

REPORT TO: Corporate Services
Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 8th September 2009

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director Corporate and Policy

SUBJECT: Markets Update

WARDS: Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of the report is to bring members up to date with the current position with regard to Halton's Markets and the work being undertaken by the Markets Topic Group, chaired by Councillor Wainwright.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the report be noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Over the past few years Halton Markets have been operating in an increasingly competitive environment. This is having an impact on trader numbers and Council income.

3.2 This Board, being aware of this situation, has set up a members' working party to look at these issues and see if there were ways to improve the situation to ensure the Borough, its residents and visitors continue to enjoy the benefits of vibrant markets.

3.3 Widnes Market is well occupied but many traders are under pressure. To assist this, the Council has given the traders a ten percent reduction in rent and frozen the rent increase of 2.5 percent that was due in April 2009. This has helped the traders and the numbers leaving have now stopped and some new traders are appearing. The rent arrears are also reducing, with payment plans in place to eliminate all arrears.

3.4 Runcorn Market has stabilised but at a low level; rents are still at half standard rates. Various initiatives have been tried but with little improvement coming through. There is a core of committed traders who work closely with the market management.

3.5 With the problems of the indoor market and the general economic downturn in trade it was felt a radical solution was required.

Consequently, the working party has supported the introduction of a street market and assisted in its setting-up to increase the social and financial vitality of the area. The Market commenced on Tuesday 26 May in Church Street and has proved a great success, partly assisted by some good weather in the first few weeks. It is now very much in the process of establishing itself with stall lettings increasing from 23 to 36 and over 20 different commodities currently on offer. Primarily due to the positive views and rental levels at a rate that encourages traders to stay there is a waiting list of 23 applications. The street market has only had a partial positive impact on the indoor market, but in general the town centre has seen a large increase in visitors on a Tuesday with many of the local retailers benefiting and complaints have been minimal.

3.6 Financially, in the short term the venture breaks even, but in the longer term as the market becomes more established it could show a profit. That nevertheless is only one criterion with the main emphasis at the present time being on maintaining the vibrancy of the area every Tuesday.

3.7 The Working Party is examining further aspects of the operation of both markets and further reports will be brought to this Board.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 None

5.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

5.1 Children and Young People in Halton

N/A.

5.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

By developing markets it increases the number of new and small businesses in the locality that could then expand and increase employment in the longer term.

5.3 A Healthy Halton

N/A.

5.4 A Safer Halton

N/A.

5.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

Making the markets more attractive assists in bringing more people into the town to revitalise the economy.

6.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The town centre is being regenerated

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 Doing nothing was slowly increasing the risk of the town centre failing and further retail units closing.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 None

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

None