

EXECUTIVE BOARD

At a meeting of the Executive Board on Thursday, 25 February 2016 in The Boardroom, Municipal Building

Present: Councillors Polhill (Chairman), D. Cargill, Harris, R. Hignett, Jones, T. McInerney, Nelson, Philbin, Wharton and Wright

Apologies for Absence: None

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: A. Scott, G. Cook, D. Parr, I. Leivesley, G. Meehan, M. Reaney, E. Dawson and S. Wallace-Bonner

Also in attendance: None

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER POWERS AND DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

Action

EXB111 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 11 February 2016 were taken as read and signed as a correct record.

LEADER'S PORTFOLIO

EXB112 SYRIAN REFUGEE CRISIS

The Board considered a report of the Chief Executive, on the Syrian Refugee Crisis, the current response from Central Government and at local level.

The Board was advised that Halton was working collaboratively with all the North West local authorities in respect of this agenda, and was part of the Merseyside sub regional group. It was reported that the Council had developed measures to fully engage with communities, statutory and non- statutory agencies including the faith and voluntary sector, to improve the understanding of the refugee crisis and the implications this had for Halton and the wider North West.

The report set out details of the Asylum Dispersal Programme (COMPASS), which the Home Office had

contracted out to Serco to provide asylum accommodation, transport and support. It was noted that the Syrian Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPR), would expand to admit 20,000 Syrian refugees to be admitted to the UK by 2020.

It was further reported that each local authority in the North West would take the lead role to work with local partners to ensure that arrivals were provided with suitable accommodation and the specific needs of this vulnerable group were met. Central Government would meet the cost of the arrivals in terms of orientation, support, health and education costs for the first year, with reducing support in years 2-5.

RESOLVED: That Council

- 1) support the COMPASS and VPR Programme;
- 2) work with all the North West Local Authorities to establish a robust operational mechanism to oversee and deliver the programme; and
- 3) learn from the examples of best practice nationally, to ensure that Halton provides effective humanitarian support, which is measured and proportionate, and takes into account the needs of those relocated under the programme and Halton's existing communities.

Chief Executive

HEALTH AND WELLBEING PORTFOLIO

EXB113 THE NATIONAL LIVING WAGE – CARE PROVIDER CONTRACTS

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, People and Economy, on the planned introduction of the National Living Wage, and the impact for the pooled budget for Health and Care Services in Halton.

The Board was advised that a compulsory National Living Wage (NLW) for workers aged 25 and above would be introduced from 1 April 2016. It was noted that the National Minimum Wage (NMW) would remain in place, and the distinction between the two was clarified in the report.

It was reported that the Chancellor of the Exchequer had commented that to help businesses to afford the increase in wages, he was cutting Corporation Tax by 2% by 2020 and that employers could reduce the amount of

National Insurance Contributions that were paid for employees by 50%.

In Halton, there were currently 12 domiciliary care providers working across the Borough in 29 care homes. The majority of the contracted organisations had stated that the impact of the NLW would place economic challenges on their organisations and impact on their ability to remain viable in future.

A finance model to establish the potential impact of the cost of the NLW had been designed and adopted by local authorities across the North West region. This initial analysis, set out in the report, provided Members with an indication of the costs involved for Halton.

RESOLVED: That approval be given to actively enter into discussions with Care Providers, to agree how additional costs would be met, as set out in paragraphs 5.4.3 and 5.4.4 of the report.

Strategic Director
- People and
Economy

(N.B. The following Councillors made a Disclosable Other Interest in the following item of business for the reasons stated. Councillor Polhill as Chair of the Mersey Gateway Crossings Board Limited and Councillor Wharton as Vice-Chair of the Mersey Gateway Crossings Board Limited)

TRANSPORTATION PORTFOLIO

EXB114 MERSEY GATEWAY BRIDGE PROJECT - PROGRESS UPDATE

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Community and Resources, which provided a progress update on the Mersey Gateway Bridge Project (the Project) and on the Mersey Gateway Crossings Board Limited (MGCB), for June to December 2015.

The Board was advised that the MGCB was a special purpose vehicle, established by Halton Borough Council, with delegated authority to deliver the Mersey Gateway Bridge project, and to administer and oversee the construction, maintenance and tolling of the new tolled crossings, which included the tolling of the Silver Jubilee Bridge.

The MGCB were commissioned to deliver the Project on behalf of the Council and operate as a commercial, not for profit organisation, on an arm's length basis.

The report provided an update on progress of the Project and the performance of the MGCB in monitoring the Project, as required under the Governance Agreement. It covered:-

- Key Construction Events;
- Construction of the Main Crossing, Landside and Highways;
- Most recent activities on site;
- Programmed activities for January 2016;
- Health and Safety;
- Key Performance Indicators;
- Current Progress on the actions/risks at Financial Close; and
- Production of an Annual Business Plan.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) progress with the Mersey Gateway Bridge Project, as set out in the report, be noted; and
- 2) the performance of the Mersey Gateway Crossings Board Limited in monitoring the Project Company's performance, as set out in the report, be noted.

RESOURCES PORTFOLIO

EXB115 THE ESTABLISHMENT, VICTORIA SQUARE, WIDNES

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, People and Economy, on the proposed sale of the Council's reversionary freehold interest in The Establishment (Former Halton Business Forum).

The Board was advised that the former Halton Business Forum was currently leased to SJL Leisure Ltd for a term of 150 years from November 2008. The original proposal was for the leaseholder to develop the site for a hotel and a substantial two storey extension was built at the rear of the original listed building to facilitate this.

It was reported that, due to the downturn in the economy, the only area of the building in use was the ground floor bar, the remainder of the property was

unoccupied. As the leaseholder would now like to develop the vacant area to provide office space close to the town centre, it was reported he had made an offer of £20,000 (plus professional costs) to the Council for the disposal of the Freehold Interest. This amount would be paid in instalments, as set out in the report.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) disposal of the Freehold interest on the basis set out in the report, be approved; and
- 2) the Operational Director, Economy, Enterprise and Property, be authorised to arrange for all required documentation to be completed to the satisfaction of the Operational Director, Legal and Democratic Services.

Strategic Director
- People and
Economy

EXB116 2016/17 QUARTER 3 SPENDING

The Board considered a report of the Operational Director, Finance, which summarised the overall revenue and capital spending position as at 31 December 2015.

In overall terms, revenue expenditure was £39,000 below the budget profile, however, this was only a guide to eventual spending. It was noted that spend to date showed a very marginal position and careful monitoring through to year-end was required to ensure spend was within overall budget. Saving proposals of £11.5m had already been approved by Council, and early implementation of these proposals had helped to manage the overall spend for the last three months of the financial year.

It was noted that spending on employees was £0.930m below the budget profile at the end of the quarter, with vacant posts in a number of Departments helping to generate the favourable variance to date.

Members were advised that there continued to be budget pressures within the Children and Families Department which was significantly over the profiled budget to date.

With regard to capital spending, it was reported that spending to the 31 December 2015 totalled £19.896m, which was slightly ahead of the planned spending of £19.431m at this stage. However, this represented 65% of the total capital programme of £30.478m (which assumed a 20% slippage between years).

The Council's Balance Sheet was monitored regularly in accordance with the Reserves and Balances Strategy which formed part of the Medium Term Financial Strategy. The key reserves and balances had been reviewed and were considered prudent and appropriate at this stage in the financial year and within the current financial climate.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) all spending continued to be limited only to the absolutely essential;
- 2) Strategic Directors ensure that overall spending at year-end was within their total operational budget; and
- 3) Council be recommended to approve the revised Capital Programme as set out in Appendix 3, attached to the report.

Operational
Director - Finance

EXB117 TREASURY MANAGEMENT QUARTER 3 2015/16

The Board considered a report of the Operational Director, Finance, which updated them on activities undertaken on the money market as required by the Treasury Management Statement.

The report provided supporting information on the economic outlook, interest rate forecast, short term borrowing rates, longer term borrowing rates, borrowing and investments, new long term borrowing and policy guidelines. It was noted that no debt rescheduling had been undertaken during the quarter.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

EXB118 SCHEDULE 12A OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 AND THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

The Board considered:

- (1) whether Members of the press and public should be excluded from the meeting of the Board during consideration of the following item of business in accordance with Sub-Section 4 of Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 because it was likely that, in view of the nature of the business to be considered, exempt information would be

disclosed, being information defined in Section 100 (1) and paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972; and

- (2) whether the disclosure of information was in the public interest, whether any relevant exemptions were applicable and whether, when applying the public interest test and exemptions, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed that in disclosing the information.

RESOLVED: That as, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed the public interest in disclosing the information, members of the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business in accordance with Sub-Section 4 of Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 because it was likely that, in view of the nature of the business, exempt information would be disclosed, being information defined in Section 100 (1) and paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

RESOURCES PORTFOLIO

EXB119 DISCRETIONARY BUSINESS RATES RELIEF REQUEST

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, People and Economy, and the Strategic Director, Community and Resources, on a request for discretionary business rates relief.

The Board was advised that under the Business Rates Retention Scheme, introduced in April 2013, the Council retained 49% of the business rates income that it collected, and offered a financial incentive to promote economic growth. Halton had historically considered applications for discretionary business rates relief on a case by case basis and where there were exceptional reasons for doing so.

The report set out details of the current request for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED: That discretionary business rates relief of up to 100% in respect of the company referred to in the report, be approved for 2016/17 only, on the basis set out in paragraph 3.9 of the report.

Strategic Director
- Community &
Resources

MINUTES ISSUED: 1 March 2016

CALL-IN: 8 March 2016

Any matter decided by the Executive Board may be called in no later than 5.00pm on 8 March 2016

Meeting ended at 2.12pm