

Public Document Pack



Corporate Policy and Performance Board

Tuesday, 23 January 2024 6.30 p.m.
Civic Suite - Town Hall, Runcorn

S. Young

Chief Executive

BOARD MEMBERSHIP

Councillor Robert Gilligan (Chair)	Labour
Councillor Ged Philbin (Vice-Chair)	Labour
Councillor John Bradshaw	Conservative
Councillor Noel Hutchinson	Labour
Councillor Rosie Leck	Labour
Councillor Geoffrey Logan	Labour
Councillor Alan Lowe	Labour
Councillor Angela McInerney	Labour
Councillor Norman Plumpton Walsh	Labour
Councillor Sharon Thornton	Labour
Councillor Kevan Wainwright	Labour

Please contact Kim Butler on 0151 511 7496 or kim.butler@halton.gov.uk for further information.

The next meeting of the Board is to be confirmed.

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

Part I

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1. MINUTES	1 - 6
2. DECLARATION OF INTEREST (INCLUDING PARTY WHIP DECLARATIONS)	
Members are reminded of their responsibility to declare any Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or Other Disclosable Interest which they have in any item of business on the agenda, no later than when that item is reached or as soon as the interest becomes apparent and, with Disclosable Pecuniary Interests, to leave the meeting during any discussion and voting on the item.	
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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.

CORPORATE POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD

At a meeting of the Corporate Policy and Performance Board on Tuesday, 7 November 2023 in the Civic Suite - Town Hall, Runcorn

Present: Councillors Gilligan (Chair), Philbin (Vice-Chair), Hutchinson, Logan, A. Lowe and N. Plumpton Walsh

Apologies for Absence: Councillors: J. Bradshaw, Leck, A. McInerney, Thornton and Wainwright

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: K. Butler, E. Dawson, J. Gallagher, H. Hamlett, C. Hill, M. Reaney and R. Rout.

Also in attendance: None

ITEM DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

		<i>Action</i>
CS17	MINUTES The Minutes from the meeting held on 5 September 2023 were taken as read and signed as a correct record.	
CS18	PUBLIC QUESTION TIME The Board was advised that no public questions had been received.	
CS19	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 the Board.	
CS20	CORPORATE ACCIDENT / INCIDENT REPORT 1.4.23 TO 31.8.23 The Board was provided with a report from the Corporate Director – Chief Executive’s Delivery Unit, on the performance of health and safety management within the Authority from 1 April 2023 to 31 August 2023. The report highlighted health and safety incidents that	

had taken place over the past 4 months and as a result of those incidents proposed actions for the future. The report included information around the number of actual near misses, accidents that had resulted in over 7 day absences, together with significant accidents.

In addition, the report contained information on the performance of health and safety management in relation to Key Performance Indicators for the current financial year.

Members were advised that with effect from 1 October 2023 there had been some changes to the fire regulations following the Grenfell fire in 2017 and the Protect Duty (Martyn's Law) was with Parliament for consultation. This would force legal duties on employers to have responsible persons in place in buildings with robust procedures for emergencies in the event of an incident.

Members of the Board referred to the welfare legislation contained within The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 and after some discussion it was agreed that a report on welfare would be presented to the Board at a future meeting.

It was also agreed that lone working data would be reported to the Board, once it was available.

RESOLVED: That the Board note the contents of the report including the recommendations and actions for 2023/24.

Corporate
Director - Chief
Executive's
Delivery Unit

CS21 THE CORPORATE PLAN - THE BIG CONVERSATION UPDATE

The Board received a presentation which provided an update on 'The Big Conversation'.

The Board previously received a report about the 'The Big Conversation' at its meeting in June and were reminded that the initiative was about engaging with the public so that they understood the challenges that the Council was facing. It was an approach between the Council and those who lived or worked in Halton to work together to create an improved Borough in all aspects of everyday life. A stakeholder analysis and a Communication Plan had been developed in order to generate and establish as many opportunities as possible to involve all stakeholders in many different ways.

Members were advised that up until 7 November, a

total of 933 responses had been received and a breakdown of responses by source was provided. The report outlined the promotion, consultation and engagement carried out so far, as well as the emerging themes. The gaps and actions were set out and some examples were given to how these had been addressed e.g. visits made to Riverside College and Family Hubs in both Runcorn and Widnes; information had been shared via social media to target relevant groups; and iWalkers had targeted those wards with low responses.

It was noted that the consultation would end on 30 November 2023, after which an analysis would be undertaken to identify the key priorities. January and February 2024 would see further consultation with stakeholders prior to the Corporate Plan being finalised in March, ready for its launch in April 2024.

Members of the Board discussed the report and they suggested the following agencies be approached:

- Halton Voluntary Action;
- the Youth Service;
- Priestley College (Warrington) and Sir John Deane College (Northwich); and
- Police Community Support Officers.

RESOLVED: That the Board

- 1) note the report; and
- 2) continue to endorse the approach to facilitate 'The Big Conversation'.

CS22 RESOURCING THE COUNCIL - CHALLENGES

The Board received a report from the Head of Human Resources – Operations, which provided an overall view of the resourcing challenges the Council was currently facing.

Members were advised that the Council had continued to see a rise in job vacancies since 2021/22. In 2016/17 the number of vacancies advertised were 343, in 2021/22 there were 610 and in 2022/23 there were 678. A summary of these vacancies was listed in the appendix to the report.

The continued rise in vacancy numbers creates a substantial challenge to the Council's recruitment service, which does not have the sufficient resources to manage the workflow of such volumes. Some temporary resources had

been added to the team to mitigate any delays in service provision, which remained prevalent.

The report listed a number of key reasons for the continued increase in vacancies. It was noted that this situation was not unique to Halton and it was a national issue.

The Board was advised that that the recruitment team also provided a service to schools via a chargeable Service Level Agreement (SLA). For the year 2023/24, the team provided a service for 44 schools. In 2022/23, the service processed 362 school vacancies and whilst the costs of this were paid for by the schools, it created issues in workflow as school recruitments need to be completed between May and September in time for the new school year. Members were also informed that if schools decided to covert to academy status then the Council would no longer offer an SLA and any previous service would be withdrawn.

The report outlined that the HR Operations Division had revised their approach to attract candidates to come and work for the Council and it continued to be explored. A number of changes had also recently been implemented and these included:

- Re-designing the recruitment process and streamlined applications;
- Using social media platforms to advertise roles;
- Established career graded posts;
- Specific and focused recruitment campaigns for some roles, particularly in the Adults and Children's Directorates;
- Streamlined pre-employment checks; and
- Recruitment for senior roles brought back in-house to reduce spend.

Members noted the report and requested a list of current vacancies. They also requested that consideration be given to the chargeable cost of SLA's.

RESOLVED: That the Board note the report and actions being taken to mitigate the challenges.

Corporate
Director - Chief
Executive's
Delivery Unit

CS23 HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND 2023/24

The Board received a report from the Operational Director – Finance which provided an update regarding the delivery of the Government's Household Support Fund allocation of £2.6m from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) had issued guidance that included the requirement that part of the funding must be distributed via an application process, although the Council could still proactively target particular groups of households.

A spending plan had been prepared and was attached as Appendix A. It was noted that £365,00 had been allocated to the Discretionary Support Scheme within the Benefits Division to process applications.

Appendix B of the report contained detailed information relating to spending for the period 1 April 2023 to 30 September 2023. This included expenditure from partner organisations including Halton Citizens Advice Bureau, Runcorn Foodbank, Widnes Foodbank, Affordable Warmth, Holiday Activity Food Programme and Halton Voluntary Action.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) progress with delivery of the Household Support Fund, as outlined in the report, be noted; and
- 2) a further progress report be brought to the next meeting of the Board.

CS24 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORT FOR QUARTER 2 OF 2023/24

The Board received the Performance Management Report for Quarter 2 of 2023/24. The reports related to the following functional areas which reported to the Board and detailed progress against service objectives and milestones and performance targets, and provided information relating to key developments and emerging issues that had arisen during the period:

- Finance;
- Human Resources and Organisational Development;
- ICT and Administrative Support;
- Legal and Democracy;
- Catering, Stadium and Registration Services; and
- Property Services.

It was noted that apprenticeship opportunities were being explored and thanks were expressed to the ongoing work of ICT services and the services provided at the Stadium.

RESOLVED: That the Quarter 2 Performance Management report be noted.

Meeting ended at 8.25 p.m.

REPORT TO: Corporate Policy & Performance Board

DATE: 23 January 2024

REPORTING OFFICER: Chief Executive

SUBJECT: Public Question Time

WARD(s): Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To consider any questions submitted by the Public in accordance with Standing Order 34(9).
- 1.2 Details of any questions received will be circulated at the meeting.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That any questions received be dealt with.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Standing Order 34(9) states that Public Questions shall be dealt with as follows:-

- (i) A total of 30 minutes will be allocated for dealing with questions from members of the public who are residents of the Borough, to ask questions at meetings of the Policy and Performance Boards.
- (ii) Members of the public can ask questions on any matter relating to the agenda.
- (iii) Members of the public can ask questions. Written notice of questions must be given by 4.00 pm on the working day prior to the date of the meeting to the Committee Services Manager. At any one meeting no person/organisation may submit more than one question.
- (iv) One supplementary question (relating to the original question) may be asked by the questioner, which may or may not be answered at the meeting.
- (v) The Chair or proper officer may reject a question if it:-
 - Is not about a matter for which the local authority has a responsibility or which affects the Borough;
 - Is defamatory, frivolous, offensive, abusive or racist;
 - Is substantially the same as a question which has been put at a meeting of the Council in the past six months; or
 - Requires the disclosure of confidential or exempt information.

- (vi) In the interests of natural justice, public questions cannot relate to a planning or licensing application or to any matter which is not dealt with in the public part of a meeting.
- (vii) The Chair will ask for people to indicate that they wish to ask a question.
- (viii) **PLEASE NOTE** that the maximum amount of time each questioner will be allowed is 3 minutes.
- (ix) If you do not receive a response at the meeting, a Council Officer will ask for your name and address and make sure that you receive a written response.

Please bear in mind that public question time lasts for a maximum of 30 minutes. To help in making the most of this opportunity to speak:-

- Please keep your questions as concise as possible.
- Please do not repeat or make statements on earlier questions as this reduces the time available for other issues to be raised.
- Please note public question time is not intended for debate – issues raised will be responded to either at the meeting or in writing at a later date.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

None.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

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** - none.

6.3 **A Healthy Halton** – none.

6.4 **A Safer Halton** – none.

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal** – none.

7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

7.1 None.

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

8.1 There are no background papers under the meaning of the Act.

REPORT TO: Corporate Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 23 January 2024

REPORTING OFFICER: Chief Executive

SUBJECT: Executive Board Minutes

WARD(s): Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The Minutes relating to the Corporate Services Portfolio which have been considered by the Executive Board are attached at Appendix 1 for information.
- 1.2 The Minutes are submitted to inform the Policy and Performance Board of decisions taken in their area.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the Minutes be noted.

3.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 None.

4.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 None.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

5.1 Children and Young People in Halton

None

5.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

None

5.3 A Healthy Halton

None

5.4 A Safer Halton

None

5.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

None

6.0 RISK ANALYSIS

6.1 None.

7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

7.1 None.

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

8.1 There are no background papers under the meaning of the Act.

APPENDIX 1

Extract of Executive Board Minutes relevant to the Corporate Policy and Performance Board**EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 19 OCTOBER 2023**

EXB41	TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME UPDATE
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The Board considered a report of the Corporate Director: Chief Executive's Delivery Unit, which provided an update on the progress made within the Council's Transformation Programme. Work had continued to develop the projects set out in Appendix A of the report, as well as the associated delivery plans, which would provide a framework to assess project feasibility.

The Board noted that:

- during September there had been a focus on engaging with employees and a number of workshops had taken place; and
- the recruitment of transformation resources to support the Children's Social Care programme had been undertaken and appointments had been made.

RESOLVED: That the Board noted the contents of the update.

EXB42	RE-TENDERING OF COUNCIL INSURANCE POLICIES
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The Board considered a report of the Operational Director – Finance, which sought approval to commence a procurement process to re-tender the insurance policies that were due to expire. The current contracts were due to expire on 31 March 2024 and based upon current premium levels, the total cost of the services was expected to exceed £1,000,000 over the maximum contract duration of five years.

The Board noted that prior to the procurement process, a review of the Council's insurance programme would be completed, and relevant alternatives considered to establish the most appropriate programme for the Council. This would include reviewing components such as extent of cover, levels of self-insurance and indemnity limits.

It was proposed that the procurement would be undertaken by accessing a framework agreement for insurance services managed by the Yorkshire Purchasing Organisation. The Council's insurance broker would support the tender evaluation process by completing a comprehensive evaluation of tender submissions on behalf of the Council and make recommendations.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) approval be given to commence a procurement exercise for the following Council insurance policies:
 - Combined Liability
 - Medical Malpractice
 - Engineering and inspection
 - Property
 - Motor
 - Computer
- 2) the Operational Director – Finance, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services, be delegated to deal with any matters relating to the procurement of this contract.

EXB43	DISCRETIONARY NON-DOMESTIC RATE RELIEF
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The Board received a report from the Operational Director – Finance, which presented two applications for discretionary non-domestic rate relief, under Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, for consideration.

It was noted that under the amended provisions of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, the Council was able to grant discretionary rate relief to any business ratepayer. This relief had previously only been available to organisations that were a registered charity, a community amateur sports club or a not for profit organisation.

The report outlined details of the applications from Steve Morgan Foundation and Have a Heart Foundation, in relation to their respective addresses. Appended to the report was the potential annual cost to the Council of granting the discretionary rate relief.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the application for 15% discretionary rate relief from the Steve Morgan Foundation in respect of premises at Bridgemere House, with effect from 1 April 2022, be approved;
- 2) the application for 15% discretionary rate relief from Have a Heart Foundation in respect of premises at 103-104 Chadwick Road, with effect from 1 April 2022, be approved; and
- 3) the application for 15% discretionary rate relief from Have a Heart Foundation in respect of premises at 110-111 Runcorn Shopping Centre, with effect from 1 April 2022, be approved.

EXB48	DISPOSAL OF LAND LOWLANDS ROAD, RUNCORN
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The Board considered a report of the Executive Director, Environment and Regeneration, which sought approval to the revised disposal price for the disused trumpet loop land in Runcorn.

RESOLVED: That the Board

- 1) the reconsidered valuation figure be approved;
- 2) the disposal of the freehold interest in disused land behind Picow Engineering that was once busway/trumpet loop road in Runcorn Station Quarter be approved; and
- 3) the Executive Director for Environment and Regeneration be authorised to arrange for all required documentation for the transactions to be completed to the satisfaction of the Operational Director, Legal and Democratic Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services.

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 16 NOVEMBER 2023

EXB50	MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2024/25 – 2026/27 - KEY DECISION
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The Board considered a report from the Operational Director – Finance, which presented the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the period 2024/25 to 2026/27.

The MTFS sets out a three-year projection of the Council's resources and spending and was based on information that was currently available. The most recent Public Sector Spending Review was published at the end of October 2021 and covered the next three financial years. It was noted that details of the 2024/25 Local Government Finance Settlement were expected to be released in December 2023 on a provisional basis, with a final settlement expected in January 2024.

The Board was advised that the delay and uncertainty regarding 2024/25 financial resources meant the financial information included within the MTFS was based on a large number of assumptions and best estimates. The financial forecast would be updated as and when further information was known. Appendix 1 therefore detailed the MTFS from 2024/25 – 2026/27 using a prudent estimate of the financial conditions over the course of the next three years. Appendix 2 presented the Reserves and Balances Strategy.

Reason for Decision

To seek approval for the Council's MTFS for 2024/25 to 2026/27.

Alternative options considered and rejected

The alternative option of not maintaining a MTFS has been considered. However, this would not follow good financial management practice, as the Medium Term Financial Strategy is a key element in informing the Council's financial planning and budget setting processes.

Implementation date

The MTFS 2024/25 will be implemented from 1 April 2024.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the Medium Term Financial Strategy be approved;
- 2) the 2024/25 base budget be prepared on the basis of the underlying assumptions set out in the Strategy;
- 3) the Reserves and Balances Strategy be approved; and
- 4) the award of Council Tax Support for 2024/25 remains at the 2023/24 level of 21.55%

EXB15

COUNCIL WIDE SPENDING AS AT 30 SEPTEMBER 2023
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The Board received a report from the Operational Director – Finance, advising of the Council's overall revenue and capital net spending position as at 30 September 2023, together with a forecast outturn position.

Appendix 1 presented a summary of spending against the operational revenue budget up to 30 September 2023 and Appendix 2 provided detailed figures for each individual Department. It was reported that in overall terms the outturn forecast for the year showed that net spend would be over the approved budget by £3.572m. Appendix 3 presented the Capital Programme as at 30 September 2023, highlighting the schemes which had been revised.

It was noted that the biggest pressure on the budget continued to be within the Children & Families Department, where forecast net spend for the year had increased by £0.681m over the past three months. This was predominantly as a result of increased spend against agency staff and staffing costs. Whilst considerable work was ongoing to support recruitment and retention of permanent staff, the impact was not yet being felt of any major reduction to agency numbers. Therefore, it was essential that all Departments ensured spending continued to be restricted to only essential items throughout the remainder of the financial year.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) all spending continue to be limited to only absolutely essential items;

- 2) Executive Directors continue to take urgent action to reduce or defer spending for the remainder of the current financial year, or secure additional funding;
- 3) progress with implementation of the three years approved budget savings outlined in Appendix 4, be noted; and
- 4) Council be requested to approve the revisions to the Capital Programme, as set out in paragraph 3.20.

EXB52	TREASURY MANAGEMENT 2023-24 HALF YEAR UPDATE
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The Board considered a report from the Operational Director – Finance, which presented the Treasury Management Half Year Report as at 30 September 2023.

These reports updated Members on the activities undertaken on the investment and borrowing activities undertaken during the first half of the financial year to 30 September 2023, as required by the Treasury Management Policy.

The report provided supporting information on the economic outlook, interest rate forecast, short term borrowing rates, longer term borrowing rates, borrowing and investments, budget monitoring, new long term borrowing, policy guidelines and treasury management indicators. It was noted that no debt rescheduling had been undertaken during the quarter.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

EXB53	DETERMINATION OF COUNCIL TAX BASE 2024/25
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The Board considered a report of the Operational Director – Finance, on the requirement for the Council to determine the Council Tax Base for its area and the Council Tax Base for each of the Parishes.

The Council Tax Base was the measure used for calculating Council Tax and was used by both the billing authority (the Council) and the major precepting authorities (Cheshire Fire Authority, Cheshire Police and Crime Commissioner and the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority), in the calculation of their Council Tax requirements. It was arrived at in accordance with a prescribed formula which represented the estimated full year number of chargeable dwellings in the Borough expressed in terms of the equivalent Band 'D' dwellings.

Taking account of all the relevant information and applying a 97% collection rate, the calculation for 2024/25 gave a base figure of 36,409 for the Borough as a whole. The Council Tax Base figure for each of the Parishes was noted.

RESOLVED: That Council be recommended to approve:

- 1) setting the 2024/25 Council Tax Base at 36,409 for the Borough and that the Cheshire Fire Authority, the Cheshire Police and Crime Commissioner,

Liverpool City Region Combined Authority and the Environment Agency be so notified; and

2) setting the Council Tax Base for each of the Parishes as follows:

Parish	Tax Base
Hale	667
Halebank	534
Daresbury	212
Moore	341
Preston Brook	370
Sandymoor	1,606

EXB54	DIRECTORATE PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW REPORTS FOR QUARTER 2 2023-2024
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The Board considered a report of the Chief Executive, on progress against key objectives/milestones and performance targets for the second quarter period to 30 September 2023, for the Chief Executives and Children and Young People Directorates.

The Board was advised that the Directorate Performance Overview Report provided a strategic summary of key issues arising from the relevant quarter for each Directorate and was aligned to Council priorities or functional areas. The Board noted that such information was key to the Council's performance management arrangements and Executive Board had a key role in monitoring performance and strengthening accountability. Performance Management would continue to be important in the demonstration of value for money and strengthening accountability.

RESOLVED: That the report, progress and performance information be noted.

EXB55	TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME UPDATE
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The Board considered a report of the Corporate Director: Chief Executive's Delivery Unit, which provided an update on the progress made within the Council's Transformation Programme. Appendix A to the report set out the Transformation projects for each of the Directorates, as well as the associated delivery plans, which would provide a framework to assess project feasibility.

The Board noted that engagement with employees continued to be a focus in the programme ensuring staff views and ideas were heard in the planning stage of the project. Project themed 'chats about change' sessions had begun in October with Adult Social Care and Customer Journey focused sessions.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the Board noted the contents of the update; and
- 2) individual project delivery plans are to be submitted to the relevant Policy and Performance Boards for their consideration and monitoring.

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 7 DECEMBER 2023

EXB62	DISCRETIONARY NON-DOMESTIC RATE RELIEF
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The Board received a report from the Operational Director – Finance, which presented two applications for discretionary non-domestic rate relief, under Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, for consideration.

It was noted that under the amended provisions of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, the Council was able to grant discretionary rate relief to any business ratepayer. This relief had previously only been available to organisations that were a registered charity, a community amateur sports club or a not for profit organisation.

The report outlined details of the applications from Hazlehurst Craft Studios CIC, in relation to their respective addresses. Appended to the report was the potential annual cost to the Council of granting the discretionary rate relief. Currently, where discretionary rate relief was granted to registered charities and non-profit organisations, it was provided until March 2025 in order to provide the organisations with some degree of certainty.

RESOLVED: That

- 4) the application for 90% discretionary rate relief from Hazlehurst Craft Studios CIC in respect of premises at 71 High Street, Runcorn, with effect from 1 April 2023, be approved; and
- 5) the application for 90% discretionary rate relief from Hazlehurst Craft Studios CIC in respect of premises at 1st Floor, 73 High Street, Runcorn, with effect from 16 February 2024, be approved.

EXB63	GAS & ELECTRICITY SUPPLY CONTRACTS
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The Board considered a report of the Executive Director – Environment and Regeneration, which advised that the Council purchased energy supplies via the Crown Commercial Services (CCS) framework. CCS were an executive agency sponsored by the Cabinet Office and are the biggest provider of public sector frameworks in the UK thus can provide excellent value due to their bulk buying power. CCS went through a tender process earlier this year and the result being that Total

Energies, previously Total Gas and Power, were appointed as their gas provider and EDF were appointed as their electricity provider.

The Board was advised that the Executive Director – Environment and Regeneration had approved the award of the corporate gas supply contract to Total Energies. The report also sought approval for the award of the corporate electricity supply contract to EDF. The new arrangements commenced on 2 October 2023 and both frameworks were until 20 February 2027. Full details of the cost of the contract and the arrangements were outlined in the report.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the report be noted; and
- 2) the award of the corporate electricity supply contract to EDF be approved.

EXB64	DEMOLITION OF THE FORMER WATERLOO CENTRE, RUNCORN
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The Board considered a report of the Executive Director – Environment and Regeneration, which provided information on the decision of the Chief Executive to approve a waiver of Standing Orders under section 1.14.2 Emergency Powers, to appoint a contractor to undertake the demolition of the former Waterloo Centre, Runcorn. The former Waterloo Centre had been closed since 2004 and had been surplus to Council requirements. No viable alternative use had been found for the building and without investment the building had started to fall into disrepair.

The Board noted that the intention was to demolish the building in 2019, however concerns were raised by Planning that the building adjoined Edgerton Street Library, which was a listed building. Over the last couple of years, the building had deteriorated and the latest report from a structural engineer stated that it was not feasible to shore the building up and that it needed to be demolished in a controlled manner. As a result, and following legal advice, the Operational Director – Policy, Planning and Transportation, had made the decision that the building should be demolished as soon as possible.

A tender exercise was previously carried out in 2019 and although the work had been put on hold due to the concerns raised, to expediate matters and avoid a lengthy tender exercise, negotiations had taken place with the original proposed contractor Excavation and Contracting to carry out the work. They had submitted a revised price of £110,000. In order to avoid any unnecessary delay, a waiver of Procurement Standing Orders via the Chief Executive under Emergency Powers was obtained.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

EXB65	AGENCY WORKER CONTRACT EXTENSION
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The Board considered a report of the Head of HR Operations, which sought approval to extend the current contract for the supply of agency workers. In compliance with Procurement Standing Order 1.15.3, acceptance of pre-determined contract extension, approval by the Board was required as the estimated value was likely to exceed £5,000,000 per annum.

The current contract was awarded to Matrix SCM in May 2022 and had a pre-determined option to extend for 2 x 12 month periods, the first extension period was from 1 May 2024 to 30 April 2025.

The report proposed that the current contract be extended to ensure opportunity remained to resource agency staff through a neutral vendor and to avoid costs and resource commitment of a tendering procedure, whilst other options were being explored.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the report be noted; and
- 2) the Board approve that the contract arrangement with Matrix SCM be extended for a further 12 month period from 1 May 2024 to 30 April 2025.

EXB66	TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME UPDATE
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The Board considered a report of the Corporate Director: Chief Executive's Delivery Unit, which provided an update on the progress made within the Council's Transformation Programme. Appendix A to the report set out the Transformation projects for each of the Directorates, as well as the associated delivery plans, which would provide a framework to assess project feasibility.

The Board noted that the development of delivery plans and associated trajectories against priority delivery actions was underway. The development of trajectory data would be used to monitor progress against both financial and non-financial outcomes. This work would continue throughout December.

RESOLVED: That the Board noted the contents of the update.

REPORT TO:	Corporate Policy and Performance Board
DATE:	23 January 2024
REPORTING OFFICER:	Chief Executive
PORTFOLIO:	Chief Executive's
SUBJECT:	Member Development Group Notes
WARDS:	N/A

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To consider the notes of the Member Development Group held on 26 July 2023.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That the report be noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The notes of the last meeting of the Member Development Group are before CSPPB as stated in the Constitution.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

None.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

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** - None
- 6.3 **A Healthy Halton** - None
- 6.4 **A Safer Halton** - None
- 6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal** - None

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

None.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

None.

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

None under the meaning of the Act.

Member Development Group

At a meeting of the Member Development Group held on 26 July 2023
in the Boardroom, Municipal Building Widnes

Present: Councillors A. Teeling (Chair), A. Ball, I. Bramwell, B. Gilligan, A. Lowe and D. Thompson.

Officers: K. Mackenzie and S. Riley.

Apologies for absence: Councillors V. Begg, J. Bradshaw, T. McDermott, M. Ratcliffe, T. Stretch and P. Wallace.

MDG 1 NOTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The notes of the last meeting held on 14 March 2023 were approved as a correct record.

MDG 2 ELECTED MEMBERS IT – WAY FORWARD

IPads had been distributed to all Members in December 2022. Office 365 had been installed, and Members noted that the Skype phone system would be phased out in the next few months and evolve to a newer version of TEAMS.

A Member asked if it was possible to add an internal phone directory to the Intranet that Members could access from their IPads. Members noted that a future intention was to publish the HBC Intranet containing officers contact details on the Internet via a secure login.

Members discussed Ipad training and the possibility of producing a list of FAQs. One suggestion was a series of short tutorials, though it was noted that many already existed via Google and YouTube.

It was suggested that an IT drop-in session be offered to all Members who needed assistance. Microsoft 365 was constantly evolving so it was important Members utilised such sessions if needed. This would be arranged by IT.

Phishing emails were discussed, and it was important Members were vigilant as to the source of emails and checked an address was valid before replying. If unsure the email should be deleted.

Members were reminded that they would never be contacted by telephone and informed they have IT problems and asked for personal details by HBC IT. IT would not contact Members in this way, and any IT issues should be logged with the IT Helpdesk in the usual way.

MDG 3 REVIEW OF CURRENT PERFORMANCE AGAINST TARGETS

LOD2 – Number of Members with a Member Action Plan (MAP)

The Number of Members with a MAP to date since the election of May 2023 was 54.

LOD3 – Percentage of Members attending at least one organised training event in the current financial year.

Since May 2023, 56% of Members had attended at least one training and development event. The target was 100% for the year 2023-2024.

MDG 4 LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Members noted that training sessions had been held for:

Promoting Race Equality and Tackling Racism – 30 March 2023 via ZOOM

Local Government Finance – 18 April 2023

Role of the HBC Contact Centre – Runcorn Town Hall – 7 June 2023

Role of the CAB in Halton – Hitesh Patel – 26 June 2023

Regulatory Committee Training – all Committee – 28 June 2023

Members noted that attendance was recorded but was not mandatory.

There were also sessions held before Development Management Committee that were available for all Members to attend.

Members noted that all agenda and minutes were available via the HBC website or the Mod.Gov App. Should any Member need assistance in selecting committees they should contact Committee or Member Services.

Members were reminded that there were several **eLearning courses** on offer for Members via the eLearning portal on the Intranet. If any Member needed assistance they should contact training reception via the following link - Trainrec.Trainrec@halton.gov.uk

Members were reminded of the **North West Employers** offer available with details on their website <https://nwemployers.org.uk/> Members could find details of their seminars on offer and LGA workbooks.

MDG 5 ANY OTHER BUSINESS/MEMBER SUPPORT ISSUES

The Group discussed inviting a guest speaker to attend future meetings if time allowed.

It was suggested that future meetings be held in rotation via TEAMS and in person, if this was appropriate, in consultation with the Chairperson.

MDG 6 DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED: The next meeting to be held in October/November 2023.

The meeting closed at 6.30pm

REPORT TO:	Corporate Policy & Performance Board
DATE:	23 January 2024
REPORTING OFFICER:	Corporate Director, Chief Executive's Delivery Unit
PORTFOLIO:	Leader
SUBJECT:	The Corporate Plan - The Big Conversation Analysis and the way forward
WARD(S)	Borough Wide

1.0 **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 To share with the Board an analysis of 'The Big Conversation', which is integral to formulating a new Council Corporate Plan, and to outline the next steps to ensure that this will take effect from April 2024.

2.0 **RECOMMENDED: That**

- 1) **the report be noted; and**
- 2) **that Board continues to endorse the approach to facilitate the implementation of a new Corporate Plan.**

3.0 **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 **Background**

The Big Conversation was about engaging with the public to share the challenges that the Council is facing and to establish what is important to people in the Borough.

It was an approach between the Council and those who live or work in Halton to work together in order to create an improved Borough in all aspects of everyday life.

A Stakeholder Analysis together with a Communications Plan was developed in order to generate and establish as many opportunities as possible to involve all our stakeholders in many different and varied ways.

The Big Conversation consultation opened on July 28th 2023 and closed on November 30th 2023, what follows is an analysis of the feedback.

3.2 Promotion, Consultation & Engagement:

3.2.1 Breakdown of responses by source:

Total Number of responses: 1076

This was the second biggest response ever to a Halton Borough Council survey.

Comms Meta Advert	223
HBC Staff	222
Comms Carers Centre	136
Comms Organic Facebook	124
Comms Media	64
No Reply	41
Inside Halton	39
Comms Flyer	34
Comms Partner	30
Comms HBC (Home page)	27
Comms Short URL	18
Comms Organic LinkedIn	16
Comms Community	14
Comms Linnets	13
Comms School Crossing Patrol	12
Comms Hale Village Coffee Morning	12
Active Ageing	11
Comms Organic X	9
Comms iWalkers	7
Comms Visually Impaired Group	6
Comms Halton Voices	5
Comms Colleges	3
Comms Vikings	3
Comms Dementia Group	3
Comms Schools	2
Comms Organic Threads	1
Comms TUC	1
Total Number of Responses	1076

3.2.2 Response by Age Group:

Age Group	Response Rate: Number / Percentage %
16 - 19 years	14 / 1%
20 - 24 years	11 / 1%

25 – 34 years	79 / 8%
35 – 49 years	266 / 26%
50 – 64 years	387 / 37%
65 – 74 years	191 / 19%
75 – 84 years	55 / 5%
85 years or over	15 / 1%
Prefer not to say	17 / 2%
No Reply	41
Total	1076

Census 2021 (by comparison):

Data	Percentage %
16 – 19 years	4.3
20 – 24 years	5.2
25 – 34 years	12.8
35 – 49 years	9.4
50 – 64 years	20.6
65 – 74 years	11.2
75 – 84 years	5.6
85 years and over	1.9

3.2.3 Response by Area:

- Runcorn: 55%
- Widnes: 45%

3.2.4 Consultation Success:

862: Direct (Speaking directly to stakeholders and listening)
 11,840: Indirect (Social media, partner's newsletters and flyers)

Specific Forums and Venues attended:

General Public:

- Halton Trades Union Congress
- Visually Impaired Group
- Friends of Hale Village Coffee Morning
- Eat at the Heath Community event
- Windmill Hill Shops
- Women's Institute
- Fellowship Centre
- Women's Group (St John Fisher Club)
- i-Walkers
- Kingsway Leisure Centre
- Catalyst Museum

Print & Social Media:

- Inside Halton Magazine
- LinkedIn
- X
- Thread
- Facebook
- HBC Homepage

HBC Workforce:

- Emails to staff
- Video message

Adult's Services:

- Healthy & Active Ageing events
- Partners in Prevention event
- Dementia Group meeting
- Care Home visit (Millbrow)
- Flyer distribution by Adult Social Work Services Teams
- Feature in Young Carers & Adult Carers newsletters

Children's Services:

- Primary School Heads
- Children's Provider Network Meeting
- Halton Youth Cabinet
- Family Hub Centres
- Riverside College
- School & College newsletters
- Flyers distributed by Children's Services Teams

Partners:

- Halton Patient Participation Group
- Cheshire Constabulary
- Halton & St Helens Voluntary Community Action
- Health Improvement Team
- Citizens Advice Bureau
- Public Health Vaccination Team

Businesses:

- Halton Chamber of Commerce Network Meeting
- Halton & Warrington Business Fair
- Halton Chamber of Commerce
- Business Improvement & Growth
- Sci-Tech Daresbury Business Breakfast

3.3 **Emerging Themes:**

3.3.1 The 5 themes in order of response priority were:

- Improving health, promoting wellbeing and supporting greater independence: 93%
- Building a strong, sustainable local economy: 91%
- Supporting children, young people and families: 89%
- Tackling inequality, helping those who are most in need: 84%
- Working towards a greener future: 78%

3.3.2 **Level of agreement to all of the 5 suggested themes was very high.**

Identifying other potential corporate plan themes, the top 3 identified by our stakeholders were:

- Environment / Open spaces / Litter / Overgrowth / Maintain green spaces / Keep street free of litter and weeds.
- Regeneration / Business / Economy / Support growth and town centres
- Housing / Affordability / Increase supported living / protect green spaces / Improved infrastructure

3.3.3 It is proposed that we recognise this level of engagement with our stakeholders and form a 6th priority, which encompasses all of the above, under the title '**Place and Community**'.

When asked how the Council can support these themes, the top 3 responses were:

- 'Provide opportunities for young people to engage with their local community and do things that interest them, keep them safe and make them happy'.
- 'Create vibrant town centres for everyone to enjoy across the Borough'
- 'Continue to ensure local people are able to enjoy the Borough's parks and green spaces'

3.3.4 In terms of the ways our stakeholders can support the 5 popular themes, these were as follows:

- 'Spending money with local shops and businesses'
- 'Doing our best to stay healthy and active'
- 'Being a good neighbour'

3.5 **Timeline:**

- November 30th 2023: Consultation ended
- December 2023: Analysis undertaken
- January 2024: Key priorities identified and agreed / summary developed / shared with stakeholders via drop-in sessions within council buildings and open engagement at community spaces
- February - March 2024: Corporate Plan finalised and approved at key forums
- April 2024: the New Corporate Plan is launched

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 There are no specific policy implications at this stage, however the output of this process will be a new contemporary and relevant Halton Borough Council Corporate Plan. This will form the basis of the Council's Corporate Policy framework in the immediate term.

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 None. The development of the new Corporate Plan is being delivered within existing budget and resource provision.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

- 6.1 The Corporate Plan is Halton Borough Council's key strategic document. This plan sets out the main vision, themes and values of the Council.

'The Big Conversation' has helped to determine the Council's new set of priorities, which will be translated into the plan.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

- 7.1 If the Council had continued with the same priorities that were in place in previous years, given the socio-demographic and economic changes that have taken place over the last few years, there was a significant risk that the current Corporate Plan would lose its relevance.
- 7.2 That would lead to the Council failing to maintain engagement with the people of Halton, and its workforce, around where resources are best targeted in the contemporary environment.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

- 8.1 Equality and Diversity will be an integral part of the new Corporate Plan priority under the Big Conversation banner of 'Tackling inequality, helping those who are most in need.'

8.2 The Big Conversation consultation process was fully inclusive in terms of consulting a wide and varied range of stakeholders, which covered the 9 protected characteristics in the Equality Act 2010.

8.3 An Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken as part of the plan development process.

9.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 At this stage it is evident that there will be a specific priority around climate change, with the theme receiving full support under the Big Conversation banner of 'Working towards a greener future'.

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

None under the meaning of the Act.

REPORT TO:	Corporate Policy & Performance Board
DATE:	23 rd January 2024
REPORTING OFFICER:	Assistant to the Chief Executive
PORTFOLIO:	Resources
SUBJECT:	Corporate Complaints
WARD(S)	All

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide statistical analysis of the Corporate Complaints received during the 2022 – 2023 financial year.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the content of the report be considered.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

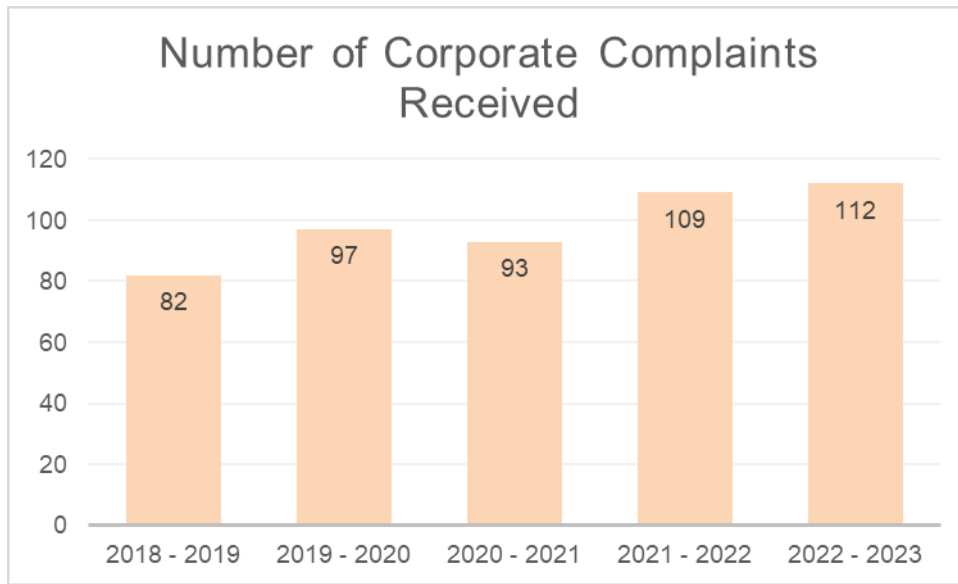
Context

- 3.1 The Council presently administers a 2-stage procedure to deal with corporate complaints whereby the public can seek redress if they believe Council departments have failed to deliver a satisfactory level of service.
- 3.2 When complaints are received that have not been raised previously, in the first instance, they are normally directed to the relevant department for matters to be investigated and a response to be provided by a Senior Officer from the service.
- 3.3 Should the complainant remain dissatisfied with the initial response or outcome to their complaint they may request an internal review of the Council's actions and position in relation to their complaint. Such reviews are undertaken independently of the service by an appointed Investigating Officer.
- 3.4 If the Council cannot resolve matters to the complainant's satisfaction individuals are advised that they can refer matters to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman or relevant Professional body or, in the case of complaints relating to Freedom of information requests that are considered by the Council's Information Governance Team, to the Information Commissioners Office.

4.0 CORPORATE COMPLAINTS TREND ANALYSIS 2022 - 23

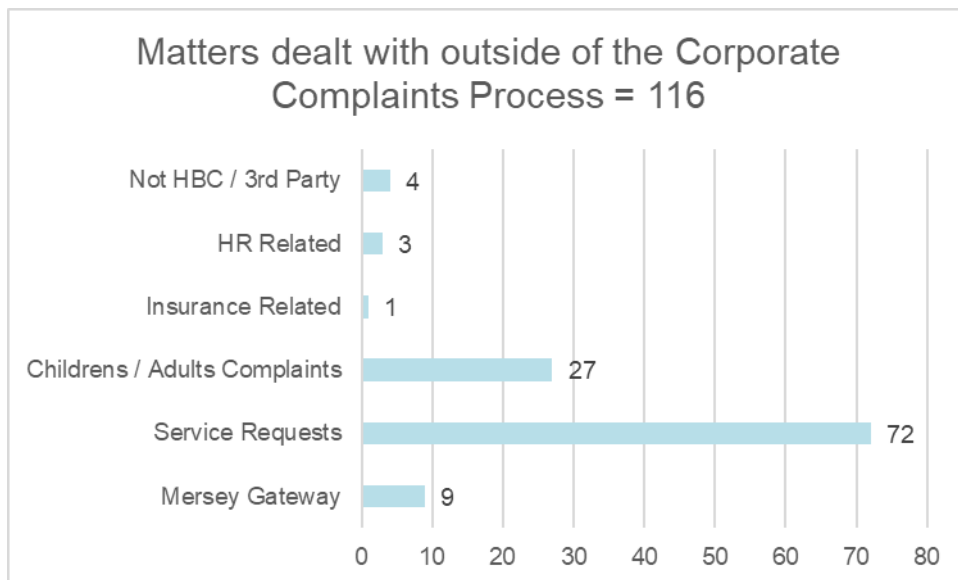
- 4.1 The chart below provides a breakdown of the number of Corporate Complaints received for each of the preceding 5 financial years from April 2018 to March

2023.



4.2 As the chart illustrates, the number of complaints has remained relatively stable over this period.

4.3 112 complaints were received in 2022 – 23, however an additional 116 complaint / enquiries were received that could not be dealt with through the Council’s Corporate Complaints Procedures (CCP). The chart below illustrates the primary nature of these additional complaints.



4.4 Some of those complaints were dealt with through other process such as the Adults and Children’s Statutory procedures or via the Mersey Gateway process. Others were considered as requests for service i.e. where the Council had not previously been aware of an issue or given the opportunity to address matters.

4.5 Presently, the Council aims to respond to complaints dealt with at stage 1 of

the Corporate Procedure within 10 working days and those dealt with at stage 2 within 28 working days.

- 4.6 The tables below show the number of complaints that were received and dealt with at each stage during the year and the success rate for responding to complainants within the relevant target timeframe for 2022 – 23 and the preceding year. When compared to the previous year, the number of stage 1 complaint responses provided within 10 working days remains the same.

Number of Stage 1 complaint responses				
Financial Year	2021 - 22		2022 - 23	
		58		100
Within 10 days target timeframe	41	71%	67	67%
Within 15 days	6	10%	8	8%
Within 20 days	3	5%	5	5%
20 days +	8	14%	20	20%
TOTAL	58		100	

Number of Stage 2 complaint responses				
Financial Year	2021 - 22		2022 - 23	
		7		12
Within 28 days target timeframe	6	86%	8	67%
Within 33 days	0	0%	1	8%
Within 38 days	0	0%	0	0%
38 days +	1	14%	3	25%
TOTAL	7		12	

4.7

4.8

More complaints were considered at stage 2 as compared to the previous year, but the response time has dipped slightly.

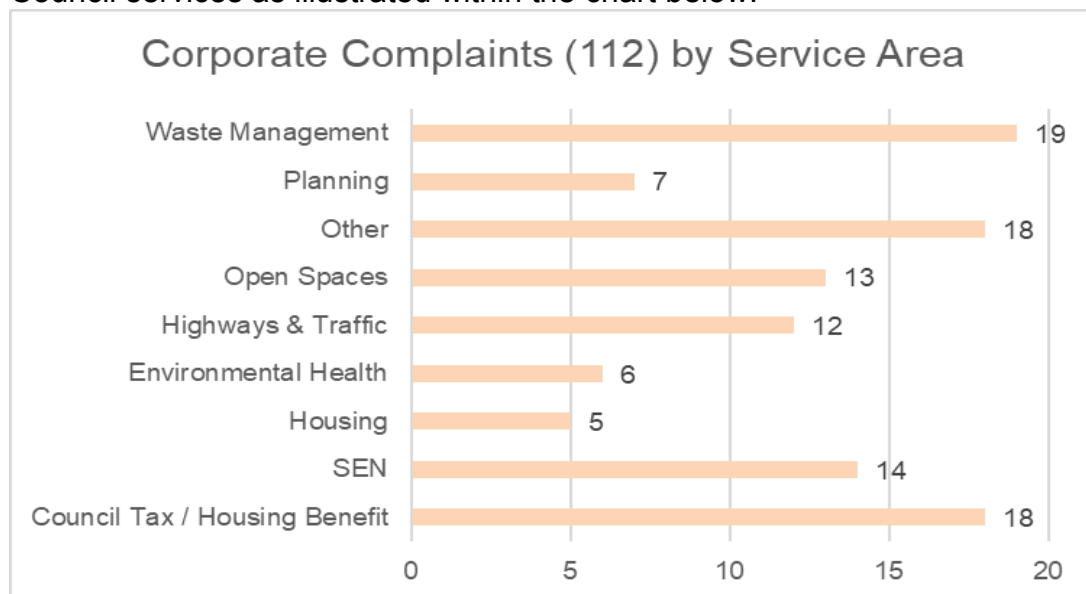
A number of complaints were dealt with outside of the target timeframe and this primarily related to staffing availability and in some cases resulted from the complexity of the issue in hand and / or the need to review preceding communications between the Council and the complainant. There was no specific service area that was subject to delays occurring and it remains standard practice that where possible, complainants are advised in advance should it be likely that target timeframes will not be met.

4.9

4.10

The determination of target response timeframes remains discretionary, and it is the case that some local authorities choose to adopt longer timescales than those currently applied in Halton. However, in taking account of the continued capacity pressures being faced by the Council it is considered that the timeframes currently in place strike an appropriate balance between the availability of resources and the reasonable expectations of complainants.

The nature of corporate complaints received covered a relatively wide range of Council services as illustrated within the chart below.



4.1
1

The service areas of Waste Management; Council Tax / Housing Benefits; and Other areas; represented the highest number of complaints received during the year.

4.1
2

The table below provides an overview of the outcome of complaints that were received during 2022 – 23.

Corporate Complaint Outcome 2022-2023				
112				
Outcome	% of Stage 1		% of Stage 2	
Complaints Upheld	49	49%	3	25%
Complaints Partially Upheld	4	4%	1	8%
Complaints Not Upheld	47	47%	8	67%
Undetermined	0	0%	0	0%
TOTAL	100		12	

4.1
3

In a small number of cases it was not possible for the Council to retrospectively determine what events may have occurred. For example, complaints concerning the alleged behaviour of staff, or the nature of interactions between two parties, where the Council has no objective means of corroborating either party's recollection of events. In such circumstances, the Council provides an appropriate explanation of the circumstances and, where relevant, would apologise for any injured feelings that the complainant had experienced.

4.1
4

As can be seen from the table above, 49% of complaints were upheld at stage 1. This would seem to suggest that service managers are not dismissive of complainants or consider complaints in a defensive manner but rather that they recognise and are willing to acknowledge, where service provision may

have fallen below an acceptable standard and act to put things right.

4.1 A smaller number of complaints that were considered at stage 2 were upheld
5 or partially upheld. This would seem to provide assurance that the actions
5 taken at a service level had been proportionate and appropriate to the
5 circumstances.

4.1 In all cases where a complaint was not upheld at stage 1, the Council
6 explained the reasons for its position and confirmed that should they remain
6 dissatisfied the complainant could request that matters be escalated to stage 2
6 of the complaints procedure.

Those complaints that were upheld were not confined to any specific service
area and broadly reflected the categorisations of complaints as detailed earlier
in this report.

4.1 In all cases where a complaint was upheld or partially upheld, the Council
7 offered an apology and took action to remedy the situation and where possible
7 provide a suitable form of redress.

4.1 An analysis of the complaints received during the course of the year does not
8 indicate that any one service is disproportionately represented, and this
8 provides assurance that there have been no systemic weaknesses within
8 existing procedures and the ongoing delivery of services across the
8 organisation.

4.1 **LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN COMPLAINTS** 9

The following table provides a summary of the numbers of complaints and
enquiries that were received by the Local Government and Social Care
Ombudsman during 2022 – 23.

LGO Complaints 2022 - 2023			
22			
Service Area Split		Upheld	Not Upheld
Housing Solutions	3		3
Planning and Development	3	1	2
Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	2		2
Corporate & Other Services	2		2
Highways & Transport	2		2
Education & Childrens Services	3	2	1
Adults Care Services	6	1	5
Other	1		1
Total	22	4	18

The LGO has recently consulted in a Joint Complaint Handling Code which
sets out requirements for organisations to respond to complaints. The purpose

- of the Code is to enable organisations to resolve complaints raised by individuals quickly, and to use the data and learning from complaints to drive service improvements. As yet there is not date for its implementation. Organisations will be asked to self-assess against the Code annually on a 'comply or explain' basis and publish this on their website. Where an organisation is unable to comply with the Code when dealing with an individual complaint, the individual must be provided with a suitable explanation and signposted to the relevant Ombudsman.
- 5.2

Non-compliance with the Code could result in the relevant Ombudsman taking further action. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman may consider failure to comply with the Code as maladministration or service failure.

- 5.3 The Code applies to all local authorities in England, as well as other specified bodies but does not replace the Children's and Adults statutory complaint processes.

- 5.4 An assessment of the Council's current procedure against the Code will be undertaken in early 2024.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.5 Complaints provide essential information and inform the development of Halton Borough Council's services and policies. The Corporate Complaints Procedure is reviewed periodically to ensure it continues to conform to best practice and remains fit for purpose.

6.0

6.1

7.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Improvement and quality assessment agendas increasingly consider the robustness of complaints procedures and how they are demonstrably used to inform and drive change. It is important for the Council to have robust complaint procedures in place to improve service delivery and ultimately help the achievement of all of its strategic priority areas.

8.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

8.1 Children & Young People in Halton

None.

8.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton

None.

8.3 A Healthy Halton

None.

8.4 A Safer Halton

None.

8.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

None.

9.0 RISK ANALYSIS

9.1 An inefficient or ineffective complaints system will fail individuals who want to use it and prevent the organisation from learning from complaints. Whilst complaints can result in positive changes for individuals, they are also a key source of intelligence, which can be used to influence the design and delivery of services that the organisation provides and commissions.

10. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

0

10.1 All complaint forms are issued with a separate form for monitoring diversity of complainants with regard to age, disability, ethnicity and gender. Unfortunately, the majority of corporate complainants choose not to return the monitoring form with their complaint so information collected is extremely limited. However, upon the basis of available evidence there is no indication that any specific social groups are over or underrepresented by age, gender, disability etc. which suggests that the complaints process remains accessible on an equitable basis.

11. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

0

None.

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

0

None under the meaning of the Act.

REPORT TO:	Corporate Policy & Performance Board
DATE:	23 rd January 2024
REPORTING OFFICER:	Assistant to the Chief Executive
PORTFOLIO:	Climate Change
SUBJECT:	Climate Change Update
WARD(S)	Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an update on related activities aimed at reducing the Council's impact on the environment and reducing CO2 emissions from Council activities.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That the report and the ongoing work be noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 CARBON FOOTPRINT

- 3.2 Since it started to measure its carbon emissions in 2006/2007, overall emissions have reduced in the Council's operations from 26,338 tonnes of CO2 to 8740 tonnes.
- 3.3 The Council was given guidelines by the Government in 2009, that public bodies would aim to reduce their carbon emissions by 30% of their 2009 carbon emission baseline by 2020. The Council calculated its baseline carbon emissions in 2009 as 26,825 carbon tonnes. In reporting year 2020, the Council had reduced its carbon emissions to 11,354 carbon tonnes. This was a reduction of 57%.
- 3.4 In 2017, the Government reset the baseline in the expectation that public bodies would reduce their carbon emissions by 50% by 2031. The Council's 2017 baseline was 14,811 carbon tonnes. In reporting year 2022/23, the Council had managed to reduce its carbon emissions to 8740 tonnes. This is a reduction of 40.9%.
- 3.5 In 2022/23 emissions were 9327 tonnes of CO2. For 2022/23, the overall emissions have reduced to 8740 tonnes, is a further annual reduction of 6.29%.
- 3.6 The above figures do need to take account of the fact that since the Council started to measure its carbon footprint in 2006/07 and

Academy Schools are no longer accounted for in the figures and Care Homes are now included in the figures and the ongoing decarbonisation of the grid has a beneficial impact on the figures. The Council is proceeding with the decarbonisation of its care homes with St Luke’s and St Patrick’s care homes planned over a two-year period.

Emission from specific Sectors CO2 (Tonnes)	
Fleet Transport	1465
Business Mileage	187
Street Lighting	992
Corporate & School Buildings	6096

- 3.7 In all areas, emissions have reduced with the exception of Fleet Transport.
- 3.8 It should be noted that while we continue to use fossil fuels for road transport the amount of co2 will continue to rise due to the ever-increasing requirements of Council operations. The Council’s vehicle fleet mileage increases by circa 5.5% year on year.
- 3.9 Decarbonisation of the vehicle fleet will be extremely financially challenging firstly in terms of installing the necessary infrastructure and secondly acquisition of the appropriate vehicles/plant and machinery to ensure the road to net zero does not have a negative impact on operational efficiency. There is also a need to seek transitional funding from central government.
- 4.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION PLAN**
- 4.1 In April 2022, the Council adopted a revised Climate Change Strategy. The Action Plan covers the period 2022-2027 and provides a clear direction for the Council over the coming years. It sets a target to be net zero by 2040 and includes both short-term and longer-term actions. It provides an initial focus on decarbonising energy use by buildings, transport, waste and enhancing the Borough’s blue/green infrastructure. It also seeks to embed climate change in council decision-making and seeks in the long term to develop partnership working as a lead into a borough-wide approach to tackling climate change. Whilst the Council has successfully implemented a range of actions aimed at reducing its carbon footprint capacity and the financial resources to implement projects remains a key challenge. A Climate Change Funding Bulletin is issued monthly to leads in each area which identifies potential funding streams that could be applied for to support the implementation of projects.
- 5.0 **KEY PROJECTS COMPLETED OR COMMENCED DURING 2023**
- 5.1 **Buildings**

- 5.1.1 We have undertaken 13 feasibility studies on Council Building to assess the decarbonisation process. Bids have been submitted to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme in respect of 5 sites in two separate bids. One covering St Lukes & St Patrick's care homes, the other covering Runcorn Town Hall, Picow Farm Depot and Kingsway Learning Centre. The outcome of bids will be known towards the end of January 2024.
- 5.1.2 An initial desk top study has been completed to assess 24 sites for the suitability of Solar PV. The initial study shows estimate that some 2,259kWp of solar PV could be installed on the roofs subject to roof studies and grid connections. The total cost of the programme would be circa £2.27m excludes any supervision and clerk of works activity that the Council may undertake at each site. Based upon the assumptions made in terms of the use of energy on site and exports sales, inflation, and debt repayments the programme would have a 14.3% IRR and an NPV of £3.33M after all costs. The study will be developing in the coming year into a rolling four-year programme of solar PV investment.
- 5.1.3 The Council has approved plans to extend the existing Solar Farm at the former St Michael's Golf Course, connecting it to the new Leisure Centre in Moor Lane, Lower House Lane, and Municipal Building. The project is also looking to provide EV charging infrastructure at the Depot and will provide a renewal source energy for the Air Source Heat pumps to be installed at the Leisure Centre, which will significantly reduce the carbon footprint of the building. The Council has approved funding and consultants have been appointed to support the development of a planning application for the extension and to undertake design work to enable bids to be invited. The Planning application will be submitted in early February with bids invited towards the end of 2024.
- 5.1.4 The existing 1MW solar farm and roof top solar schemes at the DCBL Stadium, Brookvale and Rutland House continue to operate within expectations and generate ongoing income streams. Some of the income from the schemes will be reinvested in the Building Decarbonisation Schemes highlighted in Section 5.1.
- 5.1.5 The Key Design features for new Leisure Centre were agreed and include no gas supply to building, with all plant powered via electricity with some coming from the Solar Farm when the work is completed.
- 5.1.6 Feasibility work is ongoing in respect of various options for rationalising our main office accommodation. A report will be presented to Council in 2024 with recommendations.

5.2 **Transport**

5.2.1 Four upgraded replacement EV charging points for both Lowerhouse Lane and Picow Farm depots have now been installed. This will provide a faster more efficient charge rate from the previous chargers. The extension of the Solar Farm will provide for the installation of additional EV charging infrastructure at Lowerhouse Lane and enable the Council to further consider the electrification of its vehicle fleet. A Feasibility Study to assess the introduction of low carbon emission vehicles at all Council sites that operate fleet vehicles / plant & machinery will be undertaken in 2024.

5.2.2 In late 2024 early 2025 we anticipate a new Electric Vehicle Charging point (22kw/50kw) to be installed in the Runcorn High Street area. The addition of a publicly accessible Charging Point, from which partial funding has been awarded from the UK investment Fund and compliments the Sustainable Transport corridor development on High Street which will see improvements to the Public Realm within High Street and a number of smaller interventions in neighbouring roads, as part of the wider Reconnecting Runcorn project.

5.3 **Climate Change Awareness**

5.3.1 The Council has embedded climate change in its decision-making process in a range of ways, this includes:

- The appointment of a Portfolio Holder for Climate Change on the Council's Executive Board.
- The establishment of a Climate Change Advisory Group of officers has been established to advise the Portfolio Holder for Climate Change.
- From February 2023, all Board reports include a climate change implications section.

5.3.2 The Council's Training Team has developed an e-learning Climate Change course for Officers and Members with a view to this been launched in early 2024. The short course is divided into short modules covering the global and local impact of climate change, what action Halton is taking and what can staff and members do to help?

5.3.3 The training is designed to be interactive and encourage staff and members to consider small changes in behaviour to help them reduce their own carbon footprint. Further training will emerge as more partnership working takes place.

5.3.4 To help keep people better informed on the Council's efforts to

address climate change, a dedicated space within the Council website was launched towards the end of 2022. The aim is to provide a single location on the Council website where actions on climate change can be found and where wider engagement can be encouraged in the future. Consideration will be given to how activities can be more widely shared with the public through for example a social media campaign/residents newsletter.

5.4 **Open Spaces**

- 5.4.1 The Big Halton Forest Project was launched during 2022. Addressing carbon sequestration is a long-term process, so it was agreed to initiate a step increase in tree planting as early as possible in the Action Plan. The result was the concept of The Big Halton Forest.
- 5.4.2 Up to 2030, the aim is to plant an additional 130,000 new trees across Halton above the regular annual planting of circa 1,500 trees. This will include Council owned land and other partners, including eventually the wider community.
- 5.4.3 The first planting season was the Autumn/Winter 2022/2023. The funding and management of the project is underway, with the first year's proposals expected to be met. To date the Council has secured around £300k towards the projects from the following sources:
- LCR Community Environment Fund - awarded circa £30k for planting of 2,000 trees and 3,000 bushes at Factory Lane, Widnes.
 - INEOS Environment Fund - secured £120k to be spent over 5 years as general support for the project.
 - DEFRA Woodland Creation Accelerator Fund (WCAF). The fund is to enable more trees to be planted, particularly in winter seasons 2023/24 and 2024/25. Awarded £150k to be spent across those 2 years to meet staffing costs for 2 Officers to support the project.
- 5.4.4 Opportunities to secure further funding to deliver the Big Halton Forest remain on-going. Discussions with the Mersey Forest are at an advanced stage, and it is likely that they will become the major delivery vehicle with an interim arrangement put in place in 2024 and a formal rejoining of the Mersey Forest in 2025 onward.
- 5.4.5 Halton Borough Council will retain direction and decision making of the overall project.
- 5.4.6 This is beneficial to the Mersey Forest in increasing the hectares of

land transformed and to the Council in securing significant resources to make more rapid progress in the ambitions of the Big Halton Forest. This will include establishing a more local supplier, orchard development and engaging the farming community.

5.4.7 The recruitment of a new tree and woodlands officer in the autumn of 2023 along with the divisional restructuring will also ensure a more rapid development of the Big Halton Forest and other related works from 2024 onward.

5.4.8 The first major planting activity resulting from the Big Halton Forest project saw the planting of 2,000 trees and 3,000 bushes in Widnes in early 2023. The second phase of planting will see circa 12,000 trees planted in early 2024. Planting will take place on a combination of Council owned land, housing association, privately owned land, and within a school's grounds.

5.5 **Procurement**

5.5.1 To influence the supply chain to improve sustainability in the supply of goods and services all published tenders now include Social, Environmental and Economic considerations.

5.5.2 To encourage a locally Based Supply Chain the value thresholds to support local trading opportunities to SME's and VCSE's has been increased.

5.6 **Housing**

5.6.1 There are a number of projects that the Council is facilitating to help address Climate Change relating to private and social housing.

5.6.2 Since 2021, excluding ECO4, the Council has supported improvements in the local housing stock to encourage residents to access support and grants to improve the energy efficiency of their home, a dedicated space within the Council website was created in early 2022. To date, total Investment (Completed & Planned) is £13,818,980.41, of which (Government Grant secured) £5,841,712.09.

5.6.3 The total homes (Completed & Planned) include 890 Homes completed 538 (of which 497 confirmed EPC D - G) Homes planned 352 (of which 303 confirmed EPC D - G).

5.6.4 Three candidate Council owned sites have been identified for potential inclusion of a net zero demonstration housing project (Rutland Street, Runcorn Old Town; Priory Meadow, Castlefields; Kingsway, Widnes). This may also include a social value element to share the skills and understanding net zero construction technologies within the Council and with Local schools and colleges.

5.6.5 Any approval for incorporation of net zero demonstration project and the percent of potential homes this would cover, would be sought as part of the established Council land disposal process and would be subject to viability.

5.7 **Green Growth Projects**

5.7.1 The Council is also working with the Liverpool City Region on the Hydrogen Strategy for the Region.

5.7.2 Through the work of the Business Investment Team the Council has established a New Green Growth Network from Oct 2023. This is to support local businesses to secure the economic benefits from the transition to net zero.

5.8 **UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)**

5.8.1 Halton's Delivery Plan against the UKSPF allocation includes a Green, Safe, Resilient Communities strand. Halton has been allocated funding for this strand of £301,059 over the next three years.

5.8.2 To date grants of circa 15k have been provided to local groups to improve green space, create wildflower spaces, and develop food growing initiatives.

5.8.3 Plans have been developed to improve the green space in Riddings Lane and the surrounding area.

5.8.4 Funding of 10k has been provided to support the Big Forest Initiative.

5.8.5 A contribution was made to the Eco Fest event held in Victoria Park in August 2023. It is hoped this will become an annual event. Funding grants of 54K were also received from the LCR Community Environment Funding delivery of a climate cafe in Victoria Park, a bike project operated by the local veterans' group and the Big Forest.

5.9 **Biodiversity Net Gain**

5.9.1 Despite delays throughout 2023 by central government, the early part of 2024 will see the Biodiversity Duty come into force on local authorities and other public bodies as a result of the Environment Act 2021.

5.9.2 This will include a review of the relevant council policies to ensure delivery of the duty and a local nature recovery strategy which is being developed with the Liverpool City Region.

5.9.3 The Council is also recruiting an Ecologist to assist with the development of the Biodiversity Duty.

5.10 **Planning**

5.10.1 The early part of 2024 will include a consultation on a new Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) note on Climate Change adaptation and mitigation to support the policies within the approved Local Development Plan.

5.10.2 Work will also commence on a revised Tree and Woodlands Strategy to compliment the Council's efforts to improve greenspaces and Biodiversity and residential and commercial development.

6.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

6.1 The approach and policies adopted to date are consistent with overall objective in the Corporate Plan.

7.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 Investment in energy efficient measures has the potential to reduce the Council's energy costs, reduce carbon emission and generate future income streams or the Council.

8.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

8.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

None.

8.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

Encouraging investment in energy-efficiency will benefit from lower carbon emissions, job creation, supply chain development and increased competitiveness and security of energy supply.

8.3 **A Healthy Halton**

Reducing CO2 can bring about improved air quality.

8.4 **A Safer Halton**

None.

8.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

The transition to a low carbon economy can support the

development of the local economy. Ensuring that future economic growth is decoupled from the consumption of fossil fuels and the inevitable carbon emissions.

9.0 RISK ANALYSIS

Individual schemes would have to be assessed on an individual basis to develop risk registers for each measure.

10.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

None.

11.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

11.1 The actions within this report support the Council's response to the environment and climate emergency by promoting energy efficiency; limiting/eliminating fossil fuel use for heat, power and transport; limiting/eliminating waste and encouraging re-use of resources and encouraging procurement of local suppliers.

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

None under the meaning of the Act.

REPORT TO: Corporate Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 23rd January 2024

REPORTING OFFICER: Operational Director – Finance

PORTFOLIO: Corporate Services

SUBJECT: Progress Updates regarding the Household Support Fund 2023/24, Discretionary Housing Payments, Universal Credit, and the Local Scheme for War Pensions.

WARD(S): Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To provide updates regarding delivery of the Government's Household Support Fund, Discretionary Housing Payments, Universal Credit, and the Housing Benefit Local Scheme for War Pensions.

2.0 RECOMMENDED That:

- (i) The latest position regarding the Household Support Fund, Discretionary Housing Payments and Universal Credit as outlined in the report, be noted;**
- (ii) The revision to the Household Support Fund spending plan be noted;**
- (iii) The Executive Board be recommended to approve the continuation of the local scheme, that all of a war disablement pension or war widows' pension is disregarded for the purposes of calculating housing benefit.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Household Support Fund

- 3.1 The current Household Support Fund covers the period 1st April 2023 – 31st March 2024. A report was presented to the Board on 7th November 2023 detailing spend up to 30th September 2023. This report provides an update setting out spend up to the end of December 2023.
- 3.2 Since the last report the following areas have seen a significant increase in Household Support Fund expenditure:
- Vulnerable pensioners, those entitled to Housing Benefit or Council Tax Reduction, have been awarded a payment of £120. This payment was made in November 2023, and 4,117 pensioners received this award representing a total value of £494,040.

- The Discretionary Support Scheme has paid out £125,087, which covers emergency support and community support.
- Expenditure on free school meal vouchers for the school holidays is now £710,000 which represents the summer half term, summer holidays, and the autumn half term.
- Public Health have spent £40,000 up to the end of December 2023 helping vulnerable residents.
- Halton Citizens Advice Bureau have increased their spend to £55,000.

The Appendix details the full Household Support Fund spending position at the end of December 2023.

- 3.3 When the Household Support Fund spending plan for 2023/24 was approved by Executive Board on 20th April 2023, the recommendations provided the Operational Director – Finance with delegated authority to amend the spending plan in consultation with the Leader. As part of the process of monitoring grant spending by Council departments and voluntary sector partners during 2023/24, the Public Health team now anticipate that they will only be able to spend £80,000 of the £100,000 which had been allocated to them. The Divisional Manager – Benefits, who is co-ordinating the Household Support Fund, has checked with colleagues at Halton Citizens Advice Bureau who are confident they can spend the extra £20,000 on top of the £80,000 they had already been allocated, by providing additional support and advice to residents, which meets the grant criteria. The Household Support Fund spending plan has therefore been revised as detailed above by the Operational Director – Finance in consultation with Leader.
- 3.4 In the Chancellor’s Autumn Statement no indication was provided regarding the future of the Household Support Fund after 31st March 2024. The latest information from the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on 7th December 2023 stated that no decision has yet been taken about the future of the Fund.

Discretionary Housing Payments

- 3.5 In 2022/23 total grant funding of £279,321 was received for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP). Actual expenditure totalled £279,281 representing 828 awards and giving an underspend of £40. This compares with 2021/22 where 1,144 awards were made with total expenditure of £394,071.
- 3.6 The reduction in the number of awards and total expenditure in 2022/23 compared to the previous year has been caused by central government decreasing the DHP grant funding by £114,778. The appendix provides further details of DHP spend in 2022/23 and a comparison with previous years.

Universal Credit

- 3.7 On 27th July 2016, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) commenced the roll-out of Universal Credit (UC) Full Service in Halton. This meant that all new working age claimants must now claim UC, and all claims must be made on-line. According to the DWP as at 9th November 2023 there were 16,332 Halton residents claiming UC. Section 3 in the appendix provides details of the UC caseload in Halton since March 2020.
- 3.8 On 4th December 2023 the DWP informed all councils that during 2024/25 all working age households receiving housing benefit will be migrated to Universal Credit. The DWP will inform councils by March 2024 of the details of the national roll out plan, and the volumes of housing benefit customers involved for individual local authorities. Halton has approximately 2,000 working age housing benefit claimants who will be impacted by this move to UC during 2024/25.

Housing Benefit – war disablement and war bereavement pension disregard

- 3.9 The housing benefit regulations allow councils in Great Britain to run a 'local scheme' to disregard more than £10 per week of war disablement and bereavement pensions. Using this provision, the Council determined many years ago a local scheme for war pensions, whereby all of a war widow's pension or war disablement pension is disregarded for the purposes of calculating housing benefit.
- 3.10 Halton has 16 cases that fall under the local scheme and the cost to the Council is £5,750. It is proposed that the local scheme continues and that Executive Board be recommended to approve continuation of the local scheme.

4.0 POLICY AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 None.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

5.1 Children and Young People in Halton

None identified.

5.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

None identified.

5.3 A Healthy Halton

None identified.

5.4 A Safer Halton

None identified.

5.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

The delivery of support from the Household Support Fund and Discretionary Housing Payments to the Borough's vulnerable households, has the potential to support all of the Council priorities.

6.0 RISK ANALYSIS

6.1 If the grant allocation from the Household Support Fund, is not fully utilised in accordance with the DWP guidance by the deadline date of 31st March 2024, any remaining grant funding will be clawed back by the DWP.

7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

7.1 None.

8.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 None identified.

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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Housing Support Fund 2023/24 Allocations	DCBL Stadium Lowerhouse Lane Widnes	Paul Garnett
Discretionary Housing Payment 2023/24 Grant Allocations		

APPENDIX

Household Support Fund

Spend for the period 1st April 2023 – 31st December 2023

Total grant allocation	£ 2,595,761
1. Vulnerable Households with children	
Free school meal vouchers provided for: Summer half term, Summer holidays and Autumn half term	710,000
2. Vulnerable Pensioner Households	
Paid £120 to 4,117 pensioners in November 2023	494,040
3. Discretionary Support Scheme	
Spend to date	125,087
4. Public Health	
Spend to date	40,000
5. Public Health – pre-school age	
To commence spend in January 2024	0
6. Care Leavers	
To commence spend in January 2024	0
7. Other vulnerable households	
Citizens Advice Bureau	55,000
Widnes Foodbank	20,000
Runcorn Foodbank	11,126
Holiday Activity Food programme	8,709
Affordable Warmth – Energy Projects Plus	4,100

Halton Voluntary Action	7,018
Total Expenditure	1,475,080

Discretionary Housing Payments

The table below presents an analysis of DHP expenditure for 2022/23

Purpose of DHP award	Total amount of DHP award £
Benefits cap	31,037
Under occupancy	165,079
Local Housing Allowance reform	13,564
Other (non-welfare reform)	69,601
Total	279,281

Of the 828 DHP awards made during 2022/23 603 were to Universal Credit claimants with a total value of £186,251.

The table below provides a summary of the DHP grant funding and payments since April 2019.

Year	Grant funding £	Amount spent £	No. of awards
2019/20	469,587	469,579	1,391
2020/21	527,810	527,396	1,645
2021/22	394,099	394,071	1,144
2022/23	279,321	279,281	828
2023/24	279,321	196,399*	479*

*Amount paid and number of awards at 11th December 2023.

We have continued to grant full year awards to those customers who are in properties adapted for a disability related to under occupancy provisions.

Rent in advance cases are only supported through DHP payments if the household are receiving assistance from Housing Solutions, either through statutory homeless duties or those where homeless prevention assistance has been granted.

Universal Credit (UC)

As at 9th November 2023 there were 16,332 UC claimants in Halton. The table below shows the changes in the UC caseload since March 2020.

Date	UC caseload
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Mar 2020	10,918
Dec 2020	16,502
June 2021	16,277
Dec 2021	15,445
June 2022	15,265
Dec 2022	15,541
June 2023	16,057
Nov 2023	16,332