

LOCAL ECONOMY POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD

At a meeting of the Local Economy Policy and Performance Board on Monday, 17 November 2025 in The Board Room - Municipal Building, Widnes

Present: Councillors Jones (Chair), Teeling (Vice-Chair), Connolly, Garner, Gilligan, Hutchinson, Rowe and Ryan

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Begg and Skinner

Absence declared on Council business: None.

Officers present: L. Carr, D. Cooke, S. Davies, S. McDonald, L. Nulty, J. Stevens, and I. Moorhouse.

Also in attendance: None.

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

ELS17 MINUTES

The Minutes from the meeting held on 15th September 2025, were taken as read and signed as a correct record.

Regarding the swimming pool at Halton Leisure Centre, officers noted that the pool was in disrepair when obtained by the Council. A report was made of all the defects, and the Council will see which defects the constructor could be held accountable for. There had been no extraordinary issues with anti-social behaviour. As there was no retention on the project, legal proceedings were required to hold the construction contract to account.

As the contract was agreed some time ago, officers will liaise with Property Services to see who approved the contract.

Action

Property Services

It was suggested that the pool's abrasive surface was caused by the pool's hard water, but this was contested.

ELS18 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

It was confirmed that no public questions had been received.

ELS19 EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES

The Board was presented with the minutes relating to the Employment, Learning & Skills and Community Portfolio, which had been considered by the Executive Board since the last meeting of the Board.

It was noted that the Board could not comment on items that had been approved.

RESOLVED: That the Minutes be noted.

ELS20 CULTURE AND CULTURE 26; MADE IN HALTON

The Board received a report and accompanying presentation on Culture 26; Made In Halton. Halton will be delivering a borough of Culture in 2026 titled Culture 26; Made In Halton; this was being developed in partnership with Cultivate Halton. Culture was defined as literature, music, theatre and performance, visual arts, dance and digital media. Culture 26 was part funded by the UKSPF (UK Shared Prosperity Fund) Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCR). Halton's first year of culture was in 2021.

There were four elements of Culture 26: Leadership, Communication, Diversity and Dynamism. Halton's creative consultations were held at Norton Priory and Widnes Market and showed the Council's commitment to inclusive cultural engagement through Cultivate Halton's growing network of artists, organisations, and communities. Culture 26 will link in with Visit Halton which was a successful tourism project that was funded with SIF (Strategic Investment Fund) money. Visit Halton was deemed the best tourism project in the LCR and won national awards.

The Reconnecting Runcorn scheme is made up of eight projects with £23.6 million of towns fund investment to boost skills, transport, housing, environment, and visitor attractions. Partnership opportunities were made as part of the project and more would surface as the project continues. Aspire Grants were available for residents who wanted funds to produce a cultural project.

Cultivate Halton would invest locally through inclusive programmes, festivals, and community hubs after it was granted £100,000 from the LCR Combined Authority allocation to Halton. A Cultural Officer would aim to unite sectors to co-create an inclusive cultural offer to transform Halton into a tourism destination. Cultivate Halton would

include topics like arts, technology and sciences. Festivals that happened in the borough will be built upon like Halton Fest and Eco Fest. An independent panel will allocate all grants to projects at the end of December 2025. A Film Fest was planned, and promotional work was planned with Halton Castle.

The new Place Strategy would be a longer-term strategy for the borough to strengthen collaboration between the Council and external cultural participants.

In response to questions raised by the Board, the additional information was provided:

- Historically, LCR expressed an interest in a partnership bid, but they were keen for the boroughs to collaborate amongst themselves. Halton planned present artwork from artists from neighbouring boroughs.
- LCR wanted to stop the Culture Programme after St Helens and the Wirral's second year of culture but Halton did not have a second year so Halton and Sefton will have their culture year in 2026, and Knowsley will have theirs in 2027 which will be the last one. Its replacement was being determined. The Board requested that this comes to a future meeting.
- The Studio was an active studio venue, and it will be part of Culture 26.
- The Panel who awarded the Aspire Grants consisted of the Deputy Lieutenant of Cheshire, the relevant Executive Board member, the Director of Liverpool Independents Biennial, a culture officer from LCR. Halton officers advised the Panel. All Panel members were uninvolved in the grant process.
- A promotional stall for Culture 26 will be held at Widnes Market during the Christmas light switch on.
- The Arts Council have been asked to fund the 'Light Up Halton' project which will connect more rural areas and their communities and get them to these events.
- Six schools with the lowest literacy rates were being supported to promote Lewis Carroll who was born in Halton.
- The funding from LCR would be spent by the end of 2026 and was allocated to grants, officer roles and culture projects like Halton Fest. Officers agreed to share a list detailing how the money was allocated.
- The old art space in the Brindley will become part of the new library. The former gallery has the potential to be moved to the ground floor of the Brindley and there is also new art space at Halton Lea library and

Culture Officer

Culture Officer

Kingsway Learning library. Artists were given a month to hang their pictures for free in these spaces.

- Conversations regarding arranging bus trips to help residents attend these art hubs.
- Sport, food, and faith were consciously left out of Culture 26 in favour of different art mediums. Sport, food and faith stories could be told if they were done through the medium of art. Art was focussed on so Culture Halton would be as inclusive as possible.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

ELS21 HALTON LIBRARY SERVICE REVIEW - SERVICE UPDATE INCLUDING RUNCORN LIBRARY RELOCATION

The Board received a report and accompanying presentation on the library service. In the accompanying presentation, it was highlighted that there had been an increase in footfall in its temporary location in Church Street due to its doors being left open. Events held at the library were popular. The library will move permanently to the Brindley in 2026, and officers were keen to maintain community engagement and utilise the existing Brindley audiences. Self-service technology will be at the new library, but staff will remain on site. The new library will have an outdoor reading space and larger space for events, and a cafe will be onsite too.

The library had a new electric delivery van which will deliver library books to schools, residents and care homes monthly. A phased staggered approach was planned with the vehicle to reach areas which were least efficient for deliveries. The van will also go to places with a high footfall. This service had received positive feedback and was free for residents; it was especially praised by isolated residents. Promotional work for this service will be rolled out over the next 12 months. If needed, library staff could refer residents to Council services.

The Board noted that Halton's libraries were successful and requested promotional material for their residents. They also praised the library staff for their work in the community.

In response to questions raised by the Board, the additional information was provided:

- In 2026, the library would exclusively use BorrowBox for users to access newspapers and magazines.
- All four libraries in Halton were granted 'sanctuary'

status.

- Consideration be given by the libraries to Halton adult learners who authored books. Noting however, that there is high demand from self-published authors to have their items stocked by the libraries and it is not always possible or compliant with the libraries stock policy.
- The new library service had 'library reading time' with some schools where the library van delivers new books to a class to read. This was to improve child literacy.
- Halton adult learners who wrote books had their books in the libraries but there were a lot of self-published authors who wanted to have their books there too. Therefore, these books were part of a rotating stock.
- The survey showed that there was a low footfall after 6pm so this was why the libraries close earlier during the week.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

ELS22 YOUTH GUARANTEE TRAILBLAZER (YGT)

The Board received a report providing an update on the DWP (Department for Work and Pensions) Youth Guarantee Trailblazer. In August 2025, the Council, as part of the LCR, was commissioned to deliver the DWP/LCR Youth Guarantee Trailblazer which was aimed at supporting care leavers and young people aged 18-21 that are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). Halton's YGT launched with £300,000 from the LCR in September 2025 and tried different approaches to captures its NEET residents.

Part of the Trailblazer was 'Halton People into Jobs' which helped refer young people to up skilling or signposted them to specialist services, including for mental health. NEET young people can meet with advisors who provide practical support, including CV amending and interview practice. This could also include the means of transport to get to a job. The end goal was to help 42 young people get jobs. One young person now teaches other adult learners with IT skills and is obtaining a teaching qualification.

A door-to-door service and phone calls were done to reach out to NEET young people as they would not come to the Council office for support. 36 NEET young people had been helped by November 2025 and would be managed to ensure that they were progressing in obtaining employment

or further education. Care leavers were referred to the service and officers provided funding to help young people; 14 care leavers engaged with the service and five have secured employment.

There was a wage incentive for those who helped young people get into work and remain there when apprenticeship funding was delayed. Funding for the project needed to be managed to ensure as many young people as possible could be helped. Some young people requested support with being self-employed, for example, the YGT helped a young person be a self-employed tattoo artist. In some cases, multiple attempts had to be done to get young people into employment.

The launch event at the stadium became a workshop and they learnt which areas needed to be covered to help young NEET people. 61 young people had engaged with the service since its launch. Lots of different teams worked together to make the YGT work and different elements were looked at to help them. Positive feedback was received from young people who engaged with the YGT.

For the future, the NEET/Care Leaver Panel will be re-established and the YGT will be promoted more. Promotion was done at the leisure centre and other places to reach out to as many young NEET people as possible. Young NEET people were met with weekly.

The Board praised the work done by officers of the YGT.

In response to questions raised by the Board, the additional information was provided:

- The YGT worked with Halton College and students have been referred to them. They would also attend the College's events.
- Funding had been used to put NEET young people into education and taster sessions were done with adult learner courses.
- Out of borough care leavers do not get home visits by the YGT but they may be signposted to services nearer to them.
- The YGT had funding until the end of March 2027.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

The Board received the performance management reports for Quarter 2 of 2025-26 (1 July 2025 to 30 September 2025) and were requested to consider and raise any questions or points of clarification in respect of these.

The key priorities for development or improvement in 2025-26 were agreed by Members and for the various function areas reported to the Board as follows:

- Enterprise, Employment and Skills; and
- Community and Environment.

The report 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.

In response to questions raised by the Board, the additional information was provided:

- The original budget for Supplies and Services was provided by grant funding and set in 2019; therefore, it was highly likely to overspend. The Council was borrowing this money from the Public Works Loan Board to bridge the funding gap.
- Officers agreed to bring the audit report on waste services to the next meeting.
- Officers would seek information on why £500,000 was set aside for Extended Producer Responsibility as no information was provided on it.
- It was requested that the external contractor responsible for the IT systems in the meeting rooms be contacted regarding the IT issues.

Director of Environment & Regeneration

Director of ICT and Support Services

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

Meeting ended at 20:47