

CORPORATE SERVICES POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD

At a meeting of the Corporate Services Policy and Performance Board Wednesday, 27 September 2006 in the Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn

Present: Councillors Gilligan (Chairman), Lowe (Vice-Chairman), Blackmore, Dennett, C Inch, Loftus, Nolan and Norddahl

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Bradshaw and Edge

Absence declared on Council business: Councillor K. Wainwright

Officers present: G. Ferguson, J. Burgess, I. Leivesley, R. Mackenzie, J. Tradewell and R Wainwright

Also in attendance: (none)

ITEM DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

		<i>Action</i>
CS9	MINUTES The Minutes of the meeting held on 6 th June 2006 having been printed and circulated were taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.	
CS10	PUBLIC QUESTION TIME It was noted that no public questions were received.	
CS11	MINUTES OF EXECUTIVE BOARD The Minutes of the Executive Board and the Executive Board Sub Committee, relating to the work of the Corporate Services Policy and Performance Board since its last meeting were submitted for information. RESOLVED: That the minutes be noted.	
CS12	LOCAL AREA AGREEMENTS The Board received a report outlining the need for a	

Local Area Agreement (LAA) to be negotiated with Central Government by April 2007. A LAA was a three-year protocol which set out priorities for a local area, as represented by the Lead Local Authority and other key partners through the Local Strategic Partnership. The Board was updated on the progress made to date in this respect and a copy of the draft LAA was circulated.

Within the report an outline was given of:

- how LAAs would be formed;
- how they would align with national priorities;
- the reward element;
- government timetable leading to the adoption of an LAA; and
- the building blocks already in place at Halton, which would enable a strong and robust LAA to be put in place.

RESOLVED: That the report and outline of the process be noted.

CS13 EQUALITY LEGISLATION

The Board considered an update report on the forthcoming changes in legislation in relation to age, disability and gender.

The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006 would come into force on 1st October 2006. The Regulations implement the EU framework directive (adopted in November 2000) requiring Member States to introduce legislation to ban age discrimination. The Regulations applied to all workers including self employed workers and contract workers. The Regulations also applied to people taking part in or applying for employment related vocational training including all courses at further education and higher education institutions. The regulations did not apply to political office holders.

It was reported that the Council was in the process of reviewing its personnel procedures to take account of the regulations. Areas which would need to be looked at included:

- Retirement notification procedures;
- Procedures to implement the new duty to consider requests to work beyond retirement age;
- salary bands with more than five incremental points.

The Board also considered the implications for the Council of the Disability Discrimination Act 2005. The Act built on and extended various disability discrimination legislation, principally the Disability Discrimination Act 1995. It was reported that the most significant change was the new Disability Equality Duty and the requirement to produce the Disability Equality Scheme. It was proposed to deal with the requirement to produce the Scheme by incorporating it into the Council's Corporate Equality Plan rather than producing a separate document.

In addition, the Board considered the main purposes and implications of the Equality Act 2006. It was reported that the most significant implication to the Local Authority was likely to be the new gender equality duty. As well as being a general duty, there were powers in the Act for the Secretary of State to introduce further specific duties by regulations. To a large extent, the gender equality provisions mirrored those for race equality and disability equality. In terms of the practical aspects of employment implementation, at least so far as the Council as an employer and service provider was concerned, the legislation should not require the Council to alter drastically what it already had in place to ensure that it operates in a way that was compatible with equality legislation. However, the legislation does shift the emphasis away from compliance to requiring authorities to be more pro-active in their approach to gender equality.

It was noted that it would not be enough for an authority to not discriminate to comply with the duty. In future authorities would need to be satisfied that procedures in place for ensuring that they did not discriminate against women or men in their employment practices were actually achieving results in ensuring an appropriate gender a mix in the workforce, and in eliminating any pay gap between the genders.

Arising from the discussion, the Board requested that employee indicators be submitted to the next meeting. It was also suggested that the Executive Board as part of the Employment Equality (Age Regulations) 2006, should be invited to consider whether the Council should set a default retirement age for the purposes of the Regulations.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the employee indicators be submitted to the next meeting of the Board; and

Chief Executive

(2) the Executive Board be asked to consider whether the Council should set a default retirement age of 65 in the light of the Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006.

CS14 QUARTERLY MONITORING REPORTS

The Board considered a report which outlined the progress of the Performance Management First Quarter against the Service Plan objectives, milestones and performance targets affecting the service etc. for the following areas:

- Personnel Services;
- Financial Services;
- Exchequer and Customer Services;
- ICT Services;
- Policy and Performance;
- Legal and Member Services;
- Property Services; and
- Stadium and Hospitality.

Concerns were raised regarding the following issues:

- (i) possible links between vacancies and absenteeism and the need to keep this under scrutiny;
- (ii) the increasing cost of school meals and the decline in demand;
- (iii) the absence of the 4th Quarter Monitoring reports.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Performance Monitoring Reports be noted;
- (2) a report be presented to the next meeting on behalf of Stadium and Hospitality; and
- (3) a report be presented to a future meeting on the number of staff undertaking training, types of courses and training budget.

Chief Executive

CS15 AREA FORUMS SCRUTINY OF EXPENDITURE

Under the Council's Constitution the Board had responsibility for scrutinising the expenditure of Area Forums. The Board considered a report which outlined how the Area Forums had used their funding in 2005/06.

In 2005/06 £600,000 was allocated to the Area Forums, which was made up of £300,000 NRF and £300,000 from Halton Borough Council's Priorities Fund. The money was allocated on a 'per capita' basis across the seven Area Forums that covered the Borough. The local community were invited to raise ideas for neighbourhood projects, which would help to improve their local area. The Forum considered the ideas and an action plan was agreed. Action must have community support and not result in a long-term financial commitment.

The Projects funded through the Area Forums for 2005/06 were wide and varied. These were categorised into a number of key areas, which were listed below.

- Bonfire Initiative;
- Landscapes;
- Youth facilities;
- Improved Parks;
- Pedestrian access;
- Security;
- Traffic Calming;
- Disabled facilities;
- General Improvements.

Arising from the discussion, the Board requested that in future the report outlining the scrutiny of Area Forums expenditure include figures rather than pie charts, the revenue impact of schemes and information on the applicant who had requested funding.

RESOLVED: That the Board:

- (1) consider whether the use of funding by the Area Forums is consistent with the purposes and aims of the Area Forums;
- (2) make such recommendations as it considers appropriate with regard to the future use of funding by Area Forums; and
- (3) look further at the impact of the investment made through the Area Forums (as part of the Area Forum topic in the work programme) to see whether the resultant benefits are commensurate with the investment made.

Chief Executive

CS16 AUDIT OF PARTNERSHIPS

The Board considered a report on the Audit of Partnership Activity being undertaken as well as some of the governance issues in relation to partnership working.

Once the Council was involved with the partnership, the partnership needed to have governance arrangements appropriate to the scale and nature of its activity. If it was going to spend public money, it would need to have appropriate controls over probity and propriety. In addition, it would need to keep appropriate records so there was a proper audit trail. Arrangements for contracts and decision-making would need to be consistent with Local Government law and the Council's own constitutional arrangements. It was clear that the Council needed to ensure that it had an appropriate degree of control over those partnerships with which it was involved. As a first step in this process, a survey of partnership working had been carried out within the Authority.

So far, 69 partnerships had been identified, although it was felt that this was not yet the complete picture as a number of partnerships seemed to have been missed. Details of the Partnerships identified to date were circulated to Members. Work was continuing to identify other partnerships which had yet to be identified.

The next step in the process would be to review the involvement with all the partnerships in question and to set up a framework for considering which partnerships to be involved with in the future. As part of this exercise, it would also be necessary to develop arrangements for ensuring proper accountability and scrutiny of partnership working.

RESOLVED: That the Board –

- (1) identify any issues that it considers needs to be picked up as part of the review of Partnership Working;
- (2) advise as to whether the checklist addresses the key governance areas in relation to partnership working; and
- (3) consider what kind of scrutiny arrangements might be put in place for partnerships.

CS17 TOPIC BRIEF: AREA FORUMS

The Board had previously agreed a number of topics for consideration in the coming year. One of these was to look at the role and operation of Area Forums. A draft topic brief had been previously circulated to Members of the Board for consideration. It was noted that the Working Group would hold its first meeting on 5th October 2006 and all Members of the Board were invited to attend.

RESOLVED: That the Topic Brief for the Review of Area Forums be approved.

CS18 HALTON DIRECT LINK WORKING GROUP

The Board considered a report which outlined the findings of the Working Group on the outcome of the external review of Halton Direct Link (HDL) undertaken by SOCITM.

The report highlighted future opportunities for delivering further services through HDL by extending process mapping and business process reviews using HDL at the Catalyst for achieving efficiency gains.

It was reported that the consultants report had concluded that:

“Halton Council is to be commended for its investment in the high quality, customer friendly interface with its service users. Halton’s determination from the beginning to stick to the vision of the development of face to face services before moving into other channels has paid off. There is now a stable platform with the confidence to take the service forward.”

As part of the future service developments a number of initiatives were being progressed which included a Customer Relations Management; database of information; introducing the Emergency Duty Team into HDL; the transfer of Tourist Information Centre Services to all HDL outlets; Registrar Services; ansaphone calls would be diverted to HDL; processing benefit applications; Benefit Fraud calls; library services; incoming customer mail; and the Benefits Express.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the developments outlined in the report be investigated and a programme of work developed to deliver the outcomes of these investigations; and
- (2) a timetable for business process reviews be drawn up, and progress be reported back to the Board quarterly; and
- (3) the CRM system be considered at a future meeting of the Member Services Working Party.

Chief Executive

Meeting ended at 8.12 p.m.