



# EXECUTIVE NEWS

**Information bulletin from the Chief Executive's Department**

No. 43 December 2005

## 4 stars, and we're 'improving well'

WIGAN Council has been ranked one of the country's very best local authorities - for the *fourth* year running.

Independent watchdog the Audit Commission has given Wigan a four star rating - the highest score possible under its annual 'comprehensive performance assessment' (CPA) of councils.

For the past three years the commission has judged Wigan to be an 'excellent' council: this year the description of the scores has changed but the message remains the same - Wigan is in the premier league of local government.

To win a top CPA rating, the council has had to perform well in key areas such

as use of resources, services for children and adult social care, and meet expected standards in other areas.

For the first time the commission has also introduced what is called a 'direction of travel' verdict, showing how well it thinks councils will improve in future years. Wigan is classed as 'improving well'.

Council chief executive Joyce Redfearn said she was pleased with the verdict in her first year with Wigan. She added: "It's a tribute to the staff who deliver our services, our council members, partners and the way in which we all work for the good of the communities we serve."

*The table shows the scores for all north west metropolitan and unitary councils*

<u>Authority</u>	<u>Direction of travel</u>	<u>Star rating</u>
Blackburn with Darwen	Subject to review	Subject to review
Blackpool	Improving well	2 stars
Bolton	Improving well	4 stars
Bury	Subject to review	2 stars
Cheshire	Improving adequately	3 stars
Cumbria	Improving well	1 star
Halton	Improving well	4 stars
Knowsley	Improving well	4 stars
Lancashire	Improving well	4 stars
Liverpool	Improving adequately	2 stars
Manchester	Improving adequately	3 stars
Oldham	Improving well	2 stars
Rochdale	Improving adequately	2 stars
Salford	Improving well	2 stars
Sefton	Improving well	2 stars
St Helens	Improving well	4 stars
Stockport	Improving well	4 stars
Tameside	Improving well	4 stars
Trafford	Improving well	2 stars
Warrington	Improving well	3 stars
WIGAN	IMPROVING WELL	4 STARS
Wirral	Improving adequately	2 stars

## Computer training for councillors



One part of putting the electronic government agenda into practice relates to providing training for elected members.

From March 2006, a modular training programme will be in place for councillors to develop computer skills in areas including Word, e-mail and the Internet.

There will be a range of ways for members to access the programme, ranging from taught programmes through self-study workbooks, CD-ROM and online learning.

The programme also offers a choice of qualifications – OCR (Computer Literacy and Information Technology (CLAIT)) or the British Computer Society European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL).

Successful completion of each module leads to certification against a nationally recognised qualification.

A framework is available to check members' current skill levels, and to plan how to develop new skills.

The benefits of improved IT skills include better and faster communication with constituents, increased flexibility to carry out research and more effective use of time.

If you'd like to find out more, contact Brian Leigh on ext. 3072, or Paul Ivory, Training & Development Officer on ext. 8418.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

### The big issues

Chief executive Joyce Redfearn has produced her first 'Issues Paper' looking at the council's successes this year and challenges for the future. You can read it on our website - click What's New on the home page and scroll down to 9th December.

### Keeping up standards

Core standards for a whole range of council functions and activities have been published on our website. They include topics such as communications, customer care, data protection and equality and diversity. There is also a standard for communicating with members. You can find them all at:

<http://boston/geninfo/corestandards/index.htm>



### TOTY'S back!

Fifteen council teams have made it through to the finals of Team of the Year. They will battle it out for the ultimate accolade at a ceremony on February 10th. Awards will be presented by TV stars David and Carrie Grant (*pictured above*). A list of teams nominated is on our website at: <http://boston/geninfo/toty/>

## **Council invests in its staff**

Wigan Council has been officially declared a 'corporate' Investor in People following a wide-ranging independent assessment.

The Investors in People standard is a straightforward, proven framework for delivering business improvement through people. It is widely regarded as important in both the private and public sectors.

Being an investor in people means always aiming to improve the way staff are managed and developed.

As part of the assessment process, nearly council 200 staff were interviewed (plus a couple of elected members), representing 3.2% of the total workforce. Interviews were carried out on both a one-to-one basis and in groups of no more than four. Other evidence was gathered from written materials provided by the council.

The assessment looked at four areas in depth: council and departmental planning, identification and provision of training opportunities for staff, the impact of training and development on performance, and appraisal processes in place.

Assessors Graham Curtis and Alison Lingwood concluded: "We were satisfied beyond any doubt that Wigan Council meets the requirements of the Investors In People National Standard."

The assessors found many strengths and some areas for development. The findings have been considered by the Councillor Services Group, which was pleased to hear of the award though concerned to ensure that the council learned from the points for development.

(Sharon Adams, 2309)

### **Our strengths**

- **Strong corporate commitment to the training and development of staff.**
- **Many examples of good communication within departments.**
- **Good induction programme backed up with good departmental provision.**
- **Clear community plan with links through the organisation both up and down**
- **Improvements in the quality and relevance of training and development opportunities.**
- **Good approach to work life balance and family friendly work patterns.**

### **Good practice**

Assessors identified many examples of good practice in individual departments. These included:

- **Engineering Services - developing the vision sheets with a breakdown of service objectives, Performance Indicators and key team tasks.**
- **Education – termly group meetings for remote workers to help them share experiences, training of staff and information giving.**
- **Social Services – evaluation model – this model could be used to ensure consistency across all departments.**
- **Chief Executive's/Education – management effectiveness models – these could be extended across departments and to all levels of management.**

### **Where we can improve**

- **More corporate and consistent approach to communication is needed.**
- **Corporate image is somewhat diluted by strong departmental influences.**
- **Some staff feel outside the decision making process and believe they are the last to find out when important issues are announced.**
- **There were a number of examples given by staff of barriers to progression and qualifications.**
- **Inconsistent use of terminology throughout the council. For example the terminology used for the appraisal process included; appraisal, EDNA, EDR, SDR, IPDR.**

## Another record year

THE number of media enquiries coming into the PR office continues to climb and, with several more working days to go, could break the 700 barrier for 2005. That compares to a record 612 in 2004 and doesn't even include the number of enquiries given an immediate answer (a polite one, of course!).

Naturally, most enquiries cannot be answered straight away and have to be referred to departments and officers themselves. Nearly half of them come back within the hour, with less than one in 10 taking longer than 24 hours.

E-mailed responses from the PR office to journalists are up from 34% in 2004 to 45% this year, reflecting an increasing need for unequivocal statements that cannot be misinterpreted.

An overwhelming majority (70%+) of media enquiries emanate from Lancashire Publications (Wigan Evening Post, Wigan Observer, Leigh/Wigan Reporter). Generating most media interest, again,

was Engineering Services, which accounted for one in five of all calls.

However, whereas in 2004 Engineering Services and Planning & Regeneration attracted a combined interest of 40%, that figure dropped to 30% in 2005, with most other departments (including WALH and WLCT) taking up the slack.

As the Member's Information Bulletin goes to press, the PR team is set to publish its 500<sup>th</sup> news release of the year (in addition to four Borough Life's). A big thanks goes to everyone who has helped us, proactively or reactively, throughout another challenging year. Happy Christmas!  
(Andy Donnelly, 3145)

### Friends for Life

Winning the 'Council Publication of the Year' award for *Borough Life* has led to considerable interest from other councils.

Typical was this comment from the publications manager at Wandsworth Council: "What a great magazine - I can totally see why you won. It makes me want to move to Wigan!"



## Equality for same-sex couples

FROM this month, gay and lesbian couples have been able to give notice at their local register office that they want to form a civil partnership. Under new legislation, local authority registrar offices are required to register and process civil partnerships and have the option to provide a ceremony if the couple wishes.

All over England and Wales registrars have been preparing for the changes and have been consulting and working with the gay and lesbian community. Wigan, like every Register Office in the country

has received civil partnership bookings and the first ceremony will be held on 21 December. Three other couples have registered.

The new law allows same-sex couples to get legal recognition of their relationship, giving them the same sort of rights and responsibilities as are available to married couples.

(Melvyn Jones, 5014)

## Turnout a turn off?



People need to be 're-connected' with politics after one of the lowest general election turnouts in

history. That's the conclusion of a major report into May's election, published by the Electoral Commission last month.

The commission found little consolation in figures that show:

- Just over 17 million of those registered to vote decided not to do so.
- Turnout was still some 10 percentage points and 5 million voters lower than it was in 1997 - itself a post-war low at the time.
- At 61.4% turnout was better than it had been in both 1918 and 2001 but was the third lowest since the turn of the twentieth century.

The overall figure masks considerable variations. Turnout ranged from 76.4% in Dorset West to 41.5% in Liverpool Riverside. Figures for our borough were 50.3 in Leigh, 51.5 in Makerfield, 53.3 in Wigan and 53.1 in Worsley.

Young people were half as likely to vote as older age groups and estimated turnout

among young people was lower than in 2001: according to MORI, it was 37% compared to 39% four years ago.

The Commission says people reported difficulties in deciding who to vote for, in part because of weakening political alignments, but also because of the "perceived similarities between the main parties." It adds: "The four-week campaign was seen as, at best, lacklustre and, at worst, negative in tone and too stage-managed."

There was a three-fold increase in the take-up of postal voting at the 2005 general election compared with 2001. Figures ranged from a high of 45.4% in Newcastle-upon-Tyne North to a low of 3.1% in Glasgow East.

The commission concluded: "After two historically low turnout elections some people may now be out of the habit of voting. Also, younger age groups are much less likely to see voting as a civic duty than older age groups.

"There is also a clear need to re-connect people with politics, and vice-versa, beyond moments of (relatively) high political drama such as general elections."

The full report is available on The Electoral Commission's website: [www.electoralcommission.org.uk](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk)

## DOC's away



Council policy chief Dave O'Connor is off to pastures new. Dave has been appointed assistant chief executive with Lincolnshire county council, and will take up his new post in March.

As head of policy and performance improvement, Dave has played a major role in helping the council to achieve its high CPA status over the past few years. He will be much missed by colleagues and members alike.

**Mayor's Charity Appeal – 7 December 2005**  
**Grand Prize Draw**  
**List of prizes and donors**

<b>No.</b>	<b>Prize Description</b>	<b>Donated By</b>	<b>Winning Ticket No.</b>
1.	Choice of Bike (Adults or Child)	E.B. Cycles, Pemberton	02358 Ged Rowney
2.	Compact DVD Player	Asda Distribution	03006 Mrs. Jones
3.	Photo Sitting	Silhouette Photography	02368 Martin Kimber
4.	Watch Set	Gala Bingo	00197 Mandy Fishwick
5.	Hamper		00742 Cllr Brian Merry
6.	Christmas Tree	Wallpaper Supplies	01437 Bernard Walker
7.	Hair Dryer	Gala Bingo	00063 G. Taylor
8.	Flower Display	Mayoral	03233 Vicky Bamber
9.	Perfum	Chief Executive	02183 Bernice Hadcroft
10.	Food Vouchers	Waterfields Bakery	00976 Cllr Joe Shaw
11.	Hairdressers Voucher for £20	Shearlocks of Pemberton	03601 D. Finch
12.	Uncle Joe's Hamper	Uncle Joes	01470 B. and G. Roberts
13.	Case of Pink Bubbly	Asda Distribution	02141 Janice Barton
14.	House of Lords Whiskey	Leader	02276 Josie Nicholson
15.	Bottle of Whiskey	Mayoral	01826 Paul Cartmell
16.	Towel Bales (1)	Barry Holmes	04035 Chaplain
	Towel Bales (2)	Barry Holmes	00301 Susan Lloyd
	Towel Bales (3)	Barry Holmes	03950 Glynis
	Towel Bales (4)	Barry Holmes	04017 Chaplain
17.	Cuddly Teddy Bear (1)	Councillor Mrs J Hurst	03938 Cllr Debbie Grace
	Cuddly Teddy Bear (2)	Councillor Mrs J Hurst	01807 Christine
18.	Santa Suit	Mrs Ross	03283 A. Ormshaw
19.	Thornton's Turkish Delight	Mayoral	03850 F. Charnock
20.	Crystal Goblet	Wigan Council	03615 Mrs. S. Evans
21.	Pen Set	Wigan Council	03939 Cllr Debbie Grace
22.	Teddy Bear	Debenhams	02292 Margaret Darbyshire
23.	Tie	Wigan Council	03926 Cllr Jean Beswick
24.	Picture Frame Set	Mrs Ross	03703 Edith Boydell

**Amount raised for the Charity is £1238.65 and the mayor says thank you all for your support.**

Ged Rowney has donated his winning 1st prize to Landgate school in Bryn, which recently had a number of toys stolen.

So far some £15,000 has been raised this year for the mayor's charity, Wigan and Leigh Hospice.

# News from the community engagement team

## Community Cohesion



*The 2005 WOW festival*

The last meeting of the Cohesion Forum on 14<sup>th</sup> November looked at some of the work currently underway in the borough. Key projects noted (and this list is not exhaustive!) include:

- Voluntary, community and faith sector support – Friendly Faces, Wigan Welcome, Leigh Welcome, Walasera, Sunflower Project, Wigan & Leigh United Against Racism
- Statutory Projects – Rafiki, Motswako, BME Health Development, Hate Crime, Schools Equality & Diversity Group, WMBC Diversity Champions, Wigan & Leigh College
- Partnership initiatives – Kick Racism Out Of Football, WOW Festival, Asylum Seeker Providers Forum, Cohesion Working Group, PCT Minority Communities Partnership

We are also working towards revising our cohesion framework and re-launching it in April.

*For further information please contact:  
Richard Helmn, Chief Executive's  
Department (6167)*

## Local Neighbourhood Renewal Strategy

Earlier this year we received notification of continued funding under the Neighbourhood Renewal programme.

Government expectations (and rules) have become much more clearly focused on the neighbourhoods of highest need. The existing local neighbourhood renewal strategy is currently being revised and will be shared for consultation in the new year. The strategy is an important opportunity to bring together many of our different approaches to supporting communities.

*For further information please contact;  
Susan Powers, Planning and  
Regeneration.  
Simon Dale, Chief Executive's  
Department (6171)*

## Partnership Convention

It's that time of year again. The Annual Partnership Convention takes place on Friday February 3<sup>rd</sup>. It's open to anyone involved in supporting communities, partnerships and townships in the borough.

This year's focus will be on communication and information sharing – and in particular on getting our message across. It's hoped the BBC's Dave Guest will be the day's keynote presenter.

*If you want to book a place on the event please contact Nicola Robertson on 6155  
(n.robertson@wiganmbc.gov.uk)*

## Wigan Borough Partnership Board

At its latest meeting on 12 the December the Board considered a number of key issues:

- Neighbourhood Renewal
- Community Plan Impact assessment
- Community Empowerment
- Future arrangements for Board membership
- Township Programme

For further information on any of these items please contact Lynn Kay (6156).

## 2005 - One Year, 500 Stories

So that was 2005.

A year of extremes. A year of stupendous highs and terrible lows.

A year when the earth shook and Mother Nature vented her fury.

2005 began in sombre fashion with the massive and magnificent relief effort to help the victims of the Asian Tsunami. As the year ends another massive relief effort for the victims of the Pakistan earthquake is still very much underway.

But it wasn't all doom and gloom. It was the year the global community took some giant strides towards Making Poverty History and it was proved that music can still make a difference through the hugely successful global Live8 concerts.

Cricket came home with England taking the Ashes, whilst in the Premiership a team from a small town in the North West of England was making the entire world sit up and take notice.

In footballing terms, and much more besides, it's been Wigan's year. Throughout 2005 the council's Public Relations team has produced more than 500 releases highlighting some of the borough's biggest news stories.

Here's a selection...

### January

#### ***Five of the best***

The council's Community Protection Department got the year off to a flying start by celebrating its fifth national accolade in a row.

In January the team celebrated a quintet of gongs, namely:

- Charter Mark for the second time.
- Investors in People, awarded to organisations that value and invest in their staff.
- ISO 9000 — an international standard recognising the quality and delivery of the management systems in place.
- Community Legal Services Quality Mark — a quality standard for organisations that provide legal and other advice.
- A Beacon Council award for the quality of its private sector housing renewal services.

#### ***Top Team Triumphs***



Former Wigan rugby hero Martin Offiah was in town to congratulate another of the council's winners - the Learning Disabilities Team.

The 'unsung heroes' won the top honours in Wigan Council's annual Team of the Year awards and were presented with their trophy by none other than 'Chariots' himself during a glittering ceremony at Wigan Investment Centre.

## February

### ***How Clean Are My Alleys?***

Grot spots were given the brush off as the council's team responsible for the look of our streets was given national recognition. People and Places was mentioned in despatches during the national Tidy Britain Awards. The Engineering Services-based squad landscaped 20 sites from Atherton in the east to Orrell in the west, planted half a million bulbs and three hundred trees, and delivered 150 new litter bins to local communities.

### ***Pooling Our Resources***



Fancy a dip?  
Then jump right in because as of February if you're 16 or under in Wigan, it's free!  
Wigan Leisure & Culture Trust's groundbreaking initiative to get more young people active was launched in

spectacular fashion at Wigan International Pool and became an immediate success. In fact youngsters from all over the borough took to it like err...ducks to water.

## March

### ***Vive La Difference!***



Wigan went all continental this month when the borough's very first French Market rolled into town. Organised by the Town Centre Management Team the three-day event saw a colourful array of goods and produce hit market street sold be an even more colourful array of characters. The traders reported that the Wigan market was their most successful in the country and returned for a second successful market in November.

### ***A Twist In The Tale***

Leigh archivist Alan Davies found himself at the centre of an historical mystery to rival anything from the pen of Dan Brown.

Alan had found himself at the centre of global attention when, whilst leafing through the rare archives, he discovered what could be one of the first ever tomes on female emancipation. *A Woman's Worth* was more than 450 years old and presented itself as: *A Treatise proving by sundry reasons that women do excel men.*

This year, with the help of renowned expert in feminist studies Professor Kari McBride of the University of Arizona, Alan discovered that the mystery author of the book may have indeed been...a man!

## April

### ***TLC For TIC***

All eyes were on Wigan when a new centre showcasing what the borough has to offer to tourists opened its doors this month.

The Tourist Information Centre (TIC) is right in the middle of Wigan town centre on Wallgate and offers an expanded service supporting not just the anticipated 60,000 visitors and tourism telephone inquiries, but tourism students and local attraction and hotel managers. It provides information to help potential tourism developers make investment decisions.

### ***Goodbye Christine***



The council said farewell to Douglas ward councillor Christine Hitchen who passed away at the age of 54 following a brave fight against cancer.

Cllr Hitchen, who lived in Worsley Hall, was cabinet member for Adult Services and worked as a librarian at Manchester University.

She held many high-ranking council roles including being a member of the community safety panel and overview and scrutiny committee.

## May

### ***It's Coming Home***

Football fever hit town as Wigan Athletic made it into the soccer's top flight in magnificent fashion. The team's ascent into the Premiership and subsequent flying start sparked a wave of global interest in Wigan with the BBC, ITV, Sky and even Al Jazeera filming in the town.

### ***The choice was Joyce***



Wigan Council welcomed its new Chief Executive this month.

Joyce Redfearn took over at the helm from a retiring Steve Jones.

A native of Wakefield, Yorkshire, Joyce became the council's fifth chief executive — and the first woman in the post — since the metropolitan borough was created in 1974.

## June

### ***All Part Of The Plan***

More silverware this month as the Planning and Regeneration Department picked up a coveted Government Charter Mark.

In fact both development and building control services qualified for the award, which is a national standard for high quality public services.

## **Sound O' t' Wigan**



Folk from all over the borough took part in a national arts project called *Whispers of Britain* which celebrated the country's wide range of regional dialects. The intergenerational project saw people of all ages take part in workshops all about the history of Wigan, the borough's culture and our distinct use of language.

## **July**

### ***Spirit In The Sky***



Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No - it's the *Spirit of Wigan*. This exciting new gateway sculpture became the latest addition to the borough's skyline when it landed on the Landgate Roundabout this month. The 10m high statue sits on a four metre high mound and welcomes visitors into the borough from junction 25 of the M6. The design came from North West artist Clare Bigger who worked with the local community to create the Spirit.

### ***Jazz On A Summer's Day***

Wigan International Jazz Festival celebrated one of its most successful years ever with a string of high-profile star performances at venues across the town. The annual *eight days of cool* began on July 9 with the ever popular Manhattan Transfer and finished with the legendary Count Basie Orchestra.

## **August**

### ***The Six Million 'Dollar' Plan***

The redevelopment of the Wigan Pier Quarter took a great leap forward this month with the announcement that the council had secured £6m in grant aid to kick-start the project. The cash came from a number of sources, including the European Regional Development Fund, the Heritage Lottery, the North West Development Agency and the Regeneration Fund.



### ***Call Us The Best***

Wigan & Leigh Housing's 'state of the art' contact centre achieved 'best practice' standard - one of just five local authority call centres nationally to qualify for the Call Centre Association's (CCA) prestigious award.

Since its launch last year, Wigan & Leigh Housing's contact centre has performed impressively, with 80 per cent of calls answered within 60 seconds and 95 per cent within 90 seconds. and customers.

## September

### ***Blue And White's Alright***

Wigan went blue and white this month thanks to tens of thousands of crocus bulbs planted all over the borough.

Latics captain Arjan de Zeeuw joined in the fun because the blooms were designed to replicated the Wigan team's colours.

People and Places Manager Nick Burdekin was speechless for once in his life after coming face-to-face with his footballing idol.

### ***Boxing Clever At Robin Park***



Boxing legend Michael Watson MBE hailed Robin Park as a fine example of an all inclusive sports facility during a special visit to the venue.

Michael is a patron of the Inclusive Fitness Initiative (IF) and was on-hand to award the arena and sports centre with its official accreditation for the improvements in access to fitness equipment and leisure facilities for the disabled.

## October

### ***Pitch Perfect***

The exciting plans for Leigh Sports Village took a running spot kick in the right direction this month. Work started on laying out six new pitches behind Howe Bridge sports centre, in Atherton. They replace the disused pitches at Leigh College's Marshall Street site that are set to become part of the new development.

### ***For Arts Sake!***



The borough proved what a talented place it is this month with a stunning display in the very best music, dance and performance we have to offer.

The Arts Factor took place at St Joseph's Hall and was a celebration of everything artistic in the borough with the community right at its heart.

## November

### ***Read All About It!***

Wigan borough's library service received a huge boost following the publication of national library performance figures for 2004/05. Having been criticised for poor performance in previous years, Wigan and Leigh's 16 libraries, which are operated by Wigan Leisure & Culture Trust, have seen their official national rating leap from 'poor' to 'good'. The borough's library service now also meets 21 out of 26 public library standards as against 14 out of 26 in 2003/04.

### **Number One For Numbers**



Wigan's Director of Finance & IT Dr David Smith was at the Dorchester in London this month to receive recognition as the top local authority money man in the country.

Dr Smith picked up the Local Government Association's Finance Director of the Year Award for his services to both Wigan and the national finance scene.

He said: "While I am delighted to receive this award it also reflects on the good work of the department and the council as a whole."

## **December**

### **Seeing Stars**

It was a case of *who cares wins* for Wigan's Adult Services when the department was judged as performing 'consistently well' by the Commission for Social Care Inspection. The department received a three star rating in the annual assessment and was judged as '*serving most people well and with excellent prospects for improvement*'.

### **Doing It For The Kids!**

Wigan's Children and Young People's Services also came under the spotlight this month following a joint inspection from Ofsted and the Commission for Social Care Inspection. And from the results it seems that once again the council's heading in the right direction when it comes to the future. The service received three stars out of a possible four and the report indicated that: *Wigan Council provides a good level of service to children and young people, with promising prospects for further improvement.*

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So there you have it.

It's been a good year for Wigan and a good year for the council. In Public Relations we always say the *good stories write themselves* and this year it's been a pleasure to tell the world about all the excellent things going on in Wigan.

Congratulations to everyone, and here's hoping for a great 2006!