

EXECUTIVE BOARD

At a meeting of the Executive Board on Thursday, 29 November 2007 in the Marketing Suite, Municipal Building

Present: Councillors McDermott (Chairman), D. Cargill, Harris, McInerney, Nelson, Polhill, Swain, Wharton and Wright

Apologies for Absence: None

Absence declared on Council business: Councillor Gerrard

Officers present: L. Butcher, B. Dodd, D. Johnson, I. Leivesley, G. Meehan, D. Parr, M. Reaney, D. Tregea, S. Williams, G. Cook and L. Cairns

Also in attendance: None

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER POWERS AND DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

Action

EXB60 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15th November 2007 were taken as read and signed as correct record.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PORTFOLIO

EXB61 SCHOOL TRAVEL PATHFINDER BID AND SUSTAINABLE SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director - Environment, and Strategic Director - Children and Young People, seeking approval to enhance the Sustainable School Travel Policy for 2008/9 and subsequent academic years in line with statutory requirements, and seeking approval for the submission of a bid to the Department of Children, Schools and Families for new funding under the School Travel Pathfinder initiative.

Members noted that, from September 2008, under the Education and Inspections Act 2006, the Council would be required to provide free travel for pupils from low income households attending one of the three nearest qualifying schools, provided the school they attended was between 2

and 6 miles away. The Council would also be obliged to provide free travel arrangements for secondary school aged pupils from low income families to their nearest preferred school on the grounds of "religion and belief" where the school was between 2 and 15 miles from their home.

The Government had invited bids from local authorities for funding under the School Travel Pathfinder initiative with the aim of enabling local authorities to offer on a trial basis extended support for home to school travel beyond the thresholds set by the Education and Inspections Act 2006. The aim of Halton's bid for £803,370 was to provide greater travel choices and support for children and young people when travelling to a range of education and training facilities across the Borough. There was a strong emphasis within the bid on improving participation rates and attainment levels by children and young people living in the most deprived communities within Halton by providing free, readily accessible and easy to use transport choices.

Further details of the bid were outlined in the report for the Board's consideration. The Government had indicated that it may approve up to 20 Pathfinder schemes, with the first projects starting in September 2009. It was anticipated that, if successful, funding would be made available until the end of July 2012.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the statutorily required enhancements to the Sustainable School Transport Policy, which allows for the provision of assistance with transport for families on low incomes, be approved; and
- (2) the submission of a bid by Halton Borough Council to the Department of Children, Schools and Families for School Travel Pathfinder funding at the end of November 2007 be confirmed.

COMMUNITY PORTFOLIO

EXB62 YOUTH MATTERS/CONNEXIONS TRANSITION - KEY DECISION

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Children and Young People regarding the transition of Connexions funding and responsibilities to Local Authorities from April 2008. Local Authorities were expected to lead a genuinely collaborative approach and develop new arrangements for delivering Information, Advice and

Guidance (IAG) that clearly met the needs of Young People in the area. These arrangements would be planned and implemented in a way that not only supported the delivery of the 14-19 learning entitlement but were integrated into a wider set of youth support services for teenagers and their parents.

The Local Authority would be responsible for ensuring the implementation of the IAG national quality standards across all work with young people, including in schools and colleges. Further obligations, arising from the Education and Skills Bill to be introduced into Parliament in the autumn, were also outlined for consideration.

It was advised that a Transition Steering Group had been established with the agreement of the City Region Leaders group to review existing arrangements and develop future arrangements for the delivery and commissioning of the Connexions Service across Merseyside. A number of actions and intended outcomes from the Steering Group were outlined for the Board's consideration. Financial implications, including the Council's maximum potential liability, were also outlined.

Reason(s) for Decision

Arrangements for the future delivery of services to young people would effect all young people aged 13 to 19 in the Borough. It would also include the targeting of specialist services to vulnerable young people to enable them to access their universal entitlement.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None.

Implementation Date

1st April 2008.

RESOLVED: That agreement be given in principle to:

- (1) commission Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership, as a strategic and delivery partner in the Children and Young People's Partnership, to deliver Connexions services to all 13 –19 year olds for the period from April 2008 to March 2011, initially;
- (2) collaborate with partner Local Authorities in the City Region to jointly commission shared services that

Strategic Director-
Children & Young
People

underpin and provide additional value to local Connexions services for the same period, initially;

- (3) review the Local Authority's position as a member of Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership Limited to ensure that accountability to the Local Authority is maintained avoiding conflicts of interest (NB Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership Board is reviewing its structure and Governance in view of the impending changes);
- (4) consider, where appropriate, commissioning other services from Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership or other providers to meet the needs of young people as identified in local plans;
- (5) confirm that the grant allocation for Connexions is passported to Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership for the period 2008-2011 in line with a specified service requirement, and that the Local Authority will seek agreement from its Strategic Partnership to this undertaking; and
- (6) act as Guarantor to the Merseyside Pension Fund in respect of a share, based on population, of the Greater Merseyside Connexions Partnership Limited.

(NB Councillors Nelson and Wright declared personal interests in the following item of business due to being Board Members of Halton Housing Trust.)

EXB63 HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY - LOCAL CONNECTION CRITERIA

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Health and Community outlining the intention of the Board of Halton Housing Trust (HHT) to amend its housing allocations policy so that points were no longer awarded to reflect a residency connection with the Borough, setting out the implications of this decision for the Council in terms of HHT's management of the Council's waiting list and allocations policy.

It was noted that, on transfer of the Council's housing stock in December 2005, HHT adopted a housing allocations scheme almost identical to the Council's policy. This resulted in minimal IT/Cost implications in terms of HHT managing the Council/HHT joint waiting list and managing nominations to other Registered Social Landlords (RSLs) post transfer. During the course of a series of Housing

Corporation regulatory inspections, it was noted that HHT's policy included provision to award points to applicants that had lived in the Borough for any 5 year period. The Housing Corporation had deemed this criterion to be potentially discriminatory and had advised HHT to remove it from its policy by the end of this year.

HHT had written to the Council to advise of its intention to change the policy with effect from 1st January 2008. When this had happened, HHT would find it difficult to meet the Council's requirement for them to select applicants for nomination to RSLs in strict accordance with the Council's policy as HHT's Academy IT system was not capable of automatically short listing applicants for rehousing using two different allocations policies. However, the Executive Board noted that the problem could be overcome manually and considered that the criterion was an inclusive one, ensuring that the bulk of local housing provision went to local residents, or to those who needed to move to the area for support, employment or other pressing medical/social reasons.

RESOLVED: That the Council retain the local residency criterion within its own Housing Allocations Policy and Halton Housing Trust be advised that the Council does not support the proposed change to Halton Housing Trust's Housing Allocations Policy.

Strategic Director
- Health and
Community

CORPORATE SERVICES PORTFOLIO

EXB64 DETERMINATION OF COUNCIL TAX BASE

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy regarding the 'Tax Base' for the area and the tax base for each of the Parishes. The Council was required to notify Cheshire Fire Authority, the Cheshire Policy Authority, the Cheshire Magistrates' Courts Committee, the Cheshire Probation Committee and the National Rivers Authority of this figure by 31st January 2008. The Council was also required to calculate and advise, if requested, the Parish Councils of their relevant tax bases.

Members were advised that the 'Tax Base' was arrived at in accordance with a prescribed formula, representing the estimated full year number of chargeable dwellings in the Borough expressed in terms of the equivalent of Band 'D' dwellings, and was the measure used for calculating the council tax. Taking account of all the relevant information, and applying a 99% collection rate, the calculation for 2008/2009 gave a tax base figure of 37,762

for the Borough as a whole.

The Board noted that, this year, there had been the creation of two new parishes at Sandymoor and Halebank. The advice of the National Association of Local Councils had been sought on the process for setting their first precepts and this advice was now awaited.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) Council be recommended that the 2008/09 Council Tax Base be set at 37,762 for the Borough, and that the Cheshire Fire Authority, the Cheshire Policy Authority and the National Rivers Authority be so notified; and
- (2) Council be recommended that the Council Tax Base for each of the Parishes be set as follows:

| Parish | Tax Base |
|---------------|-----------------|
| Hale | 724 |
| Daresbury | 140 |
| Moore | 349 |
| Preston Brook | 339 |
| Sandymoor | 816 |
| Halebank | 510 |

Strategic Director
- Corporate and
Policy

EXB65 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Health and Community providing an update on the current position on the equalities agenda in Halton.

It was noted that, in December 2006, the Council produced a new corporate equalities scheme encompassing all legal duties in terms of promoting the race, gender and disability equality schemes. Public consultation took place on the scheme in May 2007 and no adverse comments were received; it was therefore proposed that the Corporate Equality Plan be fully adopted.

Members were advised that the Government had recently published a Green Paper setting out detailed proposals for a single equality bill, which would replace the existing complex array of primary and secondary legislation. A consultation had begun on this, to which the Council had responded. It was likely to be 2010 before the Bill was enacted and became law but there was much Halton could do to pick up on the spirit of the proposal and embed in how equality and diversity policy operated in the Borough.

The considerable progress made in understanding and addressing the equality and diversity agenda across all services was outlined for Members' information together with key issues and challenges. In particular, Members noted the need to address issues collaboratively with other partners in the Halton Local Strategic Partnership, having joint approaches to strategies and plans with very clear equalities outcomes and targets embedded in the Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement.

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the report be noted and the approach described in Section 4 be agreed;
- (2) a partnership with other key partners be established under the auspices of the Local Strategic Partnership and a wider review of investment be considered;
- (3) the community cohesion agenda be directly connected to the wider equality and diversity agenda; and
- (4) the Corporate Equality Plan be fully adopted.

Strategic Director
- Health and
Community

(NB Councillor D. Cargill declared a personal interest in the following item of business due to being the communication workers' secretary.)

EXB66 POST OFFICE CLOSURES IN HALTON

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy regarding the recent announcement from the Post Office proposing the closure of three Post Offices in Halton at:

- Appleton Village, Appleton, Widnes;
- Hale Road, Halebank, Widnes (near St Michael's Road); and
- Stenhills, Picton Avenue, Runcorn.

Local Members were actively working with their local communities in raising strong objections to the proposals and were part of the process of developing a strong case for their retention: a detailed case was being prepared for submission to the Post Office by 17th December 2007 focusing on a number of key areas, which were outlined for consideration.

The Board agreed that it was vital that people had

easy access to a Post Office, particularly those residents that were elderly or infirm, or who had young children.

RESOLVED: that

- (1) the Council raises strong objections to the proposed closure of Post Offices in Halton;
- (2) the Strategic Director – Corporate and Policy, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services, produce a detailed response to the Post Office and local MPs by the 17th December 2007 deadline for submissions; and
- (3) the Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board be requested to investigate this matter.

Strategic Director
- Corporate and
Policy

Minutes Issued: 4th December 2007

Call in: 11th December 2007

Any matter decided by the Executive Board may be called in no later than 11th December 2007

Meeting ended at 2.32 p.m.