



## CORPORATE PPB ANNUAL REPORT

This has been a very difficult and complicated year with the Council and its employees having to deal with the effects of the Covid pandemic whilst maintaining essential services to our Residents. I am proud of the way our Employees worked in completely different roles to ensure services continued, the management team making sure that health and safety regimes were upheld. The cooperation between the Council the N.H.S the emergency services and the Army in delivering the Covid testing system and the vaccination programme proves we have a workforce that can rise to the challenge the Borough faced. It was a significant achievement that the electoral registration and Legal teams were able to organise and deliver the necessary requirements to enable four elections to take place - the Council all out Election, the Police Commissioner election, the Liverpool City Region Mayoral election and parish council elections. All took place without mishap and following Covid rules. The impact of Covid on family stability has led to increase in social services costs and the legal requirements arising from dealing with those problems which the team have managed well.

Throughout the pandemic the Stadium and school meals service ensured that vulnerable children and those of Key workers were able to access a free school meal and food vouchers and hampers to families in difficulty and provided food packs for the shielded community. Staff were also redeployed to help in food preparation in care homes and assist in the delivery of test and trace scheme. The pandemic meant the Council had to rely on virtual and internet systems to deal with requests from residents in order to interact with them to provide services to them, also as most staff had to work from home. This provided a significant challenge to the Council organisation and services which the I.T team were able to respond to and ensure the vulnerable and shielded community were identified and supported.

The Finance department strove to implement the government's financial business support making it possible for more businesses to survive the lack of business activity. Work was also carried out to make sure collection of Business rates and Council tax could be maintained so that services could continue to be funded.

The Property Services department worked hard to ensure the Market when open complied with Covid regulations and would be fit and ready to open when that was allowed.

Throughout the year the board have continued to scrutinise the work under its remit and were able to agree to the Area Forum structural changes and the fair distribution of funds between the different Forum groups, and made sure that all were fully protected from Covid and were able to work in a safe environment.

So I take this opportunity to thank the members and officers, and in particular my lead officer Mark Reaney, for their hard work and

diligence in pursuing the boards objectives throughout the pandemic.

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

### **MEMBERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

During 2020/21, the Board comprised of eleven Councillors – R. Gilligan (Chair), G Philbin (Vice Chair), J Abbott, H Howard, M Lloyd-Jones, C Loftus, A Lowe, A McInerney, N Plumpton-Walsh, Joe Roberts, 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 four times during the year, with all of the meetings taking place remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Set out below are some of the main initiatives upon which it has worked during that time.

### **AREA FORUMS ANNUAL REPORT**

The November meeting received a report which informed Members of the project delivery of the Local Area Forums for the financial period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020.

Members were advised that Local Area Forums (LAF) provided a mechanism for Councillors to respond to community needs and aspirations through the funding and delivery of initiatives and projects. Area Forum money could also be used as 'match funding' to help lever in additional funding from a variety of external sources.

It was reported that in 2019/20, £200,000 was allocated to Area Forums, split on a per capita basis across all seven Forums, which covered the Borough. Details of the funding for each of the LAF's, case study information and resident feedback was provided to demonstrate the impact LAF projects had made for Halton's communities. Projects funded through the LAFs were categorised into the following key areas:-

- Children and Youth Facilities;
- Community Events;
- Community Resource and Equipment;
- Community Initiatives;
- Improved Parks;
- Landscapes;
- Pedestrian and Highway Improvements; and
- Community Safety.

It was highlighted that the Area Forum budget had enabled the leverage of other grants and had secured funds from other bodies. Overall, an additional amount of £162,286.82 was 'levered' in to support Area Forum projects, providing a total spend of £413,166.98.

### **CORPORATE COMPLAINTS**

The November meeting also considered an analysis of Corporate Complaints received during the 2019/20 financial year. The report outlined the two stage procedure to deal with corporate complaints; a corporate complaints trend analysis from 2012 to 2020; the nature of those complaints received; and outcomes.

In addition, the report also provided a summary on complaints and queries that had been received by the Local Government Ombudsman during 2019/20.

It was noted that the Ombudsman had made 51 decisions during the year and undertook 38 investigations, 34 of which were not upheld. Members noted that these figures provided reassurance that the Council's internal complaints procedures were robust and effective in resolving fault where it occurred at a local level.

### **DISCRETIONARY SUPPORT SCHEME**

In July, the Board received a comprehensive report providing updates on the Discretionary Support Scheme (DSS), Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) and Universal Credit (UC).

DSS was now in its eighth year of operation and during 2019/20, 523 awards were made totalling £143,598. Full details of funding and expenditure were outlined in the report.

In respect of DHP, Members were advised that in 2019/20 grant funding of £469,587 was received and actual expenditure totalled £469,579 representing 1,391 awards. The decrease in the number of awards and total expenditure compared to the previous year had been caused by a reduction in Government funding.

In addition, Members received an update on the roll out of UC. As at May 2020 there were 14,070 Halton residents claiming UC.

### **ENERGY / CARBON REDUCTION**

The Board also received an update report on related activities aimed at reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions within the Borough. Since the Council's participation in the Local Authority Carbon Management Programme, the Council had continued to implement a number of actions to reduce its carbon emissions and impact on the environment and at the same time deliver financial savings. Overall, the Council's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions continued to reduce from a baseline of 2006/7 of 26,338 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>, to 11354 tonnes for 2019/20.

It was noted that there had been a slight increase in emissions associated with both fleet transport and business mileage from the previous years. In addition, Corporate buildings had also seen a slight increase, this being solely down to increased gas usage. The report advised members on the progress and impact of changes in the Borough which included: street lighting, roof top solar and biomass, the construction of a solar farm, climate action plan, public decarbonisation fund, municipal fleet decarbonisation plan, 3MG going green and the Astmoor low carbon study project.

### **PUBLIC HEALTH RESPONSE TO COVID-19 CORONAVIRUS**

The September meeting received a presentation covering the most recent data on COVID-19 Coronavirus; latest update on Halton outbreak support team approach, and Halton's testing approach in the community and for

schools.

Whilst COVID-19 Coronavirus presented an unprecedented challenge, well-established local arrangements for public health were being used as the basis of an enhanced response. The pandemic was having a profound impact on the Council's finances, its staff, all of its services and the way it operated.

The presentation highlighted the most recent COVID-19 Coronavirus figures for Halton and provided an update on how the Halton outbreak support team were working within the contain framework to successfully identify and manage local outbreaks using information from NHS Test and Trace and how this also worked with the Cheshire Hub.

It was recognised that testing was key and there was a robust programme in Halton with regional sites as well as mobile testing units and walk through testing sites in both Widnes and Runcorn. All of these were accessible on the national portal. In addition, national home delivery testing kits were also available.

### **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
- Markets
- School catering and the operation of the Stadium

### **WORK PROGRAMME 2020/21**

During 2020/21, the Board retained the expanded Topic Group which oversaw the operation of the Council's Discretionary Support Scheme and included scrutiny of Univeral Credit. The Board agreed that additional topic groups would be established when the need arose. However, due to the Covid 19 pandemic, a decision was taken that topic group work across the Council would be suspended.