

Public Document Pack



Corporate Policy and Performance Board

Tuesday, 28 January 2020 6.30 p.m.
Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David WR'.

Chief Executive

BOARD MEMBERSHIP

Councillor Robert Gilligan (Chair)	Labour
Councillor Ged Philbin (Vice-Chair)	Labour
Councillor John Abbott	Labour
Councillor Harry Howard	Labour
Councillor Martha Lloyd Jones	Labour
Councillor Chris Loftus	Labour
Councillor Alan Lowe	Labour
Councillor Angela McInerney	Labour
Councillor Norman Plumpton Walsh	Labour
Councillor Joe Roberts	Labour
Councillor Kevan Wainwright	Labour

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**ITEMS TO BE DEALT WITH
IN THE PRESENCE OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Part I

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1. MINUTES	1 - 5
2. DECLARATION OF INTEREST (INCLUDING PARTY WHIP DECLARATIONS)	
Members are reminded of their responsibility to declare any Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or Other Disclosable Interest which they have in any item of business on the agenda, no later than when that item is reached or as soon as the interest becomes apparent and, with Disclosable Pecuniary Interests, to leave the meeting during any discussion and voting on the item.	
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In accordance with the Health and Safety at Work Act the Council is required to notify those attending meetings of the fire evacuation procedures. A copy has previously been circulated to Members and instructions are located in all rooms within the Civic block.

CORPORATE POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD

At a meeting of the Corporate Policy and Performance Board on Tuesday, 12 November 2019 in the Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn

Present: Councillors Gilligan (Chair), Philbin (Vice-Chair), Abbott, M. Lloyd Jones, C. Loftus, A. Lowe, A. McInerney and Joe Roberts

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Howard, N. Plumpton Walsh and Wainwright

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: M. Reaney, E. Dawson, G. Ferguson, P. Garnett, C. Patino and L Pennington-Ramsden

Also in attendance: One Member of the press.

**ITEM DEALT WITH
UNDER DUTIES
EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD**

	<i>Action</i>
CS20 MINUTES	
<p>The Minutes from the meeting held on 3rd September 2019 were taken as read and signed as a correct record.</p>	
<p>Arising from the previous meeting a Member requested clarification on the impact of the General Election on 12 December on the progress of the proposed new Ward Boundaries. It was agreed that further information would be provided to the Board.</p>	
CS21 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME	Strategic Director Enterprise, Community and Resources
<p>The Board was advised that no public questions had been received.</p>	
CS22 EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES	
<p>The Board was presented with the Minutes relating to the Corporate Services Portfolio which had been considered by the Executive Board since the last meeting of this Board.</p>	
<p><u>EXB32</u> – Members discussed the future disposal of</p>	

Council land. It was agreed that the Executive Board be recommended that where possible, when the Council disposes of land for housing purposes, those houses should be freehold and not leasehold properties.

RESOLVED: That

1. the minutes and comments made be noted; and
2. the Executive Board be recommended that where possible, when the Council disposes of land for housing purposes, those houses should be freehold and not leasehold properties.

CS23 MEMBER DEVELOPMENT GROUP NOTES

The Board considered the minutes of the Member Development Group meeting held on 21st March 2019.

RESOLVED: That the minutes be noted.

CS24 CORPORATE ACCIDENT / INCIDENT REPORT 1.4.19 TO 31.8.19

The Board was provided with a report from the Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources, which presented details of health and safety management within the Authority from 1 April 2019 to 31st August 2019.

Officers commented that the report highlighted the national and local health and safety information, and together with performance and incident trends, these formed the basis for the recommended actions for 2019/20. In order to be proactive in health and safety management the report also indicated the number of completed risk assessments and training delivered to staff.

The report highlighted:

- that the Health and Safety Executive had increased Fees for Intervention from £129 to £154 per hour;
- the Health and Safety Executive had released the workplace fatal injury statistics for 2018/19 which highlighted that 147 employees were killed in their workplace and approximately a quarter were over 60 years of age;
- reportable and significant accidents for Halton were currently at a total of 15 across both directorates plus 5 near misses. This compared to 44 last year with 5 near misses;

- schools had 11 physical and 1 social media incidents;
- lone working monitoring system – registered users had decreased from the same period last year but actual percentage use had risen slightly;

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

CS25 PROGRESS UPDATES REGARDING THE DISCRETIONARY SUPPORT SCHEME, DISCRETIONARY HOUSING PAYMENTS AND UNIVERSAL CREDIT

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources, which provided an update on the delivery of the Discretionary Support Scheme, Discretionary Housing Payments and Universal Credit.

The Discretionary Support Scheme (DSS) was now in its seventh year of operation. Over this period the Scheme had been developed and amended where necessary by the Board. Details of funding and expenditure, including an analysis of applications by type and awards granted during 2018/19, were outlined in the report. It was noted that the DSS made 574 awards during 2018/19 totalling £137,238.

In 2018/19 total grant funding of £536,534 was received for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP). Actual expenditure totalled £535,414 representing 1,544 DHP awards and gave an under spend of £1,120. This compared with 2017/18 where 1,403 awards were made with total expenditure of £412,767.

The Board was advised that the increase in the number of awards and total expenditure in 2018/19 compared to the previous year was the result of increasing numbers of Halton residents becoming eligible for Universal Credit.

Arising from the discussion, the Board discussed the signposting of the DSS and if any of those awarded were claimants impacted by Universal Credit. It was noted that consideration would be given for future reports to contain information on the number of DSS award to those people impacted by Universal Credit.

RESOLVED: That the latest position regarding the Discretionary Support Scheme, Discretionary Housing Payments and Universal Credit be noted.

CS26 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORTS FOR QUARTER 2 OF 2019/20

The Board received a report of the Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources, which presented the Performance Monitoring Report for Quarter 2 of 2019/20.

The reports related to the following functional areas which reported to the Board and detailed progress against service objectives and milestones and performance targets, and provided information relating to key developments and emerging issues that had arisen during the period:

- Finance;
- Human Resources and Organisational Development;
- ICT and Administrative Support;
- Legal and Democracy;
- Policy and Performance;
- Property Services; and
- Catering, Stadium and Registration Services.

Members discussed the following:

- the financial settlement – it was unlikely that this would be known before Christmas; and
- the take up of free school meals and the steps taken to improve this. Members also welcomed an initiative held in the summer holidays to provide children with a free lunch.

RESOLVED: That the Quarter 2 Performance Monitoring reports be received and noted.

CS27 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 Section 100A (4) 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 that in disclosing the information, members of the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business in accordance with Section 100A (4) 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.

CS28 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORTS FOR QUARTER 2 OF 2019/20

The Board requested further information on:

- the contract recently agreed between Council and the Widnes Vikings; and
- the High Court Case.

RESOLVED: That the requests for further information be noted and once information was available it would be shared with Members.

Strategic Director
Enterprise,
Community and
Resources

Meeting ended at 7.40 p.m.

REPORT TO: Corporate Policy & Performance Board

DATE: 12th November 2019

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources

SUBJECT: Public Question Time

WARD(s): Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To consider any questions submitted by the Public in accordance with Standing Order 34(9).
- 1.2 Details of any questions received will be circulated at the meeting.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That any questions received be dealt with.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Standing Order 34(9) states that Public Questions shall be dealt with as follows:-

- (i) A total of 30 minutes will be allocated for dealing with questions from members of the public who are residents of the Borough, to ask questions at meetings of the Policy and Performance Boards.
- (ii) Members of the public can ask questions on any matter relating to the agenda.
- (iii) Members of the public can ask questions. Written notice of questions must be given by 4.00 pm on the working day prior to the date of the meeting to the Committee Services Manager. At any one meeting no person/organisation may submit more than one question.
- (iv) One supplementary question (relating to the original question) may be asked by the questioner, which may or may not be answered at the meeting.
- (v) The Chair or proper officer may reject a question if it:-
 - Is not about a matter for which the local authority has a responsibility or which affects the Borough;
 - Is defamatory, frivolous, offensive, abusive or racist;
 - Is substantially the same as a question which has been put at a meeting of the Council in the past six months; or

- Requires the disclosure of confidential or exempt information.
- (vi) In the interests of natural justice, public questions cannot relate to a planning or licensing application or to any matter which is not dealt with in the public part of a meeting.
- (vii) The Chair will ask for people to indicate that they wish to ask a question.
- (viii) **PLEASE NOTE** that the maximum amount of time each questioner will be allowed is 3 minutes.
- (ix) If you do not receive a response at the meeting, a Council Officer will ask for your name and address and make sure that you receive a written response.

Please bear in mind that public question time lasts for a maximum of 30 minutes. To help in making the most of this opportunity to speak:-

- Please keep your questions as concise as possible.
- Please do not repeat or make statements on earlier questions as this reduces the time available for other issues to be raised.
- Please note public question time is not intended for debate – issues raised will be responded to either at the meeting or in writing at a later date.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

None.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

None.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 **Children and Young People in Halton** - none.

6.2 **Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton** - none.

6.3 **A Healthy Halton** – none.

6.4 **A Safer Halton** – none.

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal** – none.

7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

7.1 None.

8.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

8.1 There are no background papers under the meaning of the Act.

REPORT TO: Corporate Policy and Performance Board
DATE: 12th November 2019
REPORTING OFFICER: Chief Executive
SUBJECT: Executive Board Minutes
WARD(s): Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The Minutes relating to the Corporate Services Portfolio which have been considered by the Executive Board are attached at Appendix 1 for information.
- 1.2 The Minutes are submitted to inform the Policy and Performance Board of decisions taken in their area.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the Minutes be noted.

3.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 None.

4.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 None.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

5.1 Children and Young People in Halton

None

5.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

None

5.3 A Healthy Halton

None

5.4 A Safer Halton

None

5.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

None

6.0 RISK ANALYSIS

6.1 None.

7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

7.1 None.

8.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

8.1 There are no background papers under the meaning of the Act.

APPENDIX 1

Extract of Executive Board Minutes Relevant to the Corporate Policy and Performance Board

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 14th November 2019

RESOURCES PORTFOLIO

EXB52 DETERMINATION OF COUNCIL TAX BASE 2020/21 - KEY DECISION

The Board considered a report of the Operational Director, Finance, on the requirement for the Council to determine the Tax Base for its area and the Tax Base for each of the Parishes.

The Board was advised that the Tax Base was the measure used for calculating Council Tax and was used by both the billing authority (the Council) and the major precepting authorities (Cheshire Fire Authority, Cheshire Police and Crime Commissioner and the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority), in the calculation of their Council Tax requirements. It was arrived at in accordance with a prescribed formula which represented the estimated full year number of chargeable dwellings in the Borough expressed in terms of the equivalent Band "D" dwellings. Taking account of all the relevant information and applying a 97% collection rate, the calculation for 2020/21 gave a base figure of 35,359 for the Borough as a whole.

It was noted that since 2013/14 the tax base calculation had included an element for the Council Tax Reduction Scheme (the replacement for Council Tax Benefit). In addition, the tax base calculation would include an element for Care Leavers Discretionary Discount and Foster Carers Discretionary discount.

Reason(s) for Decision

To seek approval for the 2020/21 Council Tax Base for the Borough.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

There was no alternative option, as unless the Council Tax Base was approved, it would not be possible to set the level

of Council Tax to be charged for 2020/21.

Implementation Date

The 2020/21 Council Tax Base would be implemented from 1 April 2020.

RESOLVED: That Council be recommended to approve

- 1) setting the 2020/21 Tax Base at 35,359 for the Borough, and that the Cheshire Fire Authority, the Cheshire Police and Crime Commissioner, the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority and the Environment Agency be so notified; and
- 2) the Council Tax Base for each of the Parishes be set as follows:

Operational
Director - Finance

Parish	Tax Base
Hale	663
Halebank	523
Daresbury	179
Moore	327
Preston Brook	368
Sandymoor	1,265

EXB53 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2020/2023 - KEY DECISION

The Board considered a report of the Operational Director, Finance, on the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the period 2020/23.

The Board was advised that the MTFS set out a three year projection of resources and spending based on information currently available.

The projections in the MTFS showed that there was a continued need to make a significant level of savings over the next three years. It was noted that the projections for 2020/21 took account of the Chancellor's 2019 Spending Review. However, as this was only for one year, it created

uncertainty to the following two year's projections.

The MTFs provided initial guidance to the Council on its financial position into the medium term. Revenue savings of approximately £7.9m, £15.1m and £4.40m would be required over the next three years. It was noted that as a result, a total of £27.4m would need to be removed from the Council's budget, by reducing spending or increasing income. This represented 25% of the Council's net budget and continued to be a significant challenge to find sufficient savings over the medium term in order to balance the budget.

The Board was advised that the MTFs had a number of objectives, as listed in the report. The report set out the Council's budget strategy, with budget savings proposals and areas identified for further savings. The report contained details of the Council's Capital Strategy for the management of assets such as land and buildings in Council ownership.

Reason(s) for Decision

To seek approval of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2020/21 to 2022/23.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

The alternative option of not maintaining a Medium Term Financial Strategy had been considered. However, this would not follow good financial management practice, as the Medium Term Financial Strategy was a key element in informing the Council's financial planning and budget setting processes.

Implementation Date

The MTFs 2020/21 would be implemented from 1 April 2020.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the Medium Term Financial Strategy be approved;
- 2) the 2020/21 base budget be prepared on the basis of the underlying assumptions set out in the Strategy;

Operational
Director - Finance

- 3) the Reserves and Balances Strategy be approved; and
- 4) the award of Council Tax Support for 2020/21 remains at the 2019/20 level of 21.55%.

EXB54 2019/20 QUARTER 2 SPENDING

The Board considered a report of the Operational Director, Finance, which reported on the 2019/20 Quarter 2 spending as at 30 September 2019.

A summary of spending against the revenue budget up to 30 September 2019 was attached to the report at Appendix 1, along with individual statements for each department. The Board was advised that, in overall terms, revenue expenditure was £2.654m above the budget profile at this stage. It was reported that the trend showed the overspend continuing at a steady pace over the first six months of the year. If current spending patterns continued, projections showed that the Council would have a year-end outturn overspend position of approximately £6.145m, if no corrective action was taken.

In March 2019, Council approved budget savings proposals totalling £9.250m. However, it was noted that a delay in implementing a number of savings proposals impacted detrimentally upon the forecast outturn position in Appendix 1.

Within the overall budget position for the quarter, the key budget variances were in the Children and Families Department; Community and Environment Department; Education, Inclusion and Provision; ICT and Support Services; Complex Care Pool; and Corporate and Democracy.

The Capital Programme had been revised to reflect a number of spending profiles and funding as schemes had developed and these were reported in Appendix 2, attached to the report.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) all spending continues to be limited to only absolutely essential items;
- 2) Departments seek to implement as soon as

Operational
Director - Finance

possible the 2019/20 budget savings proposals which were approved by Council in March 2019;

- 3) Strategic Directors take appropriate action to ensure overall spending is contained as far as possible within their total operational budget by year-end; and
- 4) Council be asked to approve the revised Capital Programme as set out in Appendix 2.

EXB55 TREASURY MANAGEMENT HALF YEAR REPORT 2019-2020

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

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

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

EXB56 DISCRETIONARY NON DOMESTIC RATE RELIEF

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources, on an application for discretionary non-domestic rate relief.

The Board was advised that, under the amended provisions of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, the Council was able to grant discretionary rate relief to any business rate payer. Since 1 April 2017, the Council had been responsible for meeting the full cost of all mandatory and discretionary rate relief granted, as part of the Liverpool City Region 100% Business Rates Retention Pilot Scheme.

The report set out details of an application from a registered charity for rate relief by Runcorn and District Foodbank, in Russell Road, Runcorn, for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED: That the application for 15% discretionary rate relief from Runcorn and District Foodbank in respect of their premises at Russell Road, Runcorn, be approved.

Strategic Director
- Enterprise,
Community and
Resources

EXB57 REVIEW OF POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES AND INCORPORATING THE WARD BOUNDARY REVIEW

The Board considered a report of the Returning Officer, David Parr, on the results of the formal polling districts, places and stations review.

Following a report to the Board on 18 July 2019, a Polling Station Review Working Party was established and a consultation with electors, Councillors and other interested parties via the Council's web site and Direct Link Offices commenced.

Responses to the consultation were considered by the Working Party at its meeting on 21 August 2019. Details of the recommendations arising were set out in the appendix attached to the report.

RESOLVED: That Council be recommended to adopt the amendments to the scheme detailed in the appendix attached to the report for the period 2019/2024.

Returning Officer

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 12th December 2019

RESOURCES PORTFOLIO

EXB62 DISCRETIONARY NON-DOMESTIC RATE RELIEF

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources, on two applications for discretionary non-domestic rate relief.

The Board was advised that, under the amended provisions of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, the Council was able to grant discretionary rate relief to any business rate payer. Since 1 April 2017, the Council had been responsible for meeting the full cost of all mandatory and discretionary rate relief granted, as part of the Liverpool City Region 100% Business Rates Retention Pilot Scheme.

The report set out details of applications from two registered charities for discretionary rate relief by Halton

Haven Hospice and the Cathie Stankevitch Foundation, both in Widnes, for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the application for 15% discretionary rate relief from Halton Haven Hospice in respect of premises at 23 Queen's Avenue, Widnes, from 14 October 2019, be approved; and
- 2) the application for 15% discretionary rate relief from the Cathie Stankevitch Foundation in respect of premises at 25 Albert Square, Widnes, from 14 June 2019 be approved.

Strategic Director
- Enterprise,
Community and
Resources

REPORT TO:	Corporate Policy & Performance Board
DATE:	28 January 2020
REPORTING OFFICER:	Strategic Director Enterprise, Community & Resources
PORTFOLIO:	Corporate & Resources
SUBJECT:	Communications, Design and Marketing Service Update
WARDS:	Borough-Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an overview of the work of the Communications, Design & Marketing service

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

That the content of the report be noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Communications, Design and Marketing is a centralised service, within the Legal & Democratic Services Division. The team is organised to deliver a broad range of functions including media relations, internal communications, creative design and marketing. The service also supports the Authority's statutory responsibility for 'warning and informing' and provides communications advice and support during emergencies/incidents.
- 3.2 The service adheres to the Code of Recommended Practice on Local Authority Publicity (2011).
- 3.3 The role of the department has changed over the years due to a number of factors including restructuring, financial restraints, the evolution of shared services/partnership working and by the opportunities provided by new technology.
- 3.4 The service has been subject to internal review as part of the Efficiency Review in 2010 and subsequently in 2013. During the latter, changes from the previous structure included moving digital services into the Customer Intelligence Unit and Print Services into the administration shared service.
- 3.5 Of the remaining functions, there has been a reduction in staffing levels from 16.54FTE (April 2010) to the current 8.1FTE. With a reduced

resource, the team has focused its efforts on activities where its expertise brings most value to the organisation. As such, work within the department is prioritised against a number of criteria, these being:

- An income will be generated for the authority
- There will be a reduction in cost/improved efficiency
- The reputation of the authority will be significantly enhanced/or risk to reputation will be reduced
- There is a statutory duty

- 3.6 A key priority over the years has been to support the marketing of Council-owned venues – namely The Brindley, Stadium and Widnes Market. From 2016 this has also included support for Halton’s leisure centres.
- 3.7 There has been ongoing support for major projects and regeneration activity. The Lead Officer represents the Council on the Mersey Gateway Communications & PR Group that coordinates all related Mersey Gateway PR & Communications activity from lobbying for funding in the early stages of the project, through to the organisation of the road opening fireworks event and subsequent official opening event by Her Majesty the Queen.
- 3.8 Where shared services/joint working arrangements have been established, the team has contributed its expertise – at present a member of staff delivers marketing/recruitment and retention activity as part of the Foster4 collaboration. In addition, capacity is being provided to coordinate communication activity related to One Halton. The team regularly work alongside partners on cross-borough/cross-regional campaigns and initiatives including the Cheshire Resilience Forum, SciTech Daresbury, Pan-Cheshire CSE and Domestic Violence campaigns.
- 3.9 Social media has provided a fast, inexpensive and effective way to reach increased numbers of our community. We now have an established following across our various social media accounts, enabling us to share content directly with users and/or drive them to further online content on our newsroom, websites and applications.
- 3.10 The paid-for advertising opportunities offered across these platforms have helped us to significantly reduce advertising spend. As well as being a much lower cost, digital advertising enables in-depth targeting of adverts so that tailored messages can be directed at specific audience groups – making the adverts far more cost-effective. In addition they allow us to measure much more accurately the impact of adverts.
- 3.11 It is understood that not all in our community have access to the internet, or have the necessary skills or desire to engage with the Council online. For these reasons we continue to use more traditional methods of communication and marketing where appropriate. For example our

residents' newsletter Inside Halton is delivered to each household in the borough, three times a year.

- 3.12 Choosing the right mix of activity is part of the planning process, with the service working closely with departments to understand their business, their various audiences, priorities and desired outcomes. Support in this planning process is also provided through the Customer Intelligence Unit, who can provide and analyse data to ensure we are working from a strong evidence base.
- 3.13 There is a recognition of the continued influence that broadcast, print and online media outlets have and the role they play in influencing and informing the public. Our central press office works across departments to generate positive news coverage, consistently achieving high percentage take up of press releases across our local and regional media.
- 3.14 Proactive media relations remains an important core function of the service. We endeavour to provide timely and accurate information in response to enquiries, being honest and open in our dealings with media outlets.
- 3.15 Further cost savings have been achieved through our in-house creative design service, who, working closely with our internal print unit have ensured the vast majority of marketing materials are now produced in-house. Workflow management through an 'I Want' portal has been established to improve efficiency and keep internal customers informed of task progress.
- 3.16 The service continues to strive to ensure that all communications and marketing activities achieve a high standard of quality and to keep up to date with latest practices.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

None

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The service has sought to reduce costs in all areas whilst delivering desired outcomes and offer a cost effective service to the authority

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

The work of the service supports services across this area in achieving their outcomes and priorities.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

As above

6.3 A Healthy Halton

As above

6.4 A Safer Halton

As above

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

As above

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

The service is a centralised function, which brings the benefit of having a suite of activities being carried in one area, avoiding duplication, maximising impact and maintaining quality. A key risk is the fragmenting of activity, with elements starting to be carried out in isolation by departments. This risk is mitigated through various processes and policies including the design and print policy and 'I Want' online portal.

Capacity within the service continues to be a risk as workloads increase and departments look to communications to support them in achieving income; shifting customer transactions and helping to find innovative solutions to achieve outcomes with reduced budgets.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

None. Through its work, the service supports the Council in ensuring all members of our community have access to information.

REPORT TO:	Corporate Policy and Performance Board
DATE	28 th January 2020
REPORTING OFFICER:	Strategic Director Enterprise, Community and Resources
PORTFOLIO:	Resources
SUBJECT:	2019 Government Report on Leasehold Reform: the future of ground rents, service charges and selling practices
WARDS:	Borough Wide

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the Government Report (2019) on Leasehold Reform and to consider whether any of the recommendations outlined in the report can be implemented in Halton.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That Members note the current position in regard to the Government Report on Leasehold Reform and consider whether a further assessment is required, as outlined in section 4 of the report.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 At its meeting in October, the Council approved a motion in respect of Leasehold Ownership. The background to the motion is that in 2017 the Government had commissioned an enquiry into unfair practices in the leasehold market and the enquiry had concluded in April 2019.

3.2. Following the enquiry, a report was produced which identified some areas of concern such as:

- Onerous Ground Rents;
- High and unclear service charges;
- Frequent 'one –off' bills;
- Alleged 'miss-selling' of leasehold properties by developers;
- Unbalanced dispute resolution mechanisms;
- Unreasonable costs to enfranchise or extend leases;
- Future leasehold tenure.

3.3. A number of recommendations were included in the report as follows:

Ground Rents – a recommendation that existing ground rents are limited to 0.1% of the present value of a property up to a maximum £250 per annum. A recommendation that any new leases would be set to a peppercorn rate. The

report concluded that ground rents bear no relationship to the level of maintenance or quality of service provided to leaseholders.

Unclear Service Charges – a recommendation that a standard government form should be used for service charge invoicing, providing a full breakdown of costs.

Common hold - (where homeowners collectively own and manage the freehold), Common hold is put forward as a fairer and more democratic alternative to leaseholder ownership for estates or blocks of flats.

Miss-selling by developers – There was criticism in the report concerning the information prospective purchasers receive in respect of the difference between freehold and leasehold. The report recommends a standardised ‘key features’ document for developers to use at the point of purchase.

In the government’s response to the report, it suggested that developers would be required to establish voluntary compensation schemes to assist leaseholders with onerous ground rent terms, but if it did not see the sector responding proactively, then it would take further action.

The government’s response also stated an intention to make it easier for leaseholders to buy the freehold on their property.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

A Private Members Bill had its ‘First Reading’ in the House of Commons on 25th June 2019, but it subsequently the Bill failed to make its passage through Parliament.

Leasehold Reform is mentioned in the Conservative Party manifesto, although there was no mention of it in the Queen’s Speech in December 2019.

Therefore, the report is a series of recommendations which is not currently supported by legislation.

Unfortunately, without legislation it would not be possible to apply retrospective measures to support existing leaseholders in Halton.

Similarly, the Council could not place a ban on leaseholds on non-Council land, or land that has been sold to developers in the past.

The Council could consider mechanisms for either capping or removing the costs for leaseholders on land it proposes to sell for housing development in the future. This would need to be a condition of any future Development Agreement.

However, before adopting any proposals as Council policy, Members may wish to consider whether an assessment of the advantages and disadvantages of implementing this should be undertaken.

This assessment would need to be undertaken by the Council's Property Consultants, Sanderson Wetherall, and is likely to cost £2,500 and would take approximately two weeks to complete.

The areas that could be covered as part of the assessment include:

- A mapping exercise to determine which housing developers currently operate in the borough;
- An assessment of whether they charge leasehold rents for their properties, the amounts charged and duration;
- A market assessment of any potential impact (positive or negative) on land values and capital receipts arising from the adoption of a leaseholds ban;
- An assessment of any additional legal costs arising from the implementation of a new policy;
- An assessment of whether any other Local Authorities intend to progress any of the recommendations outlined in the government's Leasehold Reform Report.
- An assessment of whether changes to policy would dissuade housing developers from investing in Halton, leading to a delay in bringing forward sites for development
- An assessment of whether changes to policy would encourage new housing investment in Halton.

Before embarking on the above assessment, Members are advised that increasingly mortgage companies will not offer loans on properties that are leasehold and, therefore, it is likely that in the future, market forces will play a role in removing this as an issue when purchasing a new home.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The financial implications are not yet known.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

6.1.1 No implications

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

6.2.1 No implications

6.3 A Healthy Halton

6.3.1 No implications

6.4 A Safer Halton

6.4.1 No implications

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

6.5.1 There may be some implications depending on the outcome of the proposed assessment.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

There are no equality and diversity issues.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

None under the meaning of the Act