

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 9th April 2015

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director Children and Enterprise

PORTFOLIO: Physical Environment

SUBJECT: Marketing and Promotional Activities Within
Runcorn and Widnes Town Centres

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide and update on existing and proposed Marketing and Promotions activities within Runcorn and Widnes Town Centres, including activities to promote Runcorn and Widnes indoor and outdoor markets.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 1) Members note existing marketing and promotional activities in Runcorn and Widnes Town Centres; and**
- 2) The Board approve future proposals outlined in the report.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 In recent years there have been a number of Policy Papers and research documents that have focused on high streets and town centres. These include the Portas Review, The Grimsey Review, The Centre for Cities Report and in December 2014 the department of Business Innovation and Skills produced a research entitled, Policy Implications of recent trends in the high street/retail sector. The contents of this research paper were presented to the Council's Environment and Urban Renewal PPB on 25th March 2015.
- 3.2 In summary, the paper identifies the key trends impacting on the UK's high street but the paper also identifies Town Centre "types" and presents some conclusions and recommendations. These recommendations could be adapted to improving and sustaining the vitality and vibrancy of Halton's town centres.
- 3.3 A number of the recommendations described above focus on place marketing and "sense of place" measures as a way of increasing the number of visitors to a high street or town centre. In light of this, it is considered that Members would welcome a summary of current and proposed marketing and promotions activities taking place within our town centres and markets. Further information on specific marketing

and promotions activities are set out in appendix 1 However, a summary of priority work areas is presented below.

- 3.4 **Widnes Markets:** Members are advised that the sustainability of Widnes Indoor Market continues to be a priority. Trading conditions are challenging and competition in the retail sector is intense. Although occupancy levels are still encouraging (85%) compared with neighbouring areas, i.e. St. Helens (67%) and Warrington 50% (pending opening of the new market hall) there have been fewer enquiries from potential traders
- 3.5 Therefore, in January a “Pinpoint Session” took place with market traders to develop a joint approach to promoting Halton’s markets. (A pinpoint session is a group discussion technique that enables all participants to take part and discuss their ideas. Over 30 traders attended the session.
- 3.6 The key areas of interest for the session were:
- The strengths and weaknesses of promotions and marketing campaigns during the last year; and
 - What market traders want or think should be achieved from marketing and promotions campaigns and how the success of these campaigns can be measured.
 - Traders taking a more active role and control of marketing and promotions activities.
- 3.7 It is encouraging to note that since January, 7 new indoor traders have signed licences to trade in the indoor market, and 5 have commenced trading.
- 3.8 The pin point session promoted positive discussions took place with traders, and in good time to prepare a longer term programme.
- 3.9 For example, preparations are well advanced for the Love Your Local Market event which takes place from 13th May to 27th May.
- 3.10 **Runcorn Town Centre:** The Council is supporting the development of a Business Improvement District for Runcorn, because if it is successful, retailers and traders in Runcorn will be able to pool resources to fund activities that are aimed at encouraging more people to visit the town.
- 3.11 In Runcorn town centre, there is a good understanding of its Unique Selling Point arising from the physical assets that it holds. Runcorn has benefitted from funding from the High Street Innovation Fund. For

relatively small sums of money a high level of goodwill and positive media have resulted.

- 3.12 This is also in part due to the fact that the Council has promoted an ongoing communication channel with town centre stakeholders through the Runcorn Town Team. This has enabled the Council to not only manage expectations, but also enabled the community to help themselves.
- 3.13 It has also demonstrated that 'softer' small scale measures can have a significant impact on increasing confidence in town centres.

3.14 Widnes Town Centre:

- 3.15 In Widnes, it is suggested that by using some of the Section 106 grant to fund activities this will generate an increased Community spirit in the town and greater collaborative working between the public, private and voluntary sectors. It is not easy to coordinate the respective interests of retailers and traders in Widnes given the absence of a town centre/ton team forum. However, there could be an opportunity to emulate some of the work that both the Runcorn town team and Runcorn Festival Committee have undertaken. One example being at Christmas, where discussions are taking place via our events officer to bring into the town centre, Christmas Street Stalls, as illustrated in the photographs appended to this report.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 A report on Town Centre Policies was presented to Members in December 2014. Therefore, there are no further policy implications arising from this report.

5.0 OTHER / FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Members are advised that there is a small marketing budget to support Halton's markets. This includes a contribution from Widnes market traders.
- 5.2 Future marketing and promotions will either need to be income generating or will need to be drawn from the private sector.
- 5.5 The forthcoming Retail Study will provide an improved understanding of why people visit or do not visit our town centres, but further work is needed with the private sector (including retailers and traders) to prioritise, and to confirm with limited financial resources what our respective sectors can or cannot deliver in our town centres.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People

N/A

6.2 Employment Learning and Skills in Halton

Town Centres represent a key source of employment opportunities in the borough.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

N/A

6.4 A safer Halton

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

It is acknowledged that our town centres are part of our 'offer' to visitors and inward investors, but also contribute to improving the quality of life of local residents, making Halton a good place to live. There is a requirement to drive up footfall and increase the numbers of people that shop, work in and use our town centres.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 The main risk associated with the development of existing and future activities identified in this report is that they become short-term and unsustainable.

7.2 To mitigate this risk, it is proposed that more formal and longer term relationships continue to be developed with key stakeholders within the town centres. The development of the town team in Runcorn is a good example of where a town centre action plan has been developed that does not rely on exclusively public sector funding but draws down private sector and voluntary sector match funding.

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

8.1 None under the meaning of the Act.