

REPORT TO: Corporate Policy & Performance Board
DATE: 3rd September 2024
REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director - Environment and Regeneration
PORTFOLIO: Corporate Services
SUBJECT: Programmes Office update
WARD(S) Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an annual update to Corporate PPB on the work of the Programmes Office in securing and managing external funding resources.
- 1.2 The Report covers the following areas:
- An update on the Programmes Office key activities and priorities.
 - Funding statistics for the period 2023-24.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That the report be noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Programmes Office role is to help maximize external funding into the Borough and to undertake the monitoring for large-scale grant programmes to ensure compliance and eliminate clawback. The Office, formerly the External Funding Team, was established in October 2022 and consists of the following posts and officers:

- Programmes Office Manager – Steph Davies
- Senior Funding Development Officer – Melanie Dodd
- Funding Development Officer – currently vacant
- Senior Monitoring Officer – Sara Wilson
- Funding and Monitoring Officer – Jonathan Patten
- Funding and Monitoring Officer 0.5 – currently vacant
- Funding Support Assistant – Robbie Arrowsmith
- Promotions Officer 0.5 – currently being delivered by an agency.

- 3.2 The Team is responsible for preparing medium to large-scale funding bids (primarily over £50,000) on behalf of Council colleagues, public sector partners, the voluntary sector and the private sector, with the aim of maximising external funding

opportunities for Halton.

3.3 The Team focuses mainly on the following funding sources: Government, National Lottery, Landfill Funding, Trusts and Foundations. Current examples include UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF), Town Deal Fund, Long Term Plan for Towns.

Key functions of the Team include:

- Drafting or proofing of large-scale grant funding bids.
- Monitoring of strategic grant programmes, including the submission of claims, in order to ensure compliance and eliminate clawback.
- Maintaining a strategic approach to funding to ensure the most appropriate bids from Halton are submitted and internal competition is averted, including the development of strategic project pipelines.
- Undertaking funding searches for specific projects; bid writing and development of supporting documents, e.g., policies and business plans etc.
- Dissemination of funding information to target audiences, mainly via the production of monthly Funding Bulletins on a range of themes.
- Lobbying funders, developing strong relationships with key funding bodies, and participating in key forums to ensure Halton gets its fair share of funding.
- Developing strong partnerships with Council colleagues, and the voluntary and private sectors where appropriate, to submit joint bids.
- Develop and deliver a training programme for HBC colleagues and partner organisations to enable capacity building.

3.4 **Key Priorities 2023-24**

Emphasis over the period 2023-24 has been on:

- Continuing to embed the new Programmes Office function, including strategic work to develop a pipeline of Regeneration projects and a project management system to support the delivery of this.
- Supporting the delivery of the Government's levelling up agenda, including Towns Fund, UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and Long-Term Plan for Towns
- Developing a Funding Plan to support the delivery of HBC's Climate Change Action Plan
- Delivering A Destination Marketing programme, which is part of an LCR-wide funded scheme, to promote Halton's visitor economy and cultural assets to both residents and visitors.
- Supporting the development of the HBC Cultural Strategy and Heritage Open Days programme.

3.5 The Team continues to look at how we can further support HBC colleagues to bid for funding for priority schemes in order that we do not miss out on any appropriate funding streams. And starting to track projects in the Economy, Enterprise and Property Department via a tracker which reviews progress, funding and risks.

3.6 **Key Projects and Team stats**

This section outlines a number of key projects that the Programmes Office are delivering and/or monitoring:

- i) Destination Halton Marketing Programme
- ii) UK Shared Prosperity Fund Programme
- iii) Reconnecting Runcorn - Towns Fund Programme

3.7 **Destination Halton Marketing Programme**

This is an LCR-wide scheme funded through the Combined Authority's Strategic Investment Fund (SIF) running from April 2022 to March 2025.

3.8 Halton received a total of £115k in funding, having contributed £30k in match. £12,000 of this was top sliced for central functions, leaving a budget of £103k over the three years.

3.9 The key outcome of the programme was '*To increase inbound national and regional domestic leisure and business visitor days to Halton by 17,693 equating to £1,116,272 in visitor expenditure*'.

3.10 The Programmes Office was required to submit a Project Delivery Plan for the three-year programme; key outputs included:

- Re-establish Halton's Visitor Economy Network and hold quarterly meetings.
- Commission Destination Marketing specialists to deliver 3 Halton campaigns per annum.
- Re-establish the Visit Halton website and regularly update for the duration of the programme.

3.11 Key progress is detailed below:

- 7 meetings of the re-established Visitor Economy Network – now called *Marketing Halton*. This forum is chaired by Rob Sanderson-Thomas from Norton Priory and includes a range of members from visitor attractions, the private sector and HBC. Discussion is currently underway about how to continue this forum beyond the end of the programme in March 2025
- Visit Halton (www.visithalton.co.uk) has been revamped under three key headings: Heritage, Art/Culture, and

Active/Outdoors. Hits to the site are increasing consistently and the website has also been used as a portal for Halton's 50th anniversary celebrations, and it is anticipated it will also act as the key portal of information for Halton's Borough of Culture year in 2026.

- Campaigns delivered to date include:
 - Halton Map – map of key sites, along with a music map and film by Pete Waterman.
 - Halton Heritage Open Days 2023 – brochure developed on the national theme of *Creativity Unwrapped* highlighting Halton's heritage and events.
 - *50 Quirky Things to Do in Halton* – leaflet and publicity campaign developed to run through 2024 to coincide with Halton's 50th celebrations – see Appendix 1.
 - *A Taste of Halton* brochure developed showcasing Halton's food and drink venues – see Appendix 2.
 - A Halton Alternative Conference Venue Guide – see Appendix 3.
 - Halton Heritage Open Days 2024 – brochure developed on the national theme of *Routes, Networks and Connections* – see Appendix 4

- 3.12 Halton Borough Council is the highest achieving local authority in the programme according to LCR programme leads and Marketing Liverpool; an example of feedback in the interim evaluation includes:
- 3.13 Halton have been really positive throughout the whole project, seized every opportunity...Halton is the number 1 partner in the programme.
- 3.14 Halton are absolutely brilliant, and their approach has been fantastic; could not have asked for a better partner, Halton are the shining example.
- 3.15 Halton have used a lean share of the City Region funding really wisely.
- 3.16 **UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)**
UKSPF is a government funding scheme allocated through the Combined Authority from April 2022-March 2025 and seen as a 'replacement' fund once the European Funding Programme ceased when the UK left the European Union.
- 3.17 Halton receives a 7.9% allocation of the Combined Authority pot, and the funding is split into a number of streams, including:
Green, Resilient, Safe Communities - £301,059
Local Culture, Arts, Heritage - £188,900
Town Centres - £118,063
Business Support Programme - £366,742

Employment Support Programme - £579,626

3.18 Funding is split into capital and revenue and across the three-year period. A breakdown of projects in each of the strands is included below. Strands are led by relevant project leads across HBC and the Programmes Office is driving and monitoring spend and progress against outputs/outcomes.

3.19 **Green, Resilient, Safe Communities**

Projects in this strand are:

- Deliver two neighbourhood environmental projects – these are Montgomery Road in Widnes and Riddings Lane in Runcorn and will be delivered in 24-25.
- Award eight green grants to community groups – 10 grants were awarded in 23-24 totalling £18,117 to: Clifton Road Allotment Association; Forget Me Not Garden; Friends of Hale Village; Four Estates; Grangeway Community Forum; Greenfingers Gardening Group; Halton Village Millennium Green; Preston Brook Pre-School; St John and St Paul Transform Widnes; Wonky Garden
- Plant 500 trees with community groups/businesses as part of the Big Halton Forest – this was delivered in 2024 with Ormiston Chadwick School, year 9 and 10 pupils.
- Deliver an Eco Festival – this was led by Victoria Park Environment Team in Victoria Park in August 2023
- Deliver energy advice and grants for small energy projects – this will be delivered in 24-25.
- Develop a green corridor into a town centre to encourage sustainable travel – this will be delivered on Church Street, Runcorn in 24-25 to tie in with the Town Deal development area.
- Create a community garden – a disused allotment site in Kingsway, Widnes was cleared in early 2024 ready to create a community allotment garden.

3.20 **Local Arts, Culture, Heritage**

Projects in this strand are:

- Create an events management/cultural role to support Halton's cultural sector – a part-time Culture Officer post commenced in April 23 and will run until March 2025
- Deliver a programme of cultural events and the development of a cultural strategy – a number of events have been funded including Makefest, Ecofest, Eurovision and Halton's 50th anniversary events. A Cultural Strategy was produced in 2023 – see Appendix 5
- Award six small grants to support local cultural organisations – 7 grants were awarded in March 2024 to organisations delivering projects that celebrate Halton's 50th Anniversary; these are: Catalyst Science Discovery Centre and Museum;

Digital Art Box, Fortuna Female Society; Halton Heritage Partnership; Norton Priory; Pride in Halton; Runcorn Community Choir.

- Undertake small capital improvements to the Brindley – new chairs have been purchased for the Studio and the remaining capital will be spent in 2024-25 on an education room.

3.21 **Town Centres**

Projects in this strand are:

- Make improvements to four market stalls at Widnes Market to attract new businesses – this was completed in 2023-24 and all four refurbished stalls are occupied, supporting 4 local businesses and 2 new jobs.
- Develop and deliver a diagnostic tool that supports 47 town centre businesses – this is behind schedule but is anticipated to be delivered in 2024-25.
- Develop better signposting for town centre businesses via the HBC website – this will be delivered by a specialist agency in 2024-25 and will include social media promotional campaigns.
- Deliver online masterclasses to town centre businesses – this is behind schedule, but it is anticipated that it will be delivered in 2024-25.

Deliver three town centre events – four events have been delivered: ComiCon and Market Music Fest, both at Widnes Market in August and September 2023 respectively; Fireworks in November 2023 and Makefest in Halton Lea Library in March 2024.

3.22 Spend to date is on track, with just a couple of projects behind on delivery, namely the town centre business support programme and neighbourhood environmental schemes and green corridors. Plans are in place to mitigate delays with full delivery anticipated by March 2025.

3.23 At this point, there is no confirmation of any future UKSPF funding from Government beyond March 2025.

3.24 **Town Deal – *Reconnecting Runcorn***

The *Reconnecting Runcorn* programme is a government allocation of £23.6 million running to March 2026 for the redevelopment/connectivity of the Old Town area of Runcorn. Funding is drawn down based on a spending profile or forecast and monitoring reports are required to be submitted to Government in May and October.

3.25 The programme is split into 8 strands and a brief overview of these is included below. A link is also included here to a short award-winning film which highlights the key aspects of the programme – https://youtu.be/Hkgv_f9QYzQ - and an overview

presentation at Appendix 6 which includes images of each project.

1. Elite House – Runcorn Station Quarter Enterprise Hub

HBC is currently obtaining legal and property advice on another route to secure an operator for a creative start-up hub. Some essential work is being carried out to the building, and a process to secure a contractor to carry out solar PV installation on the roof is in progress.

2. Unlock Runcorn – Landscaping, Visitor Centre and Canal Boat Trip experience.

Planning permission for the HBC landscaping and civil works has been awarded. The project is currently in RIBA stage 4 design and detailed drawings from the landscape architects are being drawn up. Runcorn Locks Restoration Society who will operate the visitor centre and canal boat trips are progressing with the appointment of a project manager and subsequently the ordering of the boats.

3. Brindley Theatre Enhancements – extended café, library and outdoor performance area

A contractor to deliver the scheme has been confirmed and plans to be on site mid-2024. The outdoor work will follow the extension.

4. Creative & Digital Skills Centre

Hazlehurst Arts Collective is now well established at 71a High Street, offering a varied and successful programme of events and workshops. 18 artists have taken up residence. A contractor for the Youth Club building had been appointed and is due to start on site in August 2024. The digital and IT hub in the Camden buildings is currently in design.

5. Town Centre New Homes – High Street

Halton Housing Association has purchased this site, and a contractor is now on site. Build should take about 12-18 months.

6. Health & Education Hub

Planning permission has been submitted for the Health & Education Hub (current library building) and work is forecast to start in Autumn 2024.

7. High Street Connectivity

The application for demolition of St Paul's Mews has been approved and the procurement of a contractor is in progress.

The Peace Garden is well underway; the Chedi has been cast in Thailand and this together with a Buddha have recently arrived onsite. There was a formal ceremony on Sunday 23rd June 2024 to celebrate the temple anniversary and Si Ra Reuk, or Pagoda Foundation ceremony.

Following a project creating a range of heritage stories, a booklet has been published. An artist is currently being procured to work on a street art commission for the pillars of the Silver Jubilee Bridge.

Public realm works on High Street will be progressed towards the end of the programme.

- 3.26 For further information and regular updates, please visit www.reconnectingruncorn.info
- 3.27 A more detailed report on the Town Deal programme is due to be presented to the Environment and Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board's September meeting.
- 3.28 **Other projects supported in 2023-24.**
Other projects supported in 2023-24 in which the Team played a key role in securing and monitoring important grant investment to the Borough include:
- Catalyst Science Discovery Centre and Museum - £312,499 (Arts Council England) for roof renovations
 - Open 360 - £192,071 (National Lottery Community Fund) for digital inclusion delivery
 - HBC - £291,000 (Brownfield Land Release Fund) for feasibility work on Runcorn Waterfront Housing Development
 - St Berteline's Church - £41,000 (Benefact Trust, Joseph Rank, Diocese of Chester) for reconfiguration of the church to deliver community activity.
- 3.29 The work of the Team is summarised in our Annual Funding Review which goes out to our networks – the latest version is included at Appendix 7.
- 3.30 **Capacity and Demand**
Demand for the service remains steady; the Team received 55 requests for funding in 2024-25. This is lower than the previous couple of years; however, the team is working more strategically on fewer bids but offering more in-depth support.
- 3.31 The Team works to full capacity which means decisions need to be made at times about where to allocate support, allowing the ability to respond to new enquiries and priorities, manage tight deadlines for bids, horizon scan to ensure opportunities are not missed etc.

- 3.32 Importantly, the Team does not drive projects, but specialises in sourcing funding, bid-writing and monitoring, acting as a critical friend or compliance checker.
- 3.33 Funding secured this year by the Programmes Office is £899m; this is lower than usual as the workload emphasis has been supporting with funding streams that Halton has received as an allocation, e.g. UKSPF and Long-Term Plan for Towns (LTPT) and on the monitoring of large-scale grants e.g. Towns Fund.
- 3.34 The Team is currently monitoring projects to the value of £41 million; this is a critical role for the Programmes Office, working closely with our Finance and Internal Audit colleagues, to ensure compliance and minimize clawback.
- 3.35 **Community and Voluntary Sector**
The Programmes Office maintains a remit to support voluntary and community sector organisations to secure funding to support their services as well as help deliver Halton’s strategic priorities.
- 3.36 Projects currently being supported include:
- Catalyst Science Discovery Centre and Museum to develop a £1 million bid to National Lottery Heritage Fund to redevelop its heritage gallery and activity.
 - St Lukes Church reconfiguration for the provision of toilets
 - Autism Wellbeing Project – running costs and capital work.
 - Halton Community Transport – new bus
 - Warrington, Halton and St Helens RSPCA – running costs and capital work.
 - Sam’s Diamond’s Cancer Support – running costs.
- 3.37 **Liverpool City Region, Cultural/Visitor Economy and Climate Change work**
The Team continues to undertake some key work with Liverpool City Region (LCR) and Halton partners in relation to Visitor Economy, Culture and Climate Change.
- The Programmes Office sits on the LCR Destination Management Board and is currently delivering the Halton element of a SIF funded Destination Management programme.
 - The Team supports Cultivate: Halton’s cultural partnership with funding bids to deliver a quality arts and cultural programme for people in Halton.
 - The Programmes Office Manager sits on the LCR Culture Officers Group which delivers LCR-wide cultural events and helps drive the Boroughs of Culture programme.
 - The Programmes Office Manager played a key role in the development of Halton’s Cultural Strategy published in 2023 and which is critical in securing funding via the Arts Council of England and National Lottery Heritage Fund.

- The Programmes Office supports HBC's Climate Change Steering Group, identifying funding sources to enable the delivery of HBC's Climate Action Plan. The Team produces Climate Change Funding Bulletins periodically.

3.38 **Training**

The Team has traditionally delivered a free Training Programme which is available to HBC colleagues and externally to the voluntary and other public sector partners which consisted of the following sessions:

- Top Tips for Bid-Writing
- Monitoring and Evaluation your Grant
- Now You've Got Your Grant
- Developing a Fundraising Strategy.

3.39 The training sessions are continually updated to improve bid-writing skill levels among both internal and external colleagues and also give a greater understanding of the context in which funding bids are submitted, helping to ensure that bids are prioritised and of the highest possible quality.

3.40 The Team has prioritised delivery to HBC colleagues and so far, has run three sessions; we also offer bespoke courses to individual teams or organisations.

3.41 **CONCLUDING COMMENTS**

Team's workload remains extremely busy; we continue to prioritise funding that has emerged through the Government's levelling up agenda, as well as funding opportunities via the Combined Authority in order to support HBC's priorities and to ensure Halton bids for these funds where appropriate. At the same time, we will continue with our remit to support our voluntary sector colleagues to secure funding to deliver their vital services across the Borough.

3.42 The external funding environment remains vibrant, if not competitive, and we look forward to securing further investment into the Borough in the year ahead to support the corporate priorities and key strategic schemes going forward.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 None

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

All projects that request support from the Programmes Office must support at least one of the following Council's priorities:

- Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence
- Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy
- Supporting Children, Young People and Families
- Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need
- Working Towards a Greener Future
- Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 None.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 None.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None

10.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

None under the meaning of the Act.