

**REPORT TO:** Corporate PPB  
**DATE:** 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2014  
**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director Children and Enterprise  
**PORTFOLIO:** Resources Physical Environment  
**SUBJECT:** Markets Update  
**WARD(S)** Appleton and Mersey

1.0 **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to update Members on initiatives and activities which have taken place at the borough's markets during the period 1<sup>st</sup> November 2012 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2013.

2.0 **RECOMMENDATION: That:**

i) Members note the contents of the report.

3.0 **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

Halton Borough has three markets. Widnes Indoor Market; Widnes Outdoor Market; and Runcorn Outdoor Market.

There are a number of commodities and services on offer at **Widnes Indoor Market** including fresh fruit and vegetables, meat, fish, clothing, footwear, DIY and hardware, jewellery and fashion, beauty and styling, home brew, fishing tackle, confectionery, pet supplies, luggage and bags. There is also a Market Café.

The **Widnes Outdoor market** has over 80 stalls. During four days of the week there is a retail market offering clothing for all ages, food products, bedding and linen, cosmetics and toys. The Flea and Collectibles market each Wednesday offers a vibrant mix of second-hand goods and attracts visitors and traders from some distance.

The **Runcorn Outdoor Market** operates on Church Street. It is very much a seasonal market, with an average of 12 traders attending each Tuesday throughout the year. In the summer months this peaks to 20 traders each Tuesday. Given the character of this market, care has to be taken to ensure that there is a balance of commodities being offered.

The promotion of the Runcorn Outdoor Market has been actively supported financially through the Runcorn Town Team. (The team includes market traders). The focus this year has been on raising the market's profile through the local media, advertisements on buses, as well as providing traders with advertising materials.

As Widnes Indoor and Outdoor Markets are the larger markets, a number of events and promotions have been organised to increase the number of visitors to the market

and the wider town centre. Details are contained in Appendix 1.

These include Widnes On Sea, which includes a fairground, small beach and face painting all free of charge. At Christmas a free grotto is held which includes a free gift for children. Regular updates on twitter and Facebook provide information about bargains and events.

We also piloted a couple of themed Sunday markets or , 'Super Sundays' when Widnes Outdoor Market was open for shoppers, marking Hallowe'en and then a Sunday of 'Americana' to celebrate The Tomahawks coming to Widnes for the World Cup.

The market traders have also undertaken events for Charity, including Food Bank donations to help those in need. A number of charities are supported each year by the traders with events organised to raise funds and involve the local community.

### **Changes and Improvements during the last 12 months**

There are a number of changes and improvements that have been made during the last 12 months.

**Market Accessibility** - The Widnes indoor market is accessible for people in wheelchairs and has recently been awarded the kite mark award to recognise outstanding service to young people with disabilities.

**New Trader Incentives** - Officers within the Council's Economy, Enterprise and Property department have worked hard to encourage new traders into the market.

For example, new traders are provided with introductory rent incentives to help them start up their business.

**Links to Business Start Ups** -The market office has also worked with the Enterprise Officers in the department's Employment Learning and Skills division to support particularly young entrepreneurs to consider the market as a 'first step' to running a business.

**New Stalls and Commodities Committee** -To ensure that the range of commodities remains varied, the Council last year formed the New Stalls and Commodities Committee. This Committee is chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Physical Environment and includes trader representation. This meeting gives the opportunity for a trader representative to discuss which commodities the market should allow in to the market to ensure a vibrant and varied mix. This ensures that new businesses will be more sustainable when they commence trading in the market.

### **Promotions and Partnerships**

During 2013 two promotions partnerships have been developed with local businesses. These are partnerships which are free to both parties and involve promoting each other and the market

Widnes Ice Rink – Free advertisement in the Widnes Wild Ice Hockey match programme for Widnes Market for every home game in return for use of entrance to promote their offer.

Widnes Vikings FC – Free advertising at home games in return for use of main entrance to promote their offer.

Other partnerships include:

NHS – The NHS has a pitch in the market and brought services into the market and increased footfall. Examples of services provided include smoke cessation, weight loss and alcohol programmes to help local people to have a healthier lifestyle.

Police – Cheshire Police have been located within the market since November 2013 and will vacate in January 2014. This is a more short-term project for the festive season to provide advice on issues such as crime and policing. The presence of the police within the market has helped to enhance security in the market.

The above changes and improvements are helping with occupancy levels when other markets are experiencing an increasing number of vacant stalls.

For example, in February 2012 occupancy rates were at 70%. As at 31<sup>st</sup> December 2013, the rate is 88% of However, Members are advised that it will be a significant challenge to maintain these occupancy levels during the next 12 months.

### **Training and development initiatives**

Training has been delivered to traders to help them develop their businesses using social media. This training has given advice on using the internet to set up web sites to promote their businesses, enable their businesses to be located on the internet search. This course also provided advice on ways to use face book and twitter to promote their businesses and advertise for free on a regular basis.

A further training course has been arranged to help traders with low cost ideas for keeping their businesses in the public eye and advising them how they can use public relations effectively and benefit. This course will take place in January 2014.

### **Repairs and Maintenance**

Regular repairs have taken place over the years, and the market roof has been a particular concern. However, in 2013, more in depth repairs of the roof took place to prolong its life.

### **Future Priorities**

#### **Refurbishment Work**

Improvement work to the public toilets, and disabled toilets facilities has been programmed for January 2014.

However, the improvement work scheduled for the entrance to the open market has been delayed due to a land ownership issue between the Council and Morrisons in this particular location. Plans have detailed that both the Council and Morrisons own land within the public toilets which has impacted upon progress to date.

There is a need to resolve this as soon as possible and an alternative design is being sought.

## **Power Supply**

Paradoxically, the increase in traders at the market is having an impact on power supply and this is a real threat to the future vitality of the market. Whilst the installation of LED lights and decreased use of the uplighters within the indoor market has helped, demand frequently outstrips supply and is having an impact on the ability to attract a more diverse commodity offer in the market.

Equally, how traders are charged for electricity needs to be reviewed. For example, approximately 25% of electricity usage in the market is taken by four traders. However, the payment structure does not reflect this. A major review of energy consumption and usage will be undertaken in 2014

## **WiFi Access**

Traders are increasingly using ICT to help their businesses. Wi-Fi has been on the agenda for a couple of years. Some technical constraints have been resolved and this now needs to be given priority.

## **Traders' Committee**

In 2013 the Traders Committee, (different to the Commodity committee described above), was reformed with the introduction of revised terms of reference. It is important that momentum is maintained given this is a key channel of communication between the markets office and traders.

### **4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 There are no further policy implications associated with this report.

### **5.0 OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 Levels of rent arrears at Widnes Indoor Market are still high, although this figure has reduced slightly during the last 12 months. A large proportion of the arrears are historical, going back in some cases over a five year period and relate to former market traders. In the past, the Council has taken a lenient approach in its pursuit of outstanding debts, given the important role the market plays in the town centre.

However, reluctantly, in recent months the Council has been taking a firmer route in reducing the levels of debt, and inevitably, this is resulting in the termination of licences within the market.

Going forward, as part of its on-going review of its services, the Council will need to carry out a cost benefit analysis which links to exploring ways of increasing the commercial viability of the markets, as although the markets generate a surplus each year; this represents a low return on the Council's investment.

### **6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

#### **6.1 Children & Young People in Halton**

N/A

#### **6.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

The markets allow potential entrepreneurs and fledgling businesses the opportunity to set up in a supportive and low risk environment.

**6.3 A Healthy Halton**

N/A

**6.4 A Safer Halton**

N/A

**6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal**

Markets contribute to supporting the respective town centres. It also encourages local residents to 'shop local'.

**7.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 There is a risk that the Council does not see a return on its investment through increased footfall in the markets and wider town centres and an increase in traders paying rent.

**8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 The report refers to improved access to the market. Future actions will seek to ensure that our markets remain accessible for all.

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

None under the meaning of the Act.