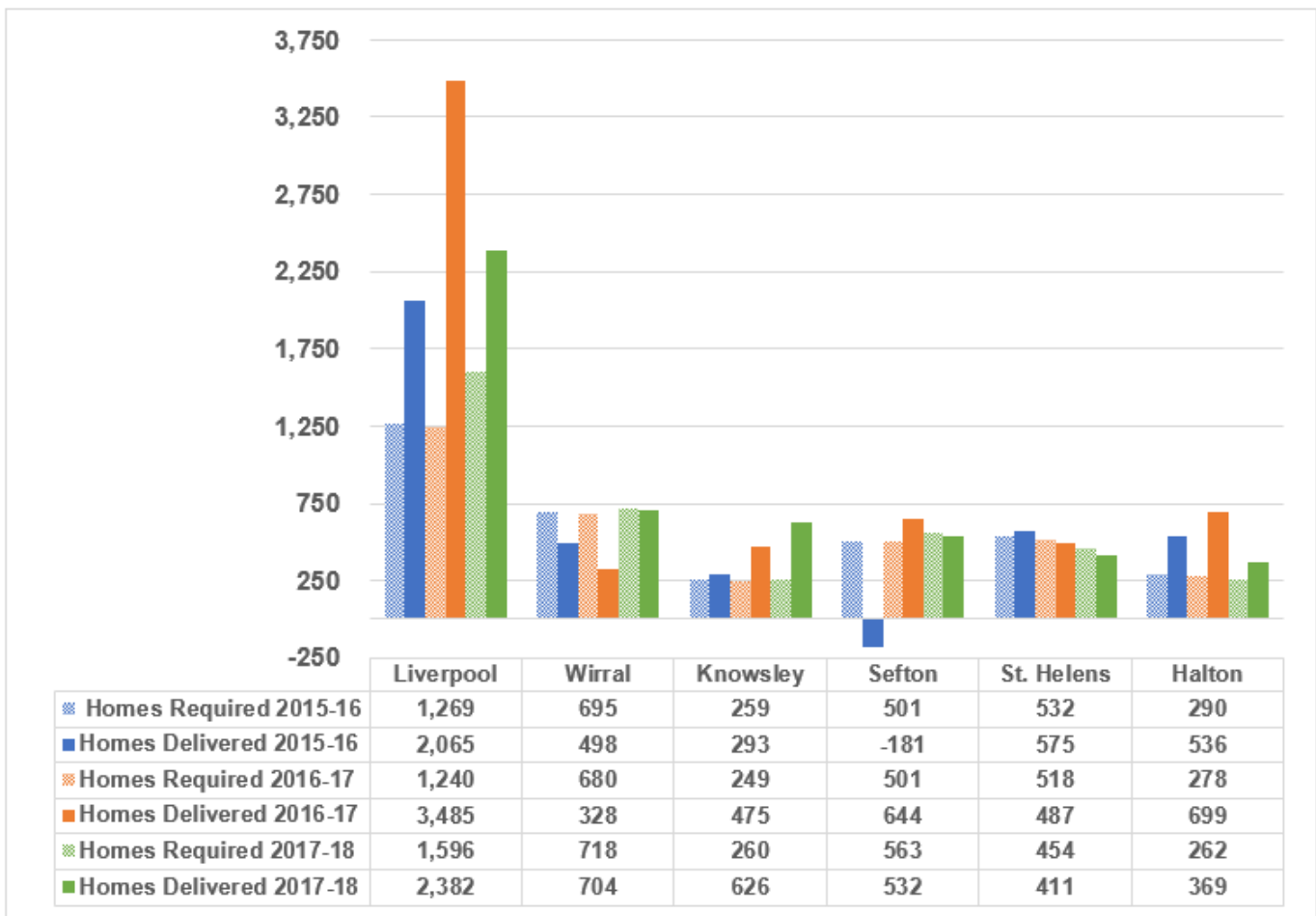


Source: [Gov.UK, Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government: Towns & Cities](https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/towns-and-cities).

Local information captured by the Local Authority (**figure 11 below**) reveals that in terms of new affordable homes in the borough, since the beginning of 2015, 1,154 affordable homes have been built including 591 which were developed using grant funding from either Wirral Council Capital Programme or Homes England and over 520 Help to Buy homes.

This compares to 2,368 total home completions in Wirral in the same period which represents 49% of all homes being affordable.

Figure 11: Numbers of houses required versus numbers of houses delivered Liverpool City Region 2015/16 to 2017/18



Source: [Housing Delivery Test: 2018 Measurement](#).

Overview - Homelessness / rough sleeping

- In Wirral, over 3,000 households seek housing advice each year to resolve their housing need with key presenting reasons including domestic abuse, parents and other relatives being unable to continue to accommodate and loss of rented accommodation.
- In particular domestic violence or abuse presentations in Wirral have accounted for 23% of all presentations in Quarter 1 of 2018/19, this could be issues such as inequality, poverty, and debt or substance misuse.
- Rough sleeping in Wirral has increased since 2010 from 4 people to 16 in 2018 (200% increase). Wirral has however recently secured funding to develop an assertive outreach service for Rough Sleeper. This service, which will be attached to the YMCA's Night Shelter, will proactively seek out, verify and engage with Rough Sleepers across the borough, in response to Street-link referrals and other sources of intelligence and coordinate the necessary action needed to bring them off the streets.

Homelessness / rough sleeping

For most people, the term 'homelessness' conjures up an image of someone sleeping on the streets, however homelessness can also take less visible forms such as 'sofa-surfers' i.e. People who will stay, temporarily, with friends/family; people living in hostels; and for others it may mean living in very poor quality accommodation, experiencing domestic abuse or having no security of tenure. The key reasons for people presenting as homeless continue to be:

- Domestic Abuse.
- Parents and other relatives being unable to continue to accommodate.
- Loss of rented accommodation (end of an Assured Shorthold Tenancy).

Homelessness rarely has a single cause or explanation; it is often seen to be a symptom of wider underlying problems, for example those who suffer from physical or mental ill health, substance misuse or have an offending background. Compared to the general population, those who are homeless experience poorer health outcomes and the consequences of homelessness will often stretch beyond the immediate effect and go on to have a lasting impact on those individuals.

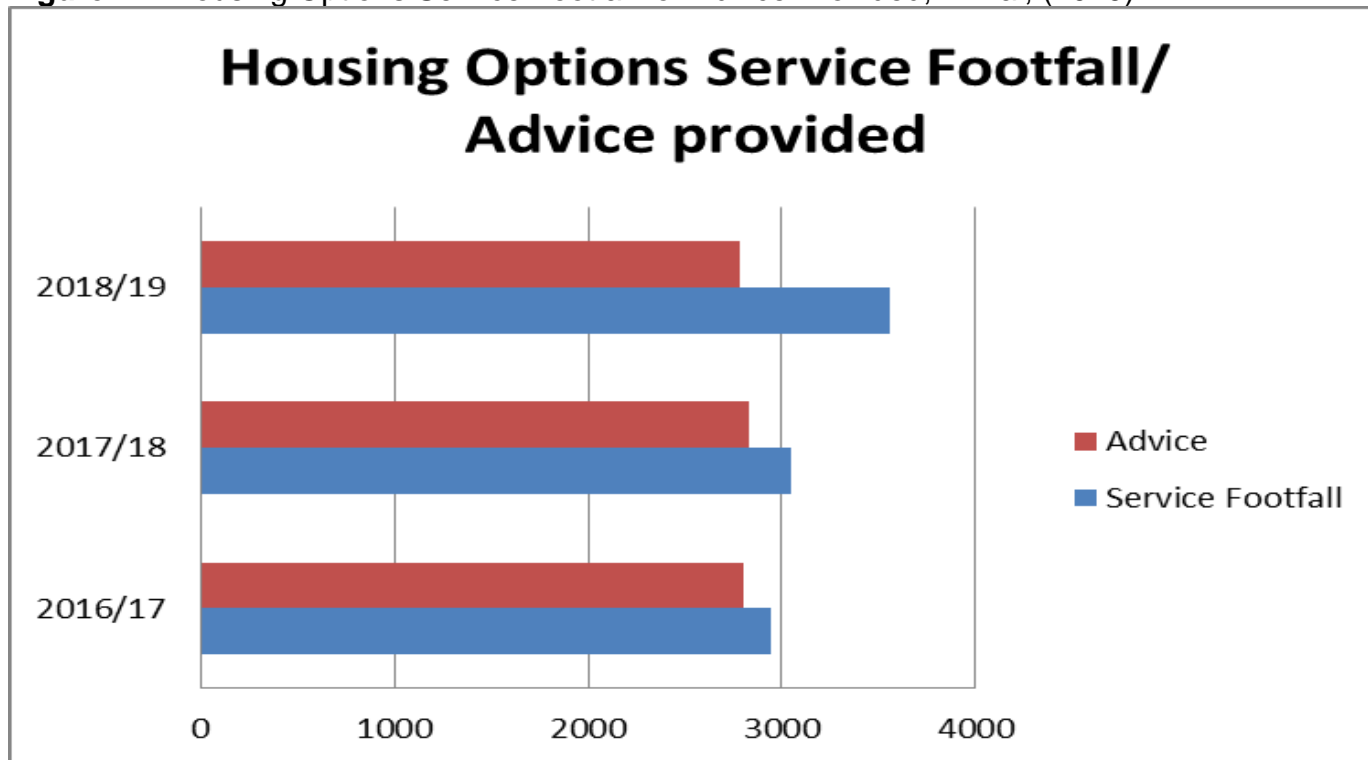
The Local Authority has legal duties towards people who are homeless or threatened with homelessness, and statutory provisions have been significantly redefined through the introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act (HRA) in 2018. A key drive of the HRA was to widen and improve services for single homeless households for whom the majority would not have been awarded a duty under the previous legislation.

The Act also placed a statutory responsibility upon public bodies including health services (hospital emergency departments, urgent treatment centres and hospital) to refer service users that they believe to be homeless or at risk of homelessness.

In Wirral, over 3,000 households seek housing advice each year to resolve their housing need, recent changes in legislation now enable Wirral Council to award a legal duty to a significant number to either:

- prevent (found to be homeless / threatened with homelessness – has an assessment of their case and a personalised housing plan developed to help them. The local authority must take reasonable steps to help people avoid becoming homeless, to help them before they reach a crisis situation e.g. helping them to find somewhere to live)
- or relieve their homelessness (The local authority must take reasonable steps to help people into accommodation with reference to their personalised housing plan e.g. the provision of a rent deposit or advice)

Figure 12: Housing Options Service Footfall for Advice Provided, Wirral, (2019)



Source: Wirral Housing Options Team (2019)

In **Figure 12** above highlights the continuing upward trend in demand for Housing Option Team services, with a 17% increase in footfall since the implementation of the HRA in 2018. External factors such as welfare benefit reform and austerity are key factors contributing to this increase, however the new 'duty to refer' placed on public bodies is also contributing to this.

The impact of the HRA, specifically the new duties to prevent or relieve homelessness, has resulted in more homeless decisions being made in 2018/19 than in any of the two previous full financial years combined. This is detailed in the **table 2** below:

Table 2: Total number of Homelessness Decisions taken for Wirral, 2016/17 to 2018/19

Decision made	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19 *HRA introduced
Full housing duty	56	113	44
Intentionally homeless	33	39	21
Prevention Duty	n/a	n/a	266
Relief Duty	n/a	n/a	434
Not in priority need	8	16	5
Not homeless	49	45	5
Ineligible	0	2	0
Total	146	215	775

Source: Wirral Housing Options Team (2019)

Notes: *The Homeless Reduction Act (HRA) was introduced in 2018

In Wirral there has been a 200% increase in rough sleeping since 2010 (from 4 to 16 people). Despite the increase in numbers, no one needs to sleep rough in Wirral as we have a wide range of service provision available for this particular homeless profile including 22 permanent beds per night for 365 nights of the year, with up to a further 40 nights per year to help with periods of extreme weather etc. It is also worth noting that the scale and public perception of Rough Sleeping has been confused and inflated by the numbers of people begging and street drinking who are assumed to be Rough Sleeping.

Overview - Availability and accessibility of accommodation

- Wirral has a higher requirement for the delivery of new homes than has been delivered over recent years. National policy indicates the need to provide at least 960 additional homes each year over the next five years and then at least 800 each year beyond this. For comparison, the number of additional homes built in 2016/17 was 328 and in 2017/18 was 704. (The figure for 2018/19 will be available in July 2019).
- Land supply in the borough remains a key influencing factor in terms of the development of new homes irrespective of tenure.
- Currently Wirral's Local Plan is being developed and will be submitted to the Secretary of State in November 2020. As part of this a Sustainability Appraisal and an updated Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) have been commissioned to provide an up to date evidence base in terms of housing requirements for the future which will inform future housing targets.
- In 2018 Wirral had a total of 152,540 homes of which 15.2% (23183) were affordable / social homes, the number of affordable homes varies in each ward from anything up to 15% of the housing stock down to only 1%.
- There is significant demand for social housing in Wirral, reflected by the 8,797 households registered and seeking affordable homes, of which 1,981 have a recognised housing need.
- The highest need is from those households requiring one bedroom accommodation, (58% of total households registered, and 60% of those registered with a recognised housing need).
- The Allocations Policy is designed to ensure available accommodation goes to those who need it most, with 80% of the 600 units of accommodation allocated 2018/19 going to those with a recognised housing need.
- Accessibility of accommodation is in demand with 361 households registered for accommodation and a further 2,732 homes provided with either a minor or major adaptation to ensure some living at the property can maintain their independence and / or reduce hospital re-admissions.
- Empty properties provide a potential housing resource. Between 2004 and 2018 the number of empty properties has reduced by 14.9% to 4,955. Over the same period the number of long term (empty for 6 months or over) empty properties has reduced by 30.1% to 903. Active intervention by the Council results in at least 250 empty properties being brought back into use per annum.

Availability and accessibility of accommodation

Land supply in the borough remains a key influencing factor in terms of the development of new homes irrespective of tenure. Currently Wirral's Local Plan is being developed and will be submitted to the Secretary of State in November 2020. As part of this a Sustainability Appraisal and an updated Strategic Housing Market Assessment (SHMA) have been commissioned to provide an up to date evidence base in terms of housing requirements for the future which will inform future housing targets.

The Government's method for determining the number of additional homes required has produced a minimum number of homes needed in Wirral of 960 per year for each of the five years after April 2019 and then at least a further 800 in each year beyond. Wirral however only currently has 2.6 years' worth of land available. The Council is seeking to meet its housing needs in the urban area and on brownfield sites, wherever possible, and is seeking to protect Green Belt land. There may however be exceptional circumstances to justify changes to Green Belt boundaries which would need to be reviewed at a future date, as part of the preparation of the Council's statutory Local Plan.

In 2018 Wirral had a total of 152,540 homes, of which 15.2% (23,183) were social sector homes. The level of social sector homes varies in each ward across the borough ranging between 1% of homes up to 15% of homes.

There is significant demand for social sector affordable homes (homes which are owned and managed by a Registered Housing Provider and let at an affordable or social rent) in Wirral, reflected by the 8,797 households registered for rehousing on the Property Pool Plus Housing Register. 1,981 (23%) of those registered have a recognised priority housing need (March 2019).

The 58% of total households registered require one bedroom accommodation, and 60% of those households with an identified housing need require one bedroom. It should be noted that many of those with a need for one bedroom accommodation prefer a property with two bedrooms to allow more flexibility in terms of lifestyle and suitability of accommodation for future needs. This need for smaller affordable accommodation is supported by the previous Strategic Housing Market Assessment which stated that for the period 2014-2032, 85% of new affordable housing should be one and two bed units.

Demand for social sector rented accommodation far outweighs the amount of accommodation available via Property Pool Plus and therefore those with a recognised housing need are prioritised in the selection process. During the financial year 2018/19 there were 645 properties allocated to people on the Wirral Housing register via Choice Based Lettings or via direct Council nomination of urgent cases. Of these allocations, 516 were made to applicants with a recognised housing need, equating to 80% of all allocations. This is 10% higher than the target for 70% of allocations to those with a recognised housing need.

Accessible social sector rented accommodation (level access or adapted) is also in demand:

- 360 households (31st March 2019) registered for rehousing have a verified need for this type of accommodation.
- Of these, 299 households (83%) have a recognised housing need, and of these 206 have a one bedroom need.
- Of the 645 properties allocated as referred to in the paragraph above, 78 properties were advertised giving preference to adapted need, and of these 58 (74%) were allocated to households with a verified need for an adapted property (all of these households had an identified housing need) showing the complexities of matching individual needs with supply of adapted accommodation which becomes available.

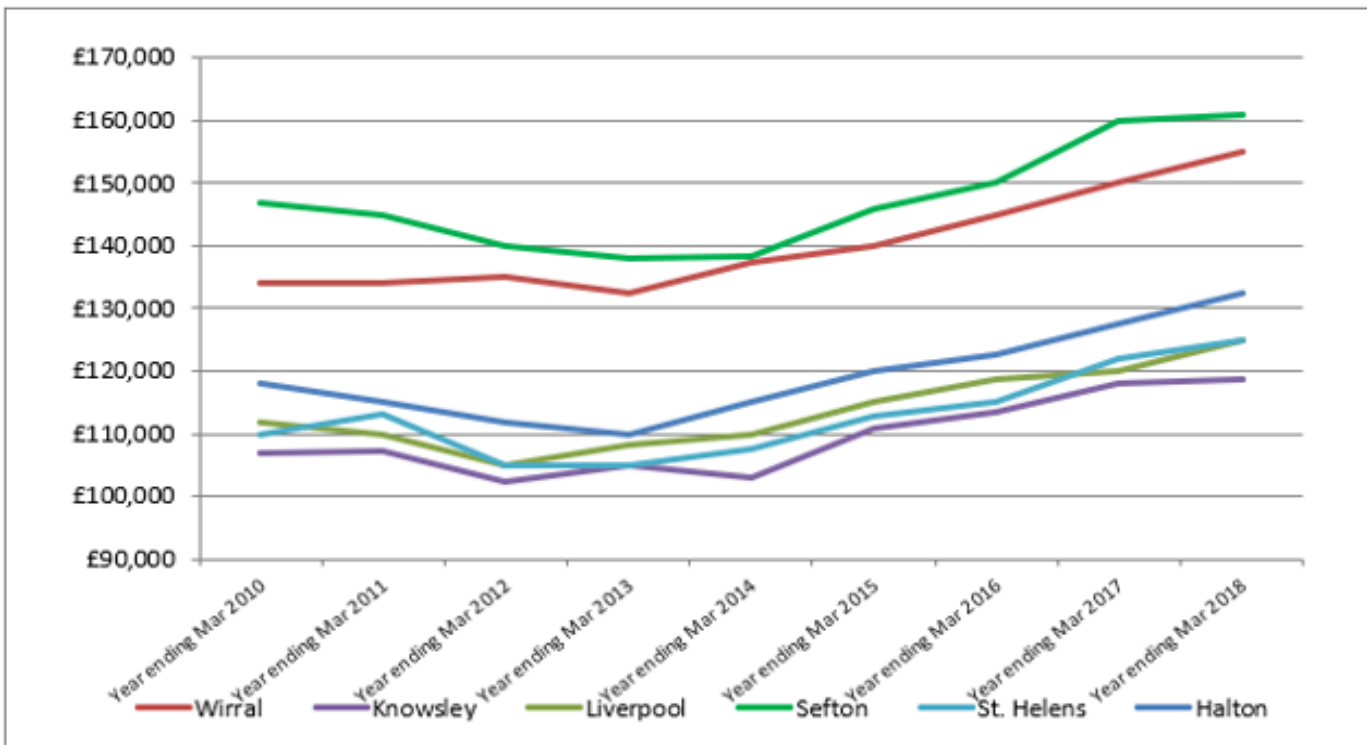
In addition, a further 2,732 households have been provided with either a minor or major adaptation in their existing home to ensure someone living at the property can maintain their independence, don't have to be re-housed and / or reduce hospital re-admissions.

House prices can provide an indication of the desirability of an area as often, the higher the house price, the more desirable the area. Whilst an increase in house price benefits existing home owners in terms of the value of their homes, this also impacts on the ability of people to access the property ladder as well as moving between homes and so it is important to ensure that Wirral continues to work towards offering a range of housing options to create a flexible housing offer in the borough.

Data available provides an overall flavour of the house sale market (**see figure 13 below**). The median House price in Wirral for 2018/19 was £155,000 representing an increase of 11.5% since 2013/14 when the median price was £139,000. Wirral has the second highest average house price behind Sefton which has an average of £161,000. Knowsley has the lowest average house price in the Liverpool City Region at £118,748.

During the same period the number of house sales have increased by 44.9% from 3,531 in 2013/14 to 5,117 in 2018/19. This compares favourably to England as a whole which had a 6.8% increase in sales and 29.9% for the North West and 36.9% for Merseyside.

Figure 13: Average House Price across Liverpool City Region (2010-2018)



Source: [ONS People, Population and Community, Median House Prices](#)

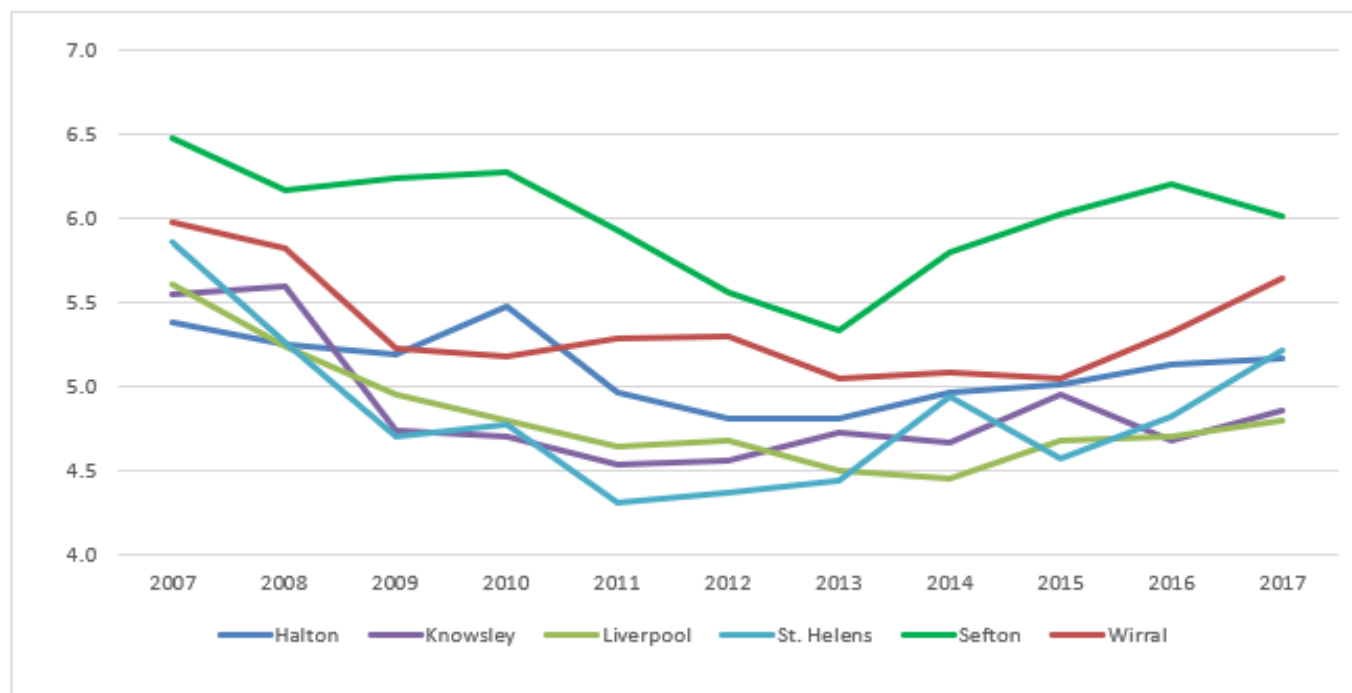
A more relevant indicator is considered to be the Lower Quartile Affordability Ratio, which measures the relationship between house price and average earnings. This is used as a key government target measure of affordability in an area and provides a straightforward comparison at national, regional and sub regional level. Higher ratios tend to indicate less affordable market housing, greater demand and difficulty for households to get onto the property ladder. Lower ratios tend to suggest greater affordability but for market sales homes may indicate lower earnings, reduced purchasing power and/or lower demand in an area.

The Lower quartile price (which is the average of the lowest 25% of homes sold), in Wirral has increased to £107,995 in 2018 which is at the highest level since the global financial crash in 2007 (**figure 14**).

This increase means that the average house price in 2018 has increased to 5.64 times the annual earnings of Wirral residents compared to 5.05 in 2017, suggesting that affordable market housing for sale in Wirral is becoming increasingly more difficult for people to access. Despite this however, Wirral’s affordability ratio is still below the Northwest (5.79) and England (7.91) although it is higher than the Liverpool City Region (LCR) (5.29).

Wirral’s housing offer is the second least affordable in the LCR after Sefton (6.01). Liverpool (4.79) has the most affordable housing offer within the LCR.

Figure 14: House Price Affordability Ratios Liverpool City Region (2007-2017)



Source: [ONS: People, Population and Community, House price \(existing dwellings\) to workplace-based earnings ratio](#)

Empty homes do provide a potential housing resource to help meet housing need in the borough. On a national scale there are now over 216,000 long term empty properties in England and the problem is thought to be most prevalent in Northern housing market. The latest vacant dwellings data published by the Ministry of Housing and Local Government shows that on 1st October 2018 vacant dwellings within the Metropolitan County of Merseyside accounts for 11.5% of the national picture, however 38.2% (9,529) of these had been unoccupied and substantially unfurnished for a period of over six months (the definition of a long term empty property).

Nationally long term empty properties have decreased by 32.1% from a figure of 318,642 in 2004 to 216,186 in 2018. For the Merseyside authorities the number of long term empty properties reduced by 50% (9,530). It is however important to note this figure is somewhat skewed by a large (63%) reduction in the number of long term empty properties in Liverpool. The average decrease for the remaining four Merseyside local authorities was 36%.

Locally in Wirral the number of all vacant properties in 2004 was 5,825 and by 2018 this had reduced by 14.9% to 4,955. The number of long term empty properties in Wirral in 2004 was 3,000 and had reduced to 2,097 by 2018, a decrease of 903 vacant dwellings (30.1%), which is a similar reduction to the current situation both locally and nationally.

Active intervention by the Council results in at least 250 empty properties being brought back into use per annum.

Overview - Quality of accommodation

- Private sector stock accounts for 84.8% of Wirral's total stock and of this 18% is within the private rented sector.
- 15,512 dwellings in the private sector have a serious (category 1 Housing Health and Safety Rating System) hazard. This equates to 12% of properties. This rises to 15% of properties in the private rented sector. Through a range of interventions that Council has improved 2200 properties since 2016.

- Selective Licensing, Landlord Accreditation and mandatory HMO licensing help to protect tenants and drive up property conditions and management standards in Wirral's growing private rented sector.
- Currently Wirral has mandatory HMO licensing and 8 Selective Licensing areas focussing on approximately 2350 rented houses.
- To date less than 1 in 3 privately rented homes comply with the licence conditions on inspection therefore a tougher enforcement approach in the last two years has seen successful prosecutions against rogue landlords for over 130 offences.
- Landlord Accreditation remains a popular scheme that encourages improvements in property standards beyond the legal minimum with some 1,300 properties accredited across the borough.
- All of these mechanisms contribute to targeting fuel poor households in the borough. In Wirral 13.1% (19,037) of households are in fuel poverty.
- This is slightly less than the Liverpool City Region average of 14.3% however is higher than the England average of 11.1%. The highest fuel poverty LSOA in Wirral is Birkenhead West with 27.5% of households who are fuel poor.
- Three in five Wirral residents are satisfied with the quality (58%) and choice (58%) of housing in the local area.
- 23% of residents state that having a nice house is one of the most important factors contributing to their quality of life.

Quality of accommodation

In Wirral, private sector homes account for 84.8% of Wirral's total stock and of this 18% are private rented homes. It is estimated that 15,512 (12%) homes in the private sector have a serious (category 1 Housing Health and Safety Rating System) hazard, rising to 15% of properties in the private rented sector. Through a range of interventions, the Council has improved 2200 properties since 2016.

Under the Housing Act 2004 a House in Multiple Occupation (HMO) is a building or part of a building which consists of one or more units of sleeping accommodation, or a self-contained flat and is occupied by persons who do not form a single household and generally there is some sharing of basic amenities (toilet, personal washing or cooking facilities).

It can also be a building which has been converted entirely into self-contained flats where the conversion did not meet the standards of the 1991 Building Regulations, and more than one-third of the flats are let on short-term tenancies (this type of HMO is commonly referred to as section 257 HMO's).

In Wirral it is estimated there are approximately 1,850 houses in multiple occupation, with the majority being made up of section 257 HMO's, although in recent years there has been an increase in shared and bedsit accommodation. Since 2006 certain types of HMO's have required a mandatory licence and more recently legislation now requires properties that are occupied by five or more persons, in two or more households to obtain and hold a valid licence, regardless of the number of storeys. Of the estimated 200 - 250 HMOs that require a license, Wirral has licensed a total of 153 HMO's to date.

Whilst HMO's can provide an affordable private rented housing option for many residents, they can also have the worst housing conditions, such as inadequate fire safety measures, lack of basic amenities and unsatisfactory management standards. Vulnerable occupiers and those on low incomes are more likely to occupy these types of accommodation. HMO's continually receive routine inspections to ensure safety standards are being maintained or assistance is required to achieve an acceptable standard of accommodation.

Selective Licensing, Landlord Accreditation and mandatory HMO licensing are all initiatives in place to help protect tenants and drive up property conditions and management standards in Wirral's growing private rented sector. Currently Wirral has mandatory HMO licensing and eight Selective Licensing areas focussing on approximately 2,350 rented houses. To date less than one in three privately rented homes comply with the licence conditions on inspection therefore a tougher enforcement approach in the last two years has seen successful prosecutions against rogue landlords for over 130 offences.

Landlord Accreditation remains a popular scheme that encourages improvements in property standards beyond the legal minimum with some 1,300 properties accredited across the Borough.

All of these intervention mechanisms also contribute to targeting fuel poor households in the borough. In Wirral 13.1% (19,037) of households are in fuel poverty. This is slightly less than the Liverpool City Region average of 14.3% however it is higher than the England average of 11.1%. The highest fuel poverty LSOA in Wirral is Birkenhead West with 27.5% of households who are fuel poor.

What are we doing and why?

Homelessness / Rough Sleeping

There is a clear commitment in Wirral to the provision of supported housing for homeless people with the Council commissioning nine organisations, delivering 15 distinct services, which provide 391 bed-spaces for both young people and adults. The following **table 3** shows the numbers of 'placements' (i.e. when someone is placed in a supported housing bed-space) made in supported housing services since 2016:

Table 3: House Price Affordability Ratios Liverpool City Region (2007-2017)

Year	Number of Placements
2016/17	892
2017/18	840
2018/19 (As at 28 March 2019)	765

Source: [ONS People, Population and Community, Median House Prices](#) (2019)

This decrease in placements should not be taken to indicate a declining need for homeless accommodation services. During this period, a large-scale commissioning exercise principally covering 2017/18 was undertaken and, as such, some services that were being tendered out ceased accepting referrals and, consequently, made no new placements at that time.

Wirral has secured funding to develop an assertive outreach service for Rough Sleepers. This service, which will be attached to the YMCA's Night Shelter, will proactively seek out, verify and engage with Rough Sleepers across the borough, in response to Street-link referrals and other sources of intelligence and co-ordinate the necessary action needed to bring them off the streets.

Evidence tells us that the health of people experiencing homelessness is significantly worse than that of the general population, and the cost of homelessness experienced by single people to the NHS and social care is considerable. Indeed, a recent national audit found that 41 per cent of homeless people reported a long term physical health problem and 45 per cent had a diagnosed mental health problem, compared with 28 per cent and 25 per cent, respectively, in the general population.

In Wirral, homeless people struggle to register and access GP Services for appointments. Even when they manage to book an appointment, they frequently do not attend for reasons associated with a chaotic lifestyle. As such, the Wirral Clinical Commissioning Group, working in collaboration with homeless accommodation services, has commissioned a number of initiatives that seek to reduce the health inequalities experienced by homeless people and to facilitate access to primary and secondary health services, these being;

A Homeless Nurse Practitioner (General) holds regular clinics in all local hostel and homeless services. The clinics are designed to address physical health needs and interventions include health assessments, BBV screening and vaccination, flu vaccination where appropriate, wound care (injection sites) and signposting to other services.

The Homeless Mental Health Nurse Practitioner similarly holds regular clinics and works with many complex cases which fall between services. In addition to the usual dual diagnosis cases, ADHD and in particular, Acquired Brain Injury cases are also prevalent amongst the rough sleeper cohort in Wirral.

Homeless legislation and services are currently undergoing significant change, following the implementation of the Homeless Reduction Act. A full review of Wirral's Homelessness Strategy and services is to be completed in 2019 which will determine needs, gaps in current service provision, inform service delivery and direct resources going forward. This will include analysing data and needs for services including those areas which we are already aware of such as female offenders who we know in Wirral are significantly high in numbers and currently being reviewed in terms of outcomes with the courts and will also help in reviewing existing services that are being focused towards early intervention and a greater emphasis on homeless prevention in order to reduce the number of households presenting to services in crisis. Baselines and performance reporting frameworks are also being established to support processes going forward.

Central government has allocated £7.7million to the Liverpool City Region (LCR) to help tackle homelessness through the implementation of the 'Housing First' Model. 'Housing First' operates on the principal that housing is an inalienable right and should not be used as a 'carrot' to ensure engagement with support, but rather that other support needs are, in theory, easier to address when someone has secured stable housing. People accommodated in this model, do not have to be 'Housing-Ready' i.e. Unlike traditional housing support services for the homeless, people accommodated in HF models are not necessarily ready for housing/independent living. The Housing First pilot will be delivered in conjunction with existing programmes throughout the city region and will help complement steps already being taken by councils and their partners. It will be initially undertaken as a first phase test and learn approach, providing services for up to 60 clients from July 2019. This will inform the second phase which will commence in October 2019.

The Council, along with its partners across the Liverpool City Region successfully submitted a bid for Central Government funding for the delivery of a new accommodation service for male and female victims of Domestic Abuse. This service is targeted at those households for whom there is not an imminent risk of harm but who still require relocation. The service will facilitate access to accommodation within the Private Rented Sector, provide housing-related support and will ensure that properties are target-hardened, where necessary.

A large-scale procurement exercise of supported housing provision for people experiencing, or at risk of social exclusion has resulted in the commissioning of flexible and responsive services that deliver interventions that enable homeless people with multiple, complex needs to be assessed, supported, signposted and moved on in a positive way to appropriate accommodation that meets their needs most effectively. It has enabled services to ensure they continue to remain responsive to the changing needs of the single homeless profile. For example, through the requirement that all accommodation services adopt the principles of psychologically informed environments and Trauma Informed Care (TIC) in relation to service delivery; and an increased focus on risk *management*, rather than risk avoidance.

The Liverpool City Region has been awarded 'Trailblazer' funding from [Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government](#) (MHCLG). This funding will enable the enhancement of the Housing Options Teams within the LCR to proactively target for support those households that have been assessed as being at increased risk of homelessness at a much earlier point than current resources allow, thereby reducing the number of households that become homeless. All households engaged through this early-intervention approach will receive robust advice and guidance, including multi-disciplinary support in relation to employment and finance/debt.

Availability and Accessibility of Accommodation

The Council is currently updating its Strategic Housing Market Assessment which will enable it to reflect the needs, in planning terms, of different household groups, for example first-time buyers and older people. It will also determine how much affordable housing is required in the Borough. It is also updating its Gypsy & Traveller Accommodation Assessment to understand the local accommodation requirements of gypsies and travellers. Both assessments will be completed in 2019.

Registered Providers who have affordable homes in the borough are strategically supported regarding a wide range of matters including their existing affordable social housing stock profiles and the future development of new housing stock, which meets both the Registered Provider and Wirral Council strategic priorities. Work is undertaken to enable the development of new homes utilising a range of intelligence to inform development briefs to meet the specific demands of users on a site by site basis.

Agencies such as Homes England are engaged with, to strategically support and provide the case for specific affordable housing social sector schemes, providing the context on how schemes will support the range of strategic priorities both locally and across the Liverpool City Region.

Opportunities to utilise existing Council land and / or building assets are considered. A number of opportunities have been taken forward through this route to deliver with partners a range of housing schemes.

This includes development partnerships with private developers on regenerating neighbourhoods, including some provision for affordable housing within schemes. Disposals of land also takes place to Registered Providers to enable the delivery of new affordable housing to increase options and meet the Council's strategic housing and other objectives including extra care provision.

In terms of new affordable homes in the borough, since the beginning of 2015, 1,154 affordable homes have been built including 591 which were developed using grant funding from either Wirral Council Capital Programme or Homes England and over 520 Help to Buy homes. This compares to 2,368 total home completions in Wirral in the same period which represents 49% of all homes being affordable.

Excluding the Help to Buy product, this active development programme has levered in a total of £66.8m inward investment (£48.5m of private finance and £18.3m Grant funding) to support housing growth, contribute to meet the affordable housing needs and wider objectives such as economic growth for the borough. As part of this investment Wirral Council itself has contributed £1,448,625 so far supporting the development of 123 of these new affordable rented homes.

In addition, through the planning system there is a requirement to provide affordable housing on any new housing development over 10 units, subject to financial viability. In the main, on-site affordable housing provision is the preferred route for this however there are instances where an alternative developer contribution (commuted sums) is provided.

Through this commuted sum route, £1,026,788 has been received so far with a further £261,587 due to be paid to the Council to support the development of new affordable housing in the borough. This takes the total which will have been received to £1,288,375 and is in addition to the grant already detailed above. Work continues with Registered Providers of affordable housing to identify opportunities to support new affordable housing developments in the borough which could be supported / enhanced through this funding route. This could include supporting more social rented units, more affordable rented homes which are accessible in terms of their layout for people with specific mobility requirements and smaller homes such as one bedroomed.

In October 2018 the Property Pool Plus Policy (for the allocation of social housing sector rented homes) was amended to take account of the new Statutory provisions incorporated within the Homeless Reduction Act. This ensures those owed a duty under the new provisions are provided with the opportunity for rehousing to the social affordable housing sector to prevent / relieve homelessness.

The Property Pool Plus Policy is currently in the early stages of a more detailed review to ensure that it supports strategic aspirations around access to housing for Wirral Council and the City Region as a whole. It is expected this will be completed late in 2019. In relation to demand for accessible accommodation the Property Pool Plus system ensures that all property vacancies already adapted are advertised giving preference to those with a verified need for this type of accommodation in order to make best use of the property. In addition, work is also undertaken to match those households with an urgent housing need for an adapted property which cannot be met by existing stock, to properties which could be adapted via a Disabled Facilities Grant.

We continue to build on our existing partnership working with Registered Providers to meet the housing and support needs for a range of vulnerable groups in the borough. This includes care leavers. This approach enables the development of independent move on homes for client groups such as care leavers, helping them to live independently, but with appropriate support tailored to individuals needs to ensure they develop aims, goals and aspirations as well as preparing them to live and work independently in the future. The success of this particular initiative will see an expansion in the number of places available from 3 to 9 units in 2019.

Quality of Accommodation

Tackling empty residential properties is a priority for Wirral Council and forms part of the Corporate Plan, a 2020 vision. The Corporate Plan includes a target of bringing back into use 1,250 empty properties between 2015 and 2020. During the 2018/19 financial year 278 properties were brought back into residential use following the intervention of the Council, contributing to a total of 1165 since April 2015. The Housing Standards and Renewal Team utilise a range of resources and legal powers to tackle empty residential properties in the borough with the intention to improve neighbourhoods and make better use of existing homes.

Through proactive work undertaken, Wirral Council is committed to assisting empty property owners return their property to use through a number of schemes specifically developed to enable owners decide which option is the most suitable for their circumstances and property including; advice and support, financial assistance in the form of Empty Property Grants, opportunity to dispose of their property via the Developers List, letting their property via advertisement or assistance from the Housing Options Team. There are certain circumstances where action is required under legislative and enforcement powers which can be used to remove or negate the effect an empty property is having on a neighbourhood in the short term. This type of action can lead to an empty property owner focussing their attention on either renovating or disposing of their property to avert the likelihood of facing further enforcement or the potential loss of their property.

Recent Government policy on tackling empty homes has also focused on legislation enabling councils to charge a council tax premium to owners of empty properties in order to encourage owners to return their properties to use. Introduced in 2013, councils have been able to charge a 50% premium on the council tax bills of owners of homes empty for two years or more. In 2018 further legislation was introduced which contained provision to double the council tax rate, an additional 100%, on properties empty for two years or more with further increases available to councils for homes left empty between five to 10 years and over 10 years in future financial years. It was proposed that the new legislation would allow councils to charge the additional 100% rate from 1st April 2019. Wirral Council Members agreed to apply the additional premium to properties in Wirral that have been empty for more than two years from the 1st April 2019'

In 2015, Selective Licensing of private rented properties began in four small areas of Wirral with the aim to reduce low housing demand by driving up standards within the worst tenure of housing for property condition. 1,300 properties have now been licensed. Compliance checks commenced early in the scheme, starting with properties at a higher risk of having poor property condition or poor management standards. As of 9th May 2019, a total of 825 properties have been inspected so far, with only 30% of these properties meeting minimum standards.

There have been 50 individual prosecutions so far for landlords who have failed to get a license and other Housing Act 2004 offences. The Council also provides a support role for residents in these areas through the Healthy Homes Team. The Team links to other organisations and Council departments to ensure residents are supported with issues such as debt, worklessness, fuel poverty and fire safety. Due to the early impact of the scheme introduced in 2015,

Cabinet agreed to introduce Selective Licensing into four further areas which were showing evidence of low housing demand and poor property condition. This new scheme began in April 2019.

The Council has had contracts in place with Energy Projects Plus for the past 10 years to deliver a Fuel Poverty & Energy Efficiency Programme. The contracts have a focus on improving heating and insulation standards within properties, linking with other schemes such as the Council's Heating & Renovation Loans, Healthy Homes Team and other initiatives run locally by Energy Projects Plus themselves such as the ECHO scheme for free replacement boilers.

For the programme that ran from 2015-18, almost three quarters of a million pounds worth of additional value was generated, ranging from small energy efficiency measures, to clearing fuel debts and the provision of energy efficient white goods.

Homelessness / Rough Sleeping

Stakeholders and partners agree that the presenting issues of single homeless people have become increasingly complex in recent years; reporting that there is an increased prevalence of 'Dual Diagnosis' amongst this cohort (i.e. the co-existence of Substance Misuse and Mental Health Problems) with a greater take-up of 'legal highs'. Indeed, substance misuse, including alcohol misuse appears to be a common factor for a number of people who are known to 'move around' the hostel system. This group, often described as a 'Core Group' consists of approximately 10-15 people who present with very complex issues and extremes of behaviour that has resulted in exclusions from most, if not all homeless hostels.

Mental health problems, particularly in the form of personality disorders, depression & anxiety and schizophrenia are prevalent. Practitioners report that the chaotic lifestyles of some rough sleepers can make engagement with mental health services problematic (i.e. missed appointments etc.) and consequently, treatment then tends to deal with crisis point situations but not the underlying causes, thereby perpetuating a 'revolving door' between hospital and community services.

Health professionals that work with homeless people report that, arising from the heroin 'boom' across Merseyside in the mid-eighties, a number of rough sleepers are now beginning to exhibit conditions associated with the long-term effects of substance misuse, which is then compounded by the physical effects of a life on the streets. Indeed, there is a high degree of physical health problems within Wirral's street population and the following conditions are prevalent:

- COPD.
- Deep Vein Thrombosis.
- Severe Chest Infections.
- Wound Infections.
- Damaged feet.
- Dermatological conditions due to poor hygiene.
- Double incontinence.
- Chronic Alcohol related issues (pancreatitis, distended liver, ulcers, etc.).

Agencies that work with younger homeless people report increased levels of learning disabilities such as ASD's and Attention-related disorders and an increase in drug and alcohol usage. Stakeholders report that debt remains a significant issue amongst all profiles of homeless people, particularly in relation to housing debt (former rent arrears) which can have a negative effect on their ability to secure permanent housing.

Prior to the implementation of the Homeless reduction Act and the new duty to refer, a programme of engagement with stakeholders took place including awareness meetings with key agencies to discuss the referral mechanisms put in place. Follow up meetings and training sessions have been scheduled to ensure all relevant agencies are aware of their obligations to refer those at risk of homeless or who are homeless to the Housing Options Service.

Availability of Accommodation

In 2017, the service provided in Wirral by Property Pool Plus (PPP) was reviewed, to establish whether it continued to be fit for purpose and provides value for money. The review included a consultation exercise with both stakeholders and service users; outcomes from which were used to produce a number of options for the service delivery in the future.

Since this time some changes have been made to improve service delivery and further changes will be considered as part of the wider sub-regional review of the PPP Policy which is currently in the early stages of a more detailed review to ensure that it supports strategic aspirations around access to housing for Wirral Council and the City region as a whole.

Quality of Accommodation

The 2017 Wirral Residents Survey identified that a good standard and affordability of housing is one of most important factors for Wirral residents in making somewhere a good place to live with 46% of residents ranking this as the most important issue for them about their local area.

In the Residents Survey three in five Wirral residents are satisfied with the quality (58%) and choice (58%) of housing in the local area. Quality and affordability represent the biggest issue for private renting tenants.

Having a nice house is one of the most important factors that contributes towards a resident's quality of life and 23% of Wirral residents considered this to be the most important.

Clearly all of these factors strengthen the case for what we already know in Wirral and so we ensure that these views factor into how we target key housing issues in the borough. An example of this is where Wirral Council has undertaken consultation with residents as well as landlords and letting agents to garner opinions on the potential introduction of Selective Licensing into these. Consultation plans were put in place for both the 2015 and 2019 schemes.

For the 2015 scheme, the overwhelming majority (68.19%) of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with selective licensing proposals compared to 25.17% who either strongly disagree or disagreed. For the 2019 scheme, an even larger majority (76.55%) of respondents either strongly agreed or agreed with selective licensing proposals. In addition to this, in the areas where Selective Licensing was introduced in 2015 views have been sought through surveys on perceptions of changes to the areas and property conditions since the scheme began.

The Council's Fuel Poverty & Energy Efficiency Programme contract with Energy Projects Plus has and is continually engaging with residents to ensure they can access the support required to adequately heat their home or to improve their home's energy efficiency. Through this engagement, schemes and programmes are set up or tweaked to ensure they are meeting the needs of residents, particularly those on low incomes.

Related sources

Wirral Residents Survey 2017

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/sites/default/files/all/About%20the%20council/Wirral%20Plan/Wirral%20Residents%20survey%20results%202017.pdf>

Underpinning and supporting evidence

[View additional information that supports this topic on Wirral Intelligence Service website](#)

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