



## **CORPORATE PPB ANNUAL REPORT**

The Council once again faces severe financial constraints as a result of 14 years of austerity cuts imposed by successive Conservative governments. The hard work and dedication of Council Officers and Councillors working in partnership together has mitigated the worst effects, and the Transformation Programme is in progress to deliver savings.

The Finance Department continues to work hard to ensure that Business Rates and Council Tax are collected in a timely and efficient way. The Benefits Division is working to get the Government's Household Support Fund out to all those families that are entitled to it, this is all taking place whilst administering the Housing Benefit and Council Tax Reduction schemes.

Work is continuing across the Council to promote Halton as an employer of choice, a theme of the Transformation Programme, and significant work was carried out in the development of the new Corporate Plan which was adopted by the Council in March.

The Health and Safety team continue to make sure all staff work safely and efficiently and are equipped to carry out their work.

The IT department have ensured that Members and Officers have access to the right equipment to facilitate them in carrying out their roles, and have dealt extremely well with maintaining maximum security.

The Property Services team continues to ensure Council buildings are efficiently maintained, that provision of working space is achieved at an economic cost and that the Council's assets are used to the maximum benefit. Major Projects also manage multiple development projects across the Borough and the Markets team continues to manage and promote very effectively the choices on offer.

The DCBL stadium and catering team continue to strive to make the stadium an attractive and interesting venue for sporting, leisure and social events .

The Legal Services Department continues to provide strong legal support to Council departments and Members. They also deal with the complex legal issues that arise from major project developments. The Member Services and Member Development

Team works diligently to make sure Councillors are fully equipped and kept up to date and provided with the information necessary to carry out their roles.

I would like to thank members of the PPB for their hard work and commitment throughout the year.

Councillor Bob Gilligan – Chair,  
Corporate Policy & Performance Board

### **MEMBERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

During 2023/24, the Board comprised of eleven Councillors – R. Gilligan (Chair), G Philbin (Vice Chair), J Bradshaw, N Hutchinson, R Leck, G Logan, A Lowe, A McInerney, N Plumpton-Walsh, S Thornton, 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, 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 below are some of the main initiatives upon which it has worked during that time.

### **HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT FUND 2023/24**

The oversight of the administration of the fund was a very significant part of the Board's work throughout the year. In June, the Board received a report which provided an update regarding delivery of the Government's Household Support Fund from 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023 and spending plans for the Fund during 2023/24. The Board noted the final expenditure of the Household Support Fund from 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023. £167,314 was awarded by the Discretionary Support Scheme through its telephone application process. £536,592 was spent on school meal vouchers which were issued during school holidays and £405,500 was spent on supporting those vulnerable pensioner households who were in receipt of a council tax reduction. The Benefits Division co-ordinated

the use of the grant on behalf of the Council and Appendix A outlined how the grant funding was utilised via a combination of Council departments and the Voluntary Sector. In February 2023, it was confirmed that Halton had been allocated grant funding of £2.6M. In April 2023, the Council's Executive Board approved a Spending Plan on how the allocation would be utilised. It was agreed to allocate £356,000 to the Discretionary Support Scheme which would cover a wide range of low income households in need, including families with children, pensioners and people with disabilities. It was estimated that the free school meals vouchers would cost approximately £1,170,000 and this would provide approximately 7,500 children with free school meals throughout all of the school holidays over the next 12 months. In order to support vulnerable pensioner households, it was decided that all those in receipt of a Council Tax reduction would be provided with a one-off award of £120. It was estimated that 4,181 pensioner households would benefit from this award, at a total cost of £501,720. In 2023/24, there would be additional funding allocations to Public Health, Care Leavers and Voluntary Sector Partners. It was agreed to allocate £100,000 to Public Health who would support vulnerable households who may fall outside those covered by the rest of the Spending Plan. They would also target support to those families who had pre-school aged children and who were flagged on the Income Deprivation Index affecting children. In addition, families who had disabled pre-school aged children. £82,126 was allocated for this project. £82,127 was allocated to make a cost of living award to recent care leavers and to those young people who would become care leavers in the next 12 months. Voluntary Sector partners would be again, asked to assist the Council with the delivery of support to residents. The grant allocations made for the previous 6 month period to Citizens Advice, Food Banks, Affordable Warmth etc had doubled for the coming year. Each organisation would be asked to provide a detailed proposal of how they intended to utilise the funding and provide a regular update to the Council with monitoring information for submission to the Department for Works and Pensions (DWP). The Benefits Division would co-ordinate use of the grant on behalf of the Council and progress with delivery of the Household Support Fund during 2023/24 would be reported regularly to the Board. If the grant was not fully spent by 31 March 2024, and/or not spent in accordance with the grant guidance, it would be clawed back by the DWP.

Further updates were provided to Members at the November and January meetings.

## **THE CORPORATE PLAN**

The development of the Council's new Corporate Plan via the Big Conversation was an extremely important area of consideration for the Board during the year.

In June the Board received a presentation introducing “The Big Conversation” which was the Council’s approach to formulating a new Corporate Plan to take effect from April 2024. “The Big Conversation” would engage with the public so that they understand the challenges of the Council. It would be an approach between the Council and everyone who lives or works in Halton to work together in order to create an improved Borough in all aspects of everyday life. The Corporate Plan Survey would consist of 5 themes and 6 questions. There would be different consultation methods depending on the audience. Responses will be monitored during the consultation period and any low response area will be targeted with iWalkers which proved to be an effective consultation method during the elections. Staff within the One-Stop-Shops and Libraries would be able to offer assistance to anyone who required help to complete the survey. All feedback and responses would be scrutinised and evaluated and then in conjunction with North West Employers, be summarised accordingly to establish a number of key objectives to form the Council’s new Corporate Plan.

A further update was brought in September and in November, Members were advised that up until 7 November, a total of 933 responses had been received and a breakdown of responses by source was provided. The report outlined the promotion, consultation and engagement carried out so far, as well as the emerging themes. The gaps and actions were set out and some examples were given to how these had been addressed e.g. visits made to Riverside College and Family Hubs in both Runcorn and Widnes; information had been shared via social media to target relevant groups; and iWalkers had targeted those wards with low responses.

It was noted that the consultation would end on 30 November 2023, after which an analysis would be undertaken to identify the key priorities. January and February 2024 would see further consultation with stakeholders prior to the Corporate Plan being finalised in March, ready for its launch in April 2024.

#### **PROGRAMME OFFICE**

In September, the Board received a report on the work of the Programme Office in securing external funding resources into Halton. The report provided an update on the Programmes Office key activities and priorities as well as emerging issues in external funding and funding statistics for 2022-23. The key priorities for 2022-23 had been:

- Embedding the new Programmes Office function, including recruitment to new posts;

- Supporting the delivery of the Government's levelling up agenda, including Towns Fund and UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF);
- Disseminating details of funding that will support the Cost of Living crisis;
- Disseminating details of funding that will help mitigate climate change and help deliver HBC's Climate Change Action Plan;
- Ensuring the remaining ESIF (European Strategic Investment Fund) is secured, spent and monitored; and
- Supporting the development of the HBC Cultural Strategy and Heritage Open Days programme. The report also described some of the key schemes currently supported by the team which included:
  - The £23.6 million Town Deal Programme for Runcorn;
  - Halton's allocation of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund;
  - Halton's allocation of an LCR Destination Marketing programme;
  - The Community and Voluntary Sector; and
  - Liverpool City Region and Cultural/Visitor Economy work. It was noted that the Programmes Office would work more with the new Environment and Regeneration Directorate on some smaller projects to try and develop them.

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

#### **WORK PROGRAMME 2023/24**

During 2023/24, the Board retained the expanded Topic Group which oversaw the operation of the Council's Discretionary Support Scheme and included scrutiny of Universal Credit. The Board agreed that additional topic groups would be established when the need arose.