

EXECUTIVE NEWS

Information bulletin from the Chief Executive's Department

No. 46 July 2006

CPA latest: partners praise council

JUST weeks before Audit Commission inspectors are due in town, the organisations we work with to provide public services have given us a big boost.

In a pre-CPA survey, our 'stakeholders' have given higher marks to the council

than in similar surveys in other councils.

On the eve of a crucial few months for the council, the news has been welcomed by Metro officers who are preparing our case for when the inspectors visit in September.



Hard work and
commitment,
outstanding services
and the Audit
Commission's CPA
rating we deserve...

We can all make it happen

Building the **future** together

Meanwhile, a colourful series of posters of council staff who have played a part in Wigan's current 4-star rating - plus a handy credit-card size aide-memoire to the council's vision and values - are the latest tools for communicating awareness of the Comprehensive Performance Assessment.

Quality

The inspectors will be in Wigan during September talking to staff, members and 'stakeholders' - and we want everyone to understand the importance of the process and what the council is doing to provide top quality services for residents.

The good news is that our partners have given a positive account of the council in a survey

A wide range of organisations that work in partnership with the council - such as health, community safety, community groups and education - were asked what they think of our performance.

Compared to other councils the ratings for Wigan have been above average in all questions, and equal to the highest rated councils in 10 out of 18 questions.

Highest results were in

- Understanding our communities and the challenges they face
- Involving stakeholders in planning and monitoring of services
- Prioritising on the things that matter and delivering on those priorities

Lower results were in:

- Working to improve and support the health of the community
- Working to support the well being of older people.

Members have already had information in the last bulletin and at a seminar on June 21st. Now a 24 page self-assessment identifying our strengths and weaknesses has been sent to the inspectors. They will use it when they are on site in September.

To bring the document to life and show the inspectors what's really happening, we will be taking them on a tour of the borough on the morning of **July 13th**.

Briefing senior council managers last week, chief executive Joyce Redfearn said: "We're not saying we're perfect, and we will always want to go on improving - but we are clearly doing a really good job with the resources available to us."
(Diane Taylor, 2135)

For what we're about to receive...



IT'S no secret that – despite the best efforts of the staff - the main reception at Wigan Town Hall (pictured above) leaves something to be desired. Compared to many it's the poor relation, and certainly doesn't present the right image for the main headquarters of the council.

But now that is set to change in the next few months.

After discussions with reception users and advice from people with mobility problems, improvements have been agreed, prices obtained and funding identified that should enable the upgrade to be completed by this autumn.

This will see the creation of:

- Automatic entrance doors and a lobby to reduce draughts
- A more comfortable seating area for the public
- An extended enquiry counter behind which two people are able to work in comfort, enabling visitors to be seen more quickly.
- A display screen on the main wall that will show details of activities underway in the borough as well as times of meetings.
- A larger interview room that can take wheelchairs and prams.
- A second interview room at the rear of the library for use by staff
- An appropriate office for the deputy superintendent registrar
- A staff room for the Registrars
- Improved signage and display equipment.

Work will start once listed building consent has been granted.

In the longer term, the council is bidding for £64 million to create a Joint Service

Centre planned to be opened in 2010.

This will include:

- A one-stop-shop - for public enquiries face to face, by telephone and electronically
- A learning zone – to improve literacy, numeracy and key skills and replace the existing town centre library
- A healthy living zone – providing a replacement for the town centre swimming pool, and including a fitness centre and primary health care facilities
- Community Safety Zone – bringing together partners to address community needs about safety
- Democratic Zone – providing accessible key political services to engage with the public

Assistant Chief executive Adrian Hardy says: “The council wants to provide much improved customer access to its services and the joint service centre will help us do that. This area of improvement has been identified from consultations that have taken place with local residents.”
(Adrian Hardy, 2130)

Member Training

Data protection

We are currently working on some guidance for elected members on Freedom of Information and Data Protection. We also

hope to offer some briefings as well. Part of the guidance will be a question and answer section to cover problems and queries that have been raised since FOI and Data Protection came into force.

Some questions have already been identified, but we would like to clarify any issue which is of particular concern to members.



If any member has any question about how the Freedom of Information or Data Protection acts work, what their rights are as members, or how FOI and DP work in Wigan, please forward these questions to Tim Turner, the Data Protection / FOI Officer in Legal and Property Services.

Contact details are:

Tim Turner,
tim.turner@wiganmbc.gov.uk, telephone
01942 488354 or internal ext 8354

Community governance

Members might be interested in a Foundation Degree in Community Governance, run in partnership with the council, Wigan College and Salford University. The course focuses on public

service management in the context of modern councils and public services. It includes units dealing with administration, resources, finance, social policy, inclusion.

It may sound a bit dull and theoretical – but student feedback says that it is a well focused and relevant curriculum that draws out the practical knowledge and experience of participants.

Each year we have promoted the scheme within the council and this has attracted a steady stream of students. It's a 3 year programme – and only costs £600 year. If any member was interested the council would consider paying the costs. The time commitment is about one full day per month as well as half a day each week.

Candidates are encouraged from a wide range of backgrounds.
(Simon Dale, 6171)

Community engagement



Leigh Neighbours

Supporting community cohesion in Leigh is the aim of this new scheme – launched by Andy Burnham MP on 16th June. Over 60 people from local groups and services attended to talk about action they can take to help support better relations between communities from different backgrounds.

The initiative will run over the next year or so and will be supported by the Township Forum for Leigh.

For more information please contact:
Andrew Sharrock – Township manager
01942 776164, or Richard Helmn – Social
Inclusion Officer 01942 776167

Grant Aid programmes

All schemes are now up and running for the current year. The Neighbourhood Renewal small grant scheme has been reconfirmed for this year and next. Although it is open to all groups across the borough, Douglas Valley Community (who manages the scheme) will be trying to increase take up in disadvantaged neighbourhoods where grant application levels have been low in the past.

For more details please contact:
Anne Roberts 01942 776165

Partnership Gazette

We are currently compiling the 2nd edition of the PARTNERSHIP GAZETTE. This will be a newspaper format update on work that is ongoing on in partnerships, townships and communities across the borough. If you think you have a story that shows good partnership working that you would like to see highlighted then please contact Lynn Kay on 01942 776156

The deadline for material for the Gazette is 31st July.

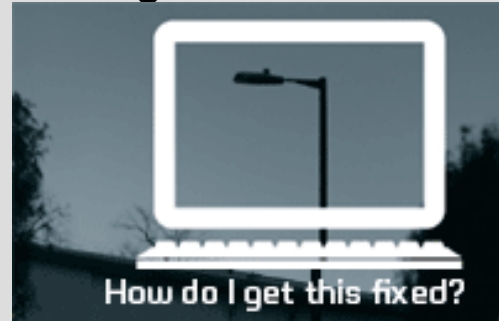
Figuring out the department

OUR latest service plan includes a pen picture of the department.

- Chief Executive's department has a much smaller percentage of part time staff - 15.3% compared to 84.7% full time staff. This compares to the council as a whole where there is a much more balanced profile of around 50%.
 - The department employs a smaller proportion of staff on temporary contracts than the Council as a whole, 16.4% compared to 21.4%.
 - The department also has a much greater percentage of female staff (65.1%) compared to male staff (34.9%) - although this gender imbalance is less pronounced than for the council as a whole, (72.4% female, 27.6% male).
 - From April 2005 to March 2006 the Chief Executive's department has seen an increase in the percentage of employees who consider themselves to be disabled, increasing from 0.5% to 1.6%.
- However this remains below the declared levels for the population at large, currently 20.1%.
- There is a need for succession planning as an increasing percentage of the department's employees are within 10 years of retirement age.
 - Currently 1.6% of Chief Executive's department employees are from minority ethnic groups. Efforts to encourage staff to complete details of their ethnicity have borne fruit during the year. This is representative of the Wigan borough but is small in absolute terms, equating to 3 members of staff.
 - Between April 2005 and March 2006 our sickness absence rate was 3.1%. This compares favourably to the council as a whole, whose rate is currently 6%. It is an improvement on the previous year's

figure of 4.1% and also better than the department's target of 3.6%.
(Adrian Hardy, 2130)

Getting connected



WIGAN Council is taking part in a national campaign to encourage local residents to take advantage of an increasing range of council services now available online.

"Connect to your council" is part of a nationwide programme that is set to free over £1.1bn to front line services, simply by putting more online. The national programme has been developed jointly by councils across the country and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG).

The Council is encouraging local residents to make our website their first port of call when doing everyday chores such as finding information on rubbish collection, reporting a faulty street light or paying bills.

More than half of the borough's homes are now connected to the Internet and residents can report a pothole, renew a library book, pay a council tax bill or tell us about a street light that isn't working...all without leaving the house 24 hours a day.

Latest figures highlight that online services are proving increasingly popular with council websites receiving over 13 million visits every month.

