

EXECUTIVE BOARD

At a meeting of the Executive Board on Thursday, 5 March 2009 in the Marketing Suite, Municipal Building

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

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Gerrard, Nelson and Wright

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: M. Reaney, G. Cook, B. Dodd, J. Downes, D. Johnson, I. Leivesley, A. McNamara, S. Nicholson, D. Parr, G. Meehan, M. Simpson and D. Tregoe

Also in attendance: Councillor Hodgkinson

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER POWERS AND DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

Action

EXB109 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12th February 2009 were taken as read and signed as correct record.

EXB110 CHOICE BASED LETTINGS - KEY DECISION

The Board received a report of the Strategic Director, Health and Community which outlined the Government's five year Housing Plan Sustainable Communities: Homes for All, published in January 2005, which set out its plans for taking forward its Choice Based Lettings (CBL) policy. The aim was for all Councils to implement CBL by 2010, and there was a national policy objective to develop sub regional/regional schemes.

It was noted that even though the Council no longer managed any dwellings, it was required to have an allocations policy to ensure that reasonable housing preference was given to households in certain categories of need through its nomination agreements with Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). Currently Halton Housing Trust

(HHT) managed a joint Council/HHT Housing Register and operated in what most respects was a common allocations policy.

The Board was advised that following on from a Member seminar held on the 27th November 2008 to agree the key elements of the CBL, this now sought the Board's agreement to work in partnership with a number of Councils and RSLs across Merseyside to develop a sub-regional CBL scheme.

Members were advised that, traditionally, anyone needing a social rented tenancy applied to a Council or RSL to join a housing register. Priority was determined by a number of means, but typically by date order or the award of points to reflect varying degrees of need. Applicants were invited to indicate their preferred neighbourhoods, but the Council or RSL determined which particular property they would be offered. The applicant's choice was limited to accepting or refusing the offer.

CBL originated in Holland and, whilst acknowledging that CBL did nothing to solve the housing shortage, it did offer a much more customer focused approach. There were any number of scheme variants but, in essence, they all featured common elements and these elements were outlined in detail in the report.

Members were advised that the most recent data provided by Government suggested that 36% of Councils had already introduced CBL, with a further 59% planning to do so. The Government was also keen to develop CBL schemes on a regional or sub-regional basis, recognising that housing markets did not follow local authority boundaries, and had awarded funding to a number of Councils that had sought support in doing this.

The Board was advised that research showed that applicants welcomed the choice, control and transparency of CBL. They also considered that the extra effort required to take part in CBL, by looking through vacancies and bidding for suitable properties, was worth it.

From a landlord's perspective there had been sustainability related savings and efficiency savings through improved ICT, reduced refusal rates, quicker relets, and demand generated for properties previously considered hard to let. From the Council's perspective, the existing of one housing register avoided duplication and provided a more accurate indication of housing needs and trends.

The Board was advised that over the last 18 months Officers of the Council and HHT had, in consultation with the larger RSLs in the Borough, undertaken an appraisal of the various CBL options. Those considered were outlined in the report in detail and it was noted that in conclusion, whilst it was not a statutory requirement, the Council could ignore it, but pressure to adopt CLB was likely to be applied through future comprehensive area assessments (CAAs) and Audit Commission inspections. CBL was a very clear Government policy target which was part of the general Government drive to improve choice in the Public Sector. A copy of the policy was attached as an appendix to the report.

Reason(s) for Decision:

To address the Government's policy objective of introducing CBL in all Councils by 2010 in the most cost effective manner.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

The various options considered for delivering CBL were described in sections 4 and 5 of the report, together with the rationale for the option recommended.

Implementation Date:

The target date for implementation of the Merseyside Sub-Regional CBL Scheme was 2010.

RESOLVED: That

1. the Board agree to the Council's participation in the development of the Merseyside Sub-Regional CBL Scheme; and
2. and that the Council would wish to include some form of local connection criteria in any choice based letting scheme.

COMMUNITY PORTFOLIO

EXB111 ARTS POLICY AND STRATEGY REVIEW - KEY DECISION

The Board received a report of the Strategic Director, Health and Community which sought to endorse the draft Arts Policy and Strategy Review which was appended to the report.

Members were advised that the Council had produced its Cultural Strategy in 2001. At the time it was one of the first in the Country and held up as an example of good practice.

Subsequently it became a requirement to produce a Cultural Strategy as part of the Best Value process, but this requirement was removed in 2006, accepting that Culture should be embedded in the Community Strategy.

It was further noted that in 2007, Culture and Leisure Services undertook an assessment Towards an Excellent Service (TAES) that was externally validated by the IDeA.

During this assessment TAES highlighted that the Cultural Strategy had not been refreshed since 2001. As the Authority had developed a separate Sports Strategy, and given that there was no longer a Best Value requirement, TAES suggested that an Arts Strategy be developed.

Members were advised that Culture and Leisure Services were able to employ a Consultant, funded by the Arts Council to help produce an Arts Strategy. The brief for the consultation was to produce a practical working document, with action plans that would be constantly reviewed and updated.

Members were advised that the Employment, Learning and Skills Policy and Performance Board had discussed the Policy and Review and had recommended it to the Executive Board for approval.

Alternatives considered:

To have no strategy, but this would be contrary to IDEA advice.

Reason for decision:

To comply with good practice.

Implementation date:

1st April 2009

RESOLVED: That the Arts Policy and Strategy Review be endorsed.

EXB112 LOCAL AREA AGREEMENT ACTION PLANS

The Board received a report of the Strategic Director Corporate and Policy which proposed the updating of the Action Plans for each of the five strategic priorities in order to deliver Halton's Local Area Agreement (LAA) and the approval of the funding allocations contained within them.

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 ensure that there was a Specialist Strategic Partnership (SSP) for each of the 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 2009/10. They set out a programme of activity to deliver the thematic elements of the Community Strategy and the LAA for Halton and, in particular, to address the key measurable outcomes. The Action Plans were expected to meet a number of proposals which were outlined in detail in the report.

It was further noted that the Action Plans used Working Neighbourhood Fund (WNF), and in the case of the Safer Halton Partnership, Safer and Stronger Communities Fund (SFCCF) 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 revised Action Plans were appended to the report for information.

Each Action Plan had been put forward by the relevant SSP and were approved by the Halton Strategic Partnership Board on the 18th February 2009, insofar as they related to Working Neighbourhoods Fund and Safer and Stronger Communities Fund.

Members were advised that the Council was the accountable body for Working Neighbourhoods Fund and Safer and Stronger Community Fund allocations, and it was incumbent upon the Executive Board to formally approve any allocations.

Members were further advised that the report set out the funding implications for each of the Action Plans attached to the report.

It was noted that 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 2009 and any necessary adjustments made then.

Members were further advised that before individual projects contained within the Action Plans could proceed, a service agreement must be entered into with the relevant SSP and the Halton Strategic Partnership Board. These service agreements set out the expected outcomes and outputs together with quarterly expenditure forecasts. The SSPs were responsible for monitoring progress on a quarterly basis and progress was reported to the Halton Strategic Partnership Board.

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 for 2009/10, and the indicative allocations for 2010/11 referred to in this report and contained in the Action Plans, be approved;
- (3) the allocation of the Council's Priority Funds referred to in this report including that contained in the Action Plans, be approved; and
- (4) 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.

QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE PORTFOLIO

EXB113 STATE OF BOROUGH REPORT 2009 AND REVIEW OF COMMUNITY STRATEGY

The Board received a report of the Strategic Director Corporate and Policy which presented the findings of the 2009 State of the Borough Report and its implications for the mid-term review of the Sustainable Community Strategy.

The Sustainable Community Strategy was adopted by 2006. It contained a long-term vision and objectives with targets for the period 2006-2011. Since it was prepared:

- (1) A national indicator set and local area

agreements had been introduced;

- (2) Statutory Guidance under the Local Government and Public Health Act had been issued; and
- (3) There had been revisions to underpinning policies and strategies such as the Children and Young People's Plan.

The Board was therefore advised that it was necessary to conduct a mid-term review of the Sustainable Community Strategy. It was intended that this would be an update, not a complete revision. Surveys to date confirmed that the underlying vision and priorities remain relevant. The main areas for the review were outlined in the report.

Members were advised that the five Specialist Strategic Partnerships had been consulted and work had commenced on the mid-term review. A consultation draft would be available for consideration by partners, SSPs and PPBs with a view to a final version being approved at the Halton Strategic Partnership Board in May and by the Council in July 2009.

It was noted that as part of the preparation for the mid-term review of the State of the Borough report had been updated. It was important to note that much of the data reflected the situation before the current economic downturn due to the time lag in the availability of statistics.

Members were advised that the final "scorecard" as set out in the report assessed the state of Halton in terms of three main dimensions of sustainable development. There had been no significant changes since the last report. The scores represented the quintile where the district fell on each of the measures and this was further outlined in the report in relation to Economic Development, Social Development and Environment.

The report also set out the most significant changes since 2008 and these were outlined in detail in the report.

Members were advised that the opportunities and challenges faced by Halton were well-known. The Sustainable Community Strategy set out the steps we needed to take to bring improvement and how we would measure progress. The LAA was a set of targets agreed with the Government which reflected the Community Strategy. The mid-term review was an opportunity to bring these together in a single coherent document.

The State of the Borough report provided further evidence to support our priorities. It did not, however, fully reflect the impact of the economic downturn. The recession should not deflect us from our long-term ambitions but may affect the pace at which we could move forward.

The Board discussed the crime rate that appeared high, in response it was reported that Halton's crime rate was consistent in comparison to other authorities in the same "demographic family", figures were above the National Crime Rate and were currently decreasing.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the revised State of the Borough report be noted; and
- (2) the Policy and Performance Boards be consulted on a mid-term review of the Sustainable Community Strategy.

PLANNING, TRANSPORTATION, REGENERATION AND RENEWAL PORTFOLIO

EXB114 MERSEY GATEWAY - SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT STRATEGY - KEY DECISION

The Board received a report of the Strategic Director, Environment which sought approval of the Mersey Gateway Sustainable Transport Strategy (MGSTS), which set out how the proposed Mersey Gateway Project (The Project) could enable improvements in integrated transport across the Borough that would further the economic, transport and sustainability objectives of the Council. By adopting this report as Council policy, the document would have significant weight in the consideration of the various planning applications for Mersey Gate Project that were now with the Government.

Members were advised that the Project was central to the achievements of the environmental and economic regeneration aspirations of Halton and was key to those of the sub-region.

It was further noted that at the local level The Project would bring about a step change in improvements to the transportation connections between Runcorn and Widnes via the Silver Jubilee Bridge (SJB). By transferring around 80% of the traffic from SJB to the new crossing, the existing

SJB would be available for local transport services and facilities. The Project would also deliver amendments to the SJB carriageway and approach roads that were intended to improve the integrity of the bus network by reducing journey times, improving reliability and supporting and underpinning improved bus services across the Mersey between Runcorn and Widnes.

Members were advised that although the key changes to the road system in Halton would be delivered through the Mersey Gateway scheme, as submitted to the Secretary of State for planning approval, to take full advantage of the opportunity presented by these changes would require co-ordinated intervention in the form of better connecting bus services and improved facilities for cycling and walking.

It was noted that the combined programme within the MGSTS would also address existing concerns over accessibility and connectivity as part of the wider sustainable transport and sustainability agenda for all residents of Halton, particularly those living in the most deprived wards in the Borough.

The MGSTS and the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy (MGRS) were integrated initiatives by the Council to support the delivery of the Project objectives and together set out a rigorous and clear approach to maximising the benefits across the Borough. The Project had seven high level strategic objectives, two of which related directly to sustainable transport.

The MGSTS aimed to deliver the following key vision of the sustainable travel options within Halton:

To identify and promote a network of high quality, safe, affordable, accessible and environmentally friendly travel measures for local residents, businesses and visitors to Halton, which supported the key objectives of the Local Transport Plan and the Project.

Members were advised that the full strategy comprised of five key sections:

- (1) Setting the Scene;
- (2) Halton's Story of Place and its Existing Transport Network;
- (3) National, Regional and Local Policy Context;
- (4) Mersey Gateway Sustainable Transport Strategy; and
- (5) Measuring progress for the Sustainable Transport

Strategy.

Each of the key sections was outlined in further detail in the report along with Phase 1 for implementation between 2014/2015 to 2024/25.

The Board held a wide ranging discussion in relation to the following:

- transport improvements in the most deprived areas;
- inclusion of cycle paths to main council buildings;
- cycle storage had been greatly improved at Council buildings including the provision of showers at Runcorn Town Hall, and
- the possibility of opening locks on the Runcorn side of the Mersey.

Reason for Decision:

By adopting this report as Council policy, the document would have significant weight in the consideration of the various planning applications for Mersey Gateway that were now with the Government.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

The recommended strategy embraced a range of transport interventions and initiatives, which had been prioritised based on funding projects and assumptions. Implementation would be flexible, taking into account a more detailed assessment of specific projects and options prior to committing proposals.

Implementation Date:

MGSTS was designed to deliver integrated transport improvements facilitated by the new crossing due to open in late 2014.

RESOLVED: That the Mersey Gateway Sustainable Transport Strategy be approved to support the delivery of the Mersey Gateway Project, subject to any minor amendments being delegated to the Strategic Director, Environment, in consultation with the Executive Board Member for Planning, Transportation, Regeneration and Renewal.

CORPORATE SERVICES PORTFOLIO

EXB115 COUNCIL INTERNAL GOVERNANCE

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

The Board was advised that on the 30th December 2007 Section 64 and Schedule 4 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 came into force. This inserted new provisions into the Local Government Act 2000. These compelled Councils to adopt one of the two new governance models. In Halton's case this decision must be taken by no later than 31st December 2010.

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

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

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

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

RESOLVED: That

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

SCHEDULE 12A OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 AND THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

The Board considered:

- (1) whether Members of the press and public should be excluded from the meeting of the Board during consideration of the following item of business in accordance with Sub-Section 4 of Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 because it was likely that, in view of the nature of the business to be considered, exempt information would be disclosed, being information defined in Section 100 (1) and paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972; and
- (2) whether the disclosure of information was in the public interest, whether any relevant exemptions were applicable and whether, when applying the public interest test and exemptions, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed that in disclosing the information.

RESOLVED: That as, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information, members of the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business in accordance with Sub-Section 4 of Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 because it is likely that, in view of the nature of the business, exempt information will be disclosed, being information defined in Section 100 (1) and paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

ENVIRONMENT, LEISURE AND SPORT PORTFOLIO

EXB116 CEMETERY PROVISION FOR 2015 AND BEYOND - KEY DECISION

The Board received a report of the Strategic Director, Health and Community which presented a cost-benefit analysis of the main options available to the Council to address the issue of there being no new grave space available in the Council's three existing cemeteries post 2014.

Reason for Decision:

There was approximately 6 – 7 years worth of new grave space available in each of the Council's two main cemeteries. A decision therefore needed to be made on

whether, and how the Council planned to provide for a new grave availability for 2015 and beyond.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected:

All of the alternative options considered were outlined in Section 3.0 of the report.

Implementation Date:

The decision to extend Widnes Cemetery should be implemented as soon as is practically possible.

The implementation of the decision to extend Runcorn Cemetery could be deferred until 2013, during which time the need for this extension may be reviewed as the Council develops its policy on the re-use of old graves.

RESOLVED: That subject to available capital

- a) Option 3 be approved;
- b) Option 4 be approved on the basis that the land was not inappropriately expensive and was not within the timescales;
- c) As a contingency, concurrently pursue Option 5 if the principles of Option 4 were not met; and
- d) Authorise all ancillary actions to be undertaken by the Strategic Director, Health and Community, in consultation with the Executive Board Member for Environment, Leisure and Sport.

MINUTES ISSUED: 18 March 2009

CALL IN: 25 March 2009

Any matter decided by the Executive Board may be called in no later than 25th March 2009.

Meeting ended at 3.02 p.m.