



Executive Board

**Thursday, 29 November 2007 2.00 p.m.
Marketing Suite, Municipal Building**

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

Chief Executive

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

PART 1

Item	Page No
1. MINUTES	
2. DECLARATION OF INTEREST	
Members are reminded of their responsibility to declare any personal or personal and prejudicial interest which they have in any item of business on the agenda no later than when that item is reached and (subject to certain exceptions in the Code of Conduct for Members) to leave the meeting prior to discussion and voting on the item.	
3. CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PORTFOLIO	
(A) SCHOOL TRAVEL PATHFINDER BID AND SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY	1 - 5

*Please contact Lynn Cairns on 0151 471 7529 or e-mail lynn.cairns@halton.gov.uk for further information.
The next meeting of the Committee is on Wednesday, 12 December 2007*

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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.

REPORT TO:	Executive Board
DATE:	29th November 2007
REPORTING OFFICER:	Strategic Directors– Environment / Children and Young People.
SUBJECT:	School Travel Pathfinder Bid and Sustainable School Transport Policy
WARDS:	Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

The purpose of the report is to seek approval from the Executive Board to enhance the Sustainable School Travel Policy for the 2008/9 and subsequent academic years in line with statutory requirements and seek approval for the submission of a bid to the Department of Children, Schools and Families for new funding under the School Travel Pathfinder initiative. The aim of the proposed bid is to improve access for children and young people, in particular from low-income households to a wider range of education, training and work based learning facilities within the Borough.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That Executive Board:-

- (1) Approve the statutorily required enhancements to the Sustainable School Transport Policy which allows for the provision of assistance with transport for families on low-incomes; and**
- (2) Confirm the submission of a bid by Halton Borough Council to the Department of Children, Schools and Families for School Travel Pathfinder funding at the end of November 2007.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Background

- 3.1 The Education and Inspections Act 2006, requires local authorities to improve the travel assistance it offers to children of both primary and secondary age from low-income households when travelling to and from school. In addition, Executive Board will recall that as from this year the Council has been required to publish a Sustainable School Travel Policy, detailing the assistance the Authority offers in terms of home to school travel. The first such statement was approved by Executive Board on 6th September 2007. [Minute EXB26]

- 3.2 From September 2008, Halton Borough Council will be required to provide free travel for pupils from low income households attending one of the three nearest qualifying schools, provided the school they attend is between 2 and 6 miles away. The Council will also be obliged to provide free travel arrangements for secondary school aged pupils from low income families to their nearest preferred school on the grounds of "religion and belief" where the school is between 2 and 15 miles from their home.
- 3.3 The Government, through the newly created Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) has also invited bids from local authorities for funding under the School Travel Pathfinder initiative. The aim of this initiative is to enable local authorities to offer on a trial basis extended support for home to school travel beyond the thresholds set by the Education and Inspections Act 2006. In particular, the Government is looking for bids which demonstrate the following improvements:-
- Provide enhanced transport arrangements which support parental preference;
 - Improve transport assistance for pupils living more than 2 miles from school; and
 - Reducing levels of car use on the home to school journey.
- 3.4 The Government has indicated that it may approve up to 20 Pathfinder schemes, with the first projects starting in September 2009. It is anticipated that if successful funding will be made available until the end of July 2012.

Objectives of the Proposed Bid

- 3.5 The aim of the Halton School Travel Pathfinder Bid is to provide greater travel choices and support for children and young people when travelling to a range of education and training facilities across the Borough. There is a strong emphasis within the bid on improving participation rates and attainment levels by children and young people living in the most deprived communities within Halton, by providing free, readily accessible and easy to use transport choices. This will in turn help support the Authority achieve new key National Outcome and Indicators for Children and Young People (as set out in the 2006 Local Government White Paper) as well as key local objectives in the Halton Children and Young People's Plan.
- 3.6 Funding is sought to provide a highly focused package of travel assistance / support for the following groups of children and young people, which are not currently provided within the Council's existing policy for assisted home to school travel, consisting of:-
- ***Improved travel opportunities for children and young people attending pre and after school activities;***

- ***Improved travel opportunities for young children and their parents / carers attending the new network of Children's Centre's across the Borough;***
- ***A package of travel assistance and support for learners participating in the new 14-19 diplomas within Halton; and***
- ***A further expansion of the Independent Travel Training initiative.***

3.7 The total amount of School Travel Pathfinder funding requested by Halton Borough Council is £803,370 which covers the period 2009/10 to 2012 /13, with an additional £50,000 in "pump prime" funding required during 2008/9. For its part, Halton Borough Council has already committed £407,370 from its Local Transport Plan to the project

Key Elements of the Proposed Bid

3.8 There are 3 key elements of the proposed bid, including:-

- **An expansion of the new "Door2Door" accessible transport scheme to cater for the above groups who are unable to use conventional public transport;**
- **Enhancing the independent travel training initiative; and**
- **A trial free public transport ticket for 14-16 year olds participating in the new 14-19 diplomas.**

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 If the proposed bid is successful, the additional funding will allow the Authority to offer additional travel assistance for the following categories of children and young people, which is not currently provided under the existing Sustainable School Travel Policy:-

Free travel on the pre bookable "door to door" transport will be offered to the following groups (where no suitable alternative is available):-

- Young children and their parent / carer (from low income families) travelling to and from home to their nearest Children's Centre within the Borough where the walking distance from home is over 1 mile;
- Primary school children up to the age of 11 years of age (from low income families) attending pre and after school activities where the home to school walking distance is over 1 mile. Other primary school children from non low income families shall be eligible to use the bookable "door2door" service to attend pre or after school activities if they live over 2 miles from their nearest primary school and provided no adequate conventional public transport service or other suitable alternative is available.
- Secondary school children aged between 11 and 16 years of age (from low income families) shall be eligible to use the bookable "door2door" service to attend pre or after school

activities provided they live over 2 miles from their nearest school (provided no alternative adequate conventional public transport or other suitable transport is available).

- 4.2 In addition, funding is being sought to provide additional transport to support learners participating in the new 14-19 diplomas which are due to start in Halton from September 2008. Funding is also sought to expand the independent travel training initiative which has been funded for two years by Neighbourhood Renewal Funding.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

Resource Implications

If the bid is unsuccessful, the Council will not be required to introduce the suggested improvements as set out in the bid.

Social Inclusion Implications

The measures contained within the proposed bid, will significantly enhance accessibility for children and young people from low-income households to a wide range of education, training and work based learning facilities across the Borough.

Best Value

The measures contained within the proposed bid are in line with the recommendations contained within the recently completed Best Value Report on Transport and Accessibility (2006).

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

If successful the proposed bid will assist in helping to meet a wide range of key objectives as contained within the Halton Children and Young People's Plan.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

If successful the bid will help to further enhance access to education, training and work based learning facilities within Halton for 14-19 year olds.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

No significant impact.

6.4 A Safer Halton

No significant impact

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

If successful the bid will assist in meeting a wide range of objectives as set out in the Halton Local Transport Plan 2006/7 – 2010/11.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 No significant risks are envisaged. If successful the additional travel will be funded from external Government grant funding. There is no commitment for the Authority to continue with the enhanced level of travel assistance beyond the trial period.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 The proposed bid will increase the accessibility of a wide range of education, training and work based learning facilities, providing opportunities for children and young people from all sections of the community within Halton. If successful the bid will ensure Halton Borough Council remains in the vanguard of pioneering transport authorities nationally.

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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Halton School Travel Pathfinder Bid	Transport Co-ordination, Rutland House.	David Hall Tel 0151 4717514

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 29 November 2007

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Children & Young People's Directorate

SUBJECT: Youth Matters/Connexions Transition

WARDS: Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To provide the Executive Board with information on the transition of Connexions funding and responsibilities to Local Authorities from April 2008.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION that agreement is sought in principle to:

- (1) Commission Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership, as a strategic and delivery partner in the Children and Young People's Partnership, to deliver Connexions services to all 13 – 19 year olds for the period from April 2008 to March 2011, initially.
- (2) Collaborate with partner Local Authorities in the City Region to jointly commission shared services that underpin and provide additional value to local Connexions services for the same period, initially.
- (3) Review the Local Authority's position as a member of Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership Limited to ensure that accountability to the Local Authority is maintained avoiding conflicts of interest. (Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership Board is reviewing its structure and Governance in view of the impending changes.)
- (4) Consider, where appropriate, commissioning other services from Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership or other providers to meet the needs of young people as identified in local plans.
- (5) Confirm that the grant allocation for Connexions is passported to Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership for the period 2008-2011 in line with a specified service requirement, and that the Local Authority will seek agreement from it's Strategic Partnership to this undertaking; and
- (6) Act as Guarantor to the Merseyside Pension Fund in respect of a share, based on population, of the Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership Limited.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 “Youth Matters” requires that by April 2008, responsibility for commissioning Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) and the funding that goes with it to be devolved to Local Authorities working through children’s trusts, schools and colleges. Local Authorities are expected to lead a genuinely collaborative approach and develop new arrangements for delivering IAG that clearly meet the needs of Young People in the area. These arrangements will be planned and implemented in a way that not only supports the delivery of the 14-19 learning entitlement but are integrated into a wider set of youth support services for teenagers and their parents.
- 3.2 The Department for Children, Schools and Families has commissioned the production of national IAG quality standards to cover all work with young people, which will be launched by the Minister in October 2007 with an implementation date of April 2008. The Local Authority will be responsible for ensuring the implementation of the IAG quality standards across all work with young people, including in schools and colleges.
- 3.3 Local Authorities are now responsible and accountable for youth policy in their area and are taking responsibility for integrated planning and commissioning of the full range of services for teenagers from universal activities through to more specialist and targeted support. This will enable, over time, universal and targeted services to work closely together to provide integrated support for Young People.
- 3.4 “Youth Matters” also made it clear that the support and guidance services provided by Connexions should now ‘go local’ so that they can be more fully included and integrated with the whole range of services for young people and their parents and carers. The ‘localisation’ of Connexions services will be achieved through the development of an Integrated Youth Support strategy at the local level; this will enable a greater coherence of service to young people and their parents/carers and provide greater efficiency in the way services are procured and delivered locally.
- 3.5 The Education and Skills Bill, which will be introduced into Parliament in the autumn, is expected to transfer the following statutory duties from the Secretary of State to Local Authorities; these duties have been enacted via the Government’s Grant to Connexions Partnerships hitherto:
- The obligations under Section 8 of the Employment and Training Act 1973 (amended by the Trade Union Reform, Employment Rights Act 1993), to ensure that careers services are provided for school and college students;

- The obligations under Section 114 of the Learning and Skills Act 2000 to ensure young people aged 13-19 are offered support to enable their effective participation in learning;
- The obligations under Section 140 of the Learning Skills Act 2000 for the assessment of young people with learning difficulties and disabilities

3.6 Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership Limited is currently an admitted body within the Merseyside Pension Fund and as a condition of its membership it is required to supply the Fund with a bond or other suitable indemnity to cover potential unfunded pension liabilities that could arise in the event of the premature termination of its membership of the Fund. Any deficit on their part of the Fund is currently guaranteed by the DCFS but under the new arrangements this guarantee will cease. A suitable solution is that the participating authorities act as financial guarantor of a share, based on population, of the potential unfunded liability. For Halton this would amount to £518,000. The likelihood of these costs becoming a reality will depend on what decisions are made about transferring staff in a closure situation to a successor authority.

3.7 **Transition Steering Group**

3.7.1 A Transition Steering Group was established with the agreement of the City Region Leaders group to review existing arrangements and develop future arrangements for the delivery and commissioning of the Connexions Service across Merseyside.

3.7.2 The group consists of:

Chief Executives – Halton, Liverpool, St Helens
Directors of Children’s Services – Knowsley, Sefton, Wirral
Chief Executive – Connexions
Chair – Connexions

And is chaired by the Chief Executive – Halton.

3.7.3 The Transition Group is developing proposals to meet the Youth Matters agenda and specifically the delivery and commissioning of the Connexions Service across Merseyside. It is seeking to secure consistent practice across the 6 Local Authorities in order to maximise smooth transfer to new arrangements from the 1st April 2008 .

3.8 **The Transition Steering Group has agreed the following actions and intended outcomes subject to the agreement of Cabinet members from the partnership of Local Authorities:**

- 3.8.1 There is a future role for Connexions as a separate legal entity adding value as a City Region partnership body. LAs will include Greater Merseyside Connexions in their commissioning of services for young people as part of a local integrated youth support strategy, which is in the process of being developed in each area.
- 3.8.2 Commissioning Connexions services will be undertaken at a City Region and a local Children and Young People Partnership level, but having regard for the need to maintain a City Region capacity to be able to provide continuous support and tracking of young people as they move between learning provision, employment and other support services and between Local Authority areas across the City Region. More than 20% of young people move between LA areas for learning and work opportunities at any one time between the ages of 16 and 19.
- 3.8.3 It is also recognised that investing in Greater Merseyside Connexions provides important economies of scale in the provision of services, e.g: provision of comprehensive national, regional careers and labour market information to support career and progression decisions; provision of a comprehensive dynamic database of all young people in the City Region; a coherent approach to engaging employers and training providers in improving the employment and training offer to young people; consistent standards of service to support frontline delivery, etc.
- 3.8.4 The partnership of the six Local Authorities build on the strengths and achievements of Connexions in supporting all young people aged 13-19 to make decisions about future learning and employment and assisting them to participate and progress in learning and obtain employment or higher education.
- 3.8.5 The partnership of the six Local Authorities maintain the capacity to track all young people and reduce the numbers of young people aged 16-19 who are NEET.
- 3.8.6 The partnership of the six Local Authorities maintain and build upon Connexions Management Information System (Connexions Customer Information System, CCIS) which enables the tracking of all 140,000 young people aged 13-19 and which provides a dynamic report on their needs and their status as part of local performance management and monitoring of outcomes.
- 3.8.7 The partnership of the six Local Authorities maintain the continuity and quality of service to young people during the period of Connexions transition.

3.8.8 Greater Merseyside Connexions also provides adult information, advice and guidance services for adults across the Liverpool City Region under contract to the Learning and Skills Council and separately through European Funding. These contracts provide adults with access to information, advice and guidance on learning and careers. They support and are an integral part of the evolving City Region Employment Strategy. Connexions' adult IAG services provide synergy, and efficiencies through further economy of scale, with services to young people in transition across the City Region. The Transition Steering Group supports the continuation of these services and wishes to develop their contribution to the achievement of economic and social well being for young people and families as part of the Every Child Matters agenda and the City Region Employment Strategy.

3.8.9 The partnership of the six Local Authorities identify and manage all risks associated with the transfer of funding and responsibilities in respect of: The interests of Local Authorities in receiving additional responsibilities and achieving those outcomes for young people that are identified in Local Area Agreements and other local plans; the interests of Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership in remaining a going concern capable of providing quality services and outcomes; the interests of the staff of Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership as the process of local contracting takes place.

3.9 Agreed Actions by Liverpool City Region Leaders subject to local approval by Executive Board

3.9.1 Endorsement of the Transition Steering Group's recommendation for all City Region Local Authorities to commission Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership to deliver services to young people according to local needs as identified in Children and Young People's Plans and 14-19 implementation plans and identified in the Outcomes Framework agreed by the Transition Steering Group as appropriate to the organisation's capacity and capability to delivery.

3.9.2 All Local Authorities to enter into an agreement with Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership for the period from 2008-09 to 2010-11 initially to allow for the evolution of integrated youth support strategies and appropriate commissioning strategies, which will apply to all Children and Young People's services once these have been established and fully implemented.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

From the 1st April 2008 funding for Connexions will be direct to Local Authorities through the LAA 'single pot'. Agreement needs to be

secured from Executive Board and the Local Strategic Partnership to passport the indicative allocation, and when confirmed the actual allocation, to enable the commissioning of the service against an agreed service specification. All of the six Merseyside Local Authorities are seeking to secure this consistent approach.

5 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

5.1 Children and Young People in Halton

The success of the Connexions service is crucial to the delivery of the Every Child Matters outcomes. One of the key Connexions outcomes is to reduce the number of 16-18 year olds in Halton who are not in employment, education or training. This target is currently within the suite of LAA targets and has recently been announced as part of PSA Delivery Agreement 14-19 - to increase the number of children and young people on the pathway to success.

5.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

The work Connexions Personal Advisers undertake is crucial to the future prosperity of young people in Halton. Impartial information and advice coupled with raising aspirations to improve enterprise are important skills young people in Halton will need to access future employment and learning opportunities.

5.3 A Healthy Halton

High quality information, advice and guidance will inform young people on the benefits and options in adopting healthy lifestyles.

5.4 A Safer Halton

Connexions working within the Integrated Youth Service agenda in Halton works closely with young people to both equip them to be safe but also to challenge young people's actions and behaviours in order for Halton to be a safer place to live.

5.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

Connexions work with a range of partners and are committed to the urban renewal agenda currently taking place in Halton.

6 RISK ANALYSIS

A strategic risk assessment has been undertaken, as **Appendix 1**.

7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

Equality and Diversity issues will be at the forefront of developments and will be addressed as part of the service specification developments.

7.1 REASON(S) FOR DECISION

Arrangements for the future delivery of services to young people will affect all young people aged 13 to 19 in the Borough. It will also include the targeting of specialist services to vulnerable young people to enable them to access their universal entitlement.

7.2 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

None.

7.3 IMPLEMENTATION DATE

1st April 2008

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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Education and Inspections Act 2006	Grosvenor House	Lorraine Butcher
Youth Matters	Grosvenor House	Lorraine Butcher
Aiming High for Young People: A Ten Year Strategy for Positive Activities (DCSF – 2007)	Grosvenor House	Lorraine Butcher
Education and Skills Bill	Grosvenor House	Lorraine Butcher

CHART 2 - RISK ASSESSMENT FORM

Organisation / department / function / project CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S DIRECTORATE

Business Objective: The transfer of accountability of Connexions to Halton Borough Council

Completed by: T Crane

Date completed: October 2007

No	Risk (Threat/Opportunity to achievement of business objective)	Assessment of Risk [As it is now]			RISK TREATMENT MEASURES	Assessment of Residual Risk [With control measures implemented]			Responsible	Timescale /Review Frequency
		Impact (Severity) [I]	Likelihood (Probability) [L]	Risk Score [IxL]		Impact (Severity) [I]	Likelihood (Probability) [L]	Residual Risk Score		
1	Failure to agree commissioning specification with other LAs	4	2	8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Commissioning sub group task ◆ Transition Strategy group decision 	2	1	2	L Butcher	Monthly
2	Funding settlement reduces as part of funding formula allocation	3	2	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Transition Group agenda item for discussion ◆ GONW agreement of funding secured 	2	1	2	L Butcher	Monthly
3	Full funding amount is not transferred as part of LAA discussion at LSP	3	2	6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Executive Board report with recommendations ◆ Possible discussion at LSP 	2	1	2	L Butcher	Monthly

APPENDIX 1

No	Risk (Threat/Opportunity to achievement of business objective)	Assessment of Risk [As it is now]			RISK TREATMENT MEASURES	Assessment of Residual Risk [With control measures implemented]			Responsible	Timescale /Review Frequency
		Impact (Severity) [I]	Likelihood (Probability) [L]	Risk Score [IxL]		Impact (Severity) [I]	Likelihood (Probability) [L]	Residual Risk Score		
4	Timescales not met resulting in statutory duties for HBC not undertaken	2	2	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Transition Plan and Steering Group task ◆ Commissioning specification agreed and in place 	2	1	2	L Butcher	Monthly
5	Delays implementation of integrated Youth Support in Halton	2	2	4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ Youth Matters Steering Group task and decision 	2	1	2	L Butcher	Monthly

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 29 November 2007

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director Health and Community.

SUBJECT: Housing Allocations Policy – Local Connection Criteria.

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To inform the Board of Halton Housing Trust's (HHT) intention to amend its housing allocations policy so that points are no longer awarded to reflect a residency connection with the Borough, and to set out the implications of this decision for the Council in terms of HHT's management of the Councils waiting list and allocations policy.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

RECOMMENDED: That the Board agree in principle to removing the residency criterion from the Council's housing allocations policy, and that following a stakeholder consultation, a further report be brought to Board to determine whether or not to formally amend the policy.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 On transfer of the Councils housing stock in December 2005, HHT adopted a housing allocations scheme almost identical to the Council's policy. The benefit of this approach for the Council was that there were minimal IT/cost implications in terms of HHT managing the Council/HHT joint waiting list and managing nominations to other Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) post transfer.

3.2 During the course of a series of Housing Corporation regulatory inspections it was noted that HHT's policy included provision to award points to applicants that have lived in the Borough for any 5 year period – what is termed a local connection criterion.

3.3 The Housing Corporation has deemed this provision to be potentially discriminatory, and has advised HHT to remove the criterion from its policy by the end of this year. HHT has now written to the Council advising of its intention to change its policy with effect from the 1st January 2008.

3.4 The Governments Code of Guidance on housing allocations implies that Councils have discretion to maintain local residency criteria

provided they do not prejudice their general duty to give assistance to persons in certain statutory need categories, and this is reflected in a diverse approach amongst neighbouring authorities. However this guidance has no force on RSLs who must comply with the Housing Corporations own guidance.

- 3.5 The implication of this change for the Council is that when HHT change their policy they will find it difficult to meet the Council's requirement for them to select applicants for nomination to RSLs in strict accordance with the Councils policy, as their Academy IT system is not capable of automatically short listing applicants for rehousing using two different allocations policies.
- 3.6 HHT say they can overcome this problem by manually checking application files and making necessary adjustments to points totals each time a shortlist is produced for a nomination, but have questioned whether it might be appropriate for the Council to also consider changing its policy at the same time.
- 3.7 Local connection criteria have historically been used by Councils to ensure that the bulk of local housing provision goes to local residents, or to those who need to move to the area for support, employment, or other pressing medical/social reasons. In practice few people make purely speculative applications to move to another locality, preferring to be housed near where they live, work, or have family ties, or to give/receive support.
- 3.8 Currently the HBC/HHT joint housing register contains nearly 2,800 applications (excl. transfer requests), 799 (29%) of which do not qualify for residency points. During 2006/07 55 (13%) of those housed did not have residency points. This shows that the relatively small number of points awarded for this criterion does not necessarily achieve the intended outcome anyway.
- 3.9 Whilst it is not possible without investing substantial time and resources to model the impact of removing the local connection criterion, it is not envisaged that the relative position of applicants on the register would be significantly changed.
- 3.10 In recent years Government statute and guidance has increasingly prescribed the framework for housing allocations policies, to determine who may and may not be housed, which needs should be prioritised, and increasing stress has been placed on the need for equality of access to housing registers. RSLs are now the exclusive providers of social rented accommodation in Halton, and the Councils policy is increasingly isolated in retaining a local connection criterion.
- 3.11 The Council and RSLs in the Borough are currently collaborating to jointly develop a Choice Based Lettings (CBL) scheme, hopefully to

be introduced in the second half of 2008/09 ahead of the Government target date of 2010. One of the underpinning reasons for introducing CBL is to create transparency and clarity for those seeking housing, and there would therefore be merit in moving toward common principles of access etc. in terms of the housing register.

- 3.12 CBL will in any event require a totally new allocations policy to be developed, and in the interim it is proposed that the Council's housing allocations policy be changed to remove the 25 points awarded for local residency, and that a consultation exercise be undertaken to seek stakeholders views. A further report will be brought to Board to advise of any responses before Board is asked to formally adopt the change.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The Council is required to formally consult RSLs and other stakeholders before adopting such a change to its housing allocations policy.

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 HHT have indicated that if the Council decide to retain the local connection criterion, they will not seek any additional payment for the additional work involved in handling the process manually as outlined in 3.6.

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 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 Paragraph 3.8 highlights the current position and introducing such a policy should not have an adverse effect on individuals.

7.2 In addition, the introduction of Choice Based Lettings before 2010 could mean that this Policy be introduced.

7.3 Affordability issues could mean more people applying for social housing and this could have an impact on local people. This needs to be considered against the worklessness agenda.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 The proposed policy change will help to demonstrate equality of access in terms of access to the HBC/HHT joint housing register, and help ensure accommodation is allocated purely according to need.

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 29th November 2007

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy

SUBJECT: Determination of Council Tax Base

WARD(S): Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 There is a requirement for the Council to determine the 'Tax Base' for its area and also the tax base for each of the Parishes.
- 1.2 It is required to notify the figure to the Cheshire Fire Authority, the Cheshire Police Authority, the Cheshire Magistrates' Courts Committee, the Cheshire Probation Committee and the National Rivers Authority by 31st January 2008. The Council is also required to calculate and advise, if requested, the Parish Councils of their relevant tax bases.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) **The Executive Board recommend to the Council that the 2008/09 Council Tax Base be set at 37,762 for the Borough, and that the Cheshire Fire Authority, the Cheshire Police Authority, and the National Rivers Authority be so notified; and**
- (2) **The Executive Board recommend to the Council that the Council Tax Base for each of the Parishes be set as follows:**

Parish	Tax Base
Hale	724
Daresbury	140
Moore	349
Preston Brook	339
Sandymoor	816
Halebank	510

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The Tax Base

The 'Tax Base' is the measure used for calculating the council tax and is used by both the billing authority (the Council) and the major

precepting authorities (the Cheshire Fire Authority and the Cheshire Police Authority), in the calculation of their council tax requirements.

The tax base figure is arrived at in accordance with a prescribed formula, and represents the estimated full year number of chargeable dwellings in the Borough, expressed in terms of the equivalent of Band 'D' dwellings.

3.2 The Council Tax Base for 2008/2009

The tax base is calculated using the number of dwellings included in the Valuation List, as provided by the Listing Officer, as at 17th September 2007. Adjustments are then made to take into account the estimated number of discounts, voids, additions and demolitions during the period 17th September 2007 to 31st March 2008.

An estimated percentage collection rate is then applied to the product of the above calculation to arrive at the tax base for the year.

Taking account of all the relevant information and applying a 99% collection rate, the calculation for 2008/2009 gives a tax base figure of 37,762 for the Borough as a whole.

This year has seen the creation of two new parishes, at Sandymoor and Halebank. The advice of the National Association of Local Councils has been sought on the process for setting their first precepts. The appropriate tax base figure for each of the Parishes is as follows:

Parish	Tax Base
Hale	724
Daresbury	140
Moore	349
Preston Brook	339
Sandymoor	816
Halebank	510

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no policy implications.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton.

None applicable

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

None applicable.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

None applicable.

6.4 A Safer Halton

None applicable.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

None applicable.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 Loss of Income to the Council if Council Tax Base is not agreed.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 None applicable

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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Working Papers	Catalyst House	Peter McCann

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 29 November 2007

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director Health & Community

SUBJECT: Equality & Diversity

WARD (S): Borough-wide

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 Equality and diversity policies are central to all Council functions. The purpose of this report is to update Executive Board on the current position on the equalities agenda in Halton.

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 1) That the report be noted, and agree the approach described in Section 4.**
- 2) That a partnership with other key partners be established under the auspices of the Local Strategic Partnership and a wider review of investment be considered.**
- 3) That the community cohesion agenda be directly connected to the wider equality and Diversity agenda.**
- 4) That the Corporate Equality Plan be fully adopted.**

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Equalities are a dynamic area of public policy. There have been some recent legislative changes in this area, including the requirement to create a gender equality scheme (from April 2007) and increased expectations in tackling discrimination on the grounds of faith, disability, age and sexuality. The legislation has also brought in the requirement to not only tackle discrimination but to actively promote diversity, and increasingly within the framework of the Human Rights Act 1998. This is a significant change to our responsibilities and one that will require us to act in different ways.
- 3.2 In December 2006 the Council produced a new corporate equalities scheme. This encompassed all legal duties in terms of promoting the race, gender and disability equality schemes. Rather than adopt separate schemes for each aspect of social identity, the Council has put in place a single equality scheme, which includes the statutory requirements to produce a Race Equality Scheme, a Disability Equality Scheme and a Gender Equality Scheme. At the time the Executive Board approved the Plan and asked for consultation to be undertaken. Public consultation took place on the scheme in May 2007 and no adverse comments were received. It is proposed that the Corporate Equality Plan be now fully adopted.

- 3.3 The Executive Board recently considered a scrutiny report surrounding community cohesion and it was decided that there should be greater congruence and partnership with the Local Strategic Partnership.

4. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 4.1 Our current strategy recognises that there are distinct drivers within the equality and diversity agenda. The national context is an important driver and it is useful to understand this context fully. Britain is changing fast: demographics; globalisation and migration are making us more aware of different identities, cultures, religions and beliefs. There are changing relationships between men and women, new family patterns and the needs of the labour market and public services.
- 4.2 The new Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC) formally began its work in October. It replaces the existing Equal Opportunities Commission, Commission for Racial Equality and Disability Rights Commission. It will also for the first time provide institutional support for tackling discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation, religion or belief and age. It will lead in promoting human rights and equal opportunity for every individual to participate in society, and fostering good relations between different groups of people.
- 4.3 Bringing together equality and human rights in the new Commission marks an important shift in thinking about equality. It places equality firmly in the context of people's fundamental rights and freedoms. This is especially about how people deal with and respect each other in 21st century Britain. In particular how to ensure that our communities are strong and cohesive. The Council has recently completed a policy development process on community cohesion in Halton.
- 4.4 Equality legislation currently is contained in numerous statutes, orders, regulations and European directives providing different degrees of protection against discrimination on grounds of race, sex, disability, sexual orientation, religion or belief and age. The government recognised the need for a more coherent legislative framework to underpin the work of the new Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC). Therefore, it recently published a Green Paper setting out detailed proposals for a single equality bill, which would replace the existing complex array of primary and secondary legislation. A consultation has begun on this, to which the Council has responded. It is likely to be 2010 before the Bill is enacted and becomes law. However, there is much Halton can do to pick up on the spirit of the proposal and embed in how equality and diversity policy operates in the borough.
- 4.5 The Council has made considerable recent progress in understanding and addressing the equality and diversity agenda across all services. Looking at the Halton position we can identify the following key issues and challenges:
- 4.6 **Leadership** - Is vital if the Council is to create a culture whereby equality and diversity becomes part of the mainstream planning and service provision process. The establishment of a lead role at Strategic Director level has been an important part of this process. In recent times the Council has developed a specific structure around its equality and diversity duties. At its core is the Corporate Equality and Diversity Group, chaired by the Strategic Director of Health & Community. This has representation from Officers from across the

Council. Underpinning this are Directorate groups. Community cohesion is now directly linked to these agendas. In addition and more importantly there is an all party Member Equality and Diversity Group, chaired by Councillor Wharton. The role of this Group is to give a strong Political foundation, champion equalities issues, and provide the necessary degree of monitoring and challenge on the Council's pursuit of its equality aspirations.

- 4.7 **Training** – It is said that our staff represents our biggest resource. The role that they play in delivering our services in a fair and equal way is a crucial element in ensuring that the Council is viewed as an organisation that takes equalities seriously. Equalities now form part of the corporate induction for all new staff. In addition there is a corporate equalities training course offered to all Officers and Members. Attendance is currently voluntary. In order to show our aspiration to be a value-led organisation it is proposed that the course be made mandatory for all, with short refresher courses for all staff to keep up with changes in this area of policy. This is akin to the stance that the Council are now taking on health and safety.
- 4.8 **Standards** – one of the current BVPIs (although not in the new National Indicator set) is the level achieved in the Equalities Standard for Local Government. The levels span 0 to 5 depending on the demonstrable commitment to equalities against a rigorous framework and measurable criteria. Halton is currently at Level 2, a median position nationally, which was achieved in April 2006.
- 4.8.1 A process plan of actions needed to achieve Level 3 has been developed. However, there is still some distance to travel. It had been hoped that Halton would take part in an Improvement and Development Agency (IDeA) peer assessment pilot project this year. In the event the programme was over-subscribed and will now take place in 2008. That process of external challenge and validation is a key part of ensuring we can demonstrate the necessary evidence to justify a Level 3 ranking. We had set a target to reach level 3 by April 2007. The target has now been amended to a more realistic timetable of April 2009.
- 4.9 **Documentation** – As statements of intent the Council has the legal Equalities Scheme, an overall Corporate Equality Plan and four Directorate Plans. The latter are of varying levels of sophistication and robustness. In the current service planning process Operational Director's are being asked to consider equality issues in their service plans and to ensure that impact assessments are in place for all policies and services. It will be important that these are done well, challenged through Directorate Equality Groups, and used to inform revised Directorate Action Plans by the new year. In addition changes to the EDR process have been agreed incorporating the equalities agenda. This will allow the Corporate Equalities Plan to be sharpened up in line with our Level 3 process plan. It is important that everything within the plan is backed up by evidence.
- 4.10 The equality and diversity section of the Council's intranet and website is being revisited to ensure all the most up to date documentation is available.
- 4.11 **Good practice** – Halton now engages in an equalities forum with other Merseyside authorities. This has been very helpful in allowing us to benchmark ourselves against best practice locally. Some of the key messages from this are around visible leadership and championing of issues

by Chief Executives and Leader/portfolio holders; addressing issues collaboratively with other partners in the LSP and having joint approaches to strategies and plans; and, very clear equalities outcomes and targets embedded in the community strategy and Local Area Agreement. The issue of partner collaboration and community cohesion has recently been raised at the Halton Strategic Partnership Board meeting.

4.12 **Resources** – Underpinning all of this and determining our rate of progress is the level of resources dedicated to the task. Partnerships with other partners are essential and other statutory partners e.g. Police, PCT, Probation, Housing etc. The Council, therefore, should be considering ways to combine our efforts and join resources to tackle the Equalities agenda. In neighbouring Authorities they have established Equalities Partnerships constituted under the LSP. There is agreement within the Corporate Equality and Diversity Group that such a group should be established in Halton in order to work together but also combine our united resources to develop the agenda. In addition this could be widened to include some outcomes in the LAA to embed the Equalities agenda in our partnership agreements.

4.12.1 In conclusion, all services will need to determine how they will effectively and efficiently encourage their teams to positively incorporate equalities issues into their attitudes, behaviour, culture and all aspects of service delivery in order for this to have a beneficial impact on our communities. A healthy focus on quality issues should be part of day-to-day business of any service area and as such must be demonstrably embedded as part of core business.

5. **POLICY & FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 Equality and diversity has an impact on how we deliver all our services. The equality and diversity agenda will also help us to lead the way forward in delivering our sustainable community strategy and corporate plan. The equality and diversity policies of the council, and their implementation, are key to the fulfilment of the Councils statutory duties. There is a need to review our current investment alongside partners and join resources to establish either a dedicated team or 'virtual' partnership with a common agenda.

6. **RISK ANALYSIS**

6.1 Another key risk to consider is that non-compliance could result in legal action and attendant bad publicity.

7. **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

7.1 The Council is still only at Level 2 of the Equality Standard and, whilst good process has been made in recent months, there remains a great deal of work to be done to both inhibit discrimination and actively promote a diverse workforce and population. If the Council is serious as an organisation about this agenda, there is a need to both make public our commitment and then ensure that our actions reflect it.

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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Corporate Equality Plan Executive Board 7 December 2006	Municipal Building Widnes	Dwayne Johnson Strategic Director Health & Community

AGENDA ITEM NO.

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 29th November 2007

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy

SUBJECT: Post Office Closures in Halton

WARDS: Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to draw members' attention to the recent announcement from the Post Office which proposes the closure of three Post Offices in Halton.
- 1.2 The report also invites the Executive Board to respond formally to the Post Office on those proposals.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the Council raises strong objections to the proposed closure of Post Offices in Halton; and**
- (2) the Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services, produces a detailed response to the Post Office by the 17th December 2007 deadline for submissions.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Earlier this year the Post Office announced that there were likely to be 2,500 Post Office closures as a result of their Network Change Programme. The Council raised concerns at that time about the impact the closure of a Post Office has for local communities and made a strong case to support the retention of the existing Post Office provision in the Borough.
- 3.2 On 6th November 2007 the Post Office published its Area Plan Proposal for Merseyside, Wirral and Cheshire with Wigan, Leigh and Makerfield. Those proposals show that the following three Post Offices in Halton are proposed for closure:
 - Appleton Village, Appleton, Widnes
 - Hale Road, Halebank, Widnes
 - Stenhills, Picton Avenue, Runcorn

- 3.3 Following that announcement, all members of the Council were informed and invited to provide their own views and comments on the proposed closure given their local knowledge of the area. Local members are actively working with their local communities in raising strong objections to the proposals and are part of the process of developing a strong case for their retention.
- 3.4 Working with local members and the local community, a detailed case is being prepared for submission to the Post Office by 17th December 2007.
- 3.5 The case will emphasise and build upon the following key points:
- these closures follow on from previous closure programmes and make easy access to services for many of the Borough's residents more and more challenging;
 - the Post Office plays a vital role in community life, helping to break down some of the isolation felt by those who live alone;
 - in an area classified by Government as having higher than average levels of deprivation, many of the population affected:
 - are more likely to be in receipt of benefits;
 - less likely to have a high street bank account;
 - less likely to own a car;
 - more likely to suffer from ill-health;
 - less likely to be able to afford public transport;
 - more likely to have caring responsibilities.
- 3.6 For these reasons it is vital people have easy access to a Post Office. This is particularly so for the elderly and infirm and people with young children.
- 3.7 Given that the consultation period runs until 17th December 2007, and that information is still being received and collated to support the case against closure, it is suggested that the Executive Board support:
- strong objections being raised to all three proposed closures;
 - agrees to a detailed case being submitted against closure to the Post Office by the 17th December 2007 deadline; and

- authorises the Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services, working with local members, to finalise that submission.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Post Offices play a key role in community life.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 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

The Post Office provides employment opportunities for local people which may be lost if these closures go ahead.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

None.

6.4 A Safer Halton

People feel a sense of safety in using their local Post Office and develop and trust and understanding with the staff who work there. Travelling further afield will affect that relationship.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

None.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 7.1 There are no direct risks associated with this report.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 8.1 Close access to Post Offices provides an important role in preventing isolation. This is particularly important for those who live alone or who do not have access to their own transport.

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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Post Office Consultation document	6th Floor, Municipal Building	Ian Leivesley