

REPORT TO: Corporate Policy and Performance Board
DATE: 30th October 2012
REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Children and Enterprise
PORTFOLIO: Resources and Physical Environment
SUBJECT: Markets Update
WARD(S) Appleton

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on changes to how the Borough's markets are being managed and to set out proposals for improving the markets offer.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That:

- 1) Members note changes made to the management of the markets; and**
- 2) Members support the submission of the list of actions to the Executive Board.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 In January 2012 the National Association of British Market Authorities (NABMA) Consultancy Services (NCS) completed a review of Widnes Market. NABMA is the recognised voice of local authority markets.

In February 2012 a report to the Council's Executive Board reaffirmed the Council's policy that the Widnes Markets (indoor and outdoor) and the outdoor market at Runcorn are regarded as key assets in Halton's town centres and that the vitality of the town centres and, in turn, the future sustainability of the markets are inextricably linked.

3.2 However, the Executive Board concluded that the NABMA recommendations contained in the review would need to be evaluated. Members requested that, were there to be any financial implications associated with the implementation of these recommendations, then a further report would need to be provided.

3.3 In April 2012 the Council aligned the management of the town centres and markets within a more clearly defined economic regeneration brief and brought town centre management, markets operations and town centre regeneration within one reporting arrangement. It was acknowledged that vibrant town centre including thriving markets, can contribute to the overall

offer that the Borough can make to potential inward investors or employers, and also offer a shopping environment that will attract shoppers from Halton and beyond.

3.4 The management of the markets fall within the remit of the Regeneration team (led by one of two regeneration managers). The Trader Liaison and Regeneration Officer is responsible for the management of the markets. Support is provided by two part time (fixed term to April 2013) town centre coordinators.

3.5 It must be noted, that in the last two years the number of staff working in the markets has been reduced by approximately 50%. Emphasis, therefore, has been placed on deploying our limited staff resources more effectively i.e. 'having the right people, doing the right job, at the right time'. There has also been a streamlining of cleaning, caretaking and security functions within the market.

3.6 Since April, existing systems and procedures within the markets are being improved and in some instances new procedures have been introduced to ensure that the markets are 'fit for the future'. New colleagues should be commended for their hard work in bringing in new changes in difficult circumstances.

A number of formal and informal meetings have been held with traders to advise them of the proposed changes to the management of the market.

3.7 New Market regulations and a written protocol have now been introduced. Although initially nervous of the proposed changes, it is fair to state that these measures have been welcomed by the vast majority of Traders because the documents clearly set out the respective roles and responsibilities of Traders and Markets staff.

3.8 Running alongside the introduction of new procedures, there has been a tightening up of issues such as 'encroachment' and displaying of goods

3.9 A 'new stall requests' panel has been introduced. The panel comprises, the Portfolio Holder, Operational Director, Trader Liaison and Regeneration Officer and a Market Trader. The panel ensures that decisions on new stalls are made in a strategic, fair and transparent way. As 'landlord' the final decision to accept or not accept a new tenant rests with the Council.

3.10 There have also been a number of marketing and promotions events in the market and examples include: -

- Easter give away of a day break via local coach company Hardings travel following Easter egg hunt for children;
- Diamond Jubilee June Bank Holiday: Pre bank holiday voucher give away by on street sandwich board person, over £800 in one pound vouchers

were redeemed in the market during the promotion;

- The Widnes Market Pound. A bank, set up in the market sold pounds that were only currency within the market. For every £10 bought by the customer, we gave them £1 free, so wherever the money was spent, they were able to spend and get 10% extra at no cost to them. Over £8,500 Widnes Market Pounds were purchased, most were spent in the market on larger objects such as carpets and fireplaces. However, some of the smaller traders also found them being used during the Love Your Market month;
- Widnes On Sea: four days of activity including a Victorian Helter Skelter, children's fairground rides, Face Painting, Donkey rides, traditional Punch and Judy plus a mini beach. Over 11,000 vouchers were handed in for the rides and activities over the 4 days. Vouchers were obtained by purchasing goods from the market traders. This took place on the last full week of August, preceding the Bank Holiday.

3.11 In all the above promotions have resulted in a reach on Facebook of over 130,000 people per event, with a peak of 200,000 for the Widnes on sea promotion.

Press coverage has increased by over 200% from where it was two years ago and the take up of stories has increased from sub regional to regional, national, periodical and trade press, with requests for further information being made from all sources.

3.12 Since April the focus has been on diversifying the offer at the market. This has been evidenced by the relocation of the Shopmobility service within the market hall. Similarly, colleagues within the Economy Enterprise and Property department who are responsible for business start-ups, have been working with markets staff to support potential entrepreneurs by offering space within the indoor and outdoor markets.

3.13 Occupation of stalls at the market are very good (91% full) and requests for new business are steady. Between July 2012 and September 2012 we have received 19 new stall requests on the market, of which 6 have been accepted. During this time traders have given notice on 3 stalls..

3.14 It is appreciated that there still a number of improvements to make to how the markets are managed. For example, the markets financial systems are being updated, Sunday trading is also being piloted in the 'run up' to Christmas and an energy audit is being undertaken. The team have talked about the possibility of allowing traders to advertise (at a small cost) in the entrance foyer. Staff are looking at an improved market stall layout plan with colour coding of the stalls in the market entrance with the advertising around this.

Overall, the market remains vibrant.

3.15 Consequently, new staff on the market have now had an opportunity to evaluate the NABMA report and its recommendations and would now wish to propose some actions and activities for Members' consideration aimed at improving the markets

3.16 Proposals are set out as follows: -

IMPROVEMENT WORKS

INDOOR MARKET

- Refurbish the main entrance with improved lighting, decoration, signage
- Allow for closing off some end shutters on selected small stalls to put new seating
- Allow for possible upgrade of the ground floor public toilets
- Allow for upgrading 2 No stalls to act as an event space
- Introduce Footfall Counters
- Installation of WiFi

OUTDOOR MARKET

- Remove and replace 2 no ornamental lighting columns with standard columns
- Allow for new entrance upgrade with signage to match indoor market including reconfiguring the fencing as required
- Improved branding and marketing and signage and sheeting for stalls

It is proposed that these matters be considered through the usual budget process.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no further policy implications associated with this report.

5.0 OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The costs of the proposals are contained within Appendix 1. The costs can be met from within existing budgets. This has been agreed by the Council's Accountancy team, using carry forward from last year's budget.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

N/A

6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

The markets allows potential entrepreneurs and fledgling businesses the opportunity to set up in a supportive and low risk environment.

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

N/A

6.4 **A Safer Halton**

N/A

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

As mentioned earlier in the report, the markets contribute to supporting the respective town centres. It also encourages local residents to 'shop local'.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 There is a risk that the Council does not see a return on its investment through increased footfall in the markets and wider town centres and an increase in traders paying rent. However, it is argued that a modest investment at this time will help to consolidate the role of the markets in town centre regeneration.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 The proposal includes improving the access to the market. A disability audit has taken place and the proposals reflect recommendations arising from the audit.

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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
NABMA Review	Floor 5 Municipal Building	W Rourke
Research and Intelligence Widnes Market Questionnaire and Review July 2011	Floor 5 Municipal Building	W Rourke