



Cllr John Gerrard
Chair

"I would like to thank all of the Members of the Environment and Urban Renewal PPB for their effort and support throughout my second year as Chair.

Members have played a significant role in the continued regeneration of the Borough and its environment in these particularly challenging times.

Over the last 12 months, the Board has responded to, and dealt with, a wide range of issues which demonstrates their level of commitment and positive attitude in reacting swiftly and effectively to matters that are brought before them. These, combined with the Board's experience and abilities help support a continuing improvement in the quality of life in Halton and the opportunities afforded to our communities."

Councillor Gerrard
Chair, Environment and Urban Renewal Policy
and Performance Board

MEMBERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITIES

During 2013/14 the Board comprised eleven Councillors:-

Councillor John Gerrard (Chairman)	Labour
Councillor Keith Morley (Vice-Chairman)	Labour
Councillor Frank Fraser	Labour
Councillor John Bradshaw	Conservative
Councillor Pauline Hignett	Labour
Councillor Andrew MacManus	Labour
Councillor Tom McInerney	Labour

Councillor Pauline Sinnott
Councillor Dave Thompson
Councillor Bill Woolfall
Councillor Geoff Zygadlo

Labour
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Labour

The Environment and Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board's primary function is to focus on the work of the Council (and its partners) in seeking to bring about the Environmental and Urban Renewal of the Borough. It is also charged with scrutinising progress against the Corporate Plan in relation to the Urban Renewal Priority.

The Board is responsible for scrutinising performance and formulating policy in relation to the following areas:

- Highways, Transportation and Logistics (including road maintenance, street lighting, road safety, traffic management, supported bus services and flood risk management)
- Landscape Services, Parks & Countryside, Cemeteries & Crematoria
- Environmental and Regulatory Services
- Major Projects
- Economic Regeneration and Business Development
- Waste Management and Waste Strategy
- Derelict and contaminated Land
- Housing Strategic Policy
- Sustainability, Climate Change and Biodiversity
- Physical Environment and Planning policies

REVIEW OF THE YEAR

The Board met 5 times during the year. As well as considering Executive Board decisions relevant to the work of the Environment and Urban Renewal Board, agreeing the Service Plans of the relevant Departments and monitoring their general activities and performance against them, set out below are some of the main activities and issues which have come before the Board during the year.

The Board received, considered reports, agreed decisions and put forward relevant actions on the following issues:-

Corporate Responsibilities

- Minutes of the Environment and Regeneration SSP.
- Regular progress reports on achieving targets contained with the Sustainable

Community Strategy for Halton.

- Updates on Business Plans for the period 2013-16 and the Directorate priorities, objectives and targets for the services that fell within the remit of the Board for this period. It also considered and commented on Quarterly Monitoring reports which detailed progress against service objectives/milestones, performance targets and factors affecting the services that fell with the remit of the Board. Members were invited to identify a small number of priorities for development or improvement that they would like to see reflected in the plans.

Highways and Transportation

- Nominations were agreed for Members to sit on the Council's Public Transport Advisory Panel for the 2013/14 Municipal Year. These were Councillors Gerrard (Chair), Morley, Stockton, Bradshaw and Woolfall.
- It was also agreed that the Chair and Vice-Chair would sit on the Consultation Review Panel as may be required from time to time.
- The current interventions and proposals being put in place to address specific Highways and Transport issues that were identified by the National Highway and Transportation public satisfaction survey held in late 2012.
- Information on how the Council's Highways Maintenance Service was developing in order to meet its statutory functions and public expectations in the face of increasing pressures to maximise efficiency and improve value for money.
- The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents had produced a guide entitled "Road Safety : A Guide for Local Councillors in England" which acknowledged the enormous cost to the local community of road traffic accidents whilst at the same time recognising the substantial budget cuts and spending restrictions placed on the Authority. The guide set how local elected members could continue to deliver effective road safety services which included highlighting the opportunities for joint working with public health colleagues who were now part of the local authority and had received their own formal guidance from the National Institute for Clinical Excellence on strategies to prevent unintentional injuries. This included such issues as 20 mph speed limits and engineering measures to reduce speed or make routes safer.
- There was a petition regarding the introduction of bollards and waiting restrictions to prevent parking on part of Cronton Lane, Widnes. It was agreed that due to the difficulties and various issues raised (which gave rise to a counter-petition when restrictions were proposed back in 2002), a wider consultation needed to be carried out in the surrounding area and the relevant Operational Director should write to the Police requesting the enforcement of the existing waiting restrictions in Cronton Lane. Following this wider consultation it had been agreed to take the necessary steps to introduce a Traffic Regulation Order to implement "At Any Time" waiting restrictions on parts of both sides of Cronton Lane, along with a request to Cheshire Police to provide additional attention to the area if parking continued.

- Following a public consultation, 2 objections had been raised regarding the proposed introduction of a 20 mph speed limit in Halton Castle ward as well as requests for their introduction to Castlefields Avenue East and North, which unfortunately are not suitable. Members noted the various groups and agencies who had been consulted with no other objections raised, so it was agreed that notice should be given of the Council's intention to introduce the reduced speed limits and the objectors be notified accordingly.
- Discussions were held over the Annual Road Traffic Collision and Casualty report for 2012. Whilst the results were mixed, with the total number of people slightly injured being reduced, the number of fatalities remained the same as in 2011. Concerns were raised that due to the reduction in Road Safety grants, both capital (£75k) and revenue ((£396k), a loss of half of the Road Safety Officers had occurred, along with funding for a wide range of projects and initiatives. This included Halton's contribution to the local safety camera partnership (Cheshire Road Safety Group). Members were worried that due to the cuts, camera enforcement in the borough would be adversely affected. Discussions were on-going to help identify alternative resources and the implications if these were not made available.

Economic Regeneration and Business Development

- The results of the BIG Castlefields Survey carried out with residents were brought to the Board's attention. This followed the 10 years of activity and the majority of the Masterplan having been delivered. The purpose of the survey was to provide residents with an opportunity to reflect on the regeneration programme and to express future aspirations for the neighbourhood, and incorporating any results into a work programme for the future that would guide the work of the Castlefields Partnership until 2023. The Board congratulated all involved with progress made at Castlefields and suggested that the results and broader lessons of the consultation should be considered for future housing and neighbourhood regeneration programmes in the borough.

Environmental and Regulatory Services

- Members received a report highlighting the conclusions and recommendations from the Tree Working Group. This group had looked at the Council's legal duty of care under both civil law and criminal law to manage its tree stock, details of the tree maintenance team, calls to the Open Space Service, issues around inspection and liability, along with the types of neighbour issues relating to trees.
 - Recommendations included developing a new Tree Strategy, the creation of an Open Space Officer, the implementation of a tree inspection regime, new advice and guidance information for elected members and the public, Officers to identify a suitable tree management IT system, strengthening of the Operational Tree Maintenance Team and Officers to explore income generation from

- the sale of the logs etc.
 - Report to be presented to the Executive Board.
- Discussions also took place following a proposal to pilot a scheme with a private enforcement company to pick up the role of issuing Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) for litter and dog control offences. Due to the resource intensive work required on behalf of Council staff to first issue a FPN and then relevant follow up if un-paid, it was agreed to support the pilot. However, elected members wanted reassurances that the chosen company wouldn't set any FPN targets or link financial incentives for their officers to the number of FPNs issued. It was also suggested that if the pilot proved to be financially successful, the Council look at employing staff to provide a FPN service and that a smoking cessation course perhaps could be offered instead of a FPN. A report will be presented to the Executive Board with appropriate recommendations.

Environmental Sustainability

- Unfortunately it was noted that DEFRA had withdrawn funding available through the Contaminated Land Capital Projects Programme. The potential implications of this for Halton were discussed by the Board. Halton had been very successful in terms of awards from this pot of funding and as there had been no consultation on the removal of this funding, officers had written to Government asking consideration on its reinstatement.

Physical Environment and Planning

- An update report on the preparation of Halton's Local Flood Risk Management Strategy which included prevention, protection and response to flood emergencies. Once completed the Strategy will be shared with Partners and the public for consultation. At a later meeting of the Board it was stated that the draft strategy had been shared with the Environment Agency who would retain a strategic overview of flood risks. It was also noted that as of April 2014, and the enactment of the Flood Water Management Act 2010, Halton would be the approval body for the Sustainable Drainage legislation part of the Act. This new role would be a substantial additional duty for the Council with significant policy and resource implications. Members asked for a further report to be brought back to the Board.
- Following a recent examination of the Core Strategy Local Plan, the Government appointed Planning Inspector concluded that there was insufficient identified land within Widnes/Hale to deliver the level of development required, particularly in relation to housing. In order to have the Plan found "sound" the Council had to commit to a review of its Green Belt boundaries and the Board agreed to the proposed methodology being put forward by officers.
- Officers presented information on the powers available under Section 215 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. This gave the Council power to force the owner and/or occupier of land which the Council considered to be in poor condition to remedy the condition of the land. Details were provided of examples of where a Section 215 had been applied and the subsequent financial and resource implications, however, it was stressed that whilst these

enforcement powers were available, the practice was to resolve cases through negotiation and informal means.

- A report explaining that Halton's Unitary Development Plan had been replaced in part by the Core Strategy which contains 25 different policies, one of which is the Delivery and Allocations Local Plan. Its main role was to allocate sites and provide detailed policies for Halton's places, areas and issues. A scoping document has been produced which will be used to review the main policy areas that the Council plans to cover when preparing the Delivery and Allocations Plan and Members were asked to note the timetable for production of the Local Plan.
- The issue of Affordable Housing within the borough was discussed by the Board following an update on the current situation. It was noted that the National Planning Policy Framework required Councils to plan to meet the assessed need for market and affordable housing in their area. The Strategic Housing Market Assessments (SHMA) were used to identify and assess needs arising and inform the development of housing and planning policy, considering the balance between supply and demand. The SHMA from 2011 had been undertaken as part of the wider Mid Mersey area and there was a proposed sub SHMA planned for 2015-16 which would help to reassess the level of affordable housing need in Halton. Officers advised that the annual unmet need for affordable housing was far in excess of the proposed targets as set out in the Core Strategy, however as the SHMA was an evidence based document that was meant to guide policy development, the targets were definite ones that had to be met. It was also reported that the private sector currently, and will continue, to be used to meet the shortfall.
- Members noted the new Statement of Community Involvement (SCI) for the Local Plans Document, following on from the first one adopted in 2007. This set out the procedures which must be followed for consultation on all local plan documents and planning applications in Halton. The new SCI had been developed due to the number of legislative changes to the planning framework

Communities

- Members were made aware of a Governance Review being undertaken by Halton Housing Trust (HHT) of which the Council has a 33% share. Recommendations of the review included reducing the number of Board Members, using a skills matrix to maximise appointments to the Board and limiting the number of years served to a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 9. Elected Members, whilst acknowledging the continued success of HHT and recognising the future difficulties faced, expressed disappointment at the proposals. A copy of HHT's legal advice on Board membership was to be circulated. Changes to HHT's Board would be supported subject to the Council having a 33% representation in line with its investment.
- Board members supported a proposal for a 12 month pilot project, working in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce, which would offer vulnerable residents access to private company services at no cost to themselves through a corporate social responsibility accreditation scheme. This was focussed on

the Section 215 notices that the Council could potentially issue for lack of maintenance of property. However, the proposed Halton Cares scheme had been developed because in a number of recent cases the residents concerned had been identified as elderly, disabled or in some way vulnerable and it had been deemed unsuitable to issue a 215 notice. The pilot scheme would focus on gardening issues and a further report would be brought back to the Board at the end of the pilot.

- The Homelessness Strategy for 2013-2018 was presented to the Board. This outlined the Council's statutory housing duty and recommendations on how this could be met. The strategy had been based on two other pieces of work:- a comprehensive review of current homelessness services and the previous Homelessness Strategy (2009-2013). It was noted that Halton was experiencing a gradual increase in those presenting themselves as homeless and the statutory homelessness acceptances. The Housing Solutions Team were working with the most vulnerable client groups, offering temporary accommodation for a limited period and facilitating a more efficient "move on" process. The Localism Act 2011 had introduced several changes around homelessness and allocations legislation, and the new Strategy took these into account.

WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2014/2015

The Board is asked to consider whether it wishes to carry out Topic Reviews for the 2014/15 Municipal year at its next or subsequent meetings.

Members of the Public are welcome at the meetings of the Board. If you would like to know where and when meetings are to be held or if you would like any more information about the Board or its work please contact Mick Noone on 0151 511 7604 or mick.noone@halton.gov.uk