



Annual Governance Statement for the year ended 31st March 2021

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. Reductions in Government funding have led to major transformation resulting in changes in staffing levels and in the way that services are provided. We also continue to face unprecedented challenges from the continuing COVID 19 pandemic and the impact of this is likely to continue throughout 2021/2022 and beyond. 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.

The final statement was formally approved by Cabinet on 5th August 2021 where it was recommended for signing by the Leader of the Council and the Chief Executive.

An updated version of the statement was approved by Cabinet on 6th July 2023 to include an additional significant governance issue, pertinent to 2020/21, that was identified during 2022/23.



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

In April 2019 the council's revised corporate strategy "The Deal 2030" building on the previous "Deal for the Future" was approved by Council and will underpin everything the council plans to achieve. The previous Deal had fundamentally marked a new relationship between citizen and state, signalling a positive approach for individuals and communities that encouraged self-reliance and independence through an equal partnership. The Deal 2030 continues and strengthens this approach by providing a unifying strategy for the whole of the borough over the next decade built on 10 key priorities.

Each priority within "The Deal 2030" has to be delivered and the Council and its partners will be held accountable on achievement via a number of partnership boards and governing committees. The Council will also produce an annual report which will demonstrate the extent of progress against each of the 10 key priorities.

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 31st March 2021 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, Staff Deal and key staff behaviours – BeWigan and BeWigan Manager
- Register of Interests for Members which is published on the Council's website against each Councillor record.

Principle B Openness and Engagement

- A Freedom of Information Publication scheme. [Publication Scheme](#)
- Publication of Committee Agendas, Minutes and decisions. [Committees](#)
- [Deal 2030](#) – an informal agreement between the Council and everyone who lives or works here to work together to create a better borough.
- Strategic Partnership Working through –Health and Wellbeing Board, Building Stronger Communities Partnership.
- [Borough Life](#) magazine
- Borough Survey.
- Listening into Action staff communication sessions supported by “You Said, We Did” and extensive staff communications and support

Principle C Defining Outcomes

- Our Vision is embedded in service delivery and performance management
- Our corporate strategy, The Deal 2030 which outlines what the future Council will look like and our approach to meeting the challenges. [Deal 2030](#)
- 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](#)
- Quarterly performance Dashboards to Directorate and Strategic Management Teams [Performance Data](#)

Principle D Making A Difference

- [Deal 2030](#) consultation ‘The Big Listening Project’ listened to the views of 6,000 residents from across the borough. The 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 programmes to make services more effective and efficient and ensure change is sustainable.
- Adoption of the GMCA 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](#)
- Annual and six monthly 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 MyTimeExtra – 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 (expanded due to COVID 19)
- Smart working and making the best use of technology and buildings is key to the way we work.

Principle F Managing Risk and Performance

- An Internal Audit function which 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.
- Budget Management Group lead by CFO.
- 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 revised Local Code of Corporate Governance in line with the CIPFA/SOLACE framework. [Local Code](#)
- An [Audit, Governance and Standards Committee](#) which includes independent members 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

<p>Internal Audit</p>	<p>External Audit</p>	<p>Information Governance</p>	<p>Counter Fraud</p>	<p>Risk Management</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Audit Opinion • Internal audit progress reports • PSIAS compliance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final accounts audit • VFM conclusion • Grant certification 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information Governance Annual Report • Information Governance Working Groups 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whistleblowing arrangements • Annual Fraud Report 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Risk Register reporting • Directorate Risk Registers • Internal audit reviews
<p>Complaints</p>	<p>External Reviews</p>	<p>Management</p>	<p>Statutory Officers</p>	<p>Committees</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two Stage Corporate Complaints procedure • Ombudsman investigations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGA Peer Review • LGC Council of the Year Award • Internal Audit Peer Review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Director Assurance Statements • Annual Review of Significant Partnerships 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring Officer - legal assurance and ethics • Chief Finance Officer role compliance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutiny performance monitoring reports • Annual Standards Report • Audit Chair's Annual Report

5. 2020/2021 Review of Effectiveness

Our review of governance arrangements for 2020/2021 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 is not quite as strong as it has been in previous years due to the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on planned improvements and delays in governance arrangements being updated to reflect new approaches, such as Deal 2030 and community wealth initiative. However, it is important to recognise that significant work has been completed during this difficult time and positive actions have been made to maintain a high level of governance during the COVID 19 pandemic. Overall, the position is still considered to be good; therefore, the Internal Audit assurance opinion is **satisfactory**. Given the significant pressure due to the budget cuts, the COVID 19 pandemic and the associated operational changes the Council has experienced and continues to go through, this is a significant achievement.”* Review of Corporate Governance
- The Council’s current strategic risks and associated management arrangements were reappraised by the Audit and Governance Committee in July 2020 (Covid Risk Register) and March 2021 (Strategic Risk Register). Throughout the year the effectiveness of these arrangements has been tested as part of the Internal Audit work programme.
- An initial review against the CIPFA FM Code has shown a good level of compliance with the recommended best practices contained within the 17 standards and 68 key questions with evidence collated to support this assessment. Recommendations for improvement will be at the fine detail level of the standards. A detailed report and improvement plan will be brought to Members during 2021/2022.
- The results of the internal audit work have been reported 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 2020/2021. This report concluded that *“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 2020/2021 which provided an update on the counter fraud work undertaken across the Council during 2020/2021 concluded, *“Members can therefore be assured that prevention and detection of fraud, along with promoting high standards of conduct are given high priority within the Council’s operations and this ensures that fraud and corruption risks are effectively managed.”*

External Assurances

External Audit

The Council's external auditor, Mazars, reported their Audit Completion (Year Ended 31st March 2020) to the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee on 14th January 2021. Verbal accounts sign off was given at the 11th March 2021 meeting of the Audit, Governance and Standards Committee. The main conclusions being :-

- *The Council has maintained appropriate arrangements throughout 2019/20 for ensuring financial resilience.*
- *The Council has maintained sufficient arrangements for monitoring and forecasting the financial position and identifying risks and taking actions to mitigate them. The budget position has been reported quarterly to Cabinet during the year setting out the current position and the projected position at the year end, and an overview of pressures, which are clearly articulated.*
- *Overall, the Council had appropriate arrangements in place in 2019/20 to monitor and mitigate pressures, particularly in Children's Services. The pandemic is creating further financial pressures and future risks but the Council has appropriate arrangements in place to keep these under review and identify actions to take to manage these pressures.*
- *The Council had been very quick to locate the areas of impact in relation to the COVID 19 pandemic and had implemented an action plan to control its cash flow and had responded quickly to changes released by central government.*
- *We conclude that for 2019/20 the Council has made proper arrangements to deliver financial sustainability in the medium term.*

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:-

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 have provided a statement of 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. The Council's Director – Resources and Contracts (Deputy Chief Executive) and Assistant Director, Corporate Contracts and Assets sit on the Board. The company appoints its own independent auditors who have provided a statement of assurance on the financial position of the company.

Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles

Inspiring Healthy Lifestyles (IHL) provided a wide range of leisure facilities across Wigan. A detailed Assurance Statement has been provided (June 2021) by the Managing Director of the organisation that he is satisfied that the company has operated a sound system of governance throughout the financial year. With effect from 1 April 2021, IHL's Wigan Contract has been brought back into the Council. This action allows an integrated leisure offer linked to the Council's health and well being ambitions. All the IHL back-office functions related to the Wigan Contract are being fully embedded with other Council services.

Norfolk Property Services

The Council operated a partnership agreement with Norfolk Property Services (NPS) for the delivery of a range of property services. A client function was retained by the Council to manage the contractual relationship including performance and governance issues. The performance of NPS Wigan continued to be reported to their local board, which includes the Council's Deputy Chief Executive and a Cabinet Member to ensure the Council's interests are effectively represented. The Council had been considering for some while the future of this range of property services and during 2019/2020 issued a termination of contract notice to NPS. The functions were brought back within the Council in the latter part of 2020/2021.

Wigan Borough Clinical Commissioning Group

Wigan Borough Clinical Commissioning Group (WBCCG). is the statutory body responsible for commissioning local health services in Wigan. Together with Wigan Council plans for a Single Commissioning Function for health and social care are being progressed.

A section 75 agreement has been in place since 2015/16 to pool resources to improve the Health and Social Care outcomes for the residents of the Borough. This agreement has includes a risk/gain share schedule which will protect both parties from financial risk.

An Integrated Commissioning Committee is in operation which is chaired on a rotating basis by the Leader of the Council and the Chair of WBCCG.

The WBCCG 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 CCG's Internal Auditors and also its Chief Officer.

Agilisys

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

- delivered the services defined within the contract in line with the contractual requirements
- Continued to support the Partners in delivering their critical services to residents. All services have been delivered within the agreed governance framework, ensuring that processes and systems have been operated to meet the contractual levels of service.
- Delivered a number of key projects, including the deployment of Microsoft Teams, incorporation of IHL users into Wigan Council, the rollout of Local Full Fibre Network capability, Wigan Private Access Network (PAN) upgrade, Wigan iTrent service migration to cloud hosted Software as a Service (SaaS), etc.
- Are currently going through the process of re-accreditation of both the ISO9001 (2015) and ISO27001 (2013) Information Security management quality standards.
- Have assisted the Authority to maintain their security posture and to ensure ongoing conformity to security standards such as Public Services Network (PSN) and Cyber Essentials+.
- Provided various layers of protective systems from email-filtering, anti-virus protection, internet filtering and multi-factor authentication. With the modern working patterns enforced upon us by the Pandemic these core services have been instrumental in ensuring ongoing protection despite the shift to working from home.

7. Governance Action Plan

A Governance Action Plan, attached at Appendix 1, provides a summary of improvement actions we will be addressing during 2021/2022. We have made good progress in implementing the agreed actions from 2020/2021 and a status position is included within Appendix C of the Review of Corporate Governance. [Review of Corporate Governance](#) All outstanding issues have been carried forward into the 2021/2022 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.

The Council continues to address the significant governance issue raised in 2018/19, relating to overspending on Childrens Social Care. An additional issue in respect the OFSTED Childrens Services (Focussed Visit) has been identified this year. Further details are provided at Appendix 2.

9. COVID-19 Challenges Reflection/Impact

Whilst the coronavirus pandemic is not a specific governance issue the operational and financial impact of the crisis and ongoing remedial actions do need to be reported.

This section considers the impact of COVID 19 on the adequacy of governance arrangements and outlines how the Council has continued to maintain essential services and support residents and businesses during this period.

Impact on Normal Service Delivery

Following the initial lockdown, the Council implemented its Emergency Command and Control arrangements. These arrangements are still in place to ensure the Council is able to react quickly to the ever-changing situation that it finds itself in.

Social distancing measures have had a significant impact on the Council's operational and governance arrangements. Parliamentary regulations laid in April 2020 provided Councils with flexibility in relation to local authority meetings held between 4 April 2020 and 6 May 2021. These regulations provided for remote access to meetings of local authorities by members of a local authority and also by the press and public, i.e., virtual meetings held on secure IT platforms.

The Council, therefore, developed arrangements and provided the necessary IT equipment to all Members to hold meetings virtually, allowing Members to fully engage in taking key decisions and enabling public participation. Since May 2020, Council committee/panel meetings have been broadcast live with Council meetings then made available via social media.

Mobile and flexible working has now become business as usual for many Council staff. This transition was achieved relatively early on during the first lockdown where all staff who could work from home were instructed to do so. Council Member and staff equipment requirements were addressed to facilitate remote working. Moving forward it is likely that a "blended" work approach will be formalised.

To keep staff and residents safe, our main reception areas have not been reopened to the general public yet. All key services have remained available through a variety of other channels. Where essential, home visits and business inspections are still carried out under COVID 19 secure protocols.

For our customers we have worked hard to ensure they feel comfortable in using the new ways of accessing our services and website. Dedicated webpages have been developed and continue to be updated with relevant information to support residents and businesses throughout the pandemic.

Since March 2020, messages have been issued by the Leader, Chief Executive and Senior Management Team, often on a daily basis, to ensure all staff and Members have the most up to date information to pass on to residents and stakeholders. Over the pandemic period, LIA sessions, Managers Briefings (our internal staff cascade) have continued via Teams, together with extensive direct and web-based staff communication and support mechanisms (health and well-being), etc.

The Council has also ensured that the local residents are regularly updated and kept informed. Social media output/impact has increased significantly since the start of the first lockdown highlighting both the increase in output from the Council and the demand from the local community for on-going information about local and national developments.

Council Activity as Part of the National Response to Covid 19 and Associated Governance Issues

From the beginning of the pandemic the Council adopted a Community Resilience Operating Model which was based on its existing Service Delivery Footprint (SDF) structure to provide community welfare support to shielding and other vulnerable residents. Within each of the 7 SDF's, lead officers and other roles were defined to coordinate the welfare response and deploy staff and volunteers. The response also included a multi-agency approach achieved through the involvement of local VCSE networks, partners and businesses.

Maintaining front line services, providing COVID 19 regulatory advice and appropriate enforcement activity, facilitation contact tracing together with providing testing and vaccination sites has been a focus for the Council whilst redeploying a significant number of staff to testing and vaccination support.

The Funding and Operational Consequences of Delivering the Council Response

The ongoing COVID 19 pandemic has already had a significant impact on Council finances, the effects of which will continue through the current period of lockdown and beyond. The financial impact will be due to both unforeseen but necessary, expenditure and significantly reduced income from fees and charges, Council Tax and Business Rates.

The impact varies by area, dependent on factors such as geography, demographics, services delivered and the nature of the local economy. However, to a large extent, it will depend on how quickly the national and local economies return to normal levels of activity.

The Emergency measures have allowed the Council to support its residents and businesses throughout these difficult times and to date over £100m has been discharged in financial support to both residents and businesses. In the initial phase some £67m was paid out to businesses.

In addition to those schemes specific to business support there have also been numerous grants paid to the Council to ensure the residents of the borough have been able to access essential financial and other support when it has been needed the most. The schemes are numerous and cover a wide range of support mechanisms.

To offset the additional financial pressures being faced by Local Government, the Government has provided financial support to the Council towards the cost of its responsive services. Additional grant funding has been provided in tranches during, 2020/21 and into 2021/22, to allow support to be provided to residents, Service Users and taxpayers.

It is unclear at this stage whether this funding will be sufficient to offset all of the financial pressures the Council will face.

Assessment of the Longer-Term Disruption/Consequences Arising from COVID 19

It is essential that the Council focuses on the likely operational and financial impacts that the continuing pandemic, and its aftermath, will have on current and future income levels. As the COVID 19 crisis is likely to be long-lasting and far reaching, affecting multiple financial years, it will be difficult for the Council to revert their spending back to pre-COVID 19 levels and income streams will not necessarily bounce back in the short term, especially if the local economy is in recession.

Although the financial position remains difficult the Council is still in a strong position to be able to manage the impact of the pandemic on its finances. We have now set a budget for the 2021/22 financial year which will continue to keep the Council on a sound financial footing. As the impact of the pandemic on our finances for 2021/22 is not yet known, the assumptions underlying later years in the MTFS will almost certainly need to change, making the “funding gap” for 2021/22 and beyond larger

Positive Outcomes for the Council

The Council’s response to COVID 19 has demonstrated a range of positive outcomes for the Council, viz.:-

- It has been an unprecedented year and yet the Council has managed to maintain services but has also reacted positively and creatively in this difficult time and supported its business community and its residents like never before.
- We have demonstrated the ability to respond, adapt, prioritise, manage and change at pace when needed, something that can be utilised in the future to adapt and deliver change across the Council and its communities.
- The Council’s staff have shown the ability to rapidly change mind-set and culture, thereby demonstrating we can deliver services successfully through a virtual front-door and work both flexibly and remotely.
- Management have developed remote communication and support methodologies that have been generally welcomed by staff.
- The pandemic has highlighted the current position regarding the resilience and integrity of our ICT infrastructure, whilst also demonstrating areas to enhance in order to optimise the proposed blended approach to work.

When the crisis concludes, the Council will conduct a review of the lessons to be learned from its overall response.

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 external assessment categorisation.

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 2021/2022**Behaving with integrity, demonstrating strong commitment to ethical values, and respecting the rule of law**

Area of Consideration	Action	Owner	Deadline	Priority
My Time/My Time Extra	A review of the My Time/My Time Extra process will be recommended. Guidance will be updated based on feedback from manager focus groups and an engagement plan developed to raise staff awareness.	Assistant Director HR and OD	September 2021	Medium
Whistleblowing Policy	An initial review of the Whistleblowing policy has been undertaken to ensure consistency between the versions on the Intranet and Internet. Further work is scheduled for June 2021 to transfer the policy on the intranet to the corporate policy template and sense check any quick updates which might need to be done.	Assistant Director HR and OD	July 2021	Low
Customer Complaints	The current member enquiry process is being finalised on the new JADU platform and is expected to go live around June 2021. This will be used as basis for developing the complaints process on the JADU platform, with learning and amendments being made as appropriate. There are a number of other services linked to the initial phase of JADU and the Digital Services team have given a timescale for complaints to be looked at of late 2021/early 2022. A full review of the Corporate Complaints policy will be completed in line with the new system.	Director Customer and Culture	March 2022	Medium
Dignity at Work Policy	The Dignity at Work Policy will be reviewed as part of the planned policy reviews scheduled as part of the recovery.	Assistant Director HR and OD	March 2022	Low
Procurement Strategy	The Procurement Strategy will be progressed once the national picture is clearer. In December 2020, the Government initiated a Green Paper review of Public Sector Procurement Policy post Brexit. This is the largest review of public procurement for 30 years and is not expected to pass through Parliament until the Autumn at the earliest.	Strategic Contracts and Procurement Manager	March 2022	High

Area of Consideration	Action	Owner	Deadline	Priority
Recruitment Policy	The draft Recruitment Policy is currently being updated with feedback from HR Extended Management Team. It is planned to go live in July 2021.	Assistant Director HR and OD	July 2021	High
Financial Procedure Rules/Contract Procedure Rules	Following the establishment of a working group by the Deputy Chief Executive-Director of Resources and Contracts, the Financial Procedure Rules and Contract Procedure Rules will be reviewed and updated as appropriate.	Deputy Chief Executive-Director of Resources and Contracts	March 2022	Medium
Anti-Fraud, Bribery & Corruption Policy Statement & Strategy	The Anti-Fraud, Bribery & Corruption Policy Statement & Strategy will be refreshed in line with the Council's Deal 2030 and the revised Local Government Counter Fraud Strategy, Fighting Fraud and Corruption Locally guidance.	Chief Internal Auditor	January 2022	Medium

Ensuring openness and comprehensive stakeholder engagement

Area of Consideration	Action	Owner	Deadline	Priority
Publication of Local Government Transparency Code data	The outstanding 19/20 and 20/21 data will be published in June. Consideration will be given to how long the data should remain available on the Open Data page.	Director Strategy, Innovation & HWP	September 2021	High
Consultation Toolkit	The Consultation Toolkit will be updated as part of the new approach to engagement.	Director Strategy, Innovation & HWP	July 2021	Low
Community Asset Transfer Policy	The Community Asset Transfer Policy will be updated to ensure that it reflects current practice and links to the Deal 2030.	Corporate Land and Community Assets Manager	September 2021	Medium
State of the Borough Report	Going forward, the State of the Borough report will be replaced by the SDF profiles which are currently being refreshed and will be published on the web.	Director Strategy, Innovation & HWP	November 2021	Medium
Equality Strategy	The current Equality strategic vision is set out in the Public Sector Equality Duty 2020 report. However, a new Equality Strategy is being developed to support this.	Director Strategy, Innovation & HWP	January 2022	Medium
Equality Action Plan	An Equality Action Plan is being drafted which will consider the newly released GM Independent Inequalities Commission Recommendations.	Director Strategy, Innovation & HWP	July 2021	Medium

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

Area of Consideration	Action	Owner	Deadline	Priority
Transformation Programme	The Transformation Strategies on a Page will be updated as the approach to delivering on Deal 2030 is updated as the Council moves out of the pandemic response.	Director Strategy, Innovation & HWP	December 2021	Medium
Performance Reports to Scrutiny Committee	Going forward, biannual performance reports will be presented to scrutiny committees.	Director Strategy, Innovation & HWP	September 2021	Medium
Risk Management Policy and Guidance	The Risk Management Policy and Guidance are currently being refreshed and will be presented to Audit, Governance and Standards Committee early in the municipal year.	Chief Internal Auditor	September 2021	Low
Directorate Risk Registers	The Directorate Risk Registers will continue to be updated as part of the Council's Recovery Plan.	Relevant Director	December 2021	Medium
Project Risks	A new 'corporate recovery report' will include a risk register for all key projects which are contributing to our recovery as a borough. This will be brought to SMT and informal cabinet on a quarterly basis starting in August.	Director Strategy, Innovation & HWP	August 2021	Low
Assurance Mapping	An assurance mapping framework will be developed to ensure that adequate assurance is gained over the Council's strategic risks	Chief Internal Auditor	March 2022	Low

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

Area of Consideration	Action	Owner	Deadline	Priority
Talent/Succession Planning	A basic talent / succession planning tool will be launched as part of a new approach to organisational shaping which includes a service health check / diagnostic to support services to consider current and future workforce planning, talent and succession. This will be a phased approach from June 2021.	Assistant Director HR and OD	July 2021	Medium
Members Training and Development Strategy	The Member Training and Development Strategy will be updated by the Councillor Service Group at its first meeting of this municipal year (June) to reflect the increase in online training.	Democratic Services Manager	July 2021	Medium
Developing Future Leaders and Management	A fresh, new flexible leadership development opportunities for current and aspiring managers will be launched from May 2021. As well as formal learning courses / modules, this will include manager events / forums, guest speakers, coffee connections. This will be a phased approach from May 2021.	Assistant Director HR and OD	July 2021	Medium

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

Area of Consideration	Action	Owner	Deadline	Priority
Corporate Business Continuity arrangements	the following actions will be carried out: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointment of an SMT lead for BCM. • Nomination of a forum for the monitoring and review of business continuity arrangements across the Council. • Procurement of a new 'off the shelf' Critical Incident Management system to manage critical incidents in respect of Business Continuity Management and Civil Contingencies. 	Director of Public Health	December 2021	Medium
CIPFA FM Code	Development of a detailed action plan to ensure full compliance with the best practice requirements of the 17 Standards that support the Code within the specified 2021/2022 timeframe.	Assistant Director Finance	November 2021	High

Significant Governance Issues

Childrens Services (Social Care)

On 3rd March 2021 the annual; “budget setting/financial efficiencies delivery” report to Council provided an updated position in respect of this key risk area, viz.:-

- *“The level of efficiencies required are much improved on those reported in July 2020. Since that time work has been undertaken to identify at the earliest possible opportunity, the savings required to deliver a balanced budget. A budget management board has been created, chaired by the Director of Resources and Contracts (Deputy Chief Executive) to oversee the delivery of the savings plans. A plan has been developed which will address the budget shortfall currently identified in our Childrens services directorate.”*
- *“The major risk area for the Council’s revenue budget remains within Children’s Social Care and Provider Services. The most significant budget pressure relates to our Looked after Children – in particular, residential placements and independent foster carer costs. The increasing number of looked after children has resulted in significantly more placements over the last 12 months. The service has also had additional social work support through a managed service to deal with demand at the front door and in localities. The service is revising both its financial and sufficiency strategy to help mitigate some of these costs.”*

During 2020/2021 the Chief Finance Officer (Deputy Chief Executive) established a Budget Management Board that he chairs supported by other senior Finance officers. Its purpose is to review key budget areas to ensure that planned savings are delivered and to also critically review service areas that run at a loss and to oversee the development of savings plans to form part of the 2021/2022 and subsequent years budgets. One of the key themes of this Board is to ensure appropriate actions are taken to deliver the required budget savings and in particular those within Childrens Services. To deliver this process the Deputy Chief Executive and the Assistant Director Finance are also members of the Childrens Services Business Delivery Board.

Additional financial support has been provided that has seen/is seeing recruitment at Assistant Director and Service Manager levels within the service.

OFSTED Childrens Services (Focussed Visit)

Following their inspection of the Children’s Service’s Front Door in 2019 and 2020, Ofsted reported that the required improvements were not being made as quickly as expected. In response, significant changes were made to the Directorate’s senior leadership team and shortly after her appointment, several critical actions were implemented by the Director of Children’s Services to address service delivery concerns in the short term.

Ofsted completed a follow up Assurance Visit in November 2020 which reported that a number of issues were outstanding. However, whilst it was noted that Covid and the associated emergency management arrangements had slowed the pace of improvement, some limited progress had been made which was starting to have an impact on the quality of work. Additionally, no new areas for development were recommended that had not already been identified by the Service.

Building on the progress acknowledged by Ofsted, the Children's Social Care Quality and Performance Plan has been strengthened and steps are being taken to implement the necessary improvement actions. The establishment of corporate oversight boards with representation from key senior managers, political leadership and external scrutiny ensures regular reporting and robust monitoring is exercised over the delivery of these required improvements to ensure that the areas of concern identified by Ofsted are addressed on a timely basis.

Data Loss Major Incident Update

In late January 2020 a system failure in respect of the Northgate Revenues and Benefits system resulted in some loss of data. The data loss concerned some Northgate Notepad entries & ATLAS (Automated Transfers to Local Authorities Systems) files from the DWP, generated over a 10 day period, which were lost due to an incorrect configuration of a backup policy.

These records represented important sources of evidence for Council Tax, Business Rates and Housing Benefit and the impact of their loss on our ability to evidence processing decisions could have put at risk the Council's reputation and its finances. However, these risks have been mitigated by records available from other processing activities, and action taken by the Customer Services to validate transactions by performing 100% quality assurance checks on the affected accounts and from the preservation of the lost data in a test system for reference purposes.

Full technical and non-technical reports about the incident have now been concluded by ICT and an action plan completed of measures required to prevent future recurrence.

The Director Digital, ICT and Integration has confirmed that appropriate remedial actions have been implemented or are scheduled to reduce the risk of system failure and any resultant data loss.

Publishing of Planning Applications

As previously reported Planning Committee were notified that an error had been identified in the processing of a number of planning applications in respect of the publishing of planning applications.

A management investigation was completed and the outcome of the review was reported to Planning Committee on 25 June 2020.

A Management review has introduced additional controls and procedures that have been introduced to strengthen the planning application consultation process to prevent a recurrence. Appropriate staff action and communications have also taken place.

The reporting of this issue within the AGS is now concluded.

Significant Governance Issues - Addendum

Due to the delay in the completion of the Council's statutory audits in respect of 2020/21 and 2021/22, the following additional significant governance issue, identified in 2022/23 but also pertinent to 2020/21, needs to be disclosed.

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. The review also reported that the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) had been overcharged for housing repairs work undertaken under the framework and that this represented a potential breach of the HRA ringfence.

A breach of the HRA ringfence was confirmed by Kings Counsel and was reported by the S151 Officer to the external auditors. As this amounted to a movement of internal accounting entries, there was no financial loss to the Council. As part of the 2022/23 budget setting process, a transfer was made from the General Fund to the HRA to correct the errors. As the external auditors are satisfied that the breach has been rectified, the Monitoring Officer has determined that the action taken is sufficient.

Other Issues

A range of issues, involving the Council, has attracted press and public interest during the financial year. Many of these issues have been recognised as significant risks to the Council and are and will be included in the Strategic Risk Register which outlines the mitigating actions along with providing a high level mechanism to monitor the effectiveness of the actions being taken. The subject area of the issues is detailed below, viz.:-

Financial and Service Delivery Issues

The Council's financial position and performance and subsequent impact of this on services has been discussed in both the local press and on social media. A lot of this content has praised the Council's progress to date and its ability to make budget reductions while improving services for residents. There were however a few items which were negative about the impact of the government's cuts on Council services.

The Council's consistent response to these issues is that formal Impact Assessments are performed to analyse the impact of proposed service reductions and other decisions may have on its residents and in particular the more vulnerable members of the community. It has prepared promptly for the financial downturn and addressed all issues in a structured way with the ongoing intention of safeguarding the front-line services it provides to residents and minimising compulsory job losses. This action as part of the Council's financial planning and management processes has been consistently endorsed by the Council's External Auditor.

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 external assessment categorisation.