

Employment, Learning, Skills and Community PPB – Priority Based Monitoring Report Q1

Reporting Period: 1st April to 31st March 2024

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report provides an overview of issues and progress against key service objectives/milestones and performance targets, during the first quarter of 2024 / 25 for service areas within the remit of the Employment, Learning, Skills and Community (ELSC) Policy and Performance Board.
- 1.2 Key priorities for development or improvement in 2024 - 25 were agreed by Members and included in Directorate Plans, for the various functional areas reporting to Employment, Learning, Skills and Community (ELSC) Policy & Performance Board i.e.
- Employment, Learning and Skills
 - Library and Culture and Leisure Services
- 1.3 The way in which traffic light symbols have been used to reflect progress to date is explained within Section 5 of this report.
- 1.4 Corporate Priorities



Halton Borough Council Corporate Plan 2024 – 2029
Our Community, Our Priorities, Our Future

Plan on a Page



2.0 High Priority Equality Actions

- 2.1 Equality issues continue to form a routine element of the Council’s business planning and operational decision making processes. Additionally the Council must have evidence to demonstrate compliance with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which came into force in April 2011.
- 2.2 The Councils latest annual progress report in relation to the achievement of its equality objectives is published on the Council website and is available via:

<http://www4.halton.gov.uk/Pages/councildemocracy/Equality-and-Diversity.aspx>

3.0 Performance Overview







The following information provides a synopsis of progress for both milestones and performance indicators across the key business areas that have been identified by the Directorate.

Employment, Learning & Skills






Key Objectives / milestones

Corporate Priority	Priority Two – Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy. Priority Three – Supporting Children, Young People and Families. Priority Four – Tackling Inequality and Helping those who are most in need. Employment, Learning & Skills
EEP 9	To promote access to learning to those who need it most and create employment opportunities for Halton residents

Milestone	Progress Q1	Supporting Commentary
Deliver six accredited ESOL and two Pre-ESOL courses across Widnes and Runcorn to help our BAME residents improve their English skills between 1 st August 2024 and 31 st July 2025	U	Tutor now in place for 3 accredited ESOL courses and one Pre-ESOL programme to run between August 2024 and 31 July 2025,. Recruitment currently ongoing to support the additional provision. Currently developing Test and Learn proposal for ESOL in Schools project. Actual figure can be reported on in Q2

<p>Utilise a budget of £11,300 LCR Devolved ESFA Hardship Funding for adult learners between 1st August 2024 and 31st July 2025</p>		<p>Delivery to commence in September 2024 (Q2) – Kingsway Warm Hub will continue (approx. £500 per month). Childcare places still to be offered for any course longer than one term in duration. Travel costs reimbursed for all learners in Hardship.</p> <p>Actual figure can be reported on in Q2.</p>
<p>Commence learning programme for those aged 19+ by 1st August 2024</p>		<p>Recruitment for the programmes started in Q1 – enrolments dates at the end of August (Q2) Prospectus disseminated to all staff. 146 residents booked in for enrolment dates at the end of August.</p> <p>Actual figure can be reported on in Q2</p>
<p>Commence year 3 of the Supported Internship Programme by August 2024</p>		<p>6 learners have so far registered to start on programme in Q2.</p> <p>Actual figure will be reported in Q2</p>
<p>Learners passing courses = 92% by July 2025</p>		<p>Delivery to commence in September 2024 (Q2). Increased Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) support offered for tutors to increase achievement in accredited programmes (monthly IQA meetings and tutor support).</p> <p>Actual figure will be reported in Q2</p>
<p>Number of learners successfully placed into Employment = 330 by July 2025</p>		<p>76 customers were supported into employment in Q1 against overall annual target of 330.</p>
<p>Percentage of people engaged in Learning from most deprived areas increased from 29% to 48% by July 2025</p>		<p>Delivery to commence in September 2024 (Q2). Targeted marketing ongoing in identified wards.</p> <p>Actual % figure can be reported on in Q2</p>

Corporate Priority	Priority Two – Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy. Priority Three – Supporting Children, Young People and Families. Priority Four – Tackling Inequality and Helping those who are most in need. Employment, Learning & Skills
EEP 10	To promote access to learning to those who need it most and create employment opportunities for Halton residents

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Commence year 3 of the Supported Internship Programme by August 2024		6 learners have so far registered to start on programme in Q2. Actual figure will be reported in Q2
The % of residents accessing Halton Adult Learning courses and achieve will increase from		Delivery to commence in September 2024 (Q2). Increased Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) support offered for tutors to increase

88% to 92% between 1 st August 2024 and July 2025.		achievement in accredited programmes (monthly IQA meetings and tutor support). Actual figure will be reported in Q2
The % of learners (average across all target wards) who are of unemployed working age residing in the LSOAs, and who access Halton Adult Learning will increase from 29% to 48% between 1 st August 2024 and end July 2025.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Delivery to commence in September 2024 (Q2). Targeted marketing ongoing in identified wards. Actual % figure will be reported in Q2
330 residents who access HPIJ employment programmes to obtain employment between April 2024 – March 2025.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	76 customers were supported into employment in Q1 against overall annual target of 330.




Library & Culture Services

Corporate Priority	Priority One - Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence. Priority Two – Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy. Priority Three – Supporting Children, Young People and Families. Priority Four – Tackling Inequality and Helping those who are most in need. Leisure Services
EEP 24	To provide a new leisure centre for Widnes




Milestone: One new leisure centre open	Progress Q1	Supporting Commentary
Opening February 2025	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	The contractor is ahead of schedule, as such we are confident that the centre will be open in February 2025, if not before. To operate the new Halton Leisure Centre, Sports Services, supported by IT and Procurement have tendered for a new Leisure Management Operating System, a contract is expected to be awarded in July 2024. In addition, the new Leisure Centre will operate differently to Kingsway Leisure

		<p>Centre and as such, requires a Service Redesign.</p> <p>Work on a business case has begun, which subject to consultation could see new Job Descriptions, operating hours and new ways of optimising the use of technology and responding to customer demands. The new centre will also have a soft play and a cafe, which the current centre does not have.</p>
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Corporate Priority	<p>Priority One - Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence.</p> <p>Priority Two – Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy.</p> <p>Priority Three – Supporting Children, Young People and Families.</p> <p>Priority Four – Tackling Inequality and Helping those who are most in need.</p> <p>Leisure Services</p>
EEP 25	Increase footfall at the Brindley

Milestone: Increase footfall at the Brindley	Progress Q1	Supporting Commentary
Brindley - Total number of tickets sold		20,244 Figures in line with expectation
Brindley - Total number of days Hired days		56 Increase in Hirer books, for theatre and studio's total
Brindley - Total number of Council Promotions		29 Figures in line with expectation, for theatre and studio's total

Corporate Priority	<p>Priority One - Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence.</p> <p>Priority Two – Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy.</p> <p>Priority Three – Supporting Children, Young People and Families.</p> <p>Priority Four – Tackling Inequality and Helping those who are most in need.</p> <p>Leisure Services</p>
EEP 25	Increase footfall at the Libraries

Milestone: Increase footfall at the Libraries	Progress Q1	Supporting Commentary
<p>Footfall for all libraries:</p> <p>Ditton Library Widnes Library Runcorn Library Halton Lea Library</p>		Total 103,945 On track to meet target.
<p>Library Digital issues</p>		Total 847,810 On track to meet target.
<p>Library Issues in branch:</p> <p>Ditton Library Widnes Library Runcorn Library Halton Lea Library</p>		Total 49,099 On track to meet target.

4.0 Financial Statements

ECONOMY ENTERPRISE & PROPERTY DEPARTMENT

Revenue Operational Budget at 31 July 2024

	Annual Budget	Budget to Date	Actual Spend	Variance (Overspend)	Forecast Outturn
	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000	£'000
Expenditure					
Employees	4,342	1,812	1,709	103	308
Agency - covering vacancies	0	0	102	(102)	(305)
Agency - in addition to establishment	0	0	0	0	0
Repairs & Maintenance	1,689	700	741	(41)	(117)
Premises	146	119	119	0	0
Energy & Water Costs	1,221	281	267	14	62
NNDR	659	633	623	10	10
Rents	163	0	0	0	0
Economic Regeneration Activities	21	0	0	0	0
Security	544	173	172	1	4
Supplies & Services	482	119	106	13	40
Supplies & Services - Grant	1,074	169	169	0	0
Grants to Voluntary Organisations	67	44	44	0	0
Capital Finance	0		0	0	0
Transfer to Reserves	165	0	0	0	0
Total Expenditure	10,573	4,050	4,052	(2)	2
Income					
Fees & Charges Income	-721	-346	-361	15	46
Rent - Commercial Properties	-871	-196	-196	0	0
Rent - Investment Properties	-38	-14	-14	0	0
Government Grant	-1,531	-753	-753	0	0
Reimbursements & Other Grant Income	-306	-172	-170	(2)	(6)
Schools SLA Income	-234	-209	-192	(17)	(17)
Recharges to Capital	-348	-163	-163	0	0
Transfer from Reserves	-393	-384	-384	0	0
Total Income	-4,442	-2,237	-2,233	(4)	23
Net Operational Expenditure	6,131	1,813	1,819	(6)	25
Recharges					
Premises Support	2,074	691	691	0	0
Transport	30	10	10	0	0
Central Support	1,947	649	649	0	0
Asset Rental Support	4	0	0	0	0
HBC Support Costs Income	-7,927	-2,642	-2,642	0	0
Net Total Recharges	-3,872	-1,292	-1,292	0	0
Net Departmental Expenditure	2,259	521	527	(6)	25

Comments on the above figures

Finance communicates with the department on a regular basis to manage and analyse spending, identifying potential savings that could support current and future priorities. In an era of constrained budgets, achieving these goals is essential. The above report forecasts that the department will be under budget by £0.025m at year-end.

Supporting Information

The department consists of 139fte, of which 69fte are externally funded, with a staff turnover savings target of £0.126m. The employee figures in this report incorporate the projected pay award for 24/25.

Through diligent account monitoring, the success of utilising grant and external funding to alleviate pressure on the core budget is evident in employee expenses. Specific projects have been identified, and staff time has been allocated accordingly. Ensuring at all times that we are compliance with the grant conditions. This approach will continue throughout the year.

To fulfil statutory and contractual obligations and support the borough's regeneration, maintaining a complete staff establishment is essential. However, the challenge of filling surveyor and project manager roles, even with a market supplement, has resulted in a lack of suitable candidates. Consequently, the engagement of agency personnel has been necessary, anticipated to cost £300,000 this financial year. Without these personnel, the borough's regeneration efforts would be hindered, potentially leading to a loss of business rates and council tax.

The recruitment of the agency staff has led to an increase in commercial rental income, as it has enabled the completion of pending rent reviews.

Managers have asked to identify and implement measures to reduce unnecessary spending, whilst also ensuring the needs of the service are met leading to the department's projecting a positive variance amounting to £0.040m within supplies and services.

A recent exercise was conducted to determine the costs associated with empty properties within the Borough. Consequently a new cost centre was established to monitor these expenses. In addition to the loss of rental income whilst the properties remain vacant, the Council incur additional costs for utilities, repairs, and maintenance. As of the end of July, the total costs related to these properties amount to £0.143m. To reduce the expenses actions need to be taken to accelerate the leasing or explore temporary uses for properties, such as short-term rentals or community projects, which will generate some income and reduce costs.

The Department highlighted the necessity of expert advice to advance regeneration projects. Additionally, the change in Government highlighted the need for an up-to-date Housing Strategy for the Borough. Following a meeting with the Director of Economy, Enterprise, and Property, it was decided to use the Department's reserves to cover these one-off costs. Seeking external advice will assist with future grant funding requests from the LCR and Government, and enable the department to fulfil its obligations regarding the borough's regeneration strategy.

Although the Council have seen a significant increase in energy costs over the last few years, it is anticipated that costs this financial year will be £0.163m lower than in 2023/24, representing a decrease of over 13%. The department is forecasting that it will be £0.062m under budget by year-end. Since contract prices are fixed until March 2025, projections are based on the 2023/24 usage using the unit price quoted by the supplier. However, if usage increases as more staff return to the office, these prices might rise.



The Repairs and Maintenance program is continually being reviewed to ensure it remains in budget. This financial year presents a challenge as no inflation adjustment was factored into the 2024/25 approved budget, and it was further reduced by 10%. It is projected that the expenditure will exceed the budget by £0.117m at the end of the year. This projection is based on the 2023/24 expenses and does not take into account the 6% inflation in general building materials over the past year, as reported by BCIS.

Additionally, the department has conducted an exercise to determine which expenditures are capital in nature, and these have now been reclassified within the capital program.

Similar to previous years, the school cleaning service's level agreement (SLA) is not meeting its financial targets due to the employment of agency for covering absences and leave, as well as the anticipated pay award. A reassessment of the SLA charges is in progress in preparation for the forthcoming budget year. Additionally, the demand for the service is declining as more schools transition to Academies.

Approved 2024/25 Savings

Please see for details of progress towards achieving budget efficiency savings agreed by Council in February 2023.

Ref.	Service Area	Net Budget £'000	Description of Saving Proposal	Savings Value		Current Progress	Comments
				24/25 £'000	25/26 £'000		
EEP4	Cleaning Services – Council Buildings	580	Review cleaning arrangements, with a focus on only emptying bins and cleaning toilets daily.	100	0		A review of the cleaning service is underway with some positions removed from the structure. The full savings will not be achieved until the accommodation review is complete.
EEP2	Caretaking & Security Services	641	A review and restructuring of caretaking arrangements.	52	0		Following advice from HR the restructure will not take place until the final quarter of the year.
Total Economy, Enterprise & Property Department				152	0		

COMMUNITY AND GREENSPACES DEPARTMENT

Revenue Budget as at 31st July 2024

	Annual Budget £'000	Budget to Date £'000	Actual Spend £'000	Variance (Overspend) £'000	Forecast Outturn £'000
Expenditure					
Employees	17,358	3,700	3,457	243	1,146
Agency - covering vacancies	0	0	66	(66)	(262)
Agency - in addition to establishment	0	0	50	(50)	(101)
Premises	3,521	1,070	1,089	(19)	(71)
Supplies & Services	1,585	380	401	(21)	(80)
Hired & Contracted Services	510	83	83	0	0
Book Fund	128	53	53	0	0
Food Provision	388	115	108	7	36
School Meals Food	2,083	320	332	(12)	(42)
Transport	117	10	11	(1)	(9)
Agency Costs	441	100	148	(48)	(94)
Other Expenditure	0	0	41	(41)	(50)
Waste Disposal Contracts	7,002	0	0	0	255
Grants to Voluntary Organisations	64	16	12	4	35
Grant to Norton Priory	172	29	87	(58)	0
Total Expenditure	33,369	5,876	5,938	(62)	763
Income					
Sales Income	-1,373	-422	-422	0	(118)
Fees & Charges Income	-5,470	-1,952	-1,942	(10)	(50)
Rental Income	-235	-39	-71	32	26
Markets Income	-910	-152	-208	56	(79)
Government Grant Income	-643	-482	-482	0	0
Reimbursements & Other Grant Income	-703	-467	-467	0	0
School SLA Income	-1,313	-219	-250	31	(10)
School Meals Income	-3,598	-600	-562	(38)	(213)
Internal Fees Income	-286	-48	-15	(33)	61
Capital Salaries	-173	-29	-14	(15)	(5)
Transfers from Reserves	-14	-14	-14	0	0
Total Income	-14,718	-4,424	-4,447	23	(388)
Net Operational Expenditure	18,651	1,452	1,491	(39)	375
Recharges					
Premises Support	1,675	279	279	0	0
Transport	2,257	376	214	162	(51)
Central Support	3,592	599	599	0	0
Asset Rental Support	199	33	33	0	0
HBC Support Costs Income	-843	-141	-141	0	0
Net Total Recharges	6,880	1,146	984	162	(51)
Net Departmental Expenditure	25,531	2,598	2,475	123	324

Comments on the above figures

The net Departmental Expenditure is forecast to be £0.324m under budget at the end of the 2024/25 financial year.

Spend on employees is forecasted to be £1.146m under the annual budget. A restructure is taking place within the Community Safety, Leisure and within the Stadium and Catering Division, in order to facilitate these restructures, posts have been held vacant on a temporary basis, leading to a reduction in costs. There have also been difficulties recruiting to certain roles due to a lack of qualified applicants, which has led to some posts being vacant for longer than planned. The figure is offset from an expected agency spend of £0.363m.

Spend on premises costs is forecast to be £0.071m over the approved budget in 2024/25, the new leisure centre is now expected to hand over within this financial year and will begin to incur costs within 24/25. The original plans were for the leisure centre to utilise the solar farm however the extension required to provide energy to the leisure centre has only recently been submitted for planning, so there is a potential budget pressure next year as the energy will have to be provided elsewhere until the solar farm extension is functioning.

Supplies and Services is showing a forecast overspend of £0.080m which is a budget pressure throughout the Department and is primarily caused by inflationary cost increases of key goods and services over recent years

Waste Disposal Contract costs are forecasted to achieve £0.255m under the approved budget during 2024/25. Costs are likely to increase slightly from 2023/24, however invoices are not received until later in the financial year so it is difficult to fully indicate what the outturn position will be at this stage.

Sales, Fees & Charges, and Markets Income are expected to be below the income target within 2024/25, these are offset against reductions in forecasted expenditure for the year in particular the staffing costs, as the staff are not in place to generate the income, however the full impact of changes of this nature will be realised following the cessation of the School Meals service as this budget pressure absorbs any underspend generated.




Capital Programme 2024/25

Scheme Detail	2024/25 Original Allocation £000	2024/25 Revised Allocation £000	Q1 Spend £000	Q2 Spend £000	Q3 Spend £000	Q4 Spend £000	Total Spend £000	Allocation remaining £000
Environment & Regeneration Directorate								
Community & Greenspace								
Stadium Minor Works	30.0	30.0	7.9				7.9	22.1
Halton Leisure Centre	8,997.0	8,997.0	2,030.0				2,030.0	6,967.0
Children's Playground Equipment	67.8	67.8	1.0				1.0	66.8
Landfill Tax Credit Schemes	340.0	340.0	0.0				0.0	340.0
Upton Improvements	13.0	13.0	0.0				0.0	13.0
Crow Wood Park Play Area	12.0	12.0	0.0				0.0	12.0
Open Spaces Schemes	600.0	600.0	130.0				130.0	470.0
Runcorn Town Park	468.6	468.6	0.0				0.0	468.6
Spike Island / Wigg Island	1,933.5	1,933.5	2.4				2.4	1,931.1
Pickerings Pasture Cafe	503.0	503.0	0.0				0.0	503.0
Replacement Cremator Widnes	308.0	308.0	0.0				0.0	308.0
Litter Bins	20.0	20.0	0.0				0.0	20.0
Total Community & Greenspace	13,292.9	13,292.9	2,171.3	0.0	0.0	0.0	2,171.3	11,121.6





5.0 Application of Symbols

Symbols are used in the following manner:

Progress Symbols

<u>Symbol</u>	<u>Objective</u>	<u>Performance Indicator</u>
Green 	Indicates that the <u>objective is on course to be achieved</u> within the appropriate timeframe.	<i>Indicates that the annual target <u>is on course to be achieved</u>.</i>
Amber 	Indicates that it is <u>uncertain or too early to say at this stage</u> whether the milestone/objective will be achieved within the appropriate timeframe.	<i>Indicates that it is <u>uncertain or too early to say at this stage</u> whether the annual target is on course to be achieved</i>
Red 	Indicates that it is <u>highly likely or certain</u> that the objective will not be achieved within the appropriate timeframe.	<i>Indicates that the target <u>will not be achieved</u> unless there is an intervention or remedial action taken.</i>

Direction of Travel Indicator

Green 	Indicates that performance is better as compared to the same period last year.
Amber 	Indicates that performance is the same as compared to the same period last year.
Red 	Indicates that performance is worse as compared to the same period last year.
N / A 	Indicates that the measure cannot be compared to the same period last year.