



Co-operative Councils

Innovation Network

STRATEGY



Wigan Council

Building a new era for public services focused on tackling inequalities.

Co-operative values and principles are at the heart of Wigan Council's thinking as it collaboratively develops its response to a 'new era' for public services.

Nationally known for its ground-breaking response to austerity through the 'Wigan Deal', Wigan Council has been working over the past year on a new movement for change that can meet the challenges and opportunities faced by local government now and in the future.

Like many councils, Wigan is experiencing increasing and complex demand on its services, particularly in adults and children's social care, combined with on-going funding restraints and inflation.

Wigan Borough is a metropolitan borough in Greater Manchester with a population of 325,000.



Members of the Wigan Voluntary, Community, Faith and Social Enterprise Sector at an Engagement Event

As an urban northern borough, it has long-standing economic, social and health inequalities – with many of these worsening during austerity.

Over the past year under the working title of ‘new era’, the council, with support from Collaborate CIC and IPPR North, has listened carefully to citizens, businesses and community partners on what their priorities are and what life is like.

As a result of this, the council and its partners have started to develop missions focused on inequalities and on delivering the best possible high-quality public services.

The new era will also build and evolve further the core DNA of what it means to work in Wigan.

This includes its working culture, behaviours and principles, the focus on asset-based working and permission to innovate.

The council is ambitious about harnessing the power of data, digital technology and artificial intelligence as a major opportunity to make the best use of human

resources and scale-up more targeted, personalised and preventative approaches through the use of digital.



Members of the Wigan Borough Community Connection Group meeting with Wigan Borough Council

The new era work has deepened co-production with the voluntary, community, faith and social enterprise sector with the establishment of a community connection group to lead engagement and the creation of a new shared leadership model.

All of this points to an exciting future for Wigan Council with the co-operative principles of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity threaded throughout this strategic work.

This strategic thinking has not got in the way of the council delivering on the ground with community wealth building-inspired policies and projects which are really making a difference to people's lives.

These include:

- Wigan's anchor partnership procurement network supporting locally rooted SMEs and VCFSE organisations to access public sector supply

chains. This has seen more than 300 businesses attend its first 'meet the buyer' event and 61 local businesses attend free procurement training. The number of Wigan businesses commissioned continues to increase year-on-year with £91m spent on Wigan-based suppliers last year including £29m spent with 165 VCFSE suppliers.

- £10m invested by the council in 2023/24 to support local care providers and to implement the 'Real Living Wage' for carers working in adult social care. This means 100% of providers commissioned by the council are now paying staff a minimum of the real living wage. There are also 80% of our care homes in the borough paying the Real Living Wage. This has had an impact on staff turnover in the sector with latest figures showing a 5.7% turnover locally, compared to 18.5% nationally.
- A landmark civic university agreement signed with anchor institutions and Edge Hill University to boost education and skills opportunities. The agreement is between the council, hospital trust, local college and the university. Career pathways have been identified within the agreement, which will improve life chances for Wigan residents and address the workforce needs of the borough. They focus on four areas: education, health and social care, digital industries and business engagement. The partnership has already seen the opening of the new Centre for Advanced Technical Studies which is developing future health professionals, civil engineers and digital and cyber specialists.
- The adoption of looked after children and care leavers as a local protected characteristic. This means future council policies and changes in services will have to show consideration for the needs of looked after children and care leavers. This follows on from several actions taken to support looked after children and care leavers including free health prescriptions, employment and training support, an annual gym pass, a laptop and free internet and a range of different accommodation options including semi-independent accommodation, supported living and independent living.
- Using the power of data and behavioural insights the council has this year helped residents receive more than £1m in additional welfare support, which they were entitled to, but had previously not claimed. A single view of residents was created from a number of datasets to identify people who were most likely to be affected by the cost-of-living

crisis and identify where it was likely eligibility for further support existed but had not been claimed. This included household support, pension credit, council tax reduction, housing benefit and attendance allowance. The council is now scaling up its work on using the power of data and AI to deliver real-life benefits and shift inequalities.



Councillor Chris Ready from Wigan Council speaking at the VCFSE gathering in December 2023

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