

Cllr. Shaun
Osborne



ANNUAL REPORT SAFER HALTON POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD APRIL 2006 – MARCH 2007

“ This was the first year of the Safer Halton Policy and Performance Board and I would like to start by offering my sincere thanks to Board members for all the work they have undertaken. The Board had a very challenging programme of monitoring, scrutiny, and policy development. I believe it is making a substantial contribution to improving the way the council and its partners work together to improve the quality of life in Halton. The Board has received a number of presentations during the year and I am grateful to all those who have contributed”.

Councillor Shaun Osborne, Chairman Safer Halton Policy and Performance Board

MEMBERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITIES

During 2006/07 the Board comprised eleven Councillors – Councillors, Osborne, Stockton, Edge, Lloyd-Jones, Morley, E.Ratcliffe, Redhead, Rowan, Swift, Thompson and Wallace.

The Board is responsible for scrutinising performance and formulating policy in relation to Community Safety and Drugs Team, Registration and Consumer Affairs, Risk and Emergency Planning, Environmental and Regulatory Services, Road Safety and Waste Management.

REVIEW OF THE YEAR

The full Board met 5 times during the year, and set out below are some of the main initiatives that the Board has worked on during the year.

COMMUNITY SAFETY ISSUES

The Board identified Anti-Social Behaviour as a key area, and through a Topic Team has supported the development of a new Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy that was formally launched in April 2007. It will now have a responsibility to monitor that Strategy. It also considered how the Community Safety Team should operate and has worked up proposals for a Multi-Agency Problem Solving approach to be developed through 2007/08. It monitored the developments in the area of domestic violence, and lent its support to the continuance of funding for this area of activity. It received a full presentation on the work of the Drug and Alcohol Team to which a group of young people were invited and who were able to ask many and various questions. The Board considered the future development and management of alleygates and recommended that mainstream funding for the future of alleygates should be sought. This was secured in 2007/08's budget.

ROAD SAFETY ISSUES

The Board analysed the annual road traffic casualty reports and the progress towards the achievement of the national casualty reduction targets. The Board received a presentation on 'Megadrive', a training scheme used in schools to educate pupils of the dangers of high speed reckless driving. From this it agreed to support a request to mainstream funding for the scheme for future years.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND REGULATORY SERVICE ISSUES

Developing policies around Waste Management to meet national targets has been a major focus of attention, and will continue to be so in 2007/08. This included strategic and operational issues around collection and disposal of waste, and options related to re-cycling including an understanding of the Merseyside Joint Waste Development Plan. It also considered how to respond to the Smoke Free Premises Legislation, due to come into force in July 2007. The Environmental Health and Risk Assessment Working Party is developing guidance on behalf of the Council.

RISK AND EMERGENCY PLANNING

The Board considered the new Civil Contingencies Act, and the responsibilities of the Council in respect of that Act. There was a particular focus on the need to develop business continuity management plans, not just for the Council, but for the private and voluntary sectors. The need to review off-site plans, and identify which agencies would take the lead during incidents was highlighted. The Board also considered the impact of vandalism on schools and identified the schools and Council's responsibilities in relation to incidents of vandalism. It resolved that schools be encouraged to allow their Site Manager/Caretaker to attend seminars on school security and fire precautions.

BEREAVEMENT SERVICES / CONSUMER PROTECTION / REGISTRATION SERVICE

During the course of the year the Board received reports on meetings of the Bereavement Services Working Party and was able to contribute to the ongoing development of policy in this sensitive area of the Council's activity.

The safety of headstones in the Council's cemeteries continued to pose a challenge during the year, but the Council continued to face this challenge in a pragmatic and sensitive manner. The Board reviewed the Council's Risk Management Strategy for Safe Headstones and recommended that the revised strategy be agreed. This revised strategy recognised the use of a relatively cheap and unobtrusive ground anchor to temporarily make safe many of the unsafe headstones in the Council's cemeteries. Additionally, the Board recommended to the Executive Board that Halton applied to be a registered Burial Authority with the British Register of Accredited Memorial Masons (BRAMM) and that from 1 October 2007, only BRAMM accredited memorial masons should be permitted to operate in the Council's cemeteries. This will provide for increased assurance of standards of Memorial Mason workmanship, more clarity as regards policing of workmanship and greater consumer protection via a 10-year guarantee, which is a requirement of the BRAMM scheme.

The Board received an update on the issue of cremations and "mercury abatement" and recommended that this Board should maintain a watching brief on this subject and receive update reports as appropriate to inform ongoing policy development. The Board noted that the Council's current position was that it "plans to contribute to a national cremation burden-sharing (i.e. cost-sharing) scheme from 1 January 2013, and has no immediate plans to install mercury abatement equipment, though this position remains under review".

During the course of the year work on phase 2 of the preparation of the western strip of Widnes cemetery for burial ground was begun and completed. Significant progress was also made on the development of a new Garden of Remembrance in Runcorn cemetery. As part of a project that began the previous year, a number of gardeners from the Landscape Services Division are now permanently based in the cemeteries. As a result, there has been a noticeable improvement in grounds maintenance and greater flexibility at peak times, when the gardeners are able to assist the cemetery workers, and vice-versa.

The Board recommended that the Executive Board adopt a revised Consumer Protection Enforcement Policy. The purpose of such an enforcement policy is to set out the Consumer Protection Service general approach to enforcement. The policy was based around the general principles of good enforcement, the Enforcement Concordat and the Code for Crown Prosecutors, and had been updated following relevant case law and other experience of legal arguments raised over enforcement policies in recent years. An important part of the revision process was consultation with business, other enforcing agencies and none users of the Service.

The Board recommended that the Executive Board agree to the operation of the Warrington Borough Council Trading Standards Approved Motor Trader Scheme in Halton. The Board was advised that for Halton, the financial and labour costs of agreeing to this arrangement were minimal. Further, because of the comparatively low numbers of motor traders in Halton, the Board appreciated that it would not be viable for Halton's Consumer Protection Service to design and operate its own Approved Motor Trader Scheme. Such a scheme would however enable Halton motor traders to compete on a level playing field with their Warrington counterparts. Additionally, the arrangement was in line with the Best Value principles of maximising cross-border partnership opportunities to the benefit of both the Council and the people we serve.

The Board received a report on the use of the Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA) by the Consumer Protection Service and heard that in recent years, there has been concern within the Trading Standards profession that courts often imposed low financial penalties on defendants in trading standards prosecutions. In some instances defendants were able to pay immediately as fines were so low. This did nothing to deter future offending, was demoralising for investigators and such low penalties did not remove the financial means from offenders to prevent them from continuing their criminality. Nor did it send a strong message to other would be offenders that 'crime does not pay'. The Board was advised that the Council's Consumer Protection Service now has an officer fully trained and accredited under the provisions of the POCA to undertake this work. The Board therefore recommended that the Executive Board agree to the use of the full 'confiscation regime' and 'offences' under the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002 by the Consumer Protection Service.

The Consumer Protection Service continued to focus its efforts on reducing sales of alcohol to children, raising its profile in the more deprived wards and protecting the vulnerable from unscrupulous doorstep sellers. With regard to the latter, and after consultation with local residents, the Service was instrumental in the creation of Halton's first "No Cold Calling Zone" which covers Cedar Avenue and Elm Avenue, Widnes.

As part of a major step forward in terms of the modernisation of the Registration Service, the Board recommended that the Executive Board agree to the pursuance of new governance arrangements for the delivery of the Halton Registration Service. Such arrangements will provide for a more flexible, less prescriptive, scheme, allowing local authorities greater discretion to deliver local services which meet both national standards and local community needs.

In this respect Proper Officers acquire increased responsibility and accountability for the delivery of the local service. Other benefits include the opportunity to explore more innovative ways of delivering the service; the strengthening of the management of the local service; the potential to make more efficient use of resources; the increased flexibility to determine staff numbers to cope with peaks and troughs in service demands; implementation of changes to staffing levels, location of offices etc. without the need for a formal registration scheme change, and the bringing of the registration service into line with other local authority service strategies for setting, maintaining and monitoring performance (though in this respect it must be noted that the Halton service is already covered by the authority's performance management regime).

WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2007/08

It is proposed that the working groups established in 2006/07 continue their on-going work. These are:

Environmental Health and Risk Assessment

Waste

Bereavement

Anti-Social Behaviour. It is proposed that this group becomes the Community Safety Working Party to encompass broader issues. A priority work area for this group will be domestic violence.

It is suggested that a new group be formed, in conjunction with the Health PPB, to consider the topic of safeguarding vulnerable adults.

It is proposed that representatives of young people be co-opted on to the Board to ensure that young people's views are properly represented.

Members of the Public are welcome at the meetings of the Board. If you would like to know where and when meetings are to be held or if you would like any more information about the Board or its work please contact Howard Cockcroft (0151 471 7461) or e-mail at howard.cockcroft@halton.gov.uk