



CORPORATE PPB ANNUAL REPORT

The Council continues to deal with the problem of budgetary restraints caused by the government's underfunding of local services. And despite the reduction in the number of people employed, Council staff continue to provide an excellent service to local residents, something for which I am extremely proud.

I am grateful for the help and assistance I have received from my Lead officer Mark Reaney and appreciate the endeavours of all the staff who provide the reports and information the board needs to carry out its scrutiny role and inform its decision making.

My Vice Chair Cllr Alan Lowe was very active and supportive in helping me in my role and I take this opportunity to wish him well in his Mayoral year. The board members are efficient and methodical in their scrutiny of the papers and information put before them. And in a recent topic group on the monitoring of staff absenteeism and sickness issues compared the Councils policy on people with life threatening illnesses with the TUC Dying To Work motion and was delighted to have confirmed what it already believed that Council was a caring and supportive employer in dealing with people in this position and fully meets the legal requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty 2011.

The board is keenly aware of the hard task the Finance Department faces in collecting in Council tax in these difficult times and is impressed that collection rate remains high. And in order to assist, the board has made recommendations designed to make collection easier, which are currently under consideration.

The board's monitoring of the security of our internet systems is reassured by the diligence and hard work put in by the staff in the Information Technology Department who strive to ensure the system remains secure.

The work of the staff who carry out the council's discretionary support scheme at a time when the numbers of people who are struggling to manage continues to rise is much appreciated by the board.

The report from the Regeneration Non Town Centre team highlighted the fact that over 5 year period over £58million had been drawn into the Borough which was well received by the board.

Work on the Mersey Gateway project continues and the same time as dealing with issues that arise from this the Legal Services

team also deals with matters arising from the LCR as well as the normal business of the Council.

I look forward to the appearance of Elton John at the Stadium which is tremendous achievement by the staff to get him to come to Halton. This can further highlight the work done by the Council in improving the local facilities and amenities.

I much appreciate the work carried out by all the officers and staff who supply the board with all the statistics and information that it needs to complete its work

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

MEMBERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITIES

During 2016/17 the Board comprised of eleven Councillors – R. Gilligan (Chair), A. Lowe (Vice Chair), Abbott, E. Cargill, Howard, C. Loftus, A. McInerney, N. Plumpton-Walsh, Joe Roberts, G. Stockton and 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 four times during the year. Set out the below are some of the main initiatives upon which it has worked during that time.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

The Board received the Annual Report at its June meeting, setting out details of Corporate Accident Statistics with associated trends from 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016. In order to be pro-active in Health and Safety management, the report indicated the number of risk assessments in place and training delivered to staff. There had been a decrease in the number of individual accidents leading to days lost and an increase in the number of staff using the Lone Monitoring Working system which was in line with recommendations from Management Team.

Conversely, there had been an increase in the number of significant accidents, violent incidents and days lost with 671 in the year compared to 373 the previous year. These were chiefly due to six accidents.

A further interim report was presented to the November meeting. This again reported on a year by year decrease in the number of accidents resulting in days lost, with 10 this year and 13 for the same period last year. It was identified that this decrease was primarily due to the reduction in the number of manual handling accidents, in particular involving Social Care Staff, and also slips and trips which took place whilst working outdoors. There had been a significant decrease in the number of physical violent incidents on both Council and School staff. Whilst there was a slight decline in the use of the Lone Working Monitoring system since the earlier report, new equipment was now available which was easier to carry and raise an alarm, and new processes were implemented which were intended to expedite registration and training.

LOCAL AREA FORUMS

The Annual Report was received by the Board at the September meeting. This dealt with the financial period 1st April 2015 to 31st March 2016. It was reported that £550,000 had been allocated to the Area Forums on a per capita basis across the seven Forums which covered the Borough. Details of each area's funding was provided in the report and it was highlighted that the budget had enabled the leverage of other grants and, through joint working, had secured access to fund from other agencies. Overall, an additional amount of £751,149.42 had been brought in to support projects, providing a total budget of £1,234,071.74 compared to £833,440 in 2014/15. A number of case studies demonstrating the positive impact of projects were included in the report. Members requested a further report following the recent Internal Audit recommendations and that report was brought to the January meeting. The findings contained a number of recommendations which led to changes in practice to the way Area Forum grant funding applications were processed, approved and managed and to the way in which goods and services for approved projects were procured. These changes came into effect in November 2015. Subsequently, a follow-up Internal Audit review was carried out in October 2016. This was to assess how effectively any issues identified in the original report have been addressed, and to consider the impact of the changes that were made to the project approval and delivery processes. Members had felt that some aspects of the new processes led to delays in projects being approved or delivered, and that the required process for sourcing suppliers or service providers was restrictive.

As a result of the follow up Audit –

- Three quotations would continue to be submitted to the Council with all funding application forms. However, where appropriate, the quotations would be compared to prices available via the Council's Corporate Contracts to determine the best procurement option.
- Where it could be demonstrated that greater value for money could be delivered by doing so, goods or services would be procured from suppliers other than those contained on the Council's approved list.
- The follow-up Audit reaffirmed the recommendation contained within the original Audit Report that all invoices should be paid directly by the Council. As well as preventing inappropriate use of funding, this would enable the Council to recover VAT on project expenditure. The only exception would be minor expenditure items where invoices would be difficult to obtain.

In line with normal practice, the follow up Audit Report would be presented to the Business Efficiency Board and details of the revised processes would be cascaded to Area Form Lead Officers for implementation.

COUNCIL TAX COLLECTION

A report was presented to the September meeting providing an update on the collection of Council Tax which detailed –

- The collection rates in Halton over the past 10 years.
- The impact of localisation of Council Tax Support.
- Council Tax arrears position for each of the past 7 years.
- Cash collection figures.
- Recovery action undertaken for Council Tax debt.

It was noted that despite increased recovery activity the arrears had increased significantly each year and this trend was expected to continue. Arising from the discussion it was agreed that a further report would be brought to a future meeting concerning the effects of additional Court costs on individuals.

That report was brought to the January meeting, and proposed a change to the treatment of costs relating to the collection of

Council Tax arrears. The Board made a recommendation to the Executive Board concerning the write-off of attachments of benefit, which would require further consideration.

EXTERNAL FUNDING

The Board considered a report in November providing an update on the work of the Regeneration Non-Town Centres Team in securing funding resources into Halton. The report highlighted –

- Success rate of applications and reasons for unsuccessful bids.
- An overview of major funding streams including an update on the European Structural and Investment Fund.
- The cost of the service against the level of funding secured.
- The effect on the Council's Core budget, if any, of securing external funding.
- A preliminary assessment of the likely implications for the Borough of the EU Referendum decision.

PROPERTY SERVICES

In November, the Board received a report providing an update on initiatives and actions which had been delivered in the previous 12 months by Property Services, and also identified future work priorities. With regard to Markets, the Board discussed the annual surplus, arrears collection, signage and promotion of the Markets.

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 Stadium.

WORK PROGRAMME 2016/17

During 2016/17, the Board retained the Topic Group overseeing the operation of the Council's Discretionary Support Scheme. A further group was set up later in the year to consider the TUC's Dying to Work document, and its relationship with the Council's

	<p>Absence Management Policy. A meeting took place in March, when issues were thoroughly ventilated.</p> <p>Members are presently giving consideration to adding a further Topic Group for the 2017/18 Municipal Year.</p>
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