



CORPORATE PPB ANNUAL REPORT

Despite the continuing pressure of the Government's austerity programme, which has led to a reduction in funding of over £50 million with a further £31 million to follow, and a reduction of staff of 462, I thank the staff for their diligence in continuing to deliver high quality services to the people of Halton. The Board is assisted in its scrutiny role by the hard work and support of Member Services and the officers who supply the reports that enable the Board to carry out its duty effectively. I am particularly grateful for the support given to me by the Lead Officer, Mark Reaney.

The Board carried out an investigation into the fees and charges the Council requires to fund the services it provides to residents. This has become necessary because of the effects of the austerity programme. These costs must be covered so that these services can continue to be delivered. This was a major task and was accomplished with the help and endeavours of the Management Team.

The Board continues to monitor the implementation of the Discretionary Support Scheme, which has become a necessity for some hard pressed individuals and families. The Board are supportive of the staff who deliver the scheme in an efficient and caring way.

Also, the Board discussed the introduction of the Organisational Strategy 2016/2020 which is required to ensure our staff are trained and skilled up to meet the challenges that the Council faces in dealing with the problem of providing services with less staff and reduced financial support from the Government.

Scrutiny continues of the Council's energy policy, and we are impressed at the savings that have been made. The PPB reviewed the Council's insurance arrangements following good work by the Finance Department, and by readjustment, a reduction of charges was achieved.

The Board is aware of the difficult trading conditions under which the Council's market is trading, and continues to monitor its progress, and is appreciative of the work done by officers in maintaining the trading position.

Information and Communication Technology continues to play an ever increasing role in the Council's business processes and with its links to local residents. The Board is impressed by the efficiency with which this work is delivered by the officers.

The Legal Services Team maintains a heavy workload whilst dealing with the complications of the issues surrounding Mersey Gateway and the Liverpool City Region.

The Board notes the excellent provision of school meals in the borough, and the take up of around 70%.

This report shows the variety and level of work carried out by the Council's officers so I take this opportunity to thank them for what they have achieved.

I would like to thank my Deputy Chair, Councillor Alan Lowe, for the support he has given me and also the Members of the Board for their commitment and work in scrutinising the activities, and the work of the Topic Groups.

– Councillor Bob Gilligan, Chair of Corporate Policy & Performance Board

MEMBERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITIES

During 2015/2016, the Board comprised of eleven councillors – R. Gilligan (Chair), A Lowe (Vice Chair), M Dennett, C Gerrard, C Loftus, A McInerney, S Osborne, N Plumpton Walsh, J Roberts, C Rowe and K Wainwright.

The Board is responsible for scrutinising performance and formulating policy in relation to Resources, HR and Training, ICT, Property, Democratic Services, Legal Services, Communications and Marketing, Stadium, Civic Catering, Procurement, Corporate Complaints and Area Forums. The Board also has responsibility for monitoring the performance of the reporting departments which during the last year have been Legal and Democratic Services including Communications and Marketing, Human Resources, Financial Services, ICT and Support Services, and the Policy and Performance Divisions.

REVIEW OF THE YEAR

The full Board met five times during the year. Set out below are some of the main initiatives upon which it has worked during that time.

MARKETS

The June meeting received a report providing an update on occupancy rates and level of arrears at Widnes indoor market. The

occupancy rates were high, and compared favourably with other market halls. The rate as at 31 March 2015 was 85%, which compared with 84% at 31 March 2014, and 92% at 31 March 2013. Since January 2015 there had been been:

- Twelve new traders operating in the market hall.
- Ten traders had left, five of which were for economic reasons.
- More traders in the market - 81 compared with 76 in 2014.

A Market Plan was being developed and the Market Management was working the Communications and Marketing Team for market traders to develop a longer term events programme.

The level and amount of arrears was similar to that 12 months' previously. It was noted that Legal Services were adopting a targeted approach which prioritised higher debts.

HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY

The Strategic Director Community and Resources reported in October on the development of a revised Corporate Health and Safety Policy, for the consideration of Members. The new document highlighted the commitment of the Council to managing health and safety effectively. It was noted that the biennial review of the Policy had been updated to reflect procedural and directorate structure changes. Members commented on the improvements to the Lone Working arrangements, the training which was provided, and the risk assessment procedures. The revised Policy was then approved.

DISCRETIONARY SUPPORT SCHEME

The Discretionary Support Scheme was now in its third year of operation, and the Topic Group had met on 30 September 2015 to review progress with both the Discretionary Support Scheme and the Discretionary Housing Payments Scheme. Details of progress were outlined in a report to the October meeting of the PPB.

The Board considered the proposals to increase the minimum value of food orders placed via the Discretionary Support Scheme from £25 to £40, and a proposal to increase the period of DHP awards from 13 weeks to 18 weeks in order to ensure more stability for payments. The Board recommended that both of those increases be made.

ENERGY

The January meeting received a report from the Strategic Director

People and Economy providing an update on activities aimed at reducing CO2 emissions within the Council and related external activities. The Council had implemented a number of short to medium/long term actions to ensure that carbon emissions and costs were reduced. Overall, the Council's CO2 emissions have significantly reduced from a baseline line in 2006/2007 of 26,338 tonnes of CO2 to 21,124 tonnes in 2014/12015. This represented a reduction of 5,214 tonnes over the period, approximately 20%

FEES AND CHARGES

A considerable amount of work had been carried out by the Fees and Charges Topic Group, which was reported to the PPB in January. The Board was advised that analysis had been undertaken of all fees and charges income generated during 2014/15 by each department.

Those areas generating income above the threshold of £100,000 were identified which had provided a focus for the Topic Group's work. A number of proposed changes to Fees and Charges were considered by the Topic Group for implementation from 1 April 2016 to support development of the Council's 2016/17 budget. In addition the Topic Group had highlighted a number of areas of Fees and Charges to be explored further by officers. The Executive Board was asked to note the outcomes of the review which it was agreed should be incorporated within the proposed Fees and Charges for 2016/17, to be considered by the Executive Board in March 2016. The Executive Board agreed to this course of action.

UNLOCKING OUR POTENTIAL – AN ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR HALTON BOROUGH COUNCIL 2016/2020.

The February meeting received a report setting out an overview of a significant strategy document which would be the successor to the People Plan. The strategy further developed and built on the achievements of the previous document and was built around five key strategic aims:

- Workforce, skills and development
- Recruitment and retention
- Engagement and recognition
- Health and wellbeing
- Innovation and flexibility

Each strategic aim contained a number of objects and actions with linked outcomes and timescales. The intended benefits were expected to be:

- Help to create flexible and sustainable business by helping to ensure the delivery of quality services.
- Protect the present strengths of the organisation and build for its future.
- Promote the investment in and continue development of our workforce.
- Aid the organisation when undertaking restructures by identifying redeployment opportunities or skills transfers.

The Board approved the submission of the strategy to the Executive Board.

PERFORMANCE ISSUES

During the course of the year the Board considered in detail the performance of the reporting departments. Issues which were overseen during the year included:

- Accident statistics
- Sickness and absence
- School catering and the operation of the Select Stadium

WORK PROGRAMME 2015/16

During 2015/16, the Board had two Topic Groups ongoing. The one overseeing the operation of the Council's Discretionary Support Scheme had been highly effective and provided significant guidance to the Executive Board and officers in relation to that extremely important service. Members had given an indication that that group could remain in place for 2016/17 as there is still work to do.

The other Topic Group related to the review of Fees and Charges which was a major piece of work which concluded towards the end of the year, and reported to the Executive Board which supported its findings. Members are presently giving consideration to adding a further Topic Group for the 2016/17 municipal year.