

CORPORATE POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD

*At a meeting of the Corporate Policy and Performance Board on Tuesday, 28 July 2020
via public remote access*

Present: Councillors Gilligan (Chair), Philbin (Vice-Chair), Abbott, Howard, M. Lloyd Jones, C. Loftus, A. Lowe, A. McInerney, N. Plumpton Walsh and Wainwright

Apologies for Absence: None

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: M. Reaney, I. Leivesley, G. Ferguson, S. Baker and P. Garnett

Also in attendance: One Member of the press

ITEM DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

		<i>Action</i>
CS1	MINUTES The Minutes from the meeting held on 28 th January 2020 were taken as read and signed as a correct record.	
CS2	PUBLIC QUESTION TIME The Board was advised that no public questions had been received.	
CS3	EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES The Board was presented with the Minutes relating to the Corporate Services Portfolio which had been considered by the Executive Board since the last meeting of this Board. RESOLVED: That the Minutes be noted.	
CS4	MEMBER DEVELOPMENT GROUP NOTES The Board considered the minutes of the Member Development Group meeting held on 26 th September 2019. RESOLVED: That the minutes be noted.	
CS5	CORPORATE PPB UPDATE	

The Board received an update on activity in areas within the responsibility of the Board over recent weeks. Since the Prime Minister announced lockdown measures on 23 March 2020, the Council had been involved in vast amounts of work in support of the community. The report set out a number of examples of activity carried out by the following teams which report to the Board:

- Finance;
- Legal & Democratic;
- Markets;
- Policy, People, Performance & Efficiency;
- School Meals, Community Meals and Stadium; and
- IT & Support Services

The Board thanked all Officers for their hard work in dealing with the demands that COVID-19 had brought upon them and the Borough. In particular the Board thanked Officers for maintaining services throughout and working together with the emergency services and Halton CCG to assist the public. The Board also recognised the work of the market staff who had provided support to traders.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

CS6 PROGRESS UPDATES REGARDING THE
DISCRETIONARY SUPPORT SCHEME, DISCRETIONARY
HOUSING PAYMENTS AND UNIVERSAL CREDIT.

The Board received an update regarding the delivery of the Discretionary Support Scheme (DSS), Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) and Universal Credit (UC).

With regard to the DSS, it was in its eighth year of operation. During 2019/20, 523 awards were made totalling £143,598. An analysis of applications by type and awards granted was set out in the report.

In respect of DHP, Members were advised that in 2019/20 grant funding of £469,587 was received and actual expenditure totalled £469,579 representing 1,391 awards. This was an over spend of £8. This compared with 2018/19 where 1,544 awards were made and a total expenditure of £535,414. It was reported that the decrease in the number of awards and total expenditure compared to the previous year had been caused by a reduction in Government funding of £66,947.

In addition, Members received an update on the roll out of UC in Halton. All new working age claimants must

now claim UC and all new claims must be made on-line. According to the DWP as at May 2020 there were 14,070 Halton residents now claiming UC. The report provided details on the UC caseload in Halton since April 2015.

RESOLVED: That the latest position regarding the Discretionary Support Scheme, Discretionary Housing Payments and Universal Credit, be noted.

CS7 BUSINESS RATES SECTION 44A DISCRETIONARY RATE RELIEF POLICY STATEMENT

The Board considered a report which sought approval to the Business Rates Section 44A Discretionary Rate Relief Policy Statement, to allow discretionary relief for a short term period for unoccupied or partly occupied business premises.

It was noted that the provision of Section 44A relief was aimed at situations where there were practical difficulties in occupying or vacating part of a property. Therefore, it was not intended that all properties which temporarily became unoccupied should have their liability reduced. Whilst the Council recognised that awarding relief was beneficial to local businesses, it must also consider the benefit to the local community. The principle consideration was that any relief granted was in the best interests of the taxpayers of Halton.

The full Section 44A Discretionary Rate Relief Policy Statement was detailed in the Appendix.

RESOLVED: That the Executive Board be recommended to approve the Business Rates Section 44A Discretionary Rate Relief Policy Statement, as presented in the Appendix.

CS8 COLLECTION FUND PROGRESS REPORT AND COVID-19 RESPONSE

The Board received a report on the Council's Collection Fund position on council tax and business rates. In addition the report provided an outline on the impact of Covid-19 on the Collection Fund.

It was noted that the 2020/21 council tax net collectible debit (the billed amount) was £64.210m, to date £17.322m of this had been collected which resulted in a collection rate of 26.98%, down by 1.00% on the same period last year.

Whilst the 'in-year' council tax collection rate had been steadily decreasing since 2013, the year on year reduction of 1% was significant. The reason for the drop could be attributed to the number of payment plan deferrals the Council had agreed to in the current year as a result of the hardship being created by the Covid-19 pandemic. To date the Council had agreed to 3,636 deferral plans which allowed the taxpayer to switch their payment plan from 10 payment periods commencing in April, to instead start from June.

It was anticipated that agreement to the deferral plans should result in the collection rate effectively catching up towards the end of the year as cash receipts in February and March should be higher than compared to previous years. This was dependent on accounts being paid as per the agreed payment plan.

As well as in-year collections the Council also actively pursued council tax debt from previous years. For the year to date the Council had collected £0.438m of old year debt. This enabled the Council to reach the target council tax collection rate of 97%, used in setting the Council's net budget.

Members also received an update on the impact of Covid19 on the council tax reduction scheme, hardship funding, business rates collected up to June 2020, collection fund recovery procedures and the processing of Covid19 Business Rate Reliefs and Business Rate Grants.

It was noted that the decrease in the collection rate for both council tax and business rates would have an adverse impact on what the Council would have set aside at financial year end in terms of a bad debt provision. At this point it was difficult to anticipate what that would be until it was further understood how the economy and business sector reacted to the pandemic and government attempts to mitigate the risk. However, the Board was advised that using current collection rates, as a worst case scenario, forecast losses on the Collection Fund were:

	£m
Business Rate Receipt Losses	6.767
Council Tax Receipt Losses	1.200
Increase to Working Age CTRS cases (as per para 3.7)	2.000
Total Loss	9.967

RESOLVED: That the latest position regarding the
Collection Fund be noted.

Meeting ended at 7.10 p.m.