

REPORT TO: Environment and Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 21st January 2014

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Policy and Resources

SUBJECT: Halton CARES – A Corporate Social Responsibility accreditation scheme

PORTFOLIO: Physical Environment

WARDS: Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 The purpose of the report is to inform Members of the development of the Halton CARES project and pilot proposal and to seek support to further develop the scheme and implement the pilot.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the Board

(1) note the content of the report; and

(2) support the development of the Halton CARES scheme and the running of a pilot project in Partnership with the Chamber of Commerce

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The Council has recently had to deal with a number of cases where local residents are potentially going to be issued with section 215 notices under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990. In these cases, a lack of maintenance to a resident's property, most frequently their gardens, are causing problems to such a degree as to be detrimental to the amenity of the local area.

3.2 In such cases, it is possible to issue a section 215 notice to allow enforcement action to be taken. However, in a number of recent cases the residents have been elderly, disabled or in some way vulnerable and it has been deemed unsuitable to take such action.

3.3 Tasked with developing a solution with no immediate cost, the Corporate Policy and Performance Team, in conjunction with the Halton Chamber of Commerce, have developed the Halton CARES proposal as a potential solution. The scheme offers our most vulnerable residents access to private company services at no cost to the resident through a corporate social responsibility accreditation scheme.

- 3.4 The accreditation scheme would operate between Halton Borough Council and the Halton Chamber of Commerce. The purpose of the scheme is for private sector organisations to gain accredited status through providing a number of hours of their expertise, free of charge, to our most vulnerable residents. In return they gain the good publicity that involvement will bring and will be able to use their accreditation in their marketing and publicity information. The services could be from a wide range of private sector areas from gardening and maintenance to legal advice and financial services.
- 3.5 Local organisations contributing to the scheme would be given an accreditation “kitemark” which they could use on their marketing and branding materials. Holding the kitemark could also potentially assist companies in demonstrating their commitment to promoting social value in tendering for contracts.
- 3.6 A directory of companies who carry the kitemark would be held on the Halton Chamber of Commerce website, and this would also be hyperlinked from the Halton Strategic Partnership and Halton Borough Council websites.
- 3.7 The current favoured name is Halton CARES (Companies Acting Ethically and Responsibly). The kitemark would be known as the Halton CARES Mark.
- 3.8 A 12 month pilot project is proposed to initially focus on gardening issues and local gardening organisations to help the Council deal with the aforementioned section 215 issues.
- 3.9 To become accredited a company would have to donate a number of hours of free service to vulnerable residents. It is suggested that a minimum of 15 free hours is defined as part of the scheme. Additionally, companies would have to show that they have policies covering the following areas:

Acting as a responsible employer	Equality and Diversity
	Volunteering, work experience or apprenticeships
Acting responsibly in the marketplace	Waste management and recycling
	Customer service standards
	Commitment to local sourcing of goods and services

- 3.10 The Council and Chamber of Commerce will offer support to organisations willing to develop them with an “off the shelf” set of policies that can be adapted to fit with the company’s business in order to help them gain accreditation.
- 3.11 To qualify for help a resident would need to be in a position where:
- Without assistance the resident would become more

- vulnerable;
- They are unable to deal with the issue or pay for it to be dealt with independently;
- There are no public sector or voluntary organisations that can provide the help and support required.

3.12 The scheme acts as an additional service that the Council can signpost residents to but is minimal in its additional work as the services are delivered outside of the Council.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 Adoption of the scheme would introduce an element of corporate social responsibility to the council's policy framework and could act as a gateway to a fuller council approach to corporate social responsibility.

4.2 The scheme provides an alternative service provision in those cases where the public and voluntary and community sector are seemingly unable to help. The scheme provides this support only to residents who are unable to deal with the issue themselves, or are unable to pay for the issue to be dealt with.

4.3 The scheme could potentially improve links between the Council and the local business community by providing a mutually beneficial scheme that supports vulnerable residents.

4.4 The scheme would also demonstrate the Council's support for raising business standards and encouraging and supporting local businesses to act in a socially responsible way.

4.5 The scheme could relieve pressure on Council services by signposting residents to alternative sources of support.

4.6 The scheme could potentially have links to the Public Services (Social Value) Act by enabling companies, when tendering for contracts, to demonstrate that they are creating social value. Public sector bodies are legally required to consider issue of social value at the pre-procurement stage of contracts for services above the EU threshold.

5.0 **OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 The main resource implication of the scheme is the administration that the scheme will require. The main tasks that will need to be undertaken are:

- **Making referrals to the scheme:** a referral will be made to the scheme by Council officers when dealing with issues that alternatively would not be signposted elsewhere. Officers will

be given a simple referral process chart that will help them to decide if a resident can be referred or not. In this way, the scheme may actually cut down on call volumes as cases without a satisfactory resolution may now be resolved.

- **Collating application forms and making accreditation decisions:** This administrative task would be handled either by the Halton Chamber of Commerce or by Halton Borough Council. There is the potential for a graduate or apprentice to take on this task and this is currently being explored.
- **Updating the register of accredited organisations:** this would be hosted on the Chamber of Commerce website and would be dealt with by the Chamber.
- **Marketing the scheme to organisations:** this could be done as a joint initiative through the Chamber of Commerce and the HBC Business Development Team. The scheme could be launched at one of the Chamber of Commerce's events.
- **Making staff aware of the scheme:** Initial call handling officers could receive simple advice and guidance on the scheme, potentially supported by an e-learning tool.
- **Providing initial policy support:** the Policy and Performance Team would produce an off-the-shelf set of templates to support organisations in meeting the policy framework requirements of the scheme.

5.2 In the past, many of these cases have been dealt with in-house, often by the Council's Open Spaces team. A recent quote for one of the cases in question to clear the garden was £2,208.80. The scheme would relieve pressure on the Council to provide solutions to these cases from its own resources. It is anticipated that the Chamber will run the project with the Council's commitment being in in-kind support as detailed in this report.

5.3 Although the pilot scheme will be focussed around potential section 215 issues, the scheme has clear potential to provide a more holistic set of services to residents. For example:

- Residents in need of legal advice could benefit from the services from a local solicitor's firm.
- Residents in need of building or maintenance work could benefit from the services of a local building firm.
- Residents in need of gardening help could be helped by local gardening companies;

- Residents needing to move house could benefit from help from local delivery companies or van hire companies;
- Residents clearing out a house or garden could access use of a skip from skip hire companies.

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

6.1 **Children and Young People in Halton**

The scheme could have positive implications for those children and young people who live in vulnerable households in Halton. Providing extra support to vulnerable families in the borough through the scheme will benefit the children in those families by providing the family with access to previously inaccessible services.

6.2 **Employment, Learning and Skills**

The scheme will potentially support businesses in the borough by providing good publicity through their involvement in the scheme. It will also promote high standards of corporate social responsibility across the borough.

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

Vulnerable residents who cannot access services to support them in these circumstances can suffer from stress which affects their mental health. Offering a referral service whereby they can access expert services at no cost can help to improve mental health and support the Council's Healthy Halton priority.

6.4 **A Safer Halton**

Through providing additional access to services vulnerable residents may become more engaged with public services, leading to vulnerable residents accessing the appropriate support, which may make them less likely to support their lifestyles through illegal activity.

6.5 **Environment and Regeneration in Halton**

The pilot scheme will provide an alternative resource in dealing with the recent issues with potential section 215 cases which will help to maintain the amenity of the borough. When rolled out it will also provide a referral service to qualifying residents to ensure they can access support to maintain their properties.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 The main risk factor associated with the scheme is around the Council's liability for the services provided by a private organisation. A meeting with a Group Solicitor for the Council will have taken place by the time this report is presented. However, initial email advice was mainly positive overall. The Chamber of Commerce has high legal standards for all of its members and would be able to provide further advice and guidance on this issue.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 The scheme provides support for our most vulnerable residents. The Council have committed to ensuring people at a socio-economic disadvantage or who are disabled are given equality of opportunity. This scheme will allow us to support our most vulnerable residents in accessing services they otherwise would not be able to access.

Appendix A



The Halton CARES Scheme

Companies Acting Responsibly and Ethically

1	Aim
1.1	This scheme provides private sector expertise at no cost to our most vulnerable residents. It will allow residents who are vulnerable to access vital private sector expertise and services that they otherwise wouldn't be able to access.
1.2	The scheme also aims to accredit those organisations in Halton committed to corporate social responsibility by ensuring they have a simple but effective policy framework in place.
2	How Does the Scheme Work?
2.1	The Halton CARES scheme works by organisations qualifying to meet our corporate social responsibility criteria, including dedicating a number of hours of their services annually. These hours are available to residents in need of assistance and who qualify for the scheme. The minimum number of hours an organisation is asked to pledge to the scheme annually is 15. If an application by a company is successful the company becomes accredited.
2.2	Accredited organisations will be given a kitemark to show their accreditation under the scheme.
2.3	A register of companies carrying the kitemark will be kept on the Halton Chamber of Commerce website. This will also be hyperlinked from the Halton Borough Council and Halton Strategic Partnership websites.

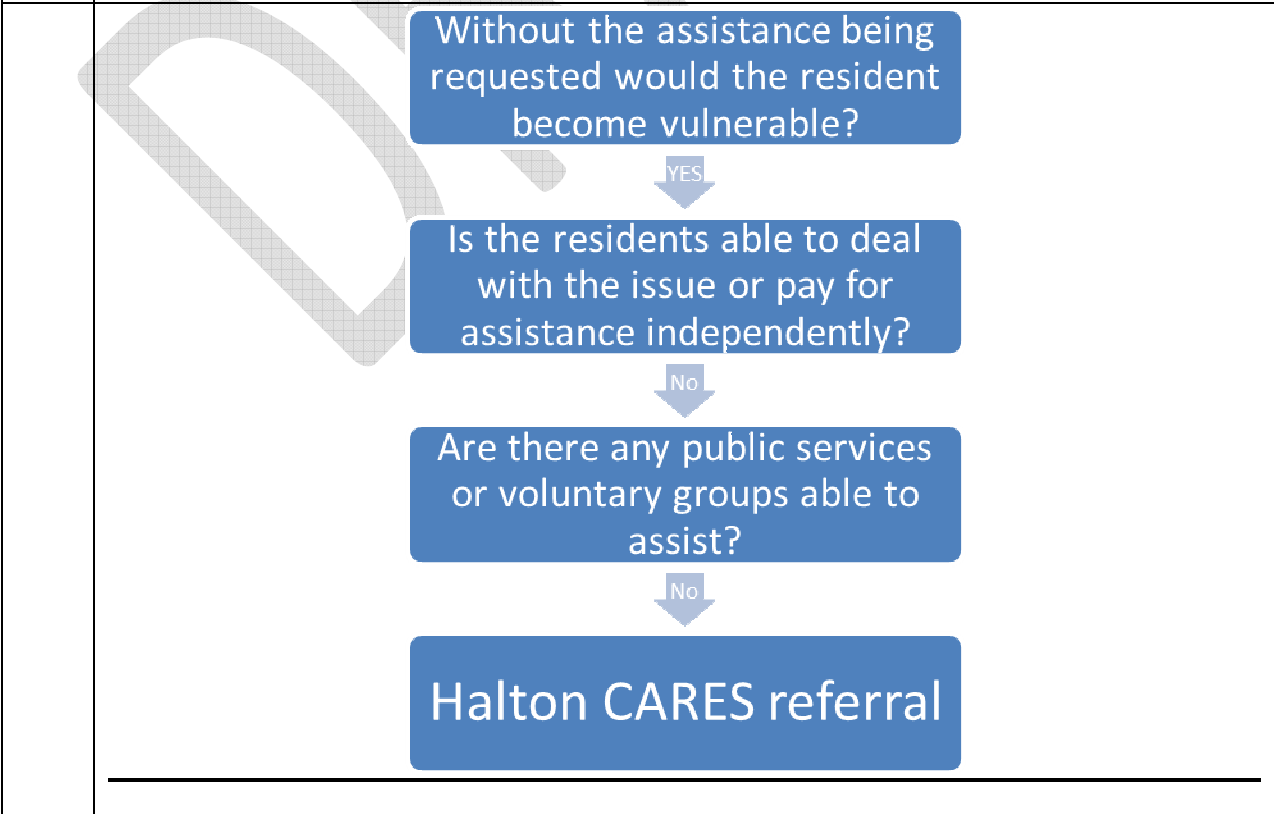
2.4	Residents receiving help through the scheme will be asked to sign an agreement for the organisation to undertake the work.							
3	Who Could the Scheme Assist?							
3.1	<p>These examples demonstrate the range of residents and companies who could benefit from this scheme.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents in need of legal advice could benefit from the services from a local solicitor’s firm. • Residents in need of building or maintenance work could benefit from the services of a local building firm. • Residents in need of gardening help could be helped by local gardening companies; • Residents needing to move house could benefit from help from local delivery companies or van hire companies; • Residents clearing out a house or garden could access use of a skip from skip hire companies. 							
4	Accreditation Criteria							
4.1	<p>The scheme is designed to accredit and reward organisations that provide added value to the community in two ways.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acting as a responsible employer - Acting responsibly in the marketplace 							
4.2	<p>There are a number of policies that an organisation must have in place that provide evidence that the company meets these two areas.</p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td rowspan="2">Acting as a responsible employer</td> <td>Equality and Diversity</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Volunteering, work experience or apprenticeships</td> </tr> <tr> <td rowspan="3">Acting responsibly in the marketplace</td> <td>Waste management and recycling</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Customer service standards</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Commitment to local sourcing of goods and services</td> </tr> </table>	Acting as a responsible employer	Equality and Diversity	Volunteering, work experience or apprenticeships	Acting responsibly in the marketplace	Waste management and recycling	Customer service standards	Commitment to local sourcing of goods and services
Acting as a responsible employer	Equality and Diversity							
	Volunteering, work experience or apprenticeships							
Acting responsibly in the marketplace	Waste management and recycling							
	Customer service standards							
	Commitment to local sourcing of goods and services							
4.3	Companies will be asked to provide a copy of these policies. The Council and Chamber of Commerce will offer support to organisations willing to develop them with an “off the shelf” set of policies that can be adapted to fit with the company’s business in order to help them gain accreditation. Policies need not be extensive but are there to ensure minimum standards are met by accredited organisations.							
5	Incentives							
5.1	<p>Companies qualifying for the scheme would benefit from the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scheme “Kitemark”: all accredited organisations will be able to use the 							

	<p>kitemark on its marketing materials;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All accredited organisations will be included on a “directory” of socially responsible organisations held on the Chamber of Commerce website and the HSP website; • Accredited organisations could demonstrate social value considerations when bidding for Council contracts; • Publicity and press through local media and the Council and Chamber websites; • Increased access to Council business support and Council policy support.
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6	Qualification for Help
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6.1	<p>For a resident to qualify for help the scheme administrators must be assured:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the resident would become vulnerable without assistance; 2. That the resident is unable to deal with the issue independently or is unable to pay for assistance; 3. That there is no available public sector or voluntary groups who are unable to assist.
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6.2	<p>Referral Process</p> <p>The flowchart below shows the referral process.</p>
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Appendix B

Halton CARES – Company Application Form

Section A: About Your Company

Company name: _____

Company address: _____

Halton Chamber of Commerce Registration Number: _____

Briefly describe the nature your business or services in the box below

How many hours per year (minimum 15) of your services could you donate to the Halton CARES scheme?

Briefly describe the type of support you could offer to qualifying residents

Section B: Accreditation Criteria

Does your organisation currently have policies covering?

Acting as a responsible employer	Equality and Diversity	YES/NO
	Volunteering, work experience or apprenticeships	YES/NO
Acting responsibly in the marketplace	Waste management and recycling	YES/NO
	Customer service standards	YES/NO
	Commitment to local sourcing of goods and services	YES/NO

The Council offers an “off the shelf” policy pack that can be adapted to your needs. If there are any policies above that you have replied “no” to, would you be interested in access this Council support to develop these policies?

YES/NO

Please note: Your organisation must have these in place, or commit to accessing Council support to develop them, to gain the Halton CARES accreditation.

Section C: Contact details

Contact name: _____

Position in company: _____

Address: _____

Phone number: _____

Email address: _____