

## EXECUTIVE BOARD

*At a meeting of the Executive Board on Thursday, 12 March 2026 in The Boardroom, Municipal Building*

Present: Councillors Wharton (Chair), Bevan, Ball, Dennett, Harris, T. McInerney, P. Nolan, Thompson, Wall and Wright

Apologies for Absence: None

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: G. Cook, M. Reaney, E. Dawson, G. Ferguson, W. Rourke, L. Wilson-Lagan, A. Donaldson and D. O'Connor

Also in attendance: None

### ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER POWERS AND DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

*Action*

At the commencement of the meeting the Leader asked the Board to stand for a minute's silence in honour of Councillor Valerie Hill who had sadly recently passed away.

#### EXB103 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 February 2026, were taken as read and signed as a correct record.

#### CORPORATE SERVICES PORTFOLIO

#### EXB104 COUNCILWIDE SPENDING AS AT 31 JANUARY 2026

The Board received a report from the Director – Finance, advising of the Council's overall revenue net spending position as at 31 January 2026, together with a 2025/26 forecast outturn position.

Appendix 1 presented a summary of spending against the operational revenue budget up to 31 January 2026 and Appendix 2 provided detailed figures for each individual Department. Appendix 3 presented detail on the High Needs 2025/26 forecast outturn position and Appendix 4 set out the progress against agreed savings.

It was reported that in overall terms the outturn forecast for the year showed that net spend at 31 January 2026, was £1.236m below budget. The outturn forecast for the year estimated that net spending would be below budget by £1.273m based upon current assumptions. The position represented a significant improvement on forecasts from earlier in the year. It was noted that the 2025/26 budget was set using £29.385m of Exceptional Financial Support (EFS), therefore, it was essential for spending to remain below budget.

Consistent with those councils who had previously sought EFS, in order for Government to provide a final capitalisation direction, the Council was required to undergo an external assurance review which would include but would not be limited to, an assessment of the Council's financial position and governance arrangements. The Council had undertaken a proactive approach and in September 2025 commissioned the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (Cipfa) to undertake such a review of the Council's financial resilience and financial management arrangements. The review had been completed, and the Council was in the process of drawing up an action plan in line with the recommendations made.

It was noted that Council had approved the 2025/26 Capital Programme on 5 March 2025. Since then, the Programme had been revised to reflect a number of changes in spending profiles and funding as schemes had been developed. Appendix 5 brought all the separate elements together and report on the Council's total planned capital programme expenditure. The report set out those Capital schemes that had been revised.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) Executive Directors continue to implement the approved 2025/26 saving proposals as detailed in Appendix 4;
- 2) Executive Directors continue to identify areas where they can further reduce their directorate's spending or generate income, in order to ensure the council wide forecast outturn overspend position for the year remains within budget;
- 3) this report be shared with each Policy and Performance Board in order to ensure they have a full appreciation of the councilwide financial position, in addition to their specific areas of responsibility;

Director  
Finance

of

- 4) Council be asked to approve the revisions to the capital programme set-out in paragraph 3.31 and incorporated within Appendix 5; and
- 5) the forecast position for High Needs funded pupil costs set-out in Para 3.18 to 3.24 and Appendix 3, be noted.

#### EXB105 REVIEW OF COUNCILWIDE FEES AND CHARGES - MARKETS

At a previous meeting of the Board held on 12 February 2026, the councilwide fees and charges for 2026/27 were approved. At that time the proposed charges relating to the Markets were not available, details of these were now included in the Appendix to the report.

RESOLVED: That the proposed fees and charges for 2026/27 relating to the Markets as set out in the Appendix, be approved.

Director of Finance

#### CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PORTFOLIO

*N.B. Councillor Dennett declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the following item of business as he is Chair of Governors at Gorsewood Primary School.*

#### EXB106 HIGH NEEDS PROVISION CAPITAL ALLOCATION – PROPOSED EXPANSION OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS & DISABILITY PROVISION - KEY DECISION

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director – Children’s Services, that sought approval for the proposals for the continued expansion of special educational needs and disability provision in Halton’s schools.

The Board noted that in March 2025 the Council received notification from the Department of Education that it would be allocated a further £1.2m in High Needs Provision capital funding to support the provision of new places and/or to expand existing provision for pupils and students with high needs at Local Authority maintained and academy schools. In the autumn term 2025, officers wrote to all schools to seek expressions of interest in offering new or additional SEND provision at their school. Subsequently eighteen expressions of interest were received. Of these fourteen were identified for progression and details of these were set out in Appendix A.

Reason(s) for Decision

The Council was required to demonstrate appropriate identification of need against spend from the High Needs Capital Allocation Grant.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

Implementation Date

It was intended that the first phase of additional provision could be offered from September 2026 and the remainder by September 2027.

RESOLVED: That the Board

- 1) approves the commencement of the statutory consultation process for those schools where the Local Authority (LA) is designated as the 'Decision Maker' (Detailed in Appendix A), with regard to the implementation of new SEND provision;
- 2) approves the progression of projects and capital expenditure for any school (LA maintained or Academy) where a statutory consultation is not required (detailed in Appendix A);
- 3) approves the allocation of funding for capital expenditure incurred at those Academy schools detailed in Appendix A providing those schools undertake their own statutory consultation if required; and
- 4) receives a further report detailing the outcome of any Local Authority led statutory consultations (providing the Board agree at this meeting to commence with those consultations).

Executive Director  
of Children's  
Services

EXB107 FOSTERING AND SPECIAL GUARDIANSHIP CARERS  
UPLIFT PAYMENT

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director - Children's Services, which advised on an uplift in payments to fostering and Special Guardianship Order (SGO) households in Halton to support foster carers/SGO carers/Staying Put who were providing care and support to the children of Halton who are placed with these carers. The request is for:

- for all foster carers, Staying Put and SGO carers to

be provided with an uplift of 2% for the 2024-2025 financial year. Payments would be backdated to April 2024 to cover the costs of raising an extra child in their home;

- for the year 2025/26 for all foster carers, staying put carers and SGO carers to be uplifted by 2.5% for the financial year;
- all foster carers, SGO carers and Staying Put carers would receive an uplift of 2.5% for 26/27;
- as part of the Council offer to recruit and maintain foster carers locally the Council have paid Council Tax for their carers once a child had been placed in their care. It was requested that this arrangement continued and approved Halton Foster Carers would continue to receive 100% council tax exemption at a cost of approximately £2000 per household per year. Based on 100 households this would require £200,000 per year additional funding. The current allowance was being reviewed to include stipulations on households only receiving tax relief once approved and children were in placement but where households were not taking children then council tax relief would cease; and
- the current monthly mobile phone allowance would be maintained and payable to all approved Halton Fostering households. This was currently set at £15 per month.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) all Halton Council approved foster carers, staying put carers and SGO carers are provided with an uplift of 2% to be backdated to 1 April 2024 until 31 March 2025 and for the 2.5% uplift to be applied from 1 April 2025 until 31 March 2026; and
- 2) approval is given to a further increase of 2.5% next year 2026/27.

## **ENVIRONMENT AND URBAN RENEWAL PORTFOLIO**

### **EXB108 NORTH WIDNES (EAST - WEST) ACTIVE TRAVEL LINK**

The Board considered a report of the Director - Environment and Regeneration, that sought a waiver in compliance with Procurement Standing Order 1.14.4 iv of part 3 of Procurement Standing Orders for the direct award of design work for active travel links (routes 40 and 36 – Lunts Heath Road, Derby Road and Cronton Lane), to Flinders Chase Consultants to the value of £120,000.

Executive Director  
of Children's  
Services

Flinders Chase Consultants had undertaken design and consultation work within Widnes previously, therefore had collated a significant amount of data and were familiar with the issues and opportunities in this locality for active travel.

Following a discussion around the proposed design work, it was suggested that elements of the scheme relating to Birchfield Road particularly near to the station, would require careful consideration and would need to be reflected in any emerging design options.

RESOLVED: That a waiver in compliance with Procurement Standing Order 1.14.4 iv of part 3 of Procurement Standing Orders is agreed, for the direct award of design work for active travel links to Flinders Chase Consultants to undertake design work for a scheme of active travel links along Routes 36 and 40 (Lunts Heath Road, Derby Road and Cronton Lane).

Executive Director  
Environment &  
Regeneration

## **HOUSING AND ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY PORTFOLIO**

*N.B. Councillor Wall declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the following item of business as she owns two rental properties in the proposed Licensed Zone area.*

### **EXB109 PRIVATE RENTED SECTOR - PROPOSAL TO INTRODUCE SELECTIVE LICENSING IN 6 AREAS - KEY DECISION**

The Board considered a report of the Director of Public Health, which sought approval to commence the statutory consultation process on the proposal to introduce selective licensing of private rental properties in 6 areas of the borough. It was noted that the Safer and Housing Policy and Performance Board had endorsed the proposal at their meeting on 9 March 2026.

#### Reason(s) for Decision

The scheme was required to ensure property standards in the private rental sector were improved and maintained to provide safe and healthy homes for residents. The scheme also sought to prevent housing conditions being a source of health inequalities.

#### Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

The current regulatory regime for housing standards is reactive and relies on tenants reporting concerns about

housing standards to the council. The Governments Renters Rights bill and the subsequent Renters Rights Act 2025 provided some measures to improve tenants rights, such as the removal of no fault evictions, however the onus was still on tenants to report concerns about property conditions. The government have recently published an implementation timetable for other measures within the renters rights bill and have indicated that measures to improve property conditions through a decent homes standards would not come into force until 2035 at the earliest. Selective Licensing was therefore the only option available to the council to proactively ensure that private rental property met the required standards.

#### Implementation Date

Pending approval by Council it was proposed to introduce the selective licensing scheme in April 2027.

RESOLVED: That the Board

- 1) approve commencement of the statutory consultation on the proposal to introduce a selective licensing scheme for private rental properties in the borough; and
- 2) delegate authority to determine appropriate license conditions to the Director of Public Health and Portfolio Holder for Housing and Environmental Sustainability.

Director of Public Health

### **ENVIRONMENT AND URBAN RENEWAL/HOUSING AND SUSTAINABILITY PORTFOLIOS**

#### **EXB110 DEVELOPING A BIODIVERSITY NET GAIN PROGRAMME FOR HALTON**

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director – Environment and Regeneration, which sought views on the development of a Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) Programme, including the allocation of proposed sites. BNG was a mandatory approach to development in England, that required a minimum 10% increase in habitat quality or quantity compared to the state of the site before a development could take place.

The report sought approval to appoint a BNG Responsible Body and to undertake further financial modelling work to ascertain potential income that could be generated on designated sites.

RESOLVED: That

Executive Director  
Environment &  
Regeneration

- 1) approval is given to enable the sites presented in the report (Appendix 1) to be designated for biodiversity enhancement and restoration;
- 2) subject to further work, the Board agrees that the sites mentioned would be protected for at least 30 years, as set out in the Environment Act 2021;
- 3) the Executive Director Environment and Regeneration in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Environment and Urban Renewal and Housing and Sustainability, be authorised to appoint a BNG Responsible Body in order to progress five pilot sites as identified in section 3.10 of the report;
- 4) the Executive Director Environment and Regeneration and Director of Finance in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Environment and Urban Renewal, Housing and Environmental Sustainability and Resources, be authorised to undertake further exploratory work to model potential income streams and to identify up front expenditure required to achieve this; and
- 5) Members views on the financial options in section 5.5 were noted.

EXB111 SCHEDULE 12A OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 AND THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

The Board considered:

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

maintaining the exemption outweighed that in disclosing the information.

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

### **ADULT SOCIAL CARE PORTFOLIO**

#### **EXB112 CARE PROVIDER CONTRACT UPLIFT 2026/27 - KEY DECISION**

The Board considered a report of the Interim Director of Adult Social Services, which advised on the outcome of the consultation with domiciliary care, direct payments, supported living and care home providers within Halton, in respect of the Care Provider Contract Uplift for 2026/27.

#### Reason(s) for Decision

Section 5 of the Care Act 2014 requires local authorities to ensure that the care market as a whole remains viable and sustainable, any uplift is essential to support this market.

#### Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Not offering an uplift for the care market would jeopardise market sustainability and potentially see providers leaving the Borough.

Ceasing delivery of the services would impact negatively on a vulnerable cohort of the borough's population and likely result in more costly, crisis intervention being.

#### Implementation Date

1<sup>st</sup> April 2026.

RESOLVED: That the Board:

- 1) note the contents of the report;
- 2) considers the recommendations and risks; and

Interim Director of  
Adult Social  
Services

- 3) approval to be given to offer the recommended uplift to care providers for 2026/27.

#### EXB113 REVIEW OF TELEHEALTHCARE SERVICES

The Board considered a report which set out a number of options following a review of the Telehealthcare Services in Halton.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) an implementation plan be developed to include focussed work on maximising individual's benefits prior to introducing the revised charging policy; and
- 2) an update report be brought back to the June meeting of the Board.

Interim Director of  
Adult Social  
Services

**MINUTES ISSUED: 18 March 2026.**

**CALL-IN: 25 March 2026 at 5.00 pm.**

**Any matter decided by the Executive Board may be called in no later than 5.00pm on 25 March 2026.**

*Meeting ended at 2.35 p.m.*