



**Wigan<sup>♥</sup>  
Council**

# **Draft Annual Governance Statement for the year ended 31st March 2025**

*(this statement remains draft until the 2024/2025 Statement of Accounts have been signed off by the External Auditors)*

**Wigan Council is committed to the highest standards of corporate governance.**

**Governance is about how bodies ensure that they do the right things, in the right way, for the right people in a timely, inclusive, open, honest and accountable manner.**

**It comprises the systems and processes, and culture and values, by which bodies are directed and controlled and through which they account to, engage with and, where appropriate, lead their communities.**

**A key aspect of governance is the requirement to put into place “effective risk management systems, including systems of internal control”.**

**This Annual Governance Statement supports the Council's Statement of Accounts and outlines how it manages its affairs to deliver high quality services and ensure that public money is efficiently and effectively spent**

## **Foreword from the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive**

We both recognise the importance of having good management, effective processes and other appropriate controls in place to enable the Council to deliver services and achieve the best possible outcomes for the people of the Borough.

To ensure the organisation continues to operate as effectively as possible, the Council embraces a governance framework which ensures consistency of purpose across the many services delivered, encourages high standards of performance and conduct and a strong public service ethos. Continuing reductions in Government funding have led to major transformation resulting in changes in staffing levels and in the way that services are provided. This is being exacerbated by a cost-of-living crisis. It is therefore more important than ever, that we continue to make the best possible use of the public money that we are entrusted with.

Each year the Council is required to produce an Annual Governance Statement (AGS) which describes how our corporate governance arrangements have been working. To help us do this, the Council's Audit, Governance and Standards Committee assisted by Internal Audit undertakes a review of our governance framework and the development of the AGS.

Members of the Strategic Management Team and the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee have considered and challenged the content and significant governance issues identified in the Statement and satisfied themselves that the Statement properly reflects how the Council is run and that appropriate improvement actions had been identified.

This statement was formally approved by Cabinet on 3rd July 2025 where it was recommended for signing by the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive.

Councillor David Molyneux  
Leader



Alison McKenzie-Folan  
Chief Executive



## 1. Introduction


This statement provides an overview of how the Council's governance arrangements operate, including how they are reviewed annually to ensure they remain effective. A summary of significant governance challenges which the Council faces is also given, alongside an explanation of what actions have been taken to bring about required improvements, and what work is still to be done. This provides transparency and gives assurance that the Council is committed to continuously improve the way in which it functions. More detail on particular topics can be accessed by clicking on the hyperlinks which are highlighted and underlined throughout the document.

## 2. Council Purpose

An extensive engagement exercise to review the impact of the Deal 2030 and reset the Corporate Strategy was undertaken in 2023/2024. The reset is based on "Progress with Unity-A new era for Wigan Borough"

Progress with Unity is a new movement for change for the decade ahead which is built around the successes and opportunities for our borough but also the lessons we have learned along the way. Through conversations we have designed two key missions and are committed to delivering these as a strong partnership within our borough.

**Progress with Unity**  
A new era for Wigan Borough

**Wigan Council**

**Mission 1**  
**Create fair opportunities for all children, families, residents & businesses.**  
  
*"Together, we will break down the barriers that create financial, health, education and environmental inequalities in our borough."*

**Mission 2**  
**Make all our towns and villages flourish for those who live and work in them.**  
  
*"Together, in genuine partnership with our residents and businesses, who know our communities best, we will help each town and village in the borough to celebrate and maintain their identity whilst understanding and helping to achieve what is needed to thrive."*

**As residents, businesses, public services and community organisations of this borough we will come together to deliver these two key missions.**

### **3. Scope of Responsibility**

Wigan Council is responsible for ensuring that its business is conducted in accordance with the law and proper standards, that public money is safeguarded and properly accounted for, and used economically, efficiently, and effectively. In discharging this accountability, members and senior officers are responsible for putting in place proper arrangements for the governance of the Council's affairs and the stewardship of the resources at its disposal. To this end the Council has approved and adopted a Local Code of Corporate Governance, which is consistent with and reflects the requirements of the CIPFA/SOLACE Framework *Delivering Good Governance in Local Government (2016)*.

The Council is committed to fulfilling its responsibilities in accordance with the highest standards of governance, underpinned by the ethical behaviour of officers and Members.

### **4. The Governance Framework**

The governance framework comprises the systems and processes, the culture and values, by which the Council is directed and controlled and its activities through which it accounts to, engages with, and leads its community. It enables the Council to monitor the achievement of its strategic objectives and to consider whether these objectives have led to the delivery of appropriate, cost-effective services.

The governance framework has been in place at the Council for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025 and up to the date of the approval of the annual report and statement of accounts.

# Governance Framework

## Principle A Integrity and Values

- A [Constitution](#) setting out how the Council operates; how decisions are made and the procedures that are followed
- Code of Conduct for Members and local procedures for the investigation of complaints against Members which include the appointment of independent persons. [Members Code of Conduct](#)
- Audit, Governance & Standards Committee responsible for advising the Authority on member conduct issues
- Employee Code of Conduct, Team Wigan staff behaviours
- Register of Interests for Members which is published on the Council's website

## Principle B Openness and Engagement

- A Freedom of Information Publication scheme. [Publication Scheme](#)
- Publication of Committee Agendas, Minutes and decisions. [Committees](#)
- Strategic Partnership Working through –Health and Wellbeing Board, Building Stronger Communities Partnership
- [Borough Life](#) magazine
- [Wigan Borough Communities Team](#)
- Staff engagement sessions supported extensive staff communications and support

## Principle C Defining Outcomes

- Our Vision is embedded in service delivery and performance management
- Our corporate strategy, [Progress with Unity](#) which outlines the partnership missions across the Borough
- A Locality Plan which describes how we will work with our partners to develop a financially sustainable health care system
- Medium Term Financial Plan and Capital Programme with quarterly financial monitoring reports to Cabinet. [Financial Plan](#)
- Performance Dashboards to Directorate and Strategic Management Teams [Performance Data](#)

## Principle D Making A Difference

- Corporate Strategy consultation helped inform budget decisions as well as the strategy for how the council and public sector partners will work in the future
- Committee report template includes consideration of Alternative Options
- Investment in transformation programs to make services more effective/efficient and ensure change is sustainable.
- Social Value Policy which aims to provide a wider benefit to the community from each £1 spent on the delivery of services. [Social Value Policy](#)
- Performances reports to scrutiny committees

# Governance Framework

(cont'd)

## Principle E Capacity and Capability

- Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined within the Constitution and the Member Officer Protocol
- Councillors are supported in their roles through an induction process and on-going programme of training and development
- Mandatory IT and Social Media Training for Members
- MyTime and MyTime Reflection – the staff performance and development process
- Clear terms and conditions of service are in place and staff are supported by a range of health and well-being policies
- Smart working and making the best use of technology and buildings continues to be key to the way we work

## Principle F Managing Risk and Performance

- An Internal Audit function which consistently conforms with PSIAS and reports regularly to the AG&S Committee
- Risk management framework embedded in policy and planning processes and approved by the AG&S Committee
- Comprehensive budget framework with clearly defined responsibilities including frequent reporting to the Executive
- Transformation Boards to monitor/deliver savings
- Application of CIPFA FM Code.
- Information Governance Framework supported by corporate oversight
- Consistent and clear commitment to countering fraud and corruption

## Principle G Transparency and Accountability

- Adoption of Local Code of Corporate Governance in line with the CIPFA/SOLACE framework. [Local Code](#)
- An [Audit, Governance and Standards Committee](#) which includes independent membership and oversees the work of Internal and External Audit
- A scrutiny function which supports and challenges the work of the Executive
- Member and Senior Management ownership and sign off for the Statement of Accounts and Annual Governance Statement
- External Performance Reporting – Corporate Scorecard
- Publication of the Local Government Transparency Code data. [Open Data](#)

## How the Council monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of its governance arrangements?

The Council annually reviews the effectiveness of its governance framework including the system of internal control. The key sources of assurance that inform this review are outlined below

Internal Audit	External Auditors	Information Governance	Counter Fraud	Risk Management
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Annual Audit Opinion</li> <li>Internal audit progress reports</li> <li>PSIAS compliance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Final accounts audit</li> <li>VFM commentary</li> <li>Grant certification</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Information Governance Annual Report</li> <li>Information Governance Working Group</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Whistleblowing arrangements</li> <li>Annual Fraud Report</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic Risk Register reporting</li> <li>Directorate Risk Registers</li> <li>Internal audit reviews</li> </ul>
Complaints	External Reviews	Management	Statutory Officers	Committees
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Two Stage Corporate Complaints procedure</li> <li>Ombudsman investigations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>OFSTED Childrens Social Care</li> <li>Internal Audit Peer Review</li> <li>LGA Corporate Peer Challenge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Annual Director and IAO Assurance Statements</li> <li>Annual Review of Significant Partnerships</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitoring Officer - legal assurance and ethics</li> <li>Chief Finance Officer role compliance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Scrutiny performance monitoring reports</li> <li>Annual Standards Report</li> <li>Audit Chair's report</li> </ul>

## 5. 2024/2025 Review of Effectiveness

Our review of governance arrangements for 2024/2025 has considered the following assurance outcomes.

### Internal Assurances

- Internal Audit re-assessed each component of the enhanced Local Code of Corporate Governance and concluded that :-

*“The Council’s position against its revised local code of corporate governance has slightly improved from that of the previous years as work continues on developing and embedding arrangements in an uncertain financial environment and in line with the new Progress with Unity strategy. Overall, the Internal Audit assurance opinion is **satisfactory**. Given the significant pressure due to the continuing financial constraints, the national economic picture and the associated operational/transformational changes the Council has experienced and continues to go through, this remains a significant achievement.*

*In the ever-changing world of local government, there are always new challenges arising and ongoing work needed to address these. It is important to recognise that the Council continues to identify and deal with these demands appropriately and promptly to ensure the interests of its residents are safeguarded.”*

- The Council’s current strategic risks and associated management arrangements were reappraised by the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee on 12<sup>th</sup> September 2024 and 13<sup>th</sup> March 2025 (Strategic Risk Register Updates). Throughout the year the effectiveness of these arrangements has been tested as part of the Internal Audit work programme.
- A detailed report and improvement plan assessing the Council against the CIPFA Financial Management (FM) Code was approved by the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee in November 2021. This initial self-assessment confirmed that the Council’s financial management is sound and complies with the overall requirements of the FM Code. Follow up reviews in May 2023 and May 2024 have confirmed that *“Specific improvements have subsequently taken place that have further enhanced the Council’s financial management processes and compliance levels with the detailed requirements of the FM Code.”* A reassessment will be carried out during 2025/2026 to ensure that the high level of compliance remains applicable.
- The results of the internal audit work have been reported (as scheduled) to the AGS Committee throughout the year and the annual internal audit opinion on the overall adequacy and effectiveness of the Council’s governance, risk and control; framework was set out in the Annual Internal Audit Report 2024/2025. This report concluded that *“In my opinion satisfactory assurance can be given that Wigan Council operates an*



*effective framework of governance, risk management and management control and audit testing has demonstrated controls to be generally working in practice”.*

- The Annual Fraud Report 2024/2025 which provided an update on the counter fraud work undertaken across the Council during 2024/2025 concluded, *“the Council has effective measures in place during 2024/2025 to enable the prevention and detection of fraud and error. Work will continue in 2025/2026 to ensure that the Council has all the necessary measures in place to create and promote an environment where fraud, bribery and corruption are not tolerated.”*

### Financial Resilience

Financial Resilience remains a key risk for Local Authorities, highlighted by a growing number of Authorities issuing Section 114 Notices. Such a notice has to be issued by the Section 151 Officer (following consultation with the Monitoring Officer) to all Council Members if there is a belief that expenditure is likely to exceed incoming resources (after accounting for the use of reserves).

In the 2025/2026 budget setting report, presented to Council on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2025 the Director of Finance & Legal (Section 151 officer) set out the Council's approach *“Members will be aware that to date the Council has successfully met the financial challenges it has faced, however the challenge remains for this to continue. Although there has been welcome additional funding for 2025/2026, this does not cover the compounded effect of real term cuts over the past 15 years, and does not cover the scale of demand-led pressures which require investment. The Council must reshape its budget allocations to meet these challenges”* and gave her opinion that *“On this basis I am confident to confirm to Members that a Section 114 Notice is not required as the Council remains in a strong financial position.”*

A key part of the financial position for a Local Authority is the adequacy of its financial reserves. In the 2025/2026 budget setting report, it was reported that *“To ensure the trajectory of reserves does not continue to an unsustainable level, the Council must have in place achievable plans to ensure reserves remain robust...additional funding has allowed for budget growth in areas facing the most significant cost and demand pressure, and transformation plans that will deliver on savings are to be closely monitored. The budget also provides a baseline contribution to reserves of £1.5m annually to recover balances.* These plans are set up in a new reserves strategy, which was presented as part of the report.

Regular consideration of Public Interest reports, CIPFA guidance and assessment of lessons learnt as applicable for Wigan continues to take place.

Financial resilience risks, existing risk mitigations and further planned actions are included in the Strategic Risk Register.

## External Assurances

### External Audit

The 2022/2023 accounts were signed off by Forvis Mazars on 10/12/2024 and the Audit Completion Report was presented to Audit, Governance and Standards Committee on 30/01/2025. This included the following comment” *In our audit report issued we reported that we had completed our work on the Council’s arrangements to secure economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources and had not issued recommendations in relation to identified significant weaknesses in those arrangements.* “

The 2023/2024 Audit Completion Report was issued on 25/2/2025 and presented to Audit, Governance and Standards Committee on 13/3/2025. It stated that “*we issued our audit report on 25 February 2025. Our audit report included a disclaimer of opinion. This means our audit report did not express an opinion on the financial statements and no assurance was provided. It was necessary to issue a disclaimer of opinion as amendments to the Account and Audit Regulations introduced a statutory deadline for publication of the Council’s financial statements. We were unable to complete the audit procedures necessary to obtain sufficient appropriate audit evidence on which to base our opinion before the date the Council published its audited financial statements.*”

This disclaimer opinion, due to External Audit being unable to complete their work by the statutory deadline, is a common occurrence across Local Authorities and further details can be found on the Council’s website [Commentary on the 2023-24 audit opinion](#).

The 2023/2024 VFM Commentary was presented to Audit, Governance and Standards Committee on 30/01/2025 and reported no significant weakness in arrangements.

### LGA Peer Challenge

A [LGA Corporate Peer Challenge](#) was conducted in January 2025, although some areas of improvement and development were recommended, the review team concluded that Wigan Council is a “*well-managed and well-led authority that consistently delivers high quality services to its residents while ensuring value for money.*”

## 6. Significant Contractual Partnerships Assurances

The Statement on Recommended Practice (SORP) 2006 places an additional responsibility on Councils in that their Annual Governance Statement should embrace controls over significant partnerships.

Assurance on the control environment of the Council's significant partnership bodies has been assessed as follows:-

#### Cityheart - Galleries Development

Cityheart is the Council's Development Partner for the Regeneration of the former Galleries Shopping complex. The project is the most significant that the Council has undertaken for many years. Governance arrangements have been established together with a comprehensive Development Agreement.

The Governance arrangements are headed by a Development Agreement Project Board supported by a Wigan/Cityheart Programme Board. Both boards are chaired by the Council's Director of Place supported by the Director of Finance and Legal and are attended by the Managing Director and a Director from Cityheart. Oversight and Coordination and Operational groups led by appropriate senior Council officers report into the boards.

An Internal Audit Review of the project governance arrangements in 2024/2025 concluded that the assessment assurance opinion is considered to be satisfactory.

#### Wigan Metropolitan Development Company

Wigan Metropolitan Development Company is a wholly owned Council Company and provides a variety of business premises to over 250 businesses throughout the Borough. The Council provides a range of professional support services directly to the Company. The company appoints its own independent auditors who provide assurance on the financial position of the company.

#### Leigh Sports Village

Leigh Sports Village is a mixed Leisure/Retail venue which is managed by Leigh Sports Village Company Limited (a wholly owned Council Company). The Council appoint the Chairman, Company Secretary, and three non-Executive Directors of the company. During 2024/2025 the Council's Director of Strategy and Innovation sat on the Board. The company appoints its own independent auditors who provide assurance on the financial position of the company.

In May 2024, Cllr Molyneux and Cllr Rehman stood down from their roles as non-Executive directors in order to facilitate their new roles as the Shareholder Committee of the Council's Cabinet following this best practice guidance for the governance of wholly owned council companies. The arrangements for the establishment of the Shareholder Committee will be reviewed in 2025/2026.

## NHS Greater Manchester Integrated Care Board

Wigan Locality formally established the Healthier Wigan Partnership System Board as a sub-committee of the NHS GM Board from 1 April 2023.

The Council's Chief Executive is the Wigan place-based lead (the accountable person for the locality to NHS GM ICB for health).

Under the revised arrangements the Council now operates a Section 75 partnership agreement with NHS GM ICB under the National Health Service Act 2006 which allows budgets to be pooled between local health and social care organisations. The pooled budget enables a more integrated approach to investment with the aim to deliver a clinically and financially sustainable health and social care system for the locality. The local Section 75 agreement between the Council and NHS GM ICB includes a risk/gain schedule which is essential to protect both partners from any potential financial risk. Whilst the construct takes shape and the new ways of working embed themselves locally the Council took the decision, based on minimising financial risk, to reduce the pooling of the fund covered by the Section 75 to the Better Care Fund only, with no other budgets to be pooled until there was absolute clarity on the revised arrangements. Since that decision there has been a national condition issued that requires that the Adults Social Care Discharge Fund allocations to be pooled into the local BCF. As such a planned value of £60.710m was included in the local 24/25 pooled fund covered by the Section 75 agreement.

NHS GM ICB publishes its own Annual Governance Statement detailing the processes in place by which it provides assurance to stakeholders and the public. Assurance can be taken from the structure and extent of governance processes outlined within the statement and the positive assurance opinions from the NHS GM ICB's Internal Auditors and also the NHS GM Integrated Care Partnership Board.

## Agilisys

Agilisys is the Council's Managed IT Service Provider. A letter of assurance has been provided by the Agilisys Partnership Director confirming that:

- Services have been delivered within the specified governance framework, ensuring that processes and systems have been operated to meet the contractual levels of service.
- This assurance statement also includes the management of Key Subcontractors and other third parties supporting delivery of the Services.
- Completion of a large proportion of the Transformation Programme, including; replacement of over 2000 end user devices, migration to Windows 11, deployment of a new WAN to support the move to a zero-trust architecture and migrations of Council applications from the existing datacentre to Azure.
- Continued support to the Authority in delivering their critical services to residents. All services and projects have been delivered within the agreed governance framework, ensuring that processes and systems have been operated to meet and exceed the contractual levels of service.

- Delivery of key projects including the migration of PSTN lines (desk phones) to digital solutions, and termination of redundant lines which will provide annual savings to the Council
- Migration of SharePoint on premise environment to SharePoint Online, including critical systems used for Safeguarding across Greater Manchester Combined Authority
- Working with Service areas to assess how Gen AI can enhance services to residents, for example, streamlining the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) annual assessment process.
- Accelerating the roll out of Cloudflare to replace Pulse client VPN to mitigate security vulnerabilities.
- Replacing ESET (anti-virus) with Defender Antivirus
- Supporting the councils move to Microsoft E5 from E3 to make use of the additional Security benefits
- Continued focus on Cyber security, with multiple simulated phishing campaigns ran to raise awareness across all service areas.

## **7. Governance Action Plan**

A Governance Action Plan, attached at Appendix 1, provides a summary of improvement actions we will be addressing during 2025/2026. We have made good progress in implementing the agreed actions from 2024/2025 and a status position is included within Appendix A of the [Review of Corporate Governance](#). All outstanding issues have been carried forward into the 2025/2026 action plan.

## **8. Significant Governance Issues**

Significant governance issues relate to any matters that may impact on the achievement of organisational objectives or fail to meet the principles of good governance. They include areas of significant interest to external inspectorates and those which may be of public concern.

These significant issues are not included in the 2025/2026 Governance Action Plan as they are monitored separately, with their own detailed action plan as appropriate.

The Council continues to address the significant governance issues raised previously, relating to overspending on Childrens Social Care, the OFSTED Inspection of Childrens Services, Wigan and Leigh Building Services Function, Housing Rent Standard and Housing - Health and Safety Compliance. Further details are provided at Appendix 2.

The issues relating to Wigan and Leigh Building Services Function and the Housing Rent Standard have been resolved sufficiently that they should no longer require reporting in future statements.

## **9. Forward Look on Governance**

To meet the future needs of the authority, further consideration will be given to the governance arrangements in the following areas:

- Leigh Sports Village
- Haigh Hall
- Galleries Development
- Longer term financial planning
- Capital Strategy monitoring linked to borrowing and the reserves strategy
- Neighbourhood working under Progress with Unity.

## **10. Conclusion**

The Council's governance and risk management arrangements enable it to deal openly and effectively with situations such as those highlighted above. The nature of the organisation means that there will always be difficult situations to deal with, but its internal control mechanisms ensure that actions are taken appropriately and promptly, and it is openly accountable for those actions. This is a major strength of the Council and a significant factor in its continued positive external assessment.

## **11. Opinion**

After conducting a review of the governance arrangements across the Council and overall compliance with the Council's Local Code of Corporate Governance, we are satisfied that Wigan Council's internal control and corporate governance arrangements are adequate and are operating effectively. We are satisfied that the enhancements identified will further improve our governance and internal control arrangements. We will assess their implementation and the effectiveness of dealing with the issues outlined as part of the formal risk management process.

**Governance Action Plan 2025/2026****Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law**

<b>Area of Consideration</b>	<b>Action</b>	<b>Owner</b>	<b>Deadline</b>	<b>Priority</b>
<b>Employees Electronic Register of Interests</b>	Following the refresh of the Register of Interests Policy, internal communications will be shared to raise employee awareness of the Employees Electronic Register of Interests.	Audit Manager Monitoring Officer	July 2025	Medium
<b>Procurement Guide</b>	A guide and key tools to support the Council's Mission Driven Procurement has been developed and will now be rolled out and implemented.	Assistant Director Community Wealth and Health	September 2025	Medium
<b>Workforce Strategy</b>	The new Progress with Unity Workforce Strategy 2025-2028 is due to be shared with SMT before the end of Quarter 1.	Assistant Director HR and OD	July 2025	Medium
<b>Financial Procedure Rules</b>	The Financial Procedure Rules will be updated as part of a review of the Constitution.	Director of Finance and Legal	December 2025	Low
<b>Anti-Fraud, Bribery &amp; Corruption Policy Statement &amp; Strategy</b>	The Anti-Fraud, Bribery & Corruption Policy Statement & Strategy and the Anti-Money Laundering Policy have been updated and will be presented to the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee in June for approval.	Assistant Director Finance	June 2025	Medium

## Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

Area of Consideration	Action	Owner	Deadline	Priority
<b>Freedom of Information Act publication scheme</b>	The review of the Freedom of Information Act publication scheme remains in the Information Governance workplan and has needed to be extended to December 2025.	Assistant Director Legal, Governance and Elections	December 2025	Low
<b>External Performance Reporting- Corporate Scorecard</b>	Arrangements are being made to update the External Performance Reporting website and include the new performance framework for Progress with Unity.	Assistant Director Policy and Strategy	July 2025	High
<b>Community Asset Strategy and Policy</b>	A Community Asset Strategy is being developed and the Community Asset Transfer Policy is being updated to reflect Progress with Unity.	Assistant Director Property and Assets	December 2025	Medium
<b>Publication of Local Government Transparency Code data</b>	A paper is to be taken to Strategic Management Team to improve service accountability for the timely publication of the Transparency Code data. A retention period for the data is also to be implemented as part of the Data Strategy.	Assistant Director Policy and Strategy	July 2025	Medium
<b>Neighbourhood/Town Profiles</b>	The Neighbourhood/Town profiles are due to be published in July.	Assistant Director Policy and Strategy	July 2025	Medium
<b>Equality Promises and Action Plan</b>	The three equality promises and supporting action plan will be finalised and launched by September 2025.	Assistant Director Policy and Strategy	September 2025	Medium
<b>Governance Framework for Strategic Partnerships</b>	The Governance Framework for Strategic Partnerships will be refreshed in line with Progress with Unity and presented to Audit, Governance and Standards Committee in September 2025.	Assistant Director Policy and Strategy	September 2025	High



## Defining outcomes in terms of sustainable economic, social, and environmental benefits

Area of Consideraton	Action	Owner	Deadline	Priority
<b>Directorate Management Arrangements</b> <b>Risk</b>	The arrangements for assessing and recording Directorate risks are to be reviewed during 2025/2026.	Chief Internal Auditor	March 2026	Medium

## Determining the interventions necessary to optimise the achievement of the intended outcomes

Area of Consideraton	Action	Owner	Deadline	Priority
<b>Capital Governance Arrangements</b>	A refresh of the capital governance arrangements will be undertaken to ensure alignment with the Progress with Unity missions.	Director of Finance and Legal	March 2026	Medium

## Developing the entity's capacity, including the capability of its leadership and the individuals within it

Area of Consideration	Action	Owner	Deadline	Priority
<b>LGA Peer Challenge</b>	An action plan from the LGA Peer Challenge will be developed and published by 21 <sup>st</sup> June 2025.	Assistant Director Policy and Strategy	June 2025	High

## Managing risks and performance through robust internal control and strong public financial management

Area of Consideration	Action	Owner	Deadline	Priority
<b>Corporate Business Continuity arrangements</b>	An options document for the Critical Incident Management System is being produced, which will then be taken to Digital Transformation Board to agree the route forward.	Director of Public Health	March 2026	Medium
<b>Audit, Governance and Standards Committee Improvement Action Plan</b>	The Audit, Governance and Standards Committee Improvement Action Plan includes recruitment to the vacant Independent Member position with a target date of May 2025 and a training evaluation of committee members with a target date of September 2025.	Assistant Director Finance	September 2025	Medium
<b>Directorate Retention Schedules</b>	The Directorate Retention schedules are in the process of being updated and the completion date has now been set as March 2026.	Assistant Director Legal, Governance and Elections	March 2026	High
<b>IT Security Policy</b>	The IT Security Policy is to be refreshed to ensure current responsibilities are reflected.	Director of Strategy and Innovation	June 2025	Low
<b>Artificial Intelligence Policy</b>	The GenAI policy has been drafted and shared with the working group. It is currently being updated before publication.	Assistant Director-Digital	June 2025	Medium
<b>Data Strategy</b>	The Data Strategy is currently being reviewed by the Service Lead-Performance and Insight.	Assistant Director Policy and Strategy	June 2025	Medium

## Significant Governance Issues

### **Childrens Services (Social Care)**

A major risk to the achievement of the Council's budget remains within Childrens Social Care. On 5th March 2025 the [annual Medium Term Financial Plan/Revenue Budget report](#) to Council provided an updated position in respect of this key risk area setting out the growth which has been added to the Children's budget and the actions being taken to manage and mitigate demand.

These actions and their impact are monitored by the Director of Finance and Legal (supported by Strategic Finance Managers) and the Director of Childrens Services through the Childrens Services Assurance and Transformation Board.

### **OFSTED Childrens Services**

A full Local Authority Childrens Services Inspection was carried out in May 2022 with the final report issued in July 2022. The report concluded that the service requires improvement to be good. However, the report also stated *"Senior leaders now have a more accurate self-assessment of the improvement work required, and have been proactive in responding to those issues that were only identified during the inspection, such as improving the recording of management oversight at the front door. There is now a much clearer focus on delivering long term sustainable change alongside their improvement partners"*

The resultant action plan has continued to be monitored, and progress reported. During 2024/2025, progress against the Children's Social Care Achieving Excellence Plan was reported to Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee bi-annually. Reports were presented on 17<sup>th</sup> September 2024 and 21st January 2025, both showing significant progress and reporting no actions that were overdue or at risk of drift/delay. During 2024/2025 there has been an improvement in the governance arrangements with the introduction of Evidence Check Panels to ensure that only actions that have been completed and had good impact are recommended for closure that the plan does not remain static and is a living, breathing document that is used as tool to support continuous improvement and accountability.

The most recent OFSTED focused visit on Care Leavers in November 2024 highlighted a number of positives, including the appetite of Leaders for external challenge and a strengthened offer for care leavers, stating that 'senior leaders are unrelenting in their ambition to help young people succeed' and 'service improvement is making a difference to the lives of young people'.

## **Wigan and Leigh Building Services Function**

Following an audit of the Council's building repairs service (WLBS), which examined the operation of the 'Framework Agreement for Building and Associated Works 2021-2025' and also compliance with the Construction (Design and Maintenance) Regulations 2015 (CDM Regulations), Internal Audit concluded that they could not gain any assurance from the review (July 2023).

A follow-up internal audit review was completed in October 2024 where the scope of the work was limited to the findings and recommendations of the July 2023 finalised review. The assurance opinion derived from the follow-up work has concluded that satisfactory controls have been introduced, which is based on the work undertaken by WLBS to address the significant risks identified during the previous review. These high level risks were specifically in relation to the introduction of a formal contract management processes, a reduced repairs backlog position, increased compliance with Construction Design and Management (CDM) Regulations 2015 through the delivery of H&S training and refreshed CDM policy documentation, and revised accounting arrangements to provide protection against a breach of the HRA ringfencing rules.

Although the agreed actions were mainly allocated to WLBS it became clear that the implementation of some actions would be led by the Housing Service and some would be joint actions.

In terms of this wider repairs position and the impact on tenants, additional findings were identified during the follow-up review, which were confirmed as the responsibility of the Housing Service. The additional findings and outstanding WLBS actions have been accepted by management and collaborative work is ongoing between WLBS and the Housing Service to implement the recommendations of the review to strengthen the repairs service.

There is no requirement to conduct a further detailed Internal Audit review as controls have been enhanced and the risks reduced. Therefore, provided that sufficient progress is made to implement the latest recommendations, the reporting of this issue with the AGS is now concluded.

## **Housing Rent Standard**

In March 2024, the Council became aware of a breach of the Rent Standard and reported this to the Regulator of Social Housing.

The breach is due to the Council having incorrectly charged 61 of its properties as affordable rent rather than social rent. Affordable rent tenancies were introduced in 2010 for rented homes funded through the former Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) Affordable Homes Programme 2011-15. Under these schemes the Council was required to convert 323 properties to affordable rent. However, over the period 2019 – 2022, the Council continued to convert properties to affordable rent after the 323 property conversions had been met.

The Rent Standard has also been breached by the practice of not revaluing affordable rent properties when they were relet. Under the Rent Standard, when reletting an affordable rent property, the rent should be compared to the market rent for a similar property and charged at no more than 80% of that figure. There should have been no detriment to tenants from this breach.

The following actions have been taken to address this issue and ensure it doesn't happen again.

- A new Rent Policy and Rent Model has been introduced to reflect the Rent Standard and other requirements for how housing rent is calculated and charged.
- A comprehensive forensic audit of individual rent accounts and service charges has been undertaken and any rent errors corrected – all affordable relets over the past 6 years have been checked with retrospective valuations completed to ensure that rents have not been set higher than 80% of market rent on relet.
- A process for undertaking periodic checks to validate rent charges against the Rent Policy has been established.
- The 61 properties incorrectly charged have had their rent charges amended on the system and have been advised of their new (correct) charges for 2024/2025.
- Refunds have been calculated and interest of 8% less a deduction for tax applied to the refunds and customers have been advised of how to request a tax refund from HMRC if they are exempt.
- The DWP has been contacted to agree the process for the repayment of any overpaid Universal Credit and account for any overpayment of housing benefit. However, to date there has been no further updates provided, DWP have however confirmed that they are looking at this from a national perspective this is not just a Wigan based issue.

The Regulator of Social Housing is satisfied with the action the Council has taken to address this issue and has confirmed that no further regulatory action will be taken.

As all but one of the corrective actions have been completed and the outstanding action is outside the control of the Council, the reporting of this issue within the AGS is now concluded.

## **Housing - Health and Safety Compliance**

Following early engagement with the Regulator of Social Housing for the new Housing Standards, it was identified that the Council was in breach of the Home Standard for the following areas:

- Gas Safety and installation of carbon monoxide detectors.
- Fire Safety.
- Electrical Safety.

The regulator subsequently issued a regulatory notice in December 2023: ([Regulatory Notice: Wigan Council \(14 December 2023\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/regulatory-notice-wigan-council-14-december-2023))

Following an external review of our compliance management we have identified areas of weakness that we feel are the root cause of current performance issues across the compliance functions.

The following actions are being taken to address these issues:

- An initial action plan focussed on operational performance improvement is in the final stages of implementation.
- An external consultant has completed a review of the Council's associated compliance policies and processes, and a new strategic action plan is being implemented to ensure we maintain performance and provide quality assurance in the long term.
- An external consultant is to be instructed to review the compliance improvements and performance to support an application to the regulator to review the notice.

The collaboration with the regulator is very positive and has led to improved relationships and performance across the board. We continue to hold monthly meetings with the regulator in which they indicate we are making good progress.