



I am submitting this request under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 to address significant governance and transparency concerns regarding the Haigh Hall project. Based on previous responses and publicly available information, there are inconsistencies and gaps in the council's decision-making processes, financial disclosures, and stakeholder engagement that require further clarification.

## 1. Stakeholder Meetings and Updates

Your prior response suggested that stakeholders were engaged through updates or meetings following the decision to proceed with the current operational model. To ensure transparency and accountability:

a. Stakeholder Identification:

- Please provide a list of the stakeholders who were engaged, specifying organisations, roles, or categories. If names cannot be disclosed, I request their titles or affiliations.

a. Arts Council England, MHCLG, GMCA, volunteer groups, Haigh Courtyard Tenants, staff

b. Dates of Engagement:

- Please provide the specific dates of all meetings or updates where stakeholders were informed of the decision on the operating model.

b. Various dates over the period of a number of weeks. These were not formal updates, the decision was communicated as part of regular updates along with other information.

c. Nature of Communication:

- Were these updates delivered in writing, verbally, or both? If in writing, please provide copies of meeting agendas, summaries, or correspondence.
- If verbal, were minutes or notes recorded? If so, please provide copies.

c. Verbally communicated. There are no minutes of these meetings as they were regular update meetings and minutes were/are not taken

d. Stakeholder Feedback:

- Did stakeholders acknowledge or respond to these updates? If so:
- Provide summaries of their feedback or concerns.
- Explain how this feedback influenced the council's decision-making process.
- If no responses were received, please clarify whether stakeholders were invited to provide input or if the updates were purely informational.

d. Stakeholders acknowledged the information and understood the rationale for the decision.

## 2. Decision-Making and Oversight

The decision to proceed independently of Alchemy's recommendations was made under the Scheme of Delegation. However, given the scale of this project, further scrutiny is warranted:

- a. Documentation of Decision:
- Please provide any internal documentation or reports outlining the criteria and rationale for rejecting Alchemy's recommendations.
  - What alternative operational or governance models were reviewed, and why were they deemed unsuitable?
- b. Oversight:
- Was the decision subject to review or approval by council committees, independent advisors, or external stakeholders?
  - If not, please explain why this decision was not presented to a full council meeting for discussion or approval.

a. Documentation not provided under s36(2) of the Freedom of Information Act as disclosure would, or would be likely to, inhibit— the free and frank provision of advice, or the free and frank exchange of views for the purposes of deliberation.

The report was provided to enable a decision to be made and gave officers views and advice on options and alternatives . Officers should be able to give advice on options freely to enable decision making to be based on all available evidence and information .

The qualified person's decision is attached which is required when this exemption is being relied on

All of the operational/governance models outlined in Alchemy's report were reviewed. Wigan Council retaining management of the hall whilst contracting a hospitality partner was deemed to be the most suitable.

b. No, there was no requirement to do so. Haigh Hall SMT Board ratified the decision.

## 3. Financial Transparency

The council has cited commercial sensitivity to withhold financial details about Alchemy's recommendations and associated costs. However, previous disclosures (e.g., financial details of AI and AI's involvement) suggest inconsistent application of this exemption:

- a. Request for Clarification:
- Why has the council classified Alchemy's financial details as commercially sensitive while releasing details of AI and AI's fees?
  - What specific risks does the council associate with disclosing Alchemy's financial details that do not apply to other publicly disclosed expenditure?
- b. Request for Expenditure Details:
- Please provide the total breakdown of costs associated with Alchemy's consultancy work, including fees, expenses, and any additional charges.

a. In the previous response we provided details of the cost of commissioning Alchemy, however financial forecasts, projected income etc is commercially sensitive information which is why this has not been shared.

b. The total cost of Alchemy's work was £22,525 of which the council paid £9,525. The remainder of the cost was covered by a grant from Arts Council England.

#### 4. Public Communication

The council has stated that no formal public communication plans were made regarding Alchemy's recommendations or the decision to proceed independently. This raises concerns about transparency:

- a. Rationale for Lack of Public Updates:
- Why were residents and key stakeholders not informed about the decision, given the public funding involved?
  - What steps, if any, does the council plan to take to update the public on the operational model and how it aligns with the original vision for Haigh Hall?
- b. Alignment with Levelling Up Fund Goals:
- How does the current operational model align with the objectives outlined in the Levelling Up Fund bid?
  - Please provide details of any measures being taken to ensure the project meets its cultural and financial goals.

a. Please see point 1a. (above) – key stakeholders were informed of the decision.

The decision on the operating model does not impact on the original vision for Haigh Hall and therefore the council does not intend to share the decision wider than has already been shared. However, we are open and transparent when questioned on what the plans are around the operating model.

b. The current operating model aligns positively with the objectives outlined in the Levelling Up Fund bid. MHCLG (the government body that administers the fund) are supportive of the decision and understand the rationale for the decision.

We are scrutinised on a quarterly basis by funders MHCLG and NLHF. The quarterly report that we submit details performance and plans around cultural and financial goals. We also have an internal Haigh Hall board where performance is reported.

## 5. Governance and Risk Management

The Haigh Hall project has significant financial and cultural implications for the borough. In light of its inclusion on the corporate risk register, please provide:

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>a. Risk Assessment Documentation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Summaries of any risk assessments or evaluations addressing the long-term sustainability of Haigh Hall under the current operational model.</li></ul> | <p>a. Neither a risk assessment nor a evaluation of the long term sustainability of Haigh Hall specifically linked to the operating model has not been undertaken. We are aware of the opportunities and risks associated with the chosen operating model.</p>  |
| <p>b. Mitigation Measures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Details of actions being taken to address identified risks, including preservation of listed assets and financial sustainability.</li></ul>                     | <p>b. The preservation of the listed assets at Haigh is being achieved through delivering against the objectives set out in the Levelling Up and NLHF bids, removing these assets from Historic England's 'at risk' register. The Business Plan for Haigh Hall is being refreshed to ensure financial sustainability.</p> |

### Public Interest Concerns

Haigh Hall is a publicly owned asset funded through taxpayer contributions and the Levelling Up Fund. Transparency in decision-making, financial disclosure, and stakeholder engagement is essential to maintain public trust. The council's inconsistent application of commercial sensitivity exemptions and lack of public communication raises serious public interest concerns.

Noted