

## APPENDIX 1

### **Extract of Executive Board and Executive Board Sub Committee Minutes Relevant to the Corporate Services Policy and Performance Board**

#### **EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 12<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2009**

##### **EXB103 DRAFT BUDGET 2009/10 – KEY DECISION**

The Board considered a report of the Operational Director – Financial Services, which outlined a recommendation to Council in respect of the Budget, Capital Programme and Council Tax for 2009/10.

It was noted that, at the time of writing the report, the Cheshire Police and Fire Authorities had not set their budgets and Council Tax precepts. However the Board were informed that the Fire Authority had now confirmed that its precept was 2.9% and it was advised that the Police Authority was to meet on 24<sup>th</sup> February to make a decision on its precepts.

The Board was advised that the Medium Term Financial Strategy, approved on 20<sup>th</sup> November 2008, had identified a funding gap of around £6m in each of the next three years. The Strategy had the following objectives:

- to prioritise investments in the five priority areas;
- to avoid excessive Council Tax rises;
- to deliver a balanced and sustainable budget; and
- to achieve significant cashable efficiency savings to enable this to happen.

As part of the Budget Strategy each Directorate had managed its budget to generate underspend of £500,000 each. This had generated £2m to be transferred to the Invest to Save Fund. The Board noted that it was anticipated that balances at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009 would be around £6.6m broadly as planned when the budget had been set the previous year.

In order to close the £6 m funding gap a number of proposed savings had been identified. A list of the proposed savings was outlined in Appendix C to the report. The Policy and Performance Boards had been consulted on these proposals, and comments made in relation to the following items were noted:

- relocating Murdishaw and Woodlands Play Centre Services;

- Transport Services for Children's Services – it was noted that this saving was a reflection of the lower demand for the service;
- reorganise litter picking in Neighbourhood areas – it was reported that the current standard would be maintained by deploying staff in a more flexible way;
- revised arrangements for pest control;
- street lighting pilot – the proposal related to turning off lights on the Daresbury Expressway, A56 and Watkinson Way. However, an alternative for making equivalent savings within the Highways Department had been found from Street Lighting Efficiencies and following consideration of the feedback received this proposal was withdrawn; and
- delete attendants' posts at Widnes Town Centre toilets – it was noted that the toilets would still be cleaned but would no longer be staffed, and the situation would be monitored.

In relation to the item headed "Cease Trade Waste" it was noted that, although the Council was to cease providing this service directly, trade waste would continue to be collected by the private sector.

In addition, the Board noted that the Area Forums had been provided with the opportunity to feed into the consultation process and a list of comments made at the recent Area Forum meetings was provided for Members' consideration.

The Departmental analysis of the budget was shown in Appendix D to the report and the major reasons for change from the current budget were outlined for Members' information. It was noted that, after taking account of the windfall gain arising from the commutation adjustment in 2004/05 (the last year the Council could do this), the budget requirement was £105.117m.

Further information was provided in respect of the Local Government Finance Settlement, Halton's Council Tax, Parish Precepts, the Capital Programme, the Prudential Code and school budgets. In relation to the Council Tax, it was expected that Halton's total Council Tax would continue to be amongst the lowest in the North West, with residents in Band D experiencing a weekly rise of 71p per week and residents in Band A, ie half the properties in the Borough, experiencing a weekly rise of 47p.

**RESOLVED:** That the Council be recommended to adopt the resolution set out in Appendix A of the report, which includes setting the budget at £105.467m and the Band D Council Tax for Halton (before Parish, Police and Fire Precepts) of £1,116.69.

## EXB104 TREASURY MANAGEMENT AND INVESTMENT STRATEGY 2009/10

The Board considered a report of the Operational Director – Financial Services proposing the Treasury Management Strategy for 2009/10.

The Treasury Management Strategy Statement was shown in Appendix A to the report and detailed the expected activities of the Treasury function in the forthcoming financial year (2009/10).

The Local Government Act 2003 required the Council to “have regard to” the Prudential Code and to set Prudential indicators for the next three years to ensure that the Council’s capital investment plans were affordable, prudent and sustainable. The Act therefore required the Council to set out its Treasury Strategy for borrowing as well as an Investment Strategy, which set out the Council’s policies for managing its investments and for giving priority to the security and liquidity of those investments.

Members noted that a new requirement for 2009/10 was the production of a minimum revenue provision policy statement: there was a detailed explanation of why this was required within the Strategy, together with a formal statement for approval.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Council adopt the policies, strategies and statements outlined in the Treasury Management Strategy; and
- (2) delegated authority be given to the Operational Director – Financial Services, in consultation with the Corporate Services Portfolio Holder, to set the Minimum Revenue Provision repayment periods.

## **EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 5<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2009**

### EXB115 COUNCIL INTERNAL GOVERNANCE

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Corporate and Policy which considered the way forward for the Council’s internal Governance arrangements in light of the Government’s latest Consultation document.

The Board was advised that on the 30<sup>th</sup> December 2007 Section 64 and Schedule 4 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 came into force. This inserted new

provisions into the Local Government Act 2000. These compelled Councils to adopt one of the two new governance models. In Halton's case this decision must be taken by no later than 31<sup>st</sup> December 2010.

Members were advised that the two new governance models were as follows:

- (1) New-style Leader and Cabinet Executive OR
- (2) Mayor and Cabinet Executive.

No change was not an option and those were the only two models allowed. The report set out the key features of these two new models along with outlining a provisional timetable assuming final Government guidance was issued in May 2009.

The Board discussed both models in depth and noted that a most models that had an elected Mayor did not have a Ceremonial Mayor also.

RESOLVED: That

(1) the Council noted the Consultation Paper and deferred a decision on the consultation and on the choice between the two models for internal governance until the Government had published the final version of its guidance; and the Strategic Director Corporate and Policy be authorised to determine the Council's response to the Consultation Paper on the basis set out in paragraph 3.10 of the report.

#### **EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 5<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2009**

##### **EXB124 POLICY FOR THE TRANSFER OF ASSETS TO THE THIRD SECTOR**

The Board received a report of the Strategic Director Corporate and Policy which sought the Board's approval to an Asset Transfer Policy to be applied in circumstances where the transfer of land or property to the third sector could be seen to be addressing Community Strategy priorities and making financial sense to the authority.

It was noted that the Council had over many years supported organisations in the third sector in a variety of ways that provided support to the Council's priorities. This support had included the letting of surplus properties to such organisations. These arrangements had, however, been on an ad-hoc basis.

Following the publication of the Quirk Review (commissioned by the Government) in 2007 through which local community groups were encouraged to approach their local Councils to see if the local authority had any surplus assets capable of being used to support the delivery of their services, more requests were being made for the Council to transfer their assets to the third sector.

It was felt that in order to address such request, a more formal approach was needed to deal with them. The Corporate Services Policy and Performance Board included this topic in its 2008/09 work programme and had developed such a policy for consideration by the Executive Board. The Board had recommended the attached policy for adoption.

It was further noted that the first consideration in all cases would be whether the Council considered the land/ building to be surplus in the first place. This would precede any further application of the policy. This would need to be undertaken by balancing the potential commercial value of the asset against any potential use, always taking into account the wider financial implications for the Council. In particular, the need to generate capital receipts to support the Council's Capital Programme.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the work done by the Corporate Services Working Party be received;
- (2) the Asset Transfer Policy be formally adopted, subject to any final amendments; and

delegated authority be given to the Strategic Director, Corporate and Policy, in consultation with the relevant portfolio holder to approve final amendments as necessary.

#### EXB126 EFFICIENCY PARTNER – CONTRACT ARRANGEMENTS

The Board received a report of the Strategic Director, Corporate and Policy which advised Members of the contract arrangements with the Council's Efficiency Partner (KPMG), in accordance with the Executive Board Minute No. EXB74/2008 and to provide an update on progress.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

## **EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 2<sup>ND</sup> APRIL 2009**

### **EXB129 ANNUAL REVIEW OF THE CONSTITUTION**

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Corporate and Policy which sought the approval of the Council to a number of changes to the Constitution.

Members had received a revised version of the Constitution, it was advised that this amended version picked up the changes to the Council's working arrangements that had taken place during the year, as well as other changes which were intended to assist the Council to operate more effectively.

It was advised that the proposals for change had been considered by the Chief Executive and the Executive Board Member for Corporate Services in accordance with Article 16.02. It was reported that apart from the purely technical changes, the proposed amendments that were considered to be of particular significance were listed as an appendix to the report.

The Board was informed of one change to the appendix which related to Citizen's Right's of Access to Information in terms of amending the acceptability of questions put to Area Forums. It was proposed that questions put to Area Forums should be the responsibility of the Lead Officer in Consultation with Members, rather than in consultation with the chair as not all Area Forums have a standing Chairman.

**RESOLVED:** That Council be recommended to approve the changes to the Constitution as set out in the amended version detailed as follows.

#### **Local Code of Corporate Governance**

National Standard document which Council needs to adopt. Further enhances the Council's integrity framework.

#### **Warrington BC Trading Standards arrangements**

Delegated powers changed to reflect joint working with Warrington BC

#### **1. Mental Health functions – officer delegation**

A separate report seeking additional officer delegations in relation to the council's Mental Health functions. To the extent approved by Council these will be added to the final printed version of the 2009 Constitution.

## **2. Urgent Decisions**

It is important that the Council is able to respond promptly within an accountable framework. For this reason an urgent measures delegation is proposed for approval in the Scheme of Delegation.

## **3. Procurement Standing Orders**

Improvements have also been proposed to the Procurement Standing Orders to ensure that the reasons for decisions are documented. This will enhance accountability and transparency.

## **4. Call-In**

Changes have also been made to the Call-In Procedure to allow withdrawal where Members initiating the Call-In wish to discontinue the process.

## **Citizen's Right's of Access to Information, meetings etc, Number 7.**

Acceptability of questions put to Area Forums should be the responsibility of the Lead Officer in consultation with Members rather than the responsibility of the Chair since not all Area Forums have a Standing Chairman.

## **EXB130 SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES ACT 2007**

The Board received a report of the Strategic Director, Corporate and Policy which informed Members of the provisions of the Sustainable Communities Act 2007 and reported on a consultation on local spending reports pursuant to the Act.

It was advised that the Sustainable Communities Act 2007 was introduced to parliament as a Private Bill. In summary –

- 1) Local authorities were invited to make suggestions to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government aimed at improving the sustainability of local communities. Suggestions must promote economic, social and environmental well-being.
- 2) Local authorities would be able to request Local Spending Reports to help them to prioritise actions. These reports would show all of the Government spending in their communities from Government Departments and their agencies.
- 3) The Act formally changed the name "Community Strategies" (as set out in the Local Government Act 2000) to "Sustainable Community Strategies".

The Board was advised that under the provisions of the Act, the Secretary of State had invited Local Authorities to make proposals which they considered would contribute to promoting the sustainability of local communities. It was advised that the expectation was that most proposals would originate from community organisations, parties and town councils, neighbourhood forums, residents and tenants associations, local strategic partnerships and other partnership bodies. It was further noted that proposals could also be developed by Councils themselves.

The Board was informed that there was no limit on the types of proposals that local authorities could make to the Secretary of State. It was noted that they could include a request for a transfer of functions from one body to another (for example from a national to a local body or from one local body to another). This could be accompanied by a request for transfer of funding linked to that function. In making such a proposal a local authority would have first to consult with both bodies concerned. It was noted there was no specific budget associated with this Act and proposals could be made requiring new funding but generally they would need to be resourced from existing public funds.

The Board was further advised that before submitting a proposal to the Government for consideration, the local authority must first establish and consult with a panel of “representatives of local persons”. Statutory guidance required that persons from under-represented groups were included on such a panel. It was noted that for the purposes of the Act “representatives of local persons” meant a balanced selection of individuals, groups or organisations likely to be affected by or have an interest in the proposal. It did not refer to formally elected or nominated members of the community.

It was advised that the deadline for submission of proposals to the LGA was 31<sup>st</sup> July 2009. It was noted the LGA planned to consult on some draft criteria for short listing proposals in March 2009 and to publish a final proposal form in April allowing three months for local consultation and decision making before the submission deadline. It was further noted that there would be further rounds for submission on proposals but no timetable had yet been set.

The Board also considered that the Act required the Secretary of State to make arrangements for the production of Local Spending Reports. These reports provided information about public spending in relation to a particular area. It was noted that this was intended to “promote the sustainability of local communities by providing access to high quality information about the public funding that was spent in the area”. The Government expected this provision to provide greater transparency and accountability.



It was reported that the Government had recently published a consultation on proposals for local spending reports. The consultation period would end on 15<sup>th</sup> May 2009. The consultation pointed out that the statutory requirement was potentially complex and expensive and suggested that the "first arrangement" would make use of information currently available and through the consultation it could be assessed how reports should be developed over time.

It was advised that the Government proposed that the first arrangement should comprise a list of items of expenditure for all local authorities, police authorities, fire and rescue authorities and primary care trusts. It was proposed that the items of expenditure would be broken down into more detailed tables as currently set out in the revenue out-turn returns made to Central Government.

The Board was advised of a response that would be sent to the consultation indicating that to be of any use, the reports must set out what was spent by agencies and Government departments. The proposed responses to the consultation questions were appended to the report for Members' consideration.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) a seminar be held for all Members to consider how the Council might respond to promoting sustainability within the framework of the Act;
- 2) the matter be discussed at the Halton Strategic Partnership Board; and

the draft response to the consultation on local spending reports set out in the in appendix be agreed.

#### EXB131 PREPARATION FOR COMPREHENSIVE AREA ASSESSMENT - CAA

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Corporate and Policy which outlined the key features of the new CAA framework that would take effect on 1<sup>st</sup> April, 2009. Appended to the report were signposts and specific information on the following aspects of the CAA for Members' consideration:

- a) The scope and architecture of CAA
- b) The Area Assessment
- c) The Organisational Assessment
- d) Timetable for Assessment
- e) Actions being taken to prepare for CAA

It was advised that a version of this report would be circulated to all members of the Halton Strategic Partnership Board, Specialist Strategic Partnerships and Sector Based Partnerships in the near future.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the Board approves the initial actions to prepare for the Comprehensive Area Assessment set out in Section (e) of Annex 1 to the report; and
- 2) the Board supports and engages with the activities to prepare for CAA, across relevant areas of the Council and the Halton Strategic Partnership.

## **EXECUTIVE BOARD SUB COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 12<sup>TH</sup> FEBRUARY 2009**

### **ES80 SPENDING AS AT 31<sup>ST</sup> DECEMBER 2008**

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Operational Director – Financial Services, which gave details of the Council's overall Revenue and Capital spending position as at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2008.

Members were advised of the spending against the revenue budget for each Department, up to the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2008 and it was noted that, in overall terms, revenue expenditure was below the budget profile. Areas of concern were outlined in detail within the report.

Members were advised of capital spending to the 30<sup>th</sup> December 2008, which totalled £25.3m, and which was 70% of the planned spending of £36.1m at this stage. However, this represented only 52% of the total capital programme of £48.3m, although the Department for Transport had approved the carry forward of £1.6m in respect of the Local Transport Plan expenditure.

It was noted that although, historically, capital expenditure was significantly higher in the latter part of the financial year, it was important that project managers maintained pressure to keep projects and spending on schedule and in particular to ensure that all external funding was maximised.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

## **EXECUTIVE BOARD SUB COMMITTEE HELD ON 5<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2009**

### **ES89 NON-DOMESTIC DISCRETIONARY RELIEF**

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Strategic Director, Corporate and Policy which sought Members' consideration of an application for discretionary non-domestic rate relief and to review all of the current recipients, under the provisions of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

The Sub-Committee was advised that under the provisions of Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, the Authority was allowed to grant discretionary rate relief to organisations that were either a charity or a non-profit making organisation. This relief may also be awarded to Community Amateur Sports Clubs. A summary of the application was outlined within the report and a list of associated figures was attached as Appendix 1. Organisations currently receiving the relief were listed in Appendix 2 to the report.

It was reported that further information regarding three organisations was still required, namely Birchfield Park Sports & Social Club Ltd, Moorfield Sports & Social Club and Pavillions Arena Ltd. It was requested that these be deferred.

It was noted that there was an anomaly between the current awards of Discretionary Relief granted to the two 'Help the Aged' Charity Shops in the Borough.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) under the provisions of Section 47, Local Government Finance Act 1988, discretionary rate relief be granted to the following organisation at the percentage indicated, for the period from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008 or the commencement of liability, whichever was the later, to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013:

Halton Haven Hospice	20%
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- 2) A decision on the award of Discretionary Relief to Birchfield Park Sports & Social Club Ltd, Moorfield Sports & Social Club and Pavillions Arena Ltd be deferred;
- 3) Help the Aged, 34A Albert Square, Widnes be awarded 20% Discretionary Relief from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013; and

All other current recipients of discretionary rate relief still satisfying the appropriate criteria, were re-awarded the relief from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013.

## ES90 CORPORATE SCRUTINY CONTRACT

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Strategic Director, Corporate and Policy which notified Members of the intention to go out to tender with regards to procuring a new corporate security contract in line with the Council's procurement strategy. There were currently two security contracts in place, the smaller one of which would require a short extension granting in order to bring it in line with the timescales of the larger contract, as such a waiver of standing orders was requested in respect of this process.

The Committee was advised that there were two main security contracts in place. The larger contract which related to buildings was procured via Property Services and expired on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2009. The current service provider for this contract were Select Security who took over the contract when they bought out Druants in November 2008. The second security contract which related to parks and the operation of playing fields was procured via Leisure Services. This was due to expire on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2009 the current service providers for this contract were Athena Global.

As the existing contracts expire at different times it was necessary to extend the smaller contract in order to bring it in line with the timescales of the larger contract.

Members were advised that the new corporate contract would bring the services currently being provided under the two separate contracts together, in addition, to which it would also allow for other departments to purchase any necessary future security provision that may be required during the life of the contract.

It was further noted that it was intended to have the new contract in place for 1<sup>st</sup> June 2009 and it was envisaged that the new contract would be set up for a three year period with the possibility of a one year extension subject to satisfactory performance, ensuring the maximum timeframe was four years, in line with EU procurement rules.

Members were advised that the likely value of the contract over the three-year period would be in the region of £2.5m. Whilst this was above the EU procurement thresholds, security services were exempt from the full EU procurement process and, as such, the contract did not have to be advertised under OJEU notice.

Athena Global had been contacted and they had agreed to continue delivering the existing services in line with their contract until such time as the new contract was in place.

Funding for the contract came from a variety of sources and would be contained within existing budgets.

Members queried what the contract included. In response it was noted that it included the security provision for all parks and that the contract tender would be advertised in the wider North West area rather than just locally.

It was further confirmed that Councillor Wharton would oversee the procurement from the Members side and that the item would come back to the Executive Board Sub Committee for approval once the process was complete.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) in line with Procurement Standing Order 1.6 the Executive Board Sub Committee waive Standing Orders 3.1 to 3.7 in order to allow for the Operational Director Culture and Leisure Services to grant an extension to the existing security contract with Athena Global from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009 until such time as the new contract was in place, which was envisaged to be 1<sup>st</sup> June 2009; and
- 2) the intention to procure a new corporate security contract in line with the procurement strategy be noted.

## ES91 THE DIGITAL INCLUSION PILOT

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Strategic Director, Corporate and Policy which requested the waiving of Procurement Standing Orders 3.1 to 3.7 which placed a requirement of the Council to tender for contracts with a value greater than £50,000 but not exceeding £1,000,000.

Members were advised that the Halton Strategic Partnership had approved a project to digitally enable around 120 households in an area with low levels of computer ownership and broadband uptake. It was a pilot project to establish that it could be successfully delivered. Households would be provided with a keyboard, mouse, flat screen and lightweight computing device (known as a thin client) connected to a managed computing service hosted at a central data centre. The service provided access to standard software such as Microsoft Office as well as to the Internet (which could be filtered if

necessary). In the absence of existing Broadband connections, a wireless connection would be provided.

It was further noted that the service to be procured would be the provision of a robust infrastructure with low running costs. The supplier would provide basic training on how to use the device, and a free connection for 12 months. Thereafter there may be a small charge (around £2 per month).

The partnership plan to build on this provision and develop local skills and to provide access to local services such as Job Centre Plus through a local portal.

Members were advised that residents in our deprived areas suffered from many forms of exclusion, one of which could be the lack of access to services provided over the internet. This project would address that, and also help to provide local residents with IT and other skills that may help in the job market. The pilot was to be located in part of Windmill Hill. This area had been selected because it was the most deprived area of the Borough and was relatively isolated. The proximity to the Daresbury Science facility was also a possible future benefit.

AIMES was a Community Interest Company. It was established by Liverpool University with funding from North West Development Agency and ERDF. It had established similar digital inclusion schemes in St. Helens, Liverpool and Wirral. It also provided commercial services, the profits from which were re-invested back into the social enterprise. The combination of the social objectives, specific expertise, technical solutions and experience in similar projects was believed to be unique in the region. The company had a local employment policy and a commitment to work with local partners on engagement and training provision. It was therefore recommended that for the purposes of this pilot, AIMES were engaged.

The contract would be for £200,000 and would provide approximately 120 households with a managed computer service, filtered internet access and access to other hosted applications, all the required equipment and connections, a user guide, and a free service for 12 months, and thereafter at a low cost.

Members were advised that there was no market in the provision of this service to enable value for money to be established through competition. However, AIMES would be procuring the equipment via competitive process. Thus although the co-ordination and management would not be market tested, much of the costs related to equipment which would be procured on a competitive basis,

and so there was reasonable comfort that the costs represented value for money.

Members were further advised that the procurement process was transparent by virtue of this report and the availability of information via the Freedom of Information Act. The project would be subject to the Council's normal internal and external audit and scrutiny procedures.

It was noted that to ensure propriety and security the usual integrity clauses would be built into the contract document and only staff with a need to know would have information about the contract.

It was further noted that accountability for the project would remain with the Operational Director Policy and Performance. Progress would be scrutinised through the Corporate Services Policy and Performance Board and the Halton Neighbourhood Management Board.

Given the social aims of this initiative this would be a Part B contract as, as such was exempt from the tendering requirements of the Contract Regulations 2006. However, there was still a requirement to place Contract Award Notice in OJEU within 42 days of the award of the contract (supports transparency) and all other contracts including Part B were subject to the overarching EU Principles of Transparency and Non-Distortion of Competition.

Members raised concerns over the fact that this had not gone to tender and the need to waive standing orders to complete the project. In response it was noted that there was only one known supplier, and that due to the time scale involved for the use of Working Neighbourhood Fund money, there was no time to test this through a tender process.

Having expressed their views regarding the choice of ward selected to do the pilot project, Members offered their support. It was noted that officers would report back to the Employment Learning and Skills PPB with an update.

**RESOLVED:** That the Operational Director, Policy and Performance be authorised to award the contract for the provision of a Digital Inclusion Pilot to the contractor AIMES Grid Services CIC Limited in the sum of £200,000 and that in light of the exceptional circumstances and in accordance with Procurement Standing Order 1.6, Standing Orders 3.1 to 3.7 and 3.10 be waived on this occasion because the requirements can only be delivered by this particular supplier in that it can provide a technical solution, can host this solution and has successfully delivered similar projects.

## **EXECUTIVE BOARD SUB COMMITTEE HELD ON 19<sup>TH</sup> MARCH 2009**

### **ES116 MARKET RENTS**

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Strategic Director, Corporate and Policy which asked members to consider a request from Widnes Market Traders' Association to reduce stall rental at the Market for 2009/10, in light of current trading trends.

Members were advised that the Council had received a formal request from the Widnes Market Traders' Association for stall rentals to be reduced at the market for 2009/10, given the current trading trends. The Traders' Association had asked that the Council considers reducing rents by 50%, given what they described as "extraordinary" times.

It was noted that the Market was experiencing its first decrease in occupancy levels since it opened in 1995. The concern is that if more stall holders were forced to leave the Market, then its overall viability would be threatened. Whilst some new traders had tried to establish a business in recent times, three had had to cease trading within a six month period.

It was further noted that the Market, as a business, had made a significant financial contribution to the Council over many years and played an important part in the overall shopping offer within the Borough, employing many local people and attracting visitors from nearby towns.

Members were further advised that there was a fine balance to be struck in circumstances such as this and rent levels were already a key component of running a commercial operation such as a market. If they were too high for traders to sustain a healthy business and they therefore moved on, this had an impact on the view potential users of the Market and could lead to a downward spiral. However, any reduction had to be reviewed against the overall financial picture the Council was facing. Reducing rents in turn reduced income to the Council at a time when other sources of income were also reducing. Overall reductions in income required further efficiencies/savings to be found from elsewhere in the Council's budget.

Members were advised that in view of the above it was considered a 50% reduction, as requested, was too great a level to support at the current time, given that it would lead to a significant reduction in income to the Council, taking into account the wider responsibilities of the Council. However, the situation faced by traders was real and was recognised and the potential impact in the long term



on the Market was fully appreciated. In all the circumstances, it was suggested that a 10% reduction be introduced for 2009/10 and the inflationary rise that was due to be applied for that year no longer be applied.

The Sub-Committee noted that the Council had a direct interest to ensure Widnes Market continued to be successful, both as a business and as a key contributor to the Borough's shopping offer. It was agreed that a further report be submitted outline a future business plan for both markets and further reports be made on the performance of the market following the implementation of this decision.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) no inflationary uplift be applied to 2009/10 rents;
- (2) a 10% rent reduction be applied for 2009/10 and be subject to a further review before being applied beyond 2009/10; and
- (3) the Strategic Director, Corporate and Policy be requested to identify compensatory savings from within that Directorate's Budget

ES119 FORMER INFORMATION CENTRE, CHURCH STREET,  
RUNCORN

The Sub-Committee received a report of the Strategic Director, Corporate and Policy which drew Members' attention to a request received from Halton Credit Union to utilise the building formally occupied by the Information Centre in Church Street, Runcorn.

The Sub-Committee was updated on the current situation in respect of a latest commercial interest in the Former Information Centre, Runcorn. In light of this information it was agreed that the report be deferred.

RESOLVED: That given the current commercial interest the report be deferred.