

Corporate Peer Challenge **Wigan Council**

9th-11th October 2017

Feedback Report

1. Executive Summary

Wigan Council is highly regarded for its outstanding political and managerial leadership both within its borough and beyond. It has a widespread reputation for being a high performer, both within and beyond the borough's boundaries, reflected in a large and extensive number of external awards for good practice, innovation and achievement. These include improved residents' satisfaction with the council, the highest level of employment in Greater Manchester and being named as the Best Council to Work for in 2016. Like other ambitious councils it is keen to achieve more and is facing the future with confidence and purpose.

The council's culture is positive and upbeat, and everyone we encountered during our onsite work was very positive about either working for the council or working with it. Staff told us they feel valued and enjoy working for the organisation, and this is reflected in high levels of morale across the workforce. In 2016 it was independently named by the Sunday Times as the best council to work for.

The council is well-run, it has sound and well managed finances. There is capacity and appetite to do more for communities, and an evident ambition to get communities to be less reliant on the council and for people to do more for themselves, and for each other.

At the heart of this approach is the Wigan Deal. This is a multi-faceted strengths based approach to service delivery which has a core purpose of changing the relationship between the citizen and the council. The council describes the Deal as an informal contract with residents but the concept is bigger and wider than that and extends to how the council operates internally and externally. The aim is one of developing and encouraging communities to do more for themselves, as well as each parting understanding and supporting the contribution of others. The Deal is an exemplar for local government in transforming how the council works both in terms of service delivery, reducing demand and also for its own internal working practices.

There are good levels of awareness of what is and is not working through the Deal, and recognition that more needs to be done to reach and improve the lives of those with the most complex needs. The challenge however is how to bring about that change, particularly when much of the growth of the Deal to date has been organic and innovative: more structure and order may be needed to ensure impact can be achieved in more difficult areas.

Health devolution to Greater Manchester is both an opportunity and a risk for the next stage of the Deal. The opportunity in particular is to achieve better health outcomes for Wigan's residents. It is also important that Greater Manchester succeeds on health, not only for its constituent population, but also more widely for the sector: Wigan plays a significant role in making this happen. In the context of the Health Devolution arrangements, relationships with health partners within the borough need to grow and improve so that the health and care system can secure a greater consistency of approach towards the adoption of the main principles of the Deal – asset based in places. .

Whilst the Deal is creating some interesting, valuable and valued community action and activism across Wigan, the council needs to consider what more it can do to drive growth

and prosperity for the borough, and ensuring that economic development goes beyond physical infrastructural demands such as new roads or industrial sites. To an extent the Deal has been about addressing some of the difficult consequences of worklessness and deprivation, including poor physical and mental health, which have caused a reliance on the public sector, particularly the council and the NHS. The next step will be taking the approach to a greater level of prevention, and making inroads into deprivation.

Devoting more resources and energy to invigorating the local economy, through supporting businesses and encouraging more inclusive economic growth will help to create jobs, which in turn will help local people help themselves and be more self-reliant. This means a next step should be pushing forward an ambitious and inclusive vision and strategy for economic growth and culture which sets out its potential role in the Greater Manchester and regional economies. Further work to capitalise on Wigan's position between Manchester and Liverpool, the potential from HS2 to connect with Birmingham in 35 minutes and London in 83 minutes, and the borough's green and affordable location will help to take the Deal to the next level.

2. Key recommendations

There are a range of suggestions and observations within the main section of the report that will inform some 'quick wins' and practical actions, in addition to the conversations onsite, many of which provided ideas and examples of practice from other organisations. The following are the peer team's key recommendations to the Council:

- Carry on - the Deal is an exemplar of how to engage with communities, energise council culture and change the relationship between the citizen and the local state through exemplary leadership
- Improve the Deal in the next stage by protecting the strong core principles, setting baselines and evaluating impact on outcomes. Work with other councils across the country to prove the case to the Treasury for early intervention
- Consider developing further the Deal for Councillors to engage ward members across the borough in implementing the Deal. Members should be encouraged to play a greater role in community engagement and improving outcomes at local level, with the right support
- Help build the sustainability and reach of the Deal in the voluntary and community sector so it can be extended across the borough, utilising the opportunity of the seven footprints and the ALMO transfer. Consider devolving parts of the CIF to the footprints and longer term funding arrangements for some organisations and projects.
- Recast the economic strategy with a new, inclusive economic vision for the borough that capitalises on your position between Manchester and Liverpool, the opportunity of HS2 and your affordable, accessible and green location. It should include consideration of how the poorest residents in the poorest areas can benefit from growth
- Utilise the opportunity provided by the new GM transport resources. Consider how the borough can tap into existing GM and other funds to enhance Wigan town centre, key investor-ready gateway sites and other economic and cultural assets
- Produce an ambitious cultural strategy that can increase the profile of the borough and create opportunities for home grown talent. This needs to link closely to a new

economic strategy, showing how culture can create jobs and enhance quality of life for residents and visitors

- Develop associated skills and job-ready programmes with local businesses as part of the Deal
- Continue to invest in the early intervention in Children's Services and place children and young people at the heart of the new economic vision. Review the Looked after Children target reduction at the end of 2018 given current system pressures and consider becoming a DFE Partner in Practice.
- Manage the risks of health devolution actively and the leadership challenge for both the Leader in chairing the Greater Manchester Health and Care Board.
- Manage the risks of the implementation of the Wigan Locality Plan for health and care reform particularly the financial challenge of the hospital contract and the potential single accountable officer role for the council and CCG and address mental health engagement as a priority.
- Take advantage of the opportunity and context provided by health devolution, moving at pace to integrate health and social care at a Greater Manchester, Wigan and neighbourhood level by using the Deal to engage communities in the seven footprints.

3. Summary of the Peer Challenge approach

The peer team

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected member and officer peers. The make-up of the peer team reflected your requirements and the focus of the peer challenge. Peers were selected on the basis of their relevant experience and expertise and agreed with you. The peers who delivered the peer challenge at Wigan Council were:

- Chief Executive: Tom Riordan, Leeds City Council
- Member peer: Cllr Sir Stephen Houghton CBE, Barnsley Council
- Member peer: Cllr Nick Sharman, LB Hackney
- Officer peer: Peter Gadsdon, LB Brent
- Officer peer: Hazel Summers, LGA Associate
- Officer peer: Anna Randell, LGA Associate
- Officer peer: Grace Abel, LGA
- LGA peer challenge manager: Judith Hurcombe

Scope and focus

The peer team considered the following five questions which form the core components looked at by all Corporate Peer Challenges cover. These are the areas we believe are critical to councils' performance and improvement:

1. Understanding of the local place and priority setting: Does the council understand its local context and place and use that to inform a clear vision and set of priorities?

2. Leadership of Place: Does the council provide effective leadership of place through its elected members, officers and constructive relationships and partnerships with external stakeholders?
3. Organisational leadership and governance: Is there effective political and managerial leadership supported by good governance and decision-making arrangements that respond to key challenges and enable change and transformation to be implemented?
4. Financial planning and viability: Does the council have a financial plan in place to ensure long term viability and is there evidence that it is being implemented successfully?
5. Capacity to deliver: Is organisational capacity aligned with priorities and does the council influence, enable and leverage external capacity to focus on agreed outcomes?

In addition to these questions, you asked the peer team to consider/review/provide feedback on the Wigan Deal:

- The impact of the Deal on communities
- How is the Deal changing the council?
- The Deal, Children's Services, the most complex cases and the plan
- How can behavioural change be extended to partners?
- Developing the Deal for businesses and maximising corporate social responsibility
- The Deal for the street, increasing recycling and reducing environmental crime
- Sustainability and developing a meaningful strategic voice for the 3rd sector
- The Deal in the future

The peer challenge process

It is important to stress that this was not an inspection. Peer challenges are improvement focused and tailored to meet individual councils' needs. They are designed to complement and add value to a council's own performance and improvement. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of local government to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read.

The peer team prepared for the peer challenge by reviewing a range of documents and information in order to ensure they were familiar with the Council and the challenges it is facing. The team then spent 3 days onsite at Wigan, during which they:

- Spoke to more than 300 people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external partners and stakeholders.

- Gathered information and views from more than 50 meetings, visits to key sites in the area and additional research and reading.
- Collectively spent more than 180 hours to determine their findings – the equivalent of one person spending more than 6 weeks in Wigan.

This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings. It builds on the feedback presentation provided by the peer team at the end of their on-site visit (9th-11th October 2017). In presenting feedback to you, they have done so as fellow local government officers and members, not professional consultants or inspectors. By its nature, the peer challenge is a snapshot in time. We appreciate that some of the feedback may be about things you are already addressing and progressing.

4. Feedback

4.1 Understanding of the local place and priority setting

The council has a strong and clear understanding of the borough, its communities and their needs. The Deal as the brand for Wigan and what it stands for is very clear and widely owned and understood. It is talked about widely, both inside and outside of the council as a positive force for good. The challenges facing Wigan are widely shared, not only by the statutory agencies that might be expected, but are also widely understood by residents, partners and community organisations.

The council has an ambition to bring in the best and innovative work from elsewhere to the benefit of Wigan, both for communities and for the council. Work is ongoing on behavioural insights to understand what else the council can do to bring about change in its communities, as we applying these ideas to how the organisation is managed too. This extends to exploring happiness indicators with the town of Aarhus in Denmark, to see what can be gleaned and applied for local benefit. In early October 2017 Manchester Evening News reported that Wigan is the happiest place to live in Greater Manchester.

There is a good degree of analysis and understanding of the data available to the council, and information about the scale of problems is readily available, and presented in an accessible way. This includes the widespread use of 'plans on a page' encompassing the issues and actions to tackle them.

4.2 Leadership of Place

The leadership of the council is visible both within and beyond the borough, particularly for the role that the Leader, Deputy Leader and senior councillors play in the sub-region through the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA). The Leader of the Council plays a strong leadership role at the Combined Authority where he is the lead member for Health and Social Care. The visits of the Leader and Chief Executive to areas of the borough to listen to stakeholders and communities is valued by those who participate.

The professional leadership of the council is also widely respected through the Chief Executive and her management team. She brings outstanding leadership to the council, widely recognised both internally by staff and externally by stakeholders, businesses and residents. Leadership is widely dispersed through the organisation and those members and officers who engaged with the peer challenge team are clearly ambitious for the council and the borough, and willing to take risks.

Partnership working is strong and an impression is gained of a connected and cohesive approach to working with stakeholders and agencies. Often unprompted external partners, including businesses, readily talk about the positive attributes of the council and its members of staff, at all levels.

However there is room for improvement and visible engagement between the council and some organisations and individuals within the health sector. Some of this may relate to the different pressures and drivers facing partners, but greater commitment from and closer working with partners at the CCG and mental health has the potential to achieve a great deal more for Wigan, as well as for the organisations involved. An example which illustrates variable commitment is the failure of some health staff to participate in agreed approaches and interventions because they have not received the relevant yet available training. This applies to the senior levels within partners' organisations, as well as at practitioner level delivering frontline services, and the council needs to give some consideration to a "hearts and minds" exercise to improve engagement.

4.3 Organisational leadership and governance

There are good member-officer working relationships across the council. This is clear from how both aspects of the council talk about how well they work together, and there is mutual respect for others' roles. Where there are occasional issues arising due to poor behaviours, these are dealt with and effectively through the council's protocols and through professional and calm management engagement.

The Leader and Chief Executive run fortnightly Listening into Action sessions with staff from across the council. This enables employees to engage with and listen to what the council is trying to achieve. The extent of the coverage these events is widespread and involvement in the sessions is valued by staff. It also allows the senior leadership of the council to hear directly of issues of concern for staff and to provide direct support and encouragement to them. Although these are time-intensive sessions the investment paid into them seems to have been realised.

Staff also value the culture of the council. A number of people who engaged with the peer challenge offered experiences of working for other councils and suggest that Wigan is a very good place to work. This is due to a number of reasons, not least the leadership style shown by the Chief Executive and the council's Directors. This extends to a style of staff engagement and appraisals called My Time which place emphasis on a strengths based approach, and a focus on a personable style of management which supports conversations about wellbeing.

The council's reward scheme My Rewards is also valued by staff. It includes a wide range of benefits which fit and reiterate the overall ethos of the Deal about feeling valued at work and being rewarded for performance and commitment. It includes discounted gym membership, high street rewards and online shopping.

The Audit Committee is well run and is regarded as having good councillors and good independent members who are working well together, and who focus on the right things. Unusually the committee is seen as an active part of the public and councillor scrutiny process, not as is often the case elsewhere, a bureaucratic function to sign off accounts. This approach should be commended.

4.4 Financial planning and viability

There is a clear and tangible approach whereby the council's finances closely follow its stated priorities, and can be clearly traced through the Medium Term Financial Strategy through to service delivery. Reductions of £131m since 2010 have been managed without relying on reserves to balance the budget, through an approach to budget setting described by the Chartered Institute of Management Accountants as realistic.

The council has managed the ongoing budget reductions well and there are clear plans to deal with the remaining financial challenges. The evident good working relationships between directors enables them to have honest conversations at senior management level and with councillors about where cost pressures lie and how they will tackle them, including re-profiling proposed savings as and when required.

Financial planning has included an 'invest to save' approach where investment has been made across the council in transformation programmes, which in turn have enabled savings to be delivered. This has been a considerable achievement in the context of the scale of the cuts the council has had to make, relative to its overall budget. Council tax increases have been frozen in previous years, with the exception of the adult social care precept. Earmarked reserves are around £70m, being allocated to the council's large scale transformation programme.

Further budget reductions of £27.5m need to be made between 2018/19 and 2020/21, when the council's revenue budget is estimated to be £221.4m. There are however cost pressures in-year in children's services of around £3m and in adult social care of around £1m, and any potential increases in council tax or business rates growth will not be sufficient to cover these overspends. There are plans to reduce the numbers of Looked after Children by focusing more effort on children at the edge of care, and to reduce the numbers of children placed in out of area placements by recruiting more foster carers: both of these approaches if successful will help to contain expenditure.

Closer working with health partners particularly in adult social care has the potential to bring significant benefits for local people. However it also presents the potential for significant risks for the council too unless the health sector is able to take a longer term view and move away from the current payment-by-result approach.

The council also is widely respected for its approach to its finances and is regarded as

working well with others, and bringing leadership in this area to partnership working across the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA).

4.5 Capacity to deliver

The council's capacity to improve in the future is positive. This view is partly based on our observations of the organisation as a whole, and the widespread confidence in its political and managerial leadership, but also the strong 'can-do' culture at all levels. The council is also in a relatively strong financial position to deal with future challenges, having good reserves and well managed resources. External observers are clear that the council tackles issues head-on and quickly once they have been identified.

Staff morale is good and improving across the council. This is reflected in very positive overall results in the staff survey conducted in summer 2017, which was constructed around the concept of the Deal, and shows improvement since the previous survey in 2015. In particular staff reflect that they understand both the Deal for residents and the Deal for Staff. The latter was created following a suggestion from a member of staff in 2014. However there are more tentative responses about how the Deal relates to how individuals work, whether people feel they have the tools and resources to undertake their jobs successfully and about individual recognition for a job well done. There are also variations in morale across departments, with less positive returns in Children's Services.

Staff performance places more emphasis on behaviours than targets. The behaviours expected of staff of Be Positive, Be Accountable and Be Courageous are clearly articulated through a number of different avenues, including the Wigan Experience, the staff appraisal system called MyTime and also appear to be at the forefront of day to day working. An interesting element of the articulated behaviours is clarity about what the council doesn't expect its staff to do through a series of statements including not taking undeserved credit, not speaking about the borough in a negative way and not making assumptions about people.

Investment in behavioural change has been made both internally and externally. Internally the Wigan Experience has been designed and run in-house, with the intention of supporting employees to understand their roles in delivering the Deal. It has attracted much attention from other organisations and has been awarded the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development's Experience of the Year. In addition the council has made a conscious decision when making new staff appointments to focus on the attitude of applicants.

The mental health of staff has a high profile and the first cohort of mental health champions has been trained. Emphasis is also placed on managers understanding mental health and training for them has been provided.

An assets based approach is being applied to sickness absence, with a focus on what an employee can, rather than cannot do. This is a positive move and may have some inroads into further reducing the number of sickness absence days lost per employee, which is currently around 10 days per FTE. Although some of the sickness absence returns will

undoubtedly be skewed by a small number of individuals with longer term health problems, there is a broader issue which we were unable to understand: if staff morale is good and the culture of the council is very positive, why haven't the days lost to sickness been reduced more radically?

In Adult Social Care the council is entering into a new phase with commissioned homecare providers, using an ethical framework and providers have signed up to the Deal principles. The Head of Commissioning is working with the providers, who have around 3,000 staff, to become adopters of new ways of working with individuals and communities. There is widespread acknowledgement of the practical difficulties involved in tackling demand for services, particularly in social care. Wigan has reduced the numbers of looked after children and made progress on delayed transfers of care, and performance in these areas is good relative to the GMCA, but the council is not complacent and recognises that performance is fragile and dependent on many variables that require close attention.

There are some good examples of demand management in adults and children's social care. The council has a programme of work in place to ensure staff can work in an agile way and is making progress in this respect, however this should be progressed at pace to enable frontline staff, in particular, to focus on action in communities. The return of the ALMO back into the council has presented some challenges on how systems connect with the broader council systems. There are also staff concerns about having more consistency of equipment and access to networks, and connectivity in some parts of the borough, such as Leigh, is poor which makes it harder for staff to do their jobs. Staff told us of an ambition to go paperless in some areas. While all staff can access ICT from home some staff, for security reasons, have to use council provided equipment – from our conversations it appears that staff in some areas may need more support on how to utilise remote access from home. Staff told us that when the council gets to the point of fully embedding place-based working "it will be the icing on the cake".

5. The Deal

5.1 The impact of the Deal on communities

The voluntary and community sector told us that the Deal has improved the relationship between the council and them as well as with residents. It has also enabled the council to clearly communicate its ambitions and challenges, particularly on finances, to the public. There are numerous examples of where action is being taken to deliver the Deal, including the recruitment of 12,000 community health champions.

There is some emerging evidence of the Deal having some impact especially on adult social care and reducing the numbers of looked after children, and suppressing increases in demand across services.

However behavioural change by the public is vital to the continued success of the Deal and will take some time to make further inroads, and at times will be challenging for the council to manage.

Although the Deal is beginning to be effective in reducing demand for council services as

well as changing the public's perception of what residents and communities can do for themselves, the council should consider what else it can do to reduce demand, at earlier stages. For example, rather than focusing on the Deal as the mechanism where the council works with its communities and partners to support people with poor physical and mental health, the council could consider undertaking a longer term more ambitious, but also more challenging approach to reduce that demand.

Creating better conditions for people to become more economically active would in the longer term enable individuals to get jobs and be able to look after themselves, in a way which is more sustainable in the longer term. Stronger links need to be explored between the broad ambition for economic growth and the social aspects of regeneration, targeting those who are most disadvantaged in the most deprived communities. This would make the overarching approach to economic growth more inclusive and potentially of more benefit to those in Wigan who need it the most, rather than creating new jobs which potentially are not filled by people from the borough.

The Deal and how it has grown encompass a great deal of innovation and the willingness of the council's members and officers to think and act differently, and to an extent that much of its growth appears to have been based on trying new approaches as they evolve. To date this has been successful in developing the Deal as a concept and encouraging people to innovate and experiment. However if the Deal is to be embedded further then more comprehensive evaluation of impact and clearer outcome measures are needed, so that going forward in an environment of reduced resources, the council can be clear about where it can have the greatest impact on those who need it most. This may be a challenge to the established and organic way of working, but it will be needed if the Deal is to stay focused and make inroads into improving the lives of people with the most complex and resource intensive needs.

There is rightly a considerable degree of interest from other councils and the public sector more widely about the Deal and how the council works. The council is well-placed to share its knowledge about what works and collaborate with other councils to make the case for early intervention to government.

Lots of case studies have been undertaken to articulate the impact of the Deal and include some powerful stories showing where a difference has been made. These are a valuable reference source. There is widespread awareness of the need to show outcomes, over and above case studies, and some metrics have been developed. Overall a more systematic approach to measuring impact is needed, especially for more complex service users.

5.2 How is the Deal changing the council?

The council has a very positive and innovative culture. This is evident in a number of ways, for example in staff surveys, and what partners and businesses readily volunteer about working with the organisation. Councillors and employees talk very positively about the council and their roles, and also what they want to achieve for Wigan's communities: we saw this extensively during our onsite work. Staff are engaged across the organisation and told us of a high degree of empowerment to deliver the Deal, and that they recognise

and are able to act upon the strapline of the Staff Deal's Be Positive, Be Accountable, Be Courageous. It is also clear that this empowerment enables the council to take action at pace and scale.

The next phase of the Deal has been piloted at Platt Bridge and is being rolled out across seven service delivery footprints for the whole of the borough. Not all members appear to understand how delivery in the seven footprints will be undertaken, nor how it will affect communities in each of the areas. There are also some emerging staff concerns about how the footprints will work, that the footprints are at differing stages of development, and whether or not momentum can be maintained across all of the areas.

There is good partnership working with care providers and evidence of a co-production ethos. The new single commissioning function and the seven area footprints present an opportunity for further progress to be made.

Although there is a Deal for Councillors currently being piloted, it does not appear to be widely understood or have much profile. In particular members could play an enhanced role in community engagement with the right support, further allowing the Deal to be embedded at local level. Consideration needs to be given to developing a clearer vision for the role of councillors within the community. Part of this could include devolving an element of the CIF to members in their local areas, but there could be a much stronger link between councillors and the local joint service delivery teams. This is vital if officer teams are to be fully embedded in community networks and to have stronger local democratic accountability. It will also help to ensure that the Deal focuses on outcomes for communities rather than organisational process outcomes.

We heard mixed views about the council's corporate enabling services such as legal, property and ICT and how they are able to deliver on the Deal. Some stakeholders feel that the corporate services are sometimes perceived to be blockers to progress and innovation whereas others feel that corporate services still need to keep the council functioning properly and legally, often to protect the council's best interests. It may be useful to remind staff of the role of corporate functions and what they too are trying to achieve for the council, particularly on what is and is not permissible, so that everyone's roles and responsibilities are understood.

On ICT there is room to improve how the council interacts with the public through digital engagement, and any future roll out needs to ensure that the right services are digitised. Particularly as the council works more closely with health, but also internally, there will be an ongoing challenge of streamlining and adapting systems so that they support integration and minimise duplication of effort, particularly across the wider public sector, GMP for example. This may require some financial investment to get right.

5.3 The Deal, Children's Services, the most complex cases and the plan

The Deal appears to be working for the children of the borough, and parents told us that Wigan is a good place to bring up children. The Ofsted inspection reported in March 2017 gave an overall rating of good and highlighted adoption services as outstanding, although stated that safeguarding approaches require improvement. Performance in education is

high and achievement is amongst the best in Greater Manchester.

A number of good examples illustrate a child-centric approach, including the Mockingbird foster care programme, No Wrong Door where the council is redesigning its services for children in care, and the SEND respite service for children and their families. There are opportunities to further embed Deal principles for complex service users but this will be a challenge especially as demand is increasing.

We heard of concerns that it can be up to 2 years to get an SEN assessment for a child and this is causing considerable frustration and anxiety for parents. Greater engagement is needed in some instances between social workers and parents, so that they can be kept informed about progress. We also heard of frustrations on occupational equipment, particularly about the wrong equipment being delivered.

There are targets of 30% fewer Looked after Children and 100 more foster carers, and although the council can point to progress these targets are very ambitious and should be reviewed over the next 12 months.

5.4 How can behavioural change be extended to partners?

At the strategic level the majority of partners are engaged with and very positive about the Deal and what the council is aiming to achieve. In particular police and fire leaders are able to report reduced offending rates and lower incidences of fires.

As might be anticipated where people have the opportunity to be co-located, build solid practical working relationships and share structures, is where the Deal appears to have the best traction and impact. Some of this may relate to priorities for action being tangible and openly shared in a way that is easier to do if staff are working together in the same building on the same issues.

However, not all health partners have engaged as much with the Deal, nor kept pace with it to the same extent as other stakeholders. This may be due to a whole range of different factors including national departmental pressures, a reticence to be involved until more proof of impact has been shown in difficult areas such as delayed transfers of care, or due to personality differences, but nonetheless there are some tangible differences between the council's and the health sector's cultures. Whatever the cause, there is more to do to ensure that progress can be made which tackles the evident serious health inequalities in Wigan. More engagement is needed with GPs and community health practitioners about the Deal, what it means for them and how they can get involved.

The proposal for a joint chief officer for the CCG and the council creates a significant opportunity to improve relationships and working practices. Consideration needs to be given to range of improvement mechanisms including clear and visible leadership, a concerted organisational development programme which supports change, more integrated ICT systems and clear metrics to show when improvement is being delivered.

There are some significant financial challenges ahead in the health arena that may test relationships including the reduction in the 0-19 contract and the inherited hospital

contract.

One of the challenges facing the council as it moves forward with the Deal is how to get partners to change their behaviours and attitudes to doing things differently, and some of this may be inevitable given the different pressures and drivers facing other organisations. Nonetheless there is also a hearts and minds exercise that is needed to show how the Deal may work in areas new to some organisations, especially those within health where performance is tightly measured and driven by different targets.

5.5 Developing the Deal for businesses and maximising corporate social responsibility

Business representatives rate the council for its can-do culture and how it engages with them. The Forward Board provides an opportunity for the council's plans and policies to be incorporate businesses' views, for example, challenging housing growth assumptions. The council's ability to engage with businesses is good and stakeholders describe meetings with the private sector usually being "packed" with attendees who want to hear what the council is doing, and make contributions to discussions and plans.

The good working relationships between businesses and the council have been of benefit to the town, for example when the BhS store closed there was a concerted effort to place workers losing their jobs into full time employment elsewhere and to provide retraining.

There is good work to channel council initiatives through businesses e.g. the council has provided autism and domestic violence awareness training for private sector employees. There is an opportunity here to link some of this training more closely to skills development and tackling skills shortages, particularly in technological skills.

Further work is needed on the council's economic strategy is needed to position the borough as a place for inclusive growth and which promotes Wigan as a good and green place to live, and maximises the advantages from the HS2 development more overtly. Businesses are also keen for Wigan town centre to have a clearer identity and feel there should be a stronger focus on improving the walking route to the centre from the train station. The overall concept of the Deal appears to be understood by the private sector, especially the aspect of people doing things for themselves. A new strategy would benefit from having strong business input and being clear about what they can contribute to its success: there is a great deal of goodwill available across the borough that can be harnessed to deliver a new approach.

5.6 The Deal for the street, increasing recycling and reducing environmental crime

Staff feel that the Deal for the street addresses silo working at front line level, especially for cleanliness and environmental improvement. There appears to be a good understanding by staff of what the Deal means on the ground, and good buy-in too. The council is using the Deal for the street to encourage staff to be the eyes and ears of the council across its delivery in the borough, over and above their specific service areas, for example in safeguarding. Whilst it is still early days, the Deal for the street is a great concept which is showing results already, although it needs time to embed to realise its full potential.

Staff want stronger ward member engagement on frontline service issues and would welcome greater involvement and visibility from councillors in their work.

5.7 Sustainability and developing a meaningful strategic voice for the 3rd sector

We heard very positive views about the Deal and its impact on community groups, and the sector overall feels that it is treated as an equal partner with the council. The absence of an overarching voluntary and community sector organisation to represent views is not felt to be detrimental to how the council engages, and organisations involved feel that the current arrangements are meaningful and work well.

In the longer term some consideration should be given to providing a degree of grant funding for particular projects to make them and some organisations sustainable, so that there stability within the sector. This will be important for some projects, especially those dealing with complex and difficult case work, so that they can plan ahead for delivery.

The sector has also benefited from the £9m Community Investment Fund and values it. There is scope to improve both the flexibility of the Fund and how it is communicated across the borough. Not all community and voluntary organisations appear to be familiar with it, although that could be a result of not having an overarching representative body. Although it is liked and valued, does the Fund reach and have an impact on individuals and communities with the most need, or is it more readily available to communities which are better organised? The seven geographical footprints might benefit from elements of the Fund being devolved to them, so that partners and councillors could engage and support projects in specific localities. Going forward further consideration could be given to streamlining processes for accessing the Fund and how to improve the communication of decisions made on the Fund.

5.8 The Deal for the future

As the Deal expands there is a need to keep revisiting what it means and to ensure that the spirit of the core principles are protected. There is a delicate balancing act to be achieved between continuing to innovate and maintaining the enthusiasm that the Deal represents, whilst ensuring that it delivers for residents in the future. Sometimes it can feel as if the focus of the Deal is more about the council and how it operates rather than the potential impact and outcomes it could achieve for individuals and communities.

A key element of the future will be to ensure that expansion is inclusive and reaches those residents who have the most to gain the most from the public service reform agenda. The Deal is providing some good solutions for people who have difficulties now across a whole range of issues, as well as changing how the council and its partners work, but to an extent this is about treating existing problems rather than changing the longer term environment. Put simply, more resilient people equates to more self-reliance and employability, and so a future consideration going forward should be “are we creating the right conditions for people to live well?”. Does the Deal have a strong enough impetus yet to tackle deprivation and get residents out of poverty? Some of this investment will need to be for the long term, and may involve many steps on a

ladder of confidence for participants so that eventually they are able to take advantage of opportunities.

The borough's approach to culture has largely focused on football and rugby. We also heard of a tendency across Greater Manchester to look towards Manchester City Centre as the only cultural focus for the sub-region. However Wigan has many assets and expanding the cultural offer to include other interests needs more active thought, and a new cultural strategy linked closely to a new economic strategy should be considered.

We found it difficult to see how the Deal will incorporate health and social care with the seven area footprints being developed. And whilst there is confidence and enthusiasm that it will integrate, some thought needs to be given to consistency across the borough, although consistency in this sense does not mean doing the same thing everywhere.

6. Next steps

Immediate next steps

We appreciate the senior managerial and political leadership will want to reflect on these findings and suggestions in order to determine how the organisation wishes to take things forward. As part of the peer challenge process, there is an offer of further activity to support this. The LGA is well placed to provide additional support, advice and guidance on a number of the areas for development and improvement and we would be happy to discuss this. Gill Taylor, Principal Adviser is the main contact between your authority and the Local Government Association (LGA). Her contact details are: gill.taylor@local.gov.uk

In the meantime we are keen to continue the relationship we have formed with the Council throughout the peer challenge. We will endeavour to provide signposting to examples of practice and further information and guidance about the issues we have raised in this report to help inform ongoing consideration.

Follow up visit

The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge process includes a follow up visit. The purpose of the visit is to help the Council assess the impact of the peer challenge and demonstrate the progress it has made against the areas of improvement and development identified by the peer team. It is a lighter-touch version of the original visit and does not necessarily involve all members of the original peer team. The timing of the visit is determined by the Council. Our expectation is that it will occur within the next 2 years.

Next Corporate Peer Challenge

The current LGA sector-led improvement support offer includes an expectation that all councils will have a Corporate Peer Challenge or Finance Peer Review every 4 to 5 years. It is therefore anticipated that the Council will commission their next Peer Challenge before 2022.