



## CORPORATE PPB ANNUAL REPORT

Despite facing a reduction in government funding of over £60 million which has led to a reduction in the numbers of staff employed. Council employees continue to provide excellent services for our residents. The Board recognises the work done and strives to assist them by ensuring effective scrutiny leads to better decision making and efficient use of resources. We are assisted in this by the support of Member Services and directorate teams who provide the Board with the information needed to determine policy.

I am grateful for the support I receive from my lead officer Mark Reaney and my vice chair Ged Philbin and board members for their enthusiasm and dedication in dealing with the work that confronts the board.

Changes to the benefits system and the introduction of universal credit - there are now over 7500 people on this benefit - have increased the financial pressures faced by some of our residents leading to difficulties in paying council tax and rent payments. A recent report to the board from the welfare rights and benefits team highlighted how they had helped over 1000 residents to achieve their benefit entitlement and win over 85 percent of benefit appeals and as a result of this £6million was brought into the Borough's economy. The discretionary support team remains in place to deal with the other difficulties our residents face - their work is much appreciated by the board.

Members are impressed by the Finance Department's efforts in maintaining high levels of council tax collection and the efficient use of available funds by better procurement processes.

The ICT team with its octopus tentacle like reach across the council's and partners' administrative functions continues to impress and reassure members with its efficiency and safety against cyber attack.

Community involvement team reported their success in bringing in £608,871 in match funding to support Area Forum projects, their work becoming more difficult to achieve as council forum money is reduced.

The energy efficiency team singlehandedly strives to keep the council on target to reduce CO2 emissions and over a 6year period has achieved a reduction of 25.4 percent in emissions. Installation of photo voltaic cells has resulted in savings of £55000. The biomass heat scheme has generated £150000 of income from the Renewable Heat Incentive scheme.

The health and safety team has been very effective in reducing lost

time accidents this has been accomplished as result of training schemes being delivered to staff.

Corporate complaints team through its 2 stage procedure ensures that residents' complaints are dealt fairly and quickly giving the council a knowledge base across all service provision so we can learn and improve.

I will take this opportunity to thank the member development team for their good work in keeping members up to speed and informed of the latest developments through its training courses and mentoring system.

So finally I would to thank all the officers and members for their support over the year in helping me get through this year business and hope they have enjoyed the task as much as I have.

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

### **MEMBERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

During 2017/18, the Board comprised of eleven Councillors – R. Gilligan (Chair), G Philbin (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 three times during the year. Set out below are some of the main initiatives upon which it has worked during that time.

### **EXTERNAL FUNDING**

The Board received a report at its September meeting on the work of the Regeneration Non Town Centres Team in securing external funding resources into the borough. The report outlined:

- An update on the Team's priorities/key activities
- Emerging issues in External Funding
- Funding statistics for 2010 to the end of March 2017
- An update on the implications of Brexit on the ESIF Programme
- A summary of recent Idox report on the External Funding function in local authorities.

Members noted the following key headlines:

- The demonstrable increase in competition for External Funding streams.
- Evidence that local authorities with an External Funding function were more successful in accessing funding.
- An increase in availability of funding for visitor economy and cultural activity.
- The development of a training programme by the External Funding Team.
- Evidence that the level of demand for funding support was increasing.

### **CORPORATE COMPLAINTS**

Also at the September meeting, the Board considered a report analysing the successful operation of the Corporate Complaints System and setting out the two stage procedure, the nature of the complaints received and outcomes, and a trend analysis. The report detailed how the Council used the information from Complaints to improve the services provided or commissioned.

### **COUNCIL TAX**

The Board considered two matters relating to Council Tax in September.

The first was a report seeking the amendment of the Council Tax section 13A Discount Policy Statement to reduce to nil the amounts of Council Tax payable by young people leaving care from ages 18 to 25. The proposal was in response to a recent Children's Society Campaign which identified a range of disadvantages that care leavers typically experienced. It was proposed that as the Council has a parenting role which lasts in some cases until a care leaver is 24, the care leavers relief should apply to every care leaver until their 25<sup>th</sup> Birthday. The Board recommended that Executive Board approve the amendment to the statement, which was endorsed by Executive Board.

The Board also discussed a report on the Council Tax reduction

scheme. This outlined proposed changes for 2018/19, for which public consultation would be required. Members were asked to consider whether it was appropriate to align the Council Tax Reduction Scheme with the Housing Benefit Scheme to achieve a measure of consistency which had existed prior to changes in April 2013. Those changes would only affect new claimants from 1 April 2018 and would be subject to public consultation. The matter was discussed extensively at the meeting, and the Board resolved not to support the proposed changes due to the potential impact for new claimants.

## **ENERGY**

An update to Members was provided in January on measures aimed at reducing CO2 emissions within the Council. Overall, the Council's emissions had significantly reduced from a baseline in 2006/07 of 26,338 tonnes of CO2 to 19,874 tonnes for 2015/16 which equated to a 24.5% reduction over the 9 year period. This reduction was partly due to:

- Carbon reduction measures implemented by the Council.
- Rationalisation of buildings with the Council now occupying fewer buildings.
- The Council being part way through a four year programme to switch high sodium pressure street lighting used in residential areas, and the main routes throughout the borough, to LEDs.
- Solar PV on Council buildings,
- Biomass boilers installed at Brookvale Leisure Centre and Norton Priory Museum.

In addition, the Board noted that a successful bid had been submitted to the Department for Local Government and Communities to develop a solar farm on the former St Michael's golf course. This would be connected to the Halton Stadium and the system would produce between 850,000 and 950,000 wh per annum. The energy generated would reduce CO2 emissions by 380 tonnes per annum.

## **WELFARE RIGHTS SERVICE**

Also in January, Members considered a report dealing with the work of the Welfare Rights Team including information on:

- Individual posts and roles.
- Background to the establishment of the service.
- Progress to date on the delivery of the service.
- Areas of activity by the team including the number of claimants assisted at Tribunal Hearings and success rates, and the amount of benefits gained for Halton residents.
- Future challenges for the team.

The report was very well received and the hard work carried out acknowledged.

### **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 2017/18**

During 2017/18, the Board retained the Topic Group overseeing the operation of the Council's Discretionary Support System. The work of this group was expanded to include scrutiny of Universal Credit. The Topic Group met on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2017 and the report was considered at the September PPB meeting. The Group met to review the progress of the Discretionary Support Scheme and received an update regarding Discretionary Housing Payment and implementation of Universal Credit. The Topic Group noted that work had been undertaken to establish the cost of implementing the Board's previous proposal to limit the number of liability orders which would be taken out in respect of the same Council Tax payers. It was reported that the potential cost was estimated to be around £150,000 and therefore it was agreed not to implement the change at this time.