

# Trialling a new process to consult Wirral residents

In partnership with the research agency, Revealing Reality, Wirral Council have been trialling a new approach to engage with local residents, in the form of panel discussions. Nine panels, lasting two hours each, were hosted across Wirral's neighbourhoods, and over 100 people were engaged in the process.

The aim of these panels was not to do a scientific review of the local issues in each area. Rather, it was a trial that aimed to talk to people that are normally not reached by the council's consultation process.

We did this by working with local residents to recruit and facilitate the panels. We initially connected with 13 local residents, who were given a specific training session in recruitment strategy and facilitation. These participants then recruited members from their communities to take part in a two-hour conversation.

By building a network of local residents, we were able to better understand residents' thinking around the issues they experienced, as well as their thoughts on who should be responsible for addressing the issues raised.



## **Main themes that emerged...**

Throughout the process panellists raised a range of issues during the panel discussions. All these issues were recorded and passed on to the council. Whilst it was not possible to summarise all issues in this report, we have provided a summary below of the most common themes.

### **Local environment and other attractions**

People were passionate about their local environment and felt strongly about protecting and promoting the natural landscape and green spaces across Wirral. A lot of local residents took pride in these areas and felt that it was important that local residents had access to them.

Panellists also felt that the natural landscape on the Wirral was important to maintain as it made the Wirral more attractive to tourists and visitors.

### **Local businesses and economy**

Residents cared about maintaining local businesses and developing the local economy. This was often connected to their desire for their area to be attractive to outsiders, as well as wanting to be able to find employment in their area.

A lot of people felt that the council was responsible for protecting local businesses, while others felt that it was the responsibility of residents to spend money in local shops in order to support them. Some people were conflicted about this, as they wanted to maintain their local businesses while at the same time have access to more affordable non-local options, such as major supermarket chains and clothes retail outlets.

**“... this panel is so important as it brings people of the local community together that have different but equally valid opinions on how they would like the area improved and allows people to work together with the same aim.” – Facilitator for Wirral West B**



**Local support services and organisations**

Residents were passionate about maintaining and improving support for vulnerable people. Many felt that charities and support organisations in their area were essential and did a lot of good work for the community, and some had direct involvement with these charities themselves.

Panel attendees also wanted to see general improvement for everyone accessing public services.

**Anti-social behaviour and crime**

People talked about crime and anti-social behaviour being a prominent problem in their local community, and many of the attendees felt that involvement in crime was a particular issue facing young people.

Panellists felt that more work should be done to support young people and help them avoid getting into criminal or anti-social behaviour, as well as making sure that young people felt overall more invested in their local communities and could feel aspirational about their future prospects.

**Sense of community**

People across the Wirral had a strong sense of community and felt passionate about their local area and working to improve it. Many people talked about being proud of their neighbourhood and felt a strong sense of belonging to their specific community.

**Opportunity areas for local residents**

A lot of participants wanted to help improve their local area, and some people also had good ideas about how they could help solve specific issues that were raised.

However, many panellists felt that they did not know how to implement these solutions and looked to the council to provide this implementation. However, many did so without having a clear idea of the specific responsibilities within the council's remit. This could lead to frustrations when residents felt unable to make change happen, but also that the council were not addressing the issue either.

In areas where people described a strong community action mindset, people felt less frustrated and were more likely to come up with specific ideas where the community and individuals could make a difference. Where community action was possible to tackle an issue, residents found that results happened faster and were more impactful than when the council got involved.

Overall, residents wanted more information about how they could make changes to their local community.

**Since the panels...**

**Dissemination workshop with councillors**

Revealing Reality ran a workshop with councillors in which individual issues raised for specific locations across the Wirral were discussed.

**Detailed report**

Revealing Reality delivered a detailed report to the council, which included the key learnings about how to engage with residents and an evaluation of the consultation method, as well as key themes and ideas raised in the panels themselves.



**“That’s why I’m here – I’m here to help people”**  
- Panellist from Birkenhead A