



Wigan[♥]
Council

Productivity plan

July 2024

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Productivity Plan, July 2024

Introduction

This Productivity Plan demonstrates our commitment to transforming services to make better use of resources, as required by the Department of Levelling Up, Housing, and Communities. The Plan addresses the four key areas outlined by the Department.

1.0 Progress with Unity – A New Era for Wigan Borough 2024 – 2040

In Wigan, we are focused on delivering our two key missions. We want to create fair opportunities for all our children, families, residents and businesses; and make all our towns and neighbourhoods flourish for those who live and work in them. Providing place leadership is at the core of our ambitions; we demonstrate this commitment strongly in our work in Community Wealth Building, working with Anchor Partners across the Borough to radically increase investment. As a place leader we convene strong strategic partnerships across health and social care, business, community safety, children’s services, and environment and climate.


2.0 Transformation of our Services since 2010





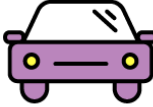
Over the last fourteen years we have been at the forefront of public service reform and transformation. We have used asset-based conversations and approaches to transform how we work with our communities, giving our staff the permission to innovate, and take personal accountability to do the right thing. We have developed a shared set of attitudes and behaviours of public service for our staff: Be Accountable, Be Courageous, Be Positive, Be Kind, and ensured through these that we always work towards genuine connections, engagement, and co-production.

Since 2010, the Council has saved £180 million, whilst being able to state with confidence in February 2024 in our Medium-Term Financial Plan that the Council remains in a strong financial position. Our success in delivering efficiencies and providing value for money has been further affirmed by our External Auditors whom in previous years have issued an unqualified VFM conclusion stating, “the Council has made proper arrangements to deliver financial sustainability in the medium term”. In our March budget we were also able to set the lowest tax rate in Greater Manchester. We believe this to be clear proof that we have **transformed our services to make better use of resources**, not just because we have received less

funding from central government, but because our way of working is important to us and our communities.

Budget 2024/25



No cuts to services 		£1m boost for community sector	Lowest council tax rates	
	New partners for town centre redevelopment	Pledge to create apprenticeships and graduate roles		Extension of free weekend parking schemes in Wigan and Leigh

We complete an annual review of our levels of compliance with the Council's Local Code (CIPFA Framework, adopted by the Council in 2017) of governance. Our Review of Corporate Governance in 2023 highlighted that the Internal Audit assurance opinion is satisfactory. This is a significant achievement, given the significant pressure due to the continuing budget cuts, the national economic picture and the aftermath of COVID 19 pandemic and the associated operational changes the Council has experienced.

We can define key outcomes for our Borough in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits:

- Fitter and healthier - 63% of adults were physically active in 2022/23, up from 57% in 2018/19 and higher than the GM average.
- Social care - 95% of care homes in Wigan are rated 'good' or 'outstanding' compared to 76% in the North West. 100% of Ethical Care Providers pay the Real Living Wage.
- Children – 96% of children post-16 are in education, employment or training compared to 92% across England whilst 94% of schools are rated 'good' or 'outstanding' compared to a national average of 89%.

- 100% of our children’s homes are rated good and outstanding
- Our partnerships in the Borough are strong and this is demonstrated with the high levels of early help assessments and support they provide to residents, over 20% higher than in other areas.
- Environment – 99.99% of bins are collected first time whilst 93% of minor highway repairs are completed on time compared to 81% for comparators.

Key Example 1 - Our Council Plan: A Commitment to Transformation and Accountability

Since the start of 2024 through careful and considered engagement we have been resetting our future relationship with our community organisations, partners, businesses and residents, leading to the New Era Missions. We are developing a Council Plan to outline the organisational change required to deliver the key missions.



To deliver Community Wealth Building, we have a programme of work in place to maximise the opportunities provided by the Procurement Act 2023. Our review of Corporate Governance in 2023 identified the development of a Procurement



Strategy and a review of our Contract Procedure Rules and Financial Procedure Rules as priorities; we are developing an interim Procurement Strategy to lead us through to 2026, shaping our approach to deliver the legislative changes and our local ambitions. We are working collaboratively with our Anchor partners to share commissioning intentions, to support the local market.

3.0 Using advances in technology and use of data to inform decision-making

The use of data and technology as enablers to drive our governance is a key theme in our Council Plan. We are developing a Data Strategy to outline how our decisions will be evidence-led. We are also developing a Corporate Performance Framework to help track progress on our missions.

There is no doubt that generative AI will be used to increase the quality and efficiency of public services and we are ready to embrace this. AI is already helping us achieve that shift by reducing administrative burdens, improving customer contact and service efficiency. At the same time, we are taking a considered approach in Wigan, ensuring that we understand what AI really means for accountability of decision-making on a service delivery level and at a democratic level; asking fundamental ethical questions first about applications that can be time-saving and efficient.

Key Example 2 – AI tool in Adult Services

A key example of our considered piloting work is in administration tasks in adult social care. A secure text analysis tool called QuickAction has been developed in partnership with our strategic IT partners, that can produce minutes from meeting transcripts, summarise lengthy documents, carry out sentiment analysis and pull-out strong 'use cases' to embed into services. Currently it is mostly used in minute taking and survey analysis, and there have been hundreds of days saved in repetitive work. We are clear that our use of AI is about ensuring that staff time is used where it is most valuable, in asset-based engagements, rather than in repetitive tasks.



4.0 Spend on the use of Consultants and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Schemes

As outlined, one of our key missions is to create fair opportunities for all our children, families, residents, and businesses. To do this, we need to understand who in our Borough is disadvantaged, and how, so that we can work with them to overcome the challenges they face. All our equality focus is on tackling inequalities for our residents, and we support our staff to take accountability for working with our communities within the context of their roles. EDI training is included as part of our mandatory requirements for all our workforce.

Key Example 3 – Data-Led Approach to Cost-of-Living Support

Wigan Council has an award-winning targeted approach to supporting residents with their cost of living. We created a complete, up-to-date picture of residents by connecting a range of disparate datasets held with Assessments, Collections, and Welfare functions and then matching this against Experian's Household Income data. This told us who was most likely be the most affected by the cost-of-living crisis, the levels of support accessed previously and where it was likely underlying eligibility for further support existed but had not been claimed. This enabled us to personalise engagement approaches using different techniques to better connect with residents and improve take-up. We identified that 83% or 213 of the 253 customers eligible for Household Support Fund awards had never applied for support previously. These residents have been advised about how they can access further awards in future. The total value of Household Support Fund awards was £8,365, providing support towards food and energy. The total amount of income generated for residents in this project is now more than £3m.

We use outside expertise, where appropriate, to bring in additional expertise where it is needed in certain areas; for example, in regeneration; or for short term pieces of work that do not require an ongoing role. We are confident that our use of consultants has been relevant and proportionate to the decisions we are making, and the scope of the work. We are committed to ensuring that our work is community-led; for example, local artists have led on the engagement work with residents for the restoration of Haigh Hall and the creation of an arts, culture and heritage destination of national significance, for which we were given £20m investment from the Levelling Up Fund.



5.0 Trade Union Facility Time

Our collaborative relationship with Trade Unions has supported excellent workforce relationships at Wigan Council. This has played a fundamental role in making Wigan a great place to work with very high staff engagement levels and is an important part in providing outstanding services for residents.

The annual cost of Trade Union facilities time as reported for 2022/23 was £334,789 ([Trade union data 2022-23 \(wigan.gov.uk\)](https://www.wigan.gov.uk/trade-union-data-2022-23)) which is estimated at 0.14% of the total pay bill. It is important to note that a proportion of this is recharged to local academies who buy back facilities time from us via a service level agreement which are not accounted for in the above, and so the % is in reality less than 0.14%. It is important to note that our total workforce headcount is 5,292, with a school/academy workforce of 4,920.

Updated figures for 2023/24 are currently being calculated, ahead of the 31 July 2024 facilities time reporting submission deadline.

6.0 Barriers Preventing Activity

- We believe that encouraging local authorities to compete for available pots of funding is an inefficient way of supporting us to achieve our missions. A more collaborative partnership between councils and Government would reduce time and public money spent on top-down competitive processes and enable council areas to work more effectively together for the benefit of local people and progress greater devolution.
- We feel, alongside colleagues in other authorities, that multi-year financial settlements are vital to provide us with the figures we need to plan our budgets effectively.
- A reset of the business rates growth has been delayed until the next spending review period. The outcome of this has seen the least deprived authorities, with high growth in their business rates base, retain millions which would have been distributed to less deprived authorities, with low growth in their business rates base, had growth been reset. Colleagues in SIGOMA were assured that true growth figures would be published by Government by the end of 2023, but we are still awaiting this data.

- We are fully supportive of the Devolution Framework agreed with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and we are committed to delivering the Greater Manchester Strategy with our colleagues in the ten authorities.

Key Example 4 – Research Into Inequalities – All Different, All Equal

Colleagues across the Council, working alongside our community partners Happy Smiles Training CIC and Everything Human Rights, have been carrying out research into inequalities across our Borough to help shape our strategic aims. An event was held at Leigh College bringing together many partners to identify inequalities around themes such as health and transport, and to identify solutions, which will feed into the development of our action plan.



- With the inevitable use of generative AI, we would welcome the development of an overall framework of governance on the use of AI in public services, together with the sector. Addressing inequalities within our communities is one of our core missions for our borough. We would urge Government to support councils' important role in recognising and responding to the needs of our increasingly diverse communities and ensuring everyone has equal opportunity to succeed.

Wigan Council is in a strong financial position because of the way we have transformed our services over the last fourteen years. We are an exemplar of public service reform, in the use of AI and technology, and in how we are relentlessly focused on fighting for fair chances in our Borough.