

EXECUTIVE BOARD

At a meeting of the Executive Board on Thursday, 21 February 2008 in the Marketing Suite, Municipal Building

Present: Councillors McDermott (Chairman), D. Cargill, Gerrard, Harris, McInerney, Nelson, Polhill, Swain, Wharton and Wright

Apologies for Absence: None

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: M. Allen, B. Dodd, D. Johnson, I. Leivesley, G. Meehan, D. Parr, M. Reaney, D. Tregea and L. Cairns

Also in attendance: None

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER POWERS AND DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

EXB88 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 7th February 2008 were taken as read and signed as correct record.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PORTFOLIO

EXB89 ANTI-BULLYING POLICY AND PRACTICE - KEY DECISION

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Children and Young People providing an overview of work to develop a local authority anti-bullying policy and guidance.

It was noted that bullying was the principal issue about which children and young people contacted the Office of the Children's Commissioner and Child Line, and it was known locally that young people saw it as one of their major issues. The Department for Children Schools and Families (DCSF) had been in the process of issuing new guidance on anti-bullying for a considerable time, which had now been published. The local policy had been produced in accordance with this "Safe to Learn" guidance.

Action

The national and local drivers for making dealing with bullying a priority were outlined for the Board's consideration, along with progress to date. It was advised that the guidance aimed to:

- support school governors, staff and volunteers in all children's settings, children and young people, parents and carers in the development of their own anti-bullying policies;
- advise on the monitoring and review of anti-bullying policy and practice;
- build on the good practice which was already present in Halton; and
- promote national and local priorities.

Reason for Decision

It was necessary for the Local Authority to provide a clear anti-bullying framework.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None considered.

Implementation Date

As soon as approved.

RESOLVED: That the policy be approved for adoption by Halton Schools and as the basis for the development of a broader Halton Anti-Bullying Strategy.

COMMUNITY PORTFOLIO

EXB90 HOUSING ADAPTATIONS – JOINT WORKING WITH REGISTERED SOCIAL LANDLORDS

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Health and Community seeking approval to develop a joint funding agreement with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) to fund future housing adaptation works in their property utilising Disabled Facility Grant (DFG) resources, and to provide financial assistance to RSLs to deal with their existing backlogs.

It was noted that, subject to statutory eligibility and means testing criteria, DFGs were a mandatory grant available to both owner occupiers and private and public sector tenants. Whilst RSL tenants had always had the legal

right to apply for DFGs, the inadequate level of funding from Government for this area of work had meant that the Council had, for many years, had to focus its resources on private sector applicants, with RSLs endeavouring to fund housing adaptation works for their tenants. This position, whilst not replicated in all authorities, was not uncommon.

Although a small adaptations fund was historically available to RSLs from the Housing Corporation, it was never adequate to meet demand and, with other competing priorities such as investment needed to reach the decent homes standard, RSLs had struggled to provide necessary funding to match demand. Backlogs had arisen and it was currently estimated that there was backlog of over £1m adaptation works in the RSL stock in Halton.

A recent Government review of the DFG framework acknowledged the inconsistent approach amongst local authorities and RSLs to funding this type of work and, as a consequence, the small Housing Corporation Fund had now been rolled into the national DFG budget, which was distributed annually to local authorities. However, there was a funding shortfall which the Government's review document failed to address.

Work had been ongoing for the past year to improve the effectiveness of Halton's adaptations service by streamlining processes, identifying and eliminating duplication and system blockages, and by amalgamating the three teams of staff involved in the process. Some early outcomes and achievements were outlined for the Board's information.

It was advised that, whilst this service for private sector clients had clearly improved, some RSL tenants were experiencing long waits. Council Officers had therefore been exploring with RSLs what could be done to improve the situation. Three potential options were outlined and it was recommended that option 3 – to develop a joint funding agreement with RSLs – be pursued as the most cost-effective way to deal with the problem, sitting well within developing Government guidance. In addition, as a result of forecasted underspend of £295,000 in the DFG budget, largely due to the shortage of suitably experienced contractors to undertake works, the opportunity for a one-off initiative to provide funding to the RSLs to deal with some of the oldest outstanding cases had been identified.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Board agree in principle to the development of a joint funding agreement as described in the report;
- (2) a further report be brought to the Board to agree the final joint funding agreement; and
- (3) up to £295,000 unspent DFG resources in 2007/08 be used to support RSLs to deal with their housing adaptations backlogs.

CORPORATE SERVICES PORTFOLIO

(NB Councillor D. Cargill declared a personal interest in respect of Appendix B of the following item of business, in relation to Community Care Services, as a relative was awaiting a care package.)

EXB91 DRAFT BUDGET 2008/09

The Board considered a draft report outlining the proposed recommendation to Council regarding the budget, capital programme and council tax for 2008/09.

It was reported that the Fire Authority had now set its precept at 2.8%: the Cheshire Police precept was awaited. A further report would be made to Council to include the precept when it became known.

Members noted that the Government had recently announced the Final Local Government Finance Settlement for 2008/09, 2009/10 and 2010/11 – the first three-year settlement in alignment with the Comprehensive Spending Review 2007. The proposed growth and savings were shown in Appendices B and C and it was advised that, after taking account of these and the use of reserves set out in the report, the budget totalled £101.895m.

The Board was advised of the process undertaken in arriving at this proposed budget including the survey taken in November 2007 using the Halton 2000 Citizens' Panel. The results of the survey had been considered by the Area Forums and a list of comments arising from the discussions at these meetings was tabled for information. In addition, it was reported that the Liberal Democrat Group had submitted a document entitled "Proposed Additional Savings". It was suggested that both these documents be considered by Full Council at the special budget meeting on 5th March 2008.

RESOLVED: That the Council be recommended to adopt the resolution set out in Appendix A, which includes

setting the budget at £101.895m and the Band D Council Tax for Halton (before Parish, Police and Fire precepts) of £1,079.97.

EXB92 NEW PARISHES OF HALEBANK AND SANDYMOOR

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy regarding the Halton (Parishes) Order 2007 and the Halton (Parish Electoral Arrangements) Order 2008, requesting that a recommendation be made to Council that the Halebank Parish Council Order 2008 and the Sandymoor Parish Council Order 2008 be made.

It was noted that, following receipt of petitions under Section 11 of the Local Government and Rating Act 1997, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government had made an Order under Sections 14 and 23 of the Act that the Council establish Parish Councils for the new Parishes of Halebank and Sandymoor.

Following that Order, the Electoral Commission had now made an Order under the same Sections setting out the electoral arrangements, requiring elections to be held on the ordinary day of election for Councillors in 2008, ie 1st May 2008. The next election for Halebank would take place in 2010, to bring it into line with the neighbouring Parish of Hale. Thereafter, elections would take place every four years. In the case of Sandymoor, the election would take place in 2008 and every fourth year thereafter, again in line with its neighbouring parishes. There would be five Councillors elected for each Parish.

The Board noted that the new Parish Council issued its official precept at any time from the May 2008 elections up to October 2008 but could not exceed the precept anticipated by the Authority, which was to be calculated by the Council and included in the Section 16 Order. It was recommended that the specified amount be £5,000 in the case of each Parish.

RESOLVED: That

(1) the making by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government of the Halton (Parishes) Order 2007, and by the Electoral Commission of the Halton (Parish Electoral Arrangements) Order 2008, be noted; and

(2) the Council be recommended to make the Halebank

Strategic Director

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE PORTFOLIO

EXB93 CARERS' SERVICES WITHIN HALTON - KEY DECISION

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Health and Community seeking approval to transfer the Carers' Centre to the Voluntary Sector and outlining the future of Carers' Services within Halton.

It was noted that, since the opening of the Carers' Centres in 2004, it had been the intention that the management of the Centres by the Local Authority would only be a temporary arrangement until a voluntary sector organisation could be identified to undertake it in order to ensure that carers would be able to maximise their access to funding streams, for example lottery funding, that otherwise would not have been accessible by the Centres under Local Authority control.

During the last 12 months, a number of activities, including meetings and consultation events, had taken place to identify the options and their associated advantages and disadvantages for the future provision of Carers' Services within Halton. During this time it had been highlighted that, whichever approach was adopted, it would need to safeguard the financial future of Halton Carers' Centre, improve and expand the services provided, and be acceptable to Halton and St. Helens Primary Care Trust, to Halton Borough Council, and to local carers. It was subsequently decided that the future provision of Carers' Services be independently assessed and three options had been examined regarding future provision:

- 1) no change;
- 2) establish a Princess Royal Trust for Carers' Centre in Halton; or
- 3) merge with Princess Royal Trust for Carers' Centre in St. Helens.

Following widespread consultation it was agreed that the most favourable option would be option 2 – "Establish a Princess Royal Trust for Carers' Centre in Halton" - for the following reasons:

- as a charitable organisation the Centre would be able

to access different funding streams, which the Local Authority was currently unable to; and

- an independent Carers' Centre would not just be a provider of services but would be an important means of ensuring the voice of carers was heard. Carers within Halton would have a direct input in to how the Centres were managed and the services provided there.

Further information was provided in respect of the possible location of the Centre and it was advised that the Princess Royal Trust had agreed to the closure of the Carers' Centre located in the Age Concern building and the exploration of alternative sites in Widnes whilst awaiting the outcome of a lottery proposal. It was recognised that carers would prefer to see two centres within Halton, one in Runcorn and one in Widnes, and this aspiration would be incorporated into the Carers' Centre three year business plan to be prepared in conjunction with the Princess Royal Trust operating from the Runcorn site in the medium term.

The financial implications were outlined for the Board's consideration, in particular the request that Procurement Standing Orders be waived to enable the Authority to enter into a three-year service level agreement to continue to provide Carers Services from the point of transfer for a three-year period. In addition, it was noted that the cost of running one centre exceeded the current costs of running two. It was confirmed that this was due to the anticipated improvements in the service.

Reasons for Decision

The proposed changes in the provision of Carers Services within Halton demonstrated that the Council recognised the importance of carers' issues and ensured that the services provided to them would be maximised.

An independent Princess Royal Trust for Carers' Centre in Halton would be able to access new funding streams and, most importantly, would be able to offer an independent service to carers and provide an opportunity to develop more innovative and tailored provision enabling them to reach out to a wider range of carers.

The Centre would also be in a strong position to effectively respond to the increased national agenda around carers culminating in the publication of the new National Carers' Strategy during 2008.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Alternative options considered regarding the future provision of Carers' Services included:

- 1) No change – i.e. the management of the Centres would continue to be provided by the Local Authority. The main reasons for this option being rejected included that, if the Centres remained in Local Authority control, it would prove difficult to access sources of funding that could be accessed by voluntary organisations or registered charities, for example lottery funding. Also, by not being managed by the Local Authority, the Centre would be able to offer a more independent service to carers, which may enable the Centre to be more effective in reaching carers who were at present “hidden”.
- 2) Merge with Princess Royal Trust for Carers Centre in St. Helens – the main reasons for this option being rejected were that, in the view of carers and groups consulted, if a merger took place there was then the potential for services to carers in Halton to become diluted in favour of St. Helens.

Implementation Date

The aim would be to establish the independent Princess Royal Trust for Carers' Centre in Halton by 1st July 2008. This date would coincide with the planned closure of the Widnes site.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Council's three year financial commitment to the running of the Carers' Centre in the sum of £160,000 in year 1, £164,000 in year 2, and £168,000 in year 3 be approved with the additional funding being met from the Carers Grant and the Primary Care Trust;
- (2) the closure of the Widnes Carers Centre outlet, co-located in the Age Concern building, be approved;
- (3) the Strategic Director – Health and Community, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Health, be authorised to award the contract for the provision of Carer Services to Halton Carers Centre in the sum of approximately £160,000 per annum over the period April 2008 to March 2011 and that, in light of the

Strategic Director
- Health and
Community

exceptional circumstances, namely that the Centre is the only available provider of the range of Carers' services required to the people of Halton, and in accordance with Procurement Standing Order 1.6, Standing Orders 3.1 to 3.7 and 3.10 be waived on this occasion; and

- (4) the Strategic Director – Health and Community, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Health, be authorised to take such action as may be necessary to give effect to the Carers Centre to provide Carer Services to the people of Halton.

LEADER'S PORTFOLIO

EXB94 LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT DELIVERY PLAN

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy proposing the updating of the Action Plans for each of the five strategic priorities in order to deliver Halton's Local Area Agreement, and the approval of the funding allocations contained within them. A slightly revised report was tabled for information including a modified Appendix to reflect the ongoing negotiations around the funding streams, with funding for the Vikings in the Community included under the Children and Young People heading.

It was noted that Halton had in place an established mechanism for managing its neighbourhood renewal programme. Since 2002, the Halton Strategic Partnership Board had ensured that there was a Specialist Strategic Partnership (SSP) for each of the five priorities. These Partnerships were commissioned to produce the original strategies and Action Plans and had produced updated Action Plans setting out their activities and investment proposals for 2008/09. They set out a programme of activity to deliver the thematic elements of the Community Strategy and, in particular, to address the key measurable outcomes set out within it.

The Action Plans utilised Working Neighbourhoods Fund (WNF) and, in the case of the Safer Halton Partnership, Safer and Stronger Communities Fund (SSCF) as well. In addition, the Council had committed a substantial amount of resources through the Priorities Fund (PF). The Council monies were aimed at supporting Neighbourhood Renewal activity by match-funding initiatives within the Action Plans. The Action Plans were appended to the report and had been considered and endorsed by the Halton

Strategic Partnership Board.

It was advised that a number of existing funding streams had been pooled by Government in the form of area based grant to help fund the Local Area Agreement, which was the operational plan for the Community Strategy. This was largely made up of a number of existing specialist and dedicated grants for a range of Council services. Although the new grant rules allowed the Authority to spend this grant on any activity, it was suggested for 2008/09 they be passported through to services as before and accounted for under current procedures. This was necessary because allocations were only announced by Government in December and there was too little time to undertake a systematic review of activity without damaging momentum. A full review would be undertaken over the following six months to inform decisions for 2009/10 onwards.

The full make up of area based grant was attached at Appendix 2 of the report and further information was provided within the report regarding funding, providing a summary of the implications. It was noted that, by reducing allocations by 20% for 2008/09 for each SSP, a new central commissioning pot had been created. In this respect, the Board was advised that a further line needed to be added to the Appendix under "Employment, Learning and Skills" to read "Commissioning New Projects - £232,106" included in the WNF column.

Draft criteria and a management process for this strategic commissioning were being developed. The intention was that the commissioning pot would have a focus on the priorities of the new LAA and, in particular, narrowing the gap on these and other measures of deprivation in the neighbourhood management areas.

The SSPs would be responsible for regular and careful monitoring of expenditure and progress would be reported to the Halton Strategic Partnership Board. The position would be reviewed in October 2008 and any necessary adjustments made then.

The Board considered a number of issues including the impact of domestic violence on the area, and the potential for the Halton Strategic Partnership Board to agree to roll forward any unspent monies.

RESOLVED: That

(1) the five Action plans accompanying the report be

approved;

- (2) the allocation of the Working Neighbourhood Fund and Safer and Stronger Communities Fund, referred to in the report and contained in the Action Plans endorsed by the Halton Strategic Partnership Board, be approved;
- (3) the continued allocation of the remaining elements of the Area-Based Grant to fund individual services be approved as set out in Appendix 2 to the report;
- (4) the allocation of the Council's Priority Funds referred to in the report, including that contained in the Action Plans, be approved; and
- (5) delegated authority be given to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Council, to approve amendments to the Action Plans as necessary.

Chief Executive

PLANNING, TRANSPORTATION, REGENERATION AND RENEWAL PORTFOLIO

EXB95 FIREWORKS FESTIVAL 2008

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Environment setting out the views of the Safer Halton Policy and Performance Board (PPB) and the Urban Renewal PPB regarding proposals to relocate Halton's Fireworks Festival.

It was noted that the PPBs had considered the history of the Fireworks Festival in Halton, together with issues relating to safety and welfare of the public attending the event. Key issues debated included the importance of maintaining a large public display for safety reasons, the fact that the display was a major event with people travelling into the Borough, and the fact that the present location enabled people to see the display from numerous locations on both sides of the River. In view of this, both PPBs resolved that:

"The comments made by the Board that the Fireworks Festival remain at its current location and that work be undertaken to find alternatives to resolve the crowd control, health and safety and car parking issues, along with trying to attract sponsors to offset the additional costs, be referred to the Executive Board."

In view of this, a request for £20,000 was to be

considered as part of the budget process for 2008/09 to cover the costs relating to more police, security staff, car park attendants and stewards to assist in the safety and welfare of visitors. In addition, continued efforts would be made to attract sponsorship, although this could not be guaranteed.

The Board noted and congratulated the two PPBs on the work carried out in this respect.

RESOLVED: That, further to the considerations of the Safer Halton and Urban Renewal PPBs, the Fireworks Festival remain in the current location.

EXB96 CASTLEFIELDS VILLAGE SQUARE

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy, and the Strategic Director – Environment, advising of a change in English Partnership's (EP's) funding position, seeking approval for the Council to utilise part of the capital receipts from the disposal of Council-owned land at Castlefields to support the development of the proposed Castlefields Village Square.

It was noted that EP, who was leading on the project, had been working with CDS Housing (CDS) and their agents to develop scheme proposals for the Village Square. EP was to provide funding to CDS for the demolition of the existing centre, enabling works, public realms works and abnormal costs, to ensure the scheme was deliverable. The costs associated with this were £3.9m.

These costs had been known for some time and EP had stated its intention to bid for additional internal resources to support the scheme. However, EP's position had now changed and it was no longer in a position to bid for additional funding. Consequently, EP had now proposed that it provide gap funding for the Canal Quarter Project if Halton agree to re-cycle part of its future land receipts from Castlefields to support the Village Square.

This EP decision had left a funding gap, which it was proposed was filled by utilising a proportion of the receipts secured from the sale of Lakeside and Canalside as outlined within the report. It was estimated that the net receipts would exceed the public realm and enhancement works. The Board was advised that the Lakeside and Canalside sites were subject to clawback by EP. This was subject to negotiation but was not expected to exceed the balance of any receipts.

RESOLVED: That:

- (1) the Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy be authorised to commence marketing and sale of the housing sites in the Council’s ownership as shown in Appendix 1 of the report;
- (2) the Council be recommended to include up to a maximum of £3.9m within the Council’s capital programme to be invested in the delivery of the Castlefields programme, including the Village Square project, funded from future land receipts;
- (3) authority be given to the Strategic Director – Environment, in consultation with the Strategic Director - Corporate and Policy, and the Operational Director and Monitoring Officer (Legal, Organisational Development and Human Resources), to enter into a development agreement and ancillary agreements with CDS Housing and English Partnerships in relation to the development of the Castlefields Village Square; and
- (4) authority be given to the Strategic Director – Environment, in conjunction with the Portfolio Holder for Planning, Transportation, Regeneration and Renewal, to take such other actions as may be necessary to implement the development of the Castlefields Village Square and the Castlefields Masterplan.

Strategic Director
- Corporate and
Policy/Strategic
Director -
Environment

QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE PORTFOLIO

EXB97 DEPARTMENTAL SERVICE PLANS 2008-11 - KEY DECISION

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy regarding the adoption of the Council’s Departmental Service Plans for 2008-2011 as a basis for action and performance monitoring.

It was noted that Departmental Service Plans sat within an established planning framework and were central to the Council’s performance management arrangements. They provided a clear statement on what individual services were planning to achieve, particularly in terms of service objectives and performance indicators, and how this contributed to the corporate priorities of the Council.

The Board was advised that there had been no significant amendments to the layout or substance of plans from 2007-08. The new National Indicator Set (NIS) that comprised 198 performance indicators, replacing the Best Value Performance Indicator Data Set (BVPIs), had been integrated into relevant Service Plans and decisions had been taken by Operational Directors to retain or delete former BVPIs as local indicators.

Following the approval of the budget by full Council in March, budgetary statements would be inserted into the Plans. Any revisions that were necessary as a result of this approval would be incorporated before plans were finalised.

Reason for Decision

Departmental Service Plans were central to the Council's performance management arrangements. As such, it was necessary for them to be approved before the start of the new financial year in order that the effective monitoring of progress could take place.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None.

Implementation Date

1st April 2008.

RESOLVED: That:

- (1) the set of advanced draft Service Plans be received; and
- (2) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Leader, to make any final amendments and adjustments that may be required and to approve the final Service Plans.

Chief Executive

MINUTES ISSUED: 27th February 2008

CALL IN: 5th March 2008

Any matter decided by the Executive Board may be called in no later than 5th March 2008

Meeting ended at 2.45 p.m.