

WIGAN COUNCIL

FUNDING BOOST FOR COMMUNITY PROJECTS

A group of innovative community projects in Wigan Borough will go ahead thanks to a £350,000 funding boost. A total of 76 projects will share the investment as Wigan Council announced the latest round of its Deal for Communities Investment Fund.

The pot of money is now in its fifth round and by the end of this round a total of £9m will have been invested in more than 450 groups in Wigan Borough. The council has invested millions of pounds into local projects and groups who are tackling local priorities and helping to solve some of the borough's biggest social problems. It's all part of The Deal – Wigan Council's informal contract with its residents where both sides work together to make the borough a better place.

The investment ranges from £200 to £10,000 and is split into three categories – start-ups, small investments and getting going, which is a specific strand of funding to get people active in their communities.

Investments include £4,000 to True Colours CIC to deliver the borough's first autism specific festival, £2,000 to Atherton Salvation Army to host youth activities, £10,000 to Reflect Therapeutic services for walk and talk therapy to improve people's mental health and £10,000 to Christ Church Pennington for increased youth provision in Leigh. A programme dedicated to giving girls aged 11-16 the self-belief and skills needed to pursue a career in digital and tech was given £8,930 investment. The group said: "This is fantastic news! Thanks so much for believing in us. We're really looking forward to working with you."

Strike a Chord CIC was given £8,800 investment to host a festival in Lilford Park. Bevan Thompson said: "We are delighted to receive funding. With it we intend to bring a live music event, artisan stalls and a family day out for the people of Leigh to enjoy. We are hoping to build on the success of our inaugural festival last year, with a bigger and better event, after listening to feedback from the community. The festival is planned to highlight the wider aims of the CIC of bringing music to the people, and with the long term goal of creating music hub in Leigh for local bands, young people and disadvantaged people to get into music, who normally may not have been able to

Cllr Chris Ready, Cabinet Member For Communities, said: "Unlike so many other places we are bucking the trend and investing money into our communities. We have already seen it have a huge impact on residents and we are seeing real results. "Other local authorities ask us what the secret formula is in Wigan but we just have a common sense approach and a great relationship with our communities. Our innovative way of working is being mirrored in other areas which we're very proud of.

"We face many different social issues and we know local people are best placed with the knowledge and connections to help us to address and tackle these problems. We've given the control to our residents and we're seeing it work and have real impact. "We are delighted to be able to keep supporting so many of our fantastic groups and small organisations." The big idea applications for the fund will be announced in 2018

For information please contact The Deal for Communities team at dealforcommunities@wigan.gov.uk

HAVE YOUR SAY ON SOCIAL HOUSING

Tenants across England are being given the opportunity to have their voices heard about social housing through an online questionnaire.

The government is asking tenants in Wigan Borough to share their views on social housing before the deadline closes on 31st January 2018 to understand what is important to residents and any concerns they may have. The questionnaire aims to give tenants a more effective voice following the Grenfell Tower tragedy last year.

Wigan Council's tests on the cladding on their seven high-rise flats have shown they are not the same as those used at Grenfell and do not pose a safety risk, however, the local authority's cabinet have agreed to install sprinklers in all blocks anyway, costing around £2m.

Councillor Terry Halliwell, cabinet member for housing and welfare at the council said: "Our main priority is the safety and welfare of our tenants. We conduct fire risk assessments weekly in each of our blocks to ensure any necessary changes are flagged in the earliest stages.

"We have already chosen to press ahead with installing sprinklers in all our tower blocks in light of the Grenfell Tower tragedy. "We would encourage tenants to have their say and share their views as part of this national questionnaire."

The questionnaire responses will inform the Green Paper on social housing in England, which the government aim to publish in spring.

To fill out the questionnaire, head to: www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/tenants2017

ARE YOU GOING DRY THIS JANUARY?

Last year 79 per cent of participants of Dry January saved money, 63 per cent had better sleep and more energy and 49 per cent lost weight. January 2018 is expected to see over 3.1 million people in the UK ditch the booze for Dry January, according to a YouGov poll commissioned by the charity Alcohol Concern.

The national Dry January campaign has launched in what will be one of the busiest periods of the year for the emergency services as Christmas parties lead to alcohol-related injuries and violence. Alcohol costs the NHS an estimated £3.5 billion each year, which amounts to £120 for every taxpayer.

Two-thirds of people who attempt Dry January make it through the month without drinking, while 72 percent maintain lower levels of harmful drinking six months later than before Dry January.

Professor Kate Ardern, director for public health at Wigan Council said: "Christmas can easily be a time for excess, particularly for those who enjoy a drink to celebrate. So why not kick start a healthy new year by taking part in Dry January."

Dry January is run by national charity Alcohol Concern, which merged with Alcohol Research UK in April to become an even stronger advocate for a world in which alcohol causes no harm. To sign up to Dry January and get support every step of the way go to www.dryjanuary.org.uk

PROTECTING COMMUNITIES FROM FLOOD

Close to £1m has been spent on essential flooding repairs to Wigan Borough and residents are encouraged to ensure they are prepared for winter weather.

Wigan Council was allocated £857,000 from the Department for Transport in April 2017 to carry out repairs to roads and culverts that were damaged in the 2015 Boxing Day floods. As a result of the funding a number of drains and more than 135 sections of highway have been repaired.

The council has also commissioned a survey of all main roads and known flooding hotspots to see how the risk of flooding can be reduced in the future. This piece of work across the whole borough involves putting

cameras down each drain to see if there are any blockages in the system and means the council will be able to gather detailed information about the drains.

Storm Eva battered Wigan Borough on Boxing Day 2015 when more than a month's rainfall fell in 24 hours leaving many properties, roads and greenspaces damaged. Work was also completed earlier in the year to repair the drain networks in Lilford Park, Platt Bridge, Crooke village and at key locations in Aspull which were all badly affected.

Councillor Kevin Anderson, cabinet member for environment, said: "This money gave us an extra boost to complete further repairs to our network. These measures should protect our communities and reduce the future flood risk. "It's also important that residents take steps to protect themselves and their own properties from flooding. If you know your property is in a flood zone then please sign up to the flooding warning system and make sure you have insurance to cover any damage caused by flooding."

Other works including lining of the sewer at Park Road/ Leyland Road, Hindley, repair of Coffin Lane culvert at Bolton Road, Bamfurlong and the replacement of highway drains on Shevington Lane and Church Lane, Shevington and Smethurst Road Billinge.

You can check whether your property is at flood risk by contacting the Flood Advisory Service.

Tips for protecting yourself from flooding:

- Register for flood warnings
- Buy sand bags and store these ready to use
- Check your insurance cover
- Develop a personal flood plan

If flooding occurs:

- Don't drive through standing flood water if you aren't sure of the depth
- Don't enter or swim in flood water
- Make sure you have sandbags ready
- Turn off all electrical items if your property is flooded
- Move your belongings upstairs if your property is flooded

More information at: <https://wigan.gov.uk/Resident/Crime-Emergencies/Flooding.aspx>

WORKING TOGETHER TO HELP OUR HOMELESS

A new and improved approach to homelessness is helping to keep thousands of residents off the streets of Wigan. The approach, which sees Wigan Council working more closely with the voluntary and private sector, is helping to deliver more effective support and rehabilitation for the borough's homeless and rough sleepers by identifying and supporting those at risk as early as possible to prevent them reaching crisis point.

In addition to the current day time programmes offered by a number of groups, the new approach will implement a borough wide outreach provision, which will operate out of hours and at weekends. Two rehabilitation and support hubs will also be created, bringing together all relevant services to help rough sleepers.

The Leigh hub, based at Leigh Court House, will be operational at the end of January 2018 and the Wigan hub will be operational in summer 2018.

There will be emergency access beds available for the homeless and borough-wide services will be available seven days a week.

If you see a homeless person on the streets, please email roughsleep@wigan.gov.uk with as much information as possible (including their location) and our officers will investigate. You will also receive an update on the situation. Those who find themselves on the streets can also ring our out of hour's service on: 01942 828777

MANAGE YOUR MONEY, DON'T STRUGGLE WITH DEBT

'Don't struggle with debt' is the message of a new campaign launching in Wigan Borough. Wigan Council has teamed up with Unify and the Citizen's Advice Bureau to help residents manage their money at one of the most expensive times of the year.

In the last twelve months, (October 2016 – November 2017) 1,718 people visited Wigan Council's crisis desk due to having no food, no money or no gas or electric so the local campaign will encourage residents to get support if they are worried about falling into debt or are already struggling.

There is lots of local support and advice out there for people but sometimes it can be difficult find help before it is too late. Credit Unions can provide loans for individuals without a good credit history and interest rates start at just 12.7 per cent, compared to payday lenders which charge APR of up to 1,509 per cent. The council is warning residents against using a payday lenders or loan sharks and is instead urging people to apply for a cheaper loan through a Credit Union or seek advice for how to manage their finances.

Lesley O'Halloran, Assistant Director for Customer Services at Wigan Council said: "If you find that you are struggling with debt and are unable to manage repayments, it is important to think about which debts you need to deal with first. There can be serious consequences to not paying your bills and we don't want people falling into debt. "At this time of year it can be easy to spend money on things that aren't needed and there is support out there for residents who need help managing their money. There are cheaper and safer alternatives to payday lenders and loan sharks. Although they may seem like the easy option, people don't realise how much interest they charge and it can be so damaging."

Angela Fishwick, Chief Executive of Unify Credit Union, said: "Residents should take extra care when borrowing money to pay for the cost of Christmas. Always ask how much the repayments will be, and what is the total cost of credit and only borrow from licensed lenders. Don't be tempted to borrow from doorstep lenders charging on average 400 per cent APR or from payday lenders charging in excess of 1000 per cent APR. If you are struggling to repay your high cost loan, talk to Unify, we are here to help."

For help and advice on how to manage your money, visit: www.wigan.gov.uk/moneyadvice
Alternatively, email welfarerightsadvice@wigan.gov.uk for information about the council's welfare outreach sessions.

ADVICE AT HAND EASIER THAN EVER

Starting Point Plus will now have longer opening hours and a new online service when Wigan Council begins offering the highly regarded support which has previously been provided by Age UK Wigan Borough.

To find out more go to www.wigan.gov.uk/startingpointplus.

The new phone lines will be available Monday to Friday 8.45 am to 5 pm and 8.45 am to 1 pm on Saturdays.

To contact the service call 01942 489011

THINK YOU CAN FOSTER?

To find out more about fostering and how to become a foster carer in Wigan Borough go to www.wigan.gov.uk/fostering and for more details on 'You Can Foster' go to www.youcanfoster.org

INCREDIBLE EDIBLE WIGAN

What is Incredible Edible?

What Can I Grow?

How to get involved

Is there Funding Available?

Keep up to Date with Events & Workshops

Go to <https://www.wigan.gov.uk/Council/The-Deal/Deal-Communities/Incredible-Edible/index.aspx>

For lots more information

WIGAN COUNCIL'S GOOD TRADER SCHEME

Wigan Council's "Good Trader Scheme" is a directory of over 200 local, reputable businesses. All the listings have star ratings of up to five gold stars that previous customers have awarded them.

Ratings are given based on workmanship and customer service; the more satisfied the customer the higher the rating.

The scheme has been set up to ensure that the residents of the Wigan Borough are getting a fair deal when it comes to work round the home.

Trading Standards check out the traders' trading history before allowing them to be part of the scheme.

Whether it's painting and decorating, joinery, or just tidying up your garden make sure you visit www.wigan.gov.uk/goodtrader. Or ring the Citizens Advice Consumer Helpline on 03454 040506.

If you are aged over 50 or have a disability Wigan Council Starting Point Plus can access the Scheme on your behalf, contact Starting Point on 01942 489011

HEART HEALTH HELPS WITH FIGHT AGAINST DEMENTIA

To find out more about dementia support visit www.wigan.gov.uk/dementia

TOGETHER FOR ADOPTION

To find out more about Together for adoption visit www.togetherforadoption.co.uk

COUNCIL TAX EXEMPTION DECLARED FOR ALL CARE LEAVERS IN WIGAN BOROUGH

Young adults who have left care are to be exempt from paying council tax in Wigan Borough. Wigan Council's cabinet this week approved plans to exempt anyone aged between 18 and 21 who has previously been cared for by Wigan Council from paying council tax.

It is hoped the move will help support care leavers to establish independence and reduce the risk of these young people from getting into debt and rent arrears at this crucial time in their life. The change has been introduced by the council immediately and will be back-dated to April. Care leavers in full time education up to the age of 25 are already exempt.

James Winterbottom, Wigan Council's director for children's services, said: "Care leavers are among the most vulnerable groups in our community but also have many individual skills and talents that benefit our communities in many ways and we want to make sure that we support them to make best use of these.

"As corporate parents and through our commitment in The Deal the council wants to ensure that young people's experiences of leaving care and moving into independent living are positive and improve their life chances – just as any parent does. "We are proud to have introduced this change and know through

speaking with our young care leavers and through the research available that this will make a big difference to their lives.”

Wigan Council supports young people through the Deal for Children and Young People and its children and young people’s service was rated as ‘Good’ by Ofsted earlier this year. Most children who come into care have experienced complex trauma and faced significant challenges early in life.

National research shows that care leavers often experience debt and arrears of rent, council tax, household bills and transport costs and feel insufficiently prepared for independent living when they left care. Care leavers are often in a position where the transition from care to independent living is swift and at a younger age than their peers.

There are 142 care leavers aged between 18 and 21 living in Wigan Borough and the exemption will currently directly affect 31 care leavers in the borough who are paying council tax challenges in a bid to improve outcomes for children and families by supporting them to live well and healthy lives. This place-based model puts the emphasis on communities, ensuring services are accessible and visible. The aim is to wrap services around local communities to improve links between organisations.”

FROM THE STREETS TO THE TOWN HALL

A man who has turned his life around after finding himself homeless has championed a scheme that helped him get there.

At age 16, Joseph Shaw, was diagnosed with a mental illness and his relationships with family members were strained. Joe left the familiarity of the care system behind at 18 and found himself on the streets just six months later after falling into rent arrears.

Wigan Council helped Joe get his name on the housing register as a priority resident but before he was housed in Hindley, he drifted from couch-to-couch and slept rough. The council’s care leaver’s team also offered Joe an opportunity to gain experience in the work place through the Confident Futures programme, which offers young people who grew up in the care system the chance to try out different work placements and to develop professional and transferable skills.

Joe did his placement with the council gaining experience in property maintenance, which led to an apprenticeship. Now 20, Joe works full time in the council tax team in the town hall and has nothing but positive things to say about the programme.

He said: “It really has changed my life. It has given me the confidence, resilience and the skills to apply for opportunities I will benefit from. “The council has given me a chance. The organisation’s attitude towards young people is great as they understand we have new ideas and there is a real drive to get young people involved. One of my ideas has even been implemented at work, which makes me feel really valued here. “The level of support I’ve received from colleagues has been tremendous, especially after the recent passing of my brother, Chris, who also had his own troubles and had found himself on the streets. I’m now in touch with my Dad and feel like because of the opportunities I’ve been given, I’ve had the confidence to build these relationships again.” Joe will also benefit from the council’s new motion to waive council tax for care leavers up until the age of 21.

Donna Hall, chief executive of the council said: “We want our residents to be ambitious and successful and we’re committed to investing resources into our young people. “Joe has faced many obstacles in his life from a young age and to see what he has achieved and how he has turned this into a positive is really inspiring. He is a fantastic member of staff and I’m really proud of him.

“The Confident Futures programme offers young care leavers lots of support to help them succeed in whatever job role they choose to go into and to help them live well independently. “We will continue to offer support to help care leavers stay on track as they start to get jobs and move into their own accommodation.”

Any young care leavers who are interested in getting involved in future Confident Futures programmes should email Wigan Council’s aspiring futures team, aspfut@wigan.gov.uk

WEIGHT LOSS PROGRAMME GIVES SANDY A NEW LEASE OF LIFE

Sandy Mottram enrolled onto the Lose Weight Feel Great programme shortly after his 32nd birthday, and hasn’t looked back. For two years Sandy had been taking prescription pain killers every day due to the damage caused through putting pressure on his knees, this was down to his weight gain. At the time he weighed around 18 stone, which was the heaviest he had ever been.

Sandy found the sessions at Lose Weight Feel Great difficult at first as he was trying to tackle the harder levels straight away and was finding it hard to keep up. His instructor worked with him to start at the lower levels with the aim to build up in the weeks ahead. He said: “Having the option to drop down to a lower intensity kept me motivated in those early weeks, I feel if I hadn’t taken their advice I would have been disheartened by my inability to keep up and perhaps I would have stopped attending the classes.”

Each week Sandy would set himself new targets until he was able to maintain his highest level throughout the whole class. He said: “I even started running a mile from my house to the exercise class each week to get warmed up, sometimes I would run home afterwards.”

A few months after Sandy started the programme he adopted a rescue dog named Nico, previously Sandy didn’t feel fit enough to exercise a dog as much as it needed. Now Sandy walks Nico for miles every week and regularly goes running with him. Sandy said: “Nico gets tired before I do.” Managing to reach his target weight in just under six months Sandy lost a total of 4 stone 9 pounds, but more importantly he’s maintained his weight loss for a further eight months.

He reflected on his inspiring journey through the Lose Weight Feel Great programme, Sandy said: “I have enjoyed a wide range of different classes with different instructors, though I found one thing the same in all the classes and this was the extraordinary amount of care that all of the instructors have for every single person on the course, the level of care and attention still overwhelms me each week.”

Sandy now plans his meals and exercise regime for the week and it’s become second nature to him, he genuinely looks forward to it: “I strongly recommend the Lose Weight Feel Great programme to anyone who is looking to make a healthy lifestyle change. “The exercise classes are possible for anybody at any level and there is room to improve each week, this works because it’s not a diet, it is a lifestyle change. If your experience is anything like mine you will never look back!”

For more details regarding weight management please call 01942 496496 or visit the Lose Weight Feel Great webpage.

COULD YOU BE ELIGIBLE FOR HELP WITH YOUR FUEL BILL?

Thousands of residents could be entitled to help reducing their fuel bill thanks to our AWARM Plus scheme.

With temperatures continuing to drop living in a cold home can have a detrimental effect on a person’s physical and mental wellbeing. Wigan Council works closely with Wigan Care and Repair to visit homes

across the borough and complete a Healthy Home Check, which assesses what help and support is available.

The AWARM Plus service is open to anyone who is currently living on a low income, has high energy costs and living with a long term health condition. The service offers a number of energy saving measures to help keep people warm and safe, including draught proofing, loft and wall insulation, benefit checks, energy switching and much more.

Mr Derbyshire from Kitt Green had a Healthy Home Check in April 2017 and it's had a huge impact on his life. When the team visited his home Mr Derbyshire had no heating or means of hot water, his boiler was over ten years old and had broken down, and his living room fire had also been condemned.

At the time of his referral there was no funding available to assist Mr Derbyshire so The Care and Repair team successfully applied to a number of different organisations to access funding on his behalf to ensure the much needed work was carried out. This meant his old unsafe gas fire was capped off and replaced with a new electric fire, and his broken boiler was replaced costing around £2,000, the work was carried out within two weeks.

Mr Derbyshire said: "I can't thank the team enough, I'm so grateful for the help I have been given. "The contractors were excellent and very obliging".

Professor Kate Arden, Director For Public Health at Wigan Council said: "Mr Derbyshire's case is a prime example of the fantastic work that our staff and the Wigan Care and Repair team deliver to our most vulnerable residents. "Living in a cold home carries a number of health risks including flu and more serious conditions such as heart disease, stroke and also depression. I would urge anyone who is struggling with their fuel bill to check what help may be available to you."

If you're struggling to keep warm at home or for more information on AWARM Plus and other schemes available visit www.wigan.gov.uk/warmhome or call 01942 239360

SUPPORT SERVICE CELEBRATES RECRUITING 100TH VOLUNTEER

A woman from Wigan Borough who wouldn't go anywhere on her own after losing her husband has become the 100th person to sign up to volunteer for a service that supports other adults.

Dorothy Hough, from Lowton, lost her confidence after losing her husband years ago and found herself isolated and too scared to go out in public on her own. She heard about Wigan Council's Shared Lives service from a friend and thought it would be good for her to get involved.

Shared Lives works with adults who need support due to disability, age or illness

When an adult is referred to the service they get matched with a volunteer who will be their champion. Staff will ensure the adult and champion have shared interests and help them to develop a friendship.

Dorothy is looking forward to meeting her match and is hoping for an older lady who she can take along to a regular craft group. Dorothy said: "I didn't know what Shared Lives was before my friend told me about it. I'm looking forward to meeting other people and to helping someone else. "When my husband died years ago I was nervous about leaving the house on my own. I still went out with my daughter but I didn't like being in public by myself. "I don't have any previous care experience but the service has been supporting me and I'm really looking forward to being part of it. I hope to build up a good friendship with somebody and make a difference to them.

Anyone aged over 18 can become a champion for Shared Lives and will be matched with someone who will suit their personality. It is up to the champion how many hours they volunteer or what support they can provide and, in return for volunteering their time, the champion receives a modest expense payment.

Councillor Keith Cunliffe, Cabinet Member For Adult Social Care at Wigan Council, said: "What we're trying to do is build friendships. There are many residents across the borough who may be isolated and lonely and simply need a friend. "The resident and the champion both get something out of being part of Shared Lives. Often the champions themselves are lonely and it gives them the chance to give something back and it can make a huge difference to someone's life.

"Some of our volunteers have adults living with them permanently. Others may have full time jobs and only volunteer for a few hours each week. We will match each volunteer with someone who is right for them. "Volunteers have described being part of the service as 'a life shared is a life saved' and 'a shared life is a more fulfilled life'.

"We need more champions – local people with big hearts who want to volunteer and make a difference."

What type of support can champions give?

Day/evening activities – where people can realise their aspirations and do the things that are important to them with support from their champion

Respite/ short-term breaks – where people stay overnight at the home of their champion

Full-time placement –where people live with their champion on a long-term basis and are valued as 'one of the family'

To find out more about becoming a Shared Lives champion email sharedlives@wigan.gov.uk or call 01942 487044