

## **BUSINESS EFFICIENCY BOARD**

*At a meeting of the Business Efficiency Board held on Wednesday, 29 September 2010  
at the Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn*

Present: Councillors Leadbetter (Chairman), M Lloyd Jones (Vice-Chairman), Howard, D. Inch, A. Lowe, A. Macmanus, McDermott and J. Roberts

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Murray, Norddahl and Philbin

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: M. Simpson, I. Leivesley, B. Dodd, E. Dawson, M. Murphy, C. Williams and M. Thomas

Also in attendance: None

### **ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD**

*Action*

#### **BEB12 MINUTES**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2010 were taken as read and signed as a correct record.

#### **BEB13 ABOLITION OF COMPREHENSIVE AREA ASSESSMENTS AND THE AUDIT COMMISSION**

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director Resources which informed Members of Government announcements regarding the Comprehensive Area Assessment, (CAA) and the Audit Commission.

It was noted that in May 2010 the Government announced its intention to abolish the CAA. Details of what the CAA inspectorates announced on 28 May 2010 were set out in the report for information. A further announcement was made on 13 August which reported that the Government planned to disband the Audit Commission.

Members were advised that the general direction of Government policy had been made clear as follows:

- Less regulation from the centre; and

- Greater transparency allowing performance to be monitored by the local community.

It was reported that Local Authorities were being encouraged to publish frontline performance data and there had been hints that the Government would support proposals from the LGA for regular (3 yearly) peer reviews of councils.

The Board was advised that the full picture of Government and Inspectorate requirements had yet to emerge and it was therefore too early to know what would be required of the Council. The Local Government Group (formerly known as LGA) was in discussion with Government about proposals for benchmarking, peer challenge review and improvement support.

It was felt that there would not be a situation where the Council was not held accountable and once things were clearer the Council would need to consider what information was required to manage and monitor service provision by the Council itself, and what information would be useful to the public.

Members were advised that once information had been received from the Government and things were clearer as to how the Local Authority would continue with regulation and monitoring, a report would be brought back to a future meeting of this Board.

RESOLVED: that;

- 1) The report be noted; and
- 2) A report be brought back to the board, once direction had been received from Government.

Strategic Director  
- Resources

#### BEB14 EFFICIENCY PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Resources which provided an update of progress made to date with the Efficiency Programme. The report set out updates on the following areas:

- Transactional Support Services Workstream;
- Non-transactional Support Services Workstream;
- Review of Open Spaces;
- Review of Property Services;
- Review of Revenues, Benefits and HDL;
- ICT Support Services Review;

- Review of Contracted Services to schools;
- Review of Operational Fleet & Client Transport;
- Transactional / Non-Transactional: Process Review; and
- Review of Income and Charging.

The Board was advised that the programme was well into Wave 2 with a number of workstreams established and others starting, each of which were bringing their own challenges. To date a saving of £3 million pounds had been made.

Arising from the report Members discussed the reduction in income from fees and charges and noted that this was due to the economic downturn and in respect of land charges, less people had been buying property. The Board wished to receive a document that detailed fees and charges across all departments of the Council.

With regards to the invoice payment process and officer control it was noted that if it would result in less control from officers during the process care would need to be taken.

The Board discussed the progress of equal pay claims and it was reported that when the results from the employment tribunal scheduled for November were received, more information could be provided. Members requested a report be brought back to a future meeting with details of claims and payments made under equal pay legislation.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) The report be noted; and
- 2) A detailed report regarding the equal pay be presented to a future meeting once the results of the employment tribunal had been received.

Strategic Director  
- Resources

## BEB15 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE REPORT 2009/10

The Board received a report of the Operational Director, Finance which contained the Annual Governance Report for 2009/10. Appended to the report was a letter of representation for approval.

It was reported at the Board's meeting on 30 June 2010, Members approved the Council's Draft Statement of

Accounts (The Abstract) for 2009/10. Since that meeting the Audit Commission had undertaken their audit of the Council's financial statements.

The Members discussed the Government's proposals to abolish the Audit Commission and it was reported that the Minister had made positive comments regarding the audit part of the business.

The Audit Report was appended to the report for consideration and detailed the following:

- Key messages;
- Next steps;
- Financial Statements;
- Value for Money;
- Independent auditor's report to Members of HBC;
- Amendments to the draft accounts;
- Value for money criteria; and
- Action Plan.

The Board wished to place on record that the Audit Commission be commended for the excellent work undertaken over the years.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) The Audit Commission's Annual Governance Report 2009/10 be noted; and
- 2) The Letter of representation in Appendix 2 be approved.

## BEB16 PROCUREMENT

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Resources which informed Members of progress made to date by the new Procurement Centre of Excellence.

It was reported that the team was established on 1 April 2010 as part of the major Halton Borough Council restructure. The purpose was to lead the Council in managing change and developing procurement activity to realise spend reduction and to make financial savings. It was further noted that the team was led by a Divisional Manager with four Category Managers, one attached to each of the four Directorates, to co-ordinate the review and rollout strengthened procurement practice.

Members were advised that the Council was committed to using the E-Tendering system, Due North, to advertise and manage all tender exercises. This would be phased across all spend areas of the Council over the next year which would bring a number of benefits to both the Council and to the business community.

It was reported that by using the system a cost saving in the region of £600,000 had already been made so far.

The Board noted that work was underway with the Chamber of Commerce so that local firms would be alerted by email once a tender was available to encourage local firms to tender for work.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) The report be noted; and
- 2) The revised Procurement Strategy be brought to the Board for approval.

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

The Board considered:

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

RESOLVED: That as, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information, members of the press and public be excluded from the

meeting during consideration of the following item of business in accordance with Sub-Section 4 of Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 because it is likely that, in view of the nature of the business, exempt information will be disclosed, being information defined in Section 100 (1) and paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

**BEB17 INTERNAL AUDIT PROGRESS REPORT - QUARTER 1 (2010/11)**

The Board considered a report of the Operational Director, Resources, which provided a summary of internal audit work for the period April to June 2010.

The report set out the progress against the audit plan, the internal audit reports, follow ups from previous internal audit recommendations and other internal audit work.

**RESOLVED:** That the Internal Audit progress report be noted.

*Meeting ended at 7.38 p.m.*