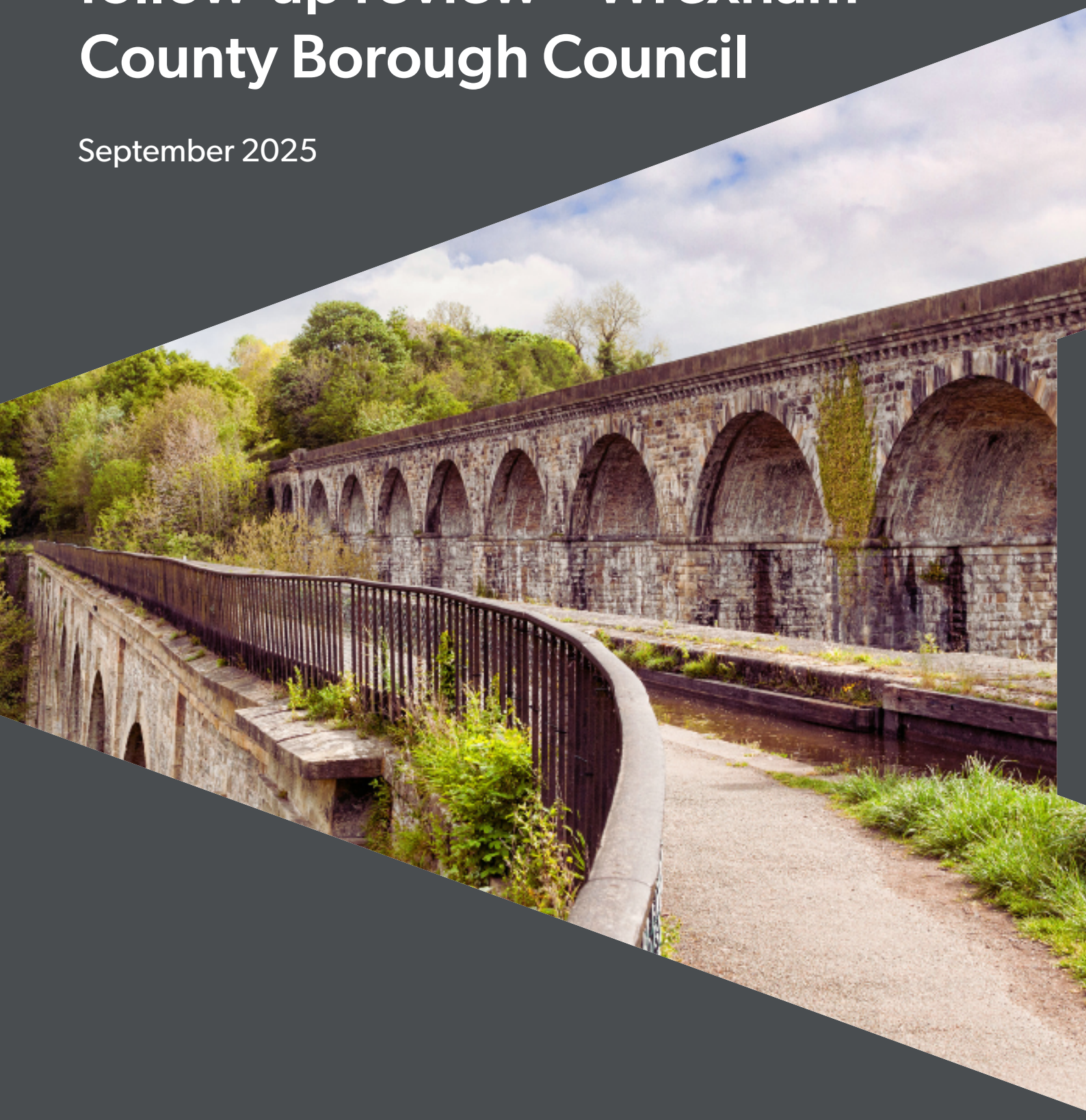


# Values and behaviours follow-up review – Wrexham County Borough Council

September 2025



---

# About us

---

This document has been prepared for the internal use of Wrexham County Borough Council as part of work performed/to be performed in accordance with Section 17 of the Public Audit (Wales) Act 2004 and Section 15 of the Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales) 2015.

## © Auditor General for Wales 2025

You may re-use this publication (not including logos except as an integral part of the document) free of charge in any format or medium. If you re-use it, your re-use must be accurate and must not be in a misleading context. The material must be acknowledged as Auditor General for Wales copyright and you must give the title of this publication. Where we have identified any third party copyright material you will need to obtain permission from the copyright holders concerned before re-use.

## If you need any help with this document

If you would like more information, or you need any of our publications in an alternative format or language, please:

- call us on 029 2032 0500
- email us at [info@audit.wales](mailto:info@audit.wales)

You can use English or Welsh when you get in touch with us – we will respond to you in the language you use.

Corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay.

Mae'r ddogfen hon hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.

The Auditor General for Wales follows the international performance audit standards issued by the International Organisation of Supreme Audit Institutions (INTOSAI).

# Contents

---

Foreword	4
Preface	5
Audit snapshot	6
Recommendations	7
Our findings	8
About us	12

# Foreword

---

This is my second review of values and behaviours at Wrexham County Borough Council since 2023.

Despite my previous recommendations, and statements of good intent from the Council, it is disheartening to observe that it has made insufficient progress in addressing critical governance issues. My officers observed low levels of member engagement in training and personal development, key materials that could be usefully updated, and further examples of poor behaviour and fractured relationships at senior level. Taken together, these factors put at risk the Council's decision making, governance and reputation.

The persistent low engagement in essential training by members is concerning. Personal and professional development are fundamental to understanding roles and responsibilities, and the effective exercise of the Council's statutory duties.

The fact that some key materials haven't been reviewed and strengthened in many years weakens its governance framework.

Councillors and officers are reliant on one another, and relationships founded on mutual respect are essential for good governance. So perhaps of greatest concern for the effective performance of the Council are the ongoing strained relationships and distrust between some members and senior officers. Unless addressed urgently and genuinely, this will undermine the positive work of the wider Council and its workforce.

It is imperative that the Council takes immediate and decisive action to address these fundamental matters of good governance and culture.



**Adrian Crompton**

Auditor General  
for Wales

---



# Preface

---

Since our fieldwork has concluded there have been further examples of press statements which highlight ongoing tensions, which we consider may negatively impact on relationships. Whilst we recognise the rights of both officers and politicians to express their views in public, it is important that they remain mindful of the risks in taking this approach.

In addition, a recent meeting of the Planning Committee was not quorate due to last-minute apologies. It is essential that planning committee continues to function to avoid any unnecessary delays in the planning process.



# Audit snapshot

---

## What we looked at

We reviewed the Council's progress in addressing the recommendations in our [2024 Review of governance arrangements with a specific focus on the Planning Service at Wrexham County Borough Council](#). This follow-up audit focused on values and behaviours across the Council because the recommendations we made weren't confined to the planning service. We sought to answer this main question: **Does the Council have arrangements to secure value for money in its actions to address the 2024 Audit Wales report recommendations on values and behaviours?**

## Why is this important

Effective arrangements to support good values and behaviours are part of good governance. Our previous audit found that ongoing delays in adopting key strategic documents have created significant risks for the Council and relationships between some members and officers were fractured. As a result, the Planning Service was hindered in fulfilling its role as a key enabler across the Council. Reputational damage can erode trust in a local authority's ability to make decisions and manage services effectively. It's therefore important that we follow up on the Council's progress in addressing these concerns.

## What we concluded

The Council has not fully addressed our 2024 recommendations, and we continue to have concerns about fractured relations between some members and some officers. The Council demonstrates limited awareness of expected roles and responsibilities. Without constructive values and behaviours, the Council can't be assured that it has secured value for money.



# Recommendations

---

Our 2024 review made recommendations designed in large part to support the more consistent demonstration of desired values and behaviours. As that remains a crucial area for improvement, those recommendations remain just as relevant today. In addition, we make three further recommendations targeted at some basic building blocks of the Council's governance framework:

## Recommendations

---

- R1 To improve relations between members and officers, the Council should adhere to the communication arrangements within its Protocol for Member / Officer Relations (section 21 of the Council Constitution).
- R2 To improve member knowledge, awareness and skills, the Council should:
- develop and deliver training to members, so it achieves the aims and objectives in its Elected Member Development Strategy and Annual Plan 2025-26; and
  - develop clear accountability measures to improve attendance of training, especially core training, ensuring group leaders can effectively discharge their responsibility under 2021 Local Government and elections act.
- R3 To strengthen governance arrangements, the Council should ensure key materials relating to roles and responsibilities are reviewed and updated periodically to reflect legislative requirements and clearly define expectations in an accessible way.

---



# Our findings

---

## **There are opportunities to refresh key materials to improve understanding of roles and responsibilities**

The Member Code of Conduct handbook, dated April 2016, is a direct copy of the Code as written in the Council Constitution. Its current form misses an opportunity to support members by highlighting the practical implications of the Code of Conduct. Enhancing the handbook with case studies, examples, and including other relevant codes and protocols would transform it into a comprehensive resource for member roles and responsibilities. While the Council does provide training to members that includes case studies, incorporating these examples into an accessible reference document would reinforce learning, improve consistency, and offer ongoing support outside of formal training sessions which aren't always fully attended.

The Protocol for Public Speaking at the Planning Committee which is part of the Planning Code of Conduct has not been updated since June 2015. In addition, the Protocol on Planning Committee Site Inspections, also part of the Planning Code of Conduct, has not been updated since May 2003.

Regularly reviewing policies and materials is important for any organisation to ensure impact, compliance and transparency on current practices. Given these examples, the Council cannot be assured that some of its key policies and materials on conduct, roles and responsibilities have maximum impact.

## **There is limited engagement in training by Members**

There is a significant gap in member attendance for training sessions, which is crucial for understanding roles and responsibilities. This low engagement could hinder the Council's ability to meet its statutory duties.

Training is designed to help members perform their roles and responsibilities to the Council and their communities. Almost half of Wrexham's members did not attend refresher training on their Code of Conduct, including two of the group leaders. Previous training was held in 2022 when they were elected. This creates a risk of limited awareness of the Code of Conduct and limited assurance of compliance with a key arrangement to ensure effective values and behaviours.

'Core' training is that which the Council has deemed high priority for all members and relates to member roles and responsibilities. Many of the core training modules have low attendance figures. These modules include corporate complaints procedure, equality, diversity and inclusion, Welsh language standards, violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence and data protection.

For example, only 12 of the Council's 56 members attended the corporate parenting (including safeguarding) training held in 2023-24 and 12 when it was held again in 2024-25. This is an essential arrangement to reduce safeguarding risks and raise member awareness to ensure the Council complies with its various statutory duties.

The Council has identified that a lack of digital skills restricts some members from accessing training delivered online and training which is available anytime via e-learning modules. Learning how to adapt to recently updated digital devices has also been noted as a barrier to accessing and submitting digital information. The Council has sought to address this by offering IT training, including one-to-one sessions.

However, we found that members' reasons for not attending training sessions were broader than barriers around digital. Reasons included a lack of awareness that they were expected to attend training sessions and limited interest in the training topics. This lack of clarity on roles and responsibilities is not surprising when engagement and attendance at core training is low.

The Council does not consistently seek member feedback on training and the response rate from members is low when feedback is sought. The Council has delivered training in a range of formats to try and engage members which is helpful, but this has not been sufficient to ensure that members are engaged in training development and delivery.

This limited engagement in member training has been compounded by multiple 'holds' being included in member diaries for training sessions which are then cancelled at short notice. This arrangement is not helpful for members trying to plan their diaries and detracts from the training's status. The Council should arrange a structured timetable for training so members can prioritise it and schedule other work efficiently.

Although we heard that training is discussed at political group meetings, and that group leaders take interest in their group's attendance numbers, there is little follow up by the Council. The group leaders would benefit from an annual summary of training, highlighting the gaps in attendance on core sessions. This could enable group leaders to steer discussions on training attendance.

However, we did hear that bespoke training sessions for the Planning Committee Members has been generally well-received. This was co-produced between officers and the Planning Committee members and is an example of good practice which is more likely to be sustainable.

Members have expressed a desire for training in some committees but apart from Planning Committee, it is unclear how they are involved in the current member development training schedule to maximise its impact.

The Council has identified the limited attendance at core training by members as an issue it needs to address since 2022-23. The Council's 2023-24 Annual Governance Statement notes, 'Significant Issue 5 - Improve elected member take up of core and key governance e-learning. Associated risk: C05 - There is a risk that the Council lacks the knowledge, skills, capacity, culture and ability to modernise in order to continue to meet its priorities and responsibilities'. The Council has put in place a series of improvement actions for 2024-25 to increase member training. This will need to be closely monitored and addressed at a faster pace as it is a clear and long-standing corporate governance risk. The current situation means the Council risks making poor strategic decisions on several matters.

The importance of attendance at training on the Code of Conduct has been highlighted by the Ombudsman and was raised under the independent review of the Ethical Standards Framework and Model Code of Conduct carried out by Richard Penn. Leaders of political groups should actively encourage all members in their group to read the Ombudsman's Guidance and any local guidance issued by the monitoring officer or standards committee and to take up any offer of training. They should also work constructively with standards committees and monitoring officers to identify the training requirements for themselves and for their group members.

Source: excerpt from the Welsh Government's Statutory and non-statutory guidance on democracy within principal councils.<sup>1</sup>

---

1 [Statutory and non-statutory guidance on democracy within principal councils: members' support, training and development](#)

## **There continue to be fractures and distrust between some members and senior officers in Wrexham County Borough Council**

The recent code of conduct and values and behaviours training does not seem to have significantly improved relations between some senior members and senior officers. Despite improved relationships in Planning Committee since our previous audit, some members continue to express a lack of trust in some officers and in the advice they provide.

We observed ongoing tensions between some members and officers, with a need for improved communication in line with the Council's established protocols. Communication from some members is excessive and includes requests for access to information that aren't always appropriate nor in accordance with the Council's Protocol on Member/Officer Relations.

The Council Constitution has a Members' Self-Regulatory Protocol. This is designed to sit alongside the Council's Code of Conduct to 'strengthen respect and trust'. It provides guidance on dealing with poor behaviour. Part 1.5 of the protocol states that 'Members will avoid personal confrontation in any public forum, especially in full Council and through the media.' It is clear this has not been adhered to with multiple press statements highlighting ongoing tensions.

This behaviour not only goes against the Council's Constitution and its vision; it creates an unhelpful blame culture. This does not create a productive environment for decision making in the best interests of the people of Wrexham.

# About us

---

The Auditor General for Wales is independent of the Welsh Government and the Senedd. The Auditor General's role is to examine and report on the accounts of the Welsh Government, the NHS in Wales and other related public bodies, together with those of councils and other local government bodies. The Auditor General also reports on these organisations' use of resources and suggests ways they can improve.

The Auditor General carries out his work with the help of staff and other resources from the Wales Audit Office, which is a body set up to support, advise and monitor the Auditor General's work.

Audit Wales is the umbrella term used for both the Auditor General for Wales and the Wales Audit Office. These are separate legal entities with the distinct roles outlined above. Audit Wales itself is not a legal entity.



Audit Wales

1 Capital Quarter

Tyndall Street

Cardiff CF10 4BZ

Tel: 029 2032 0500

Textphone: 029 2032 0660

E-mail: [info@audit.wales](mailto:info@audit.wales)

Website: [www.audit.wales](http://www.audit.wales)

We welcome correspondence and telephone calls in Welsh and English.

Rydym yn croesawu gohebiaeth a galwadau ffôn yn Gymraeg a Saesneg.