



## CORPORATE PPB ANNUAL REPORT

The Council continues to deal with the devastating cuts to funding imposed on it by this Conservative Government - to date over £60 million, a cut of 48 percent. To deal with this problem the council has had to make cuts to the number of people employed so I take this opportunity to thank our staff for their hard work in maintaining the services the people of Halton need.

This is assisted by the diligence and efficiency of the Finance Department who ensure we hit our Budgetary targets. And with the effective collection of Council Tax and Business rates provide the money to deliver the functions the Council has to provide.

Corporate PPB members with the assistance of our team of officers continues to scrutinise the services within its remit to ensure that value for money and efficiency are effectively delivered. So I would like to thank my lead officer Mark Reaney, my Deputy Chair Cllr Ged Philbin and Board members for their support.

We have scrutinised the I.T department to test the effectiveness of the service they provide the board was impressed by the range of services they provide to the community which is such that it has become much easier for residents to access the services they require. Also the realisation that Department sells its services to other Local Authorities bringing money in to support the Councils service delivery.

The Property Services Department ensures the effective use of the Council's buildings and properties which has led to savings and through the selling of land and properties has generated a further £1.9 million which helps to fund other services and developments. These developments include the maintenance and acquisition of Council Care homes within the Borough. The Department has overseen the successful completion of the refurbishment of Widnes Market roof improving insulation thereby reducing heat loss which has helped to contributed to a 7.6 percent reduction in carbon emissions.

The community development officers have by effective use of Area Forum monies brought in an extra £60.427 which has been achieved despite a reduction in staff adding to a cumulative spend of £274,000 all of which has gone to community projects.

Behind the scenes our officers provide the essential budget and performance statistics we need to perform effective oversight of the Councils operations which enables the PPB to carry out its work. We seek to provide a safe and secure environment for our staff to

work in. This is achieved by having a Health and Safety team dedicated to this task. Data is collected on hazards and accident incidents providing the PPB with the information needed to inform policy and instigate change which has led to a reduction in lost time accidents.

The corporate complaints team through its handling and investigation of public dissatisfaction with Council services ensures that we can establish any failings and take appropriate action to ensure our any mistakes or inefficiencies are dealt with properly and lead to service improvement.

The energy efficiency team contrives single handedly to reduce carbon emissions and reduce energy costs.

Finally I would like to thank my Lead Officer Mark Reaney for all the help and advice I have had from him this year and to my Deputy Chair Ged for his continued support. Members of the PPB have worked diligently in scrutinising the Council's activities and I would like them for their endeavours in helping to improve service provision.

- Councillor Bob Gilligan – Chair, Corporate Policy & Performance Board

## **MEMBERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

During 2018/19, the Board comprised of eleven Councillors – R. Gilligan (Chair), G Philbin (Vice Chair), J Abbott, H Howard, M Lloyd-Jones, C Loftus, A Lowe, A McInerney, N Plumpton-Walsh, Joe Roberts, 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 including Communications and Marketing, 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.

### **AMENDMENT TO COUNCIL TAX SECTION 13A DISCOUNT POLICY STATEMENT**

The Board received two reports during the year proposing amendments to the Council Tax Section 13A Discount Policy Statement. The meeting in June received recommendations in connection with care leavers who were jointly and severally liable to pay council tax with one or more residents in a property who were not care leavers. The amendment was to ensure that non care leavers were not advantaged through the policy and the relief was only provided to eligible care leavers. Also, the meeting received a suggested amendment to enable the Council to provide discretionary council tax relief to care leavers regardless of which council had previously acted as their corporate parent. This would ensure that reciprocal arrangements could be provided for Halton care leavers who move to other Boroughs. These recommendations were sent to the Executive Board for consideration.

The November meeting received a further suggested amendment which related to foster carers, in a move to encourage new foster carers and help retain the existing cohort within the Borough. The proposal was to provide 100% council tax discount for all foster carers within the Borough who foster Halton children directly on behalf of the Council. The recommendation was provided to Executive Board.

### **APPRENTICES**

A report was taken to the meeting in June to provide an update on the apprenticeship policy, apprenticeship levy and public sector target. It outlined:

- The current number of apprenticeships;
- The number of new apprenticeships since the introduction of the Government levy in April 2017;
- The development of the existing workforce through the use of apprenticeship levy to promote continuous professional development;
- The work commissioned in 2017 by the Liverpool City Region which resulted in a number of initial recommendations around additional brokerage support and details of key priorities identified;
- An outline of the regional and national picture and
- Halton's Apprenticeship Policy which was updated in 2017.

## **GENDER PAY GAP**

At the June meeting, Members also considered a report which presented information and calculations for the Council in relation to the gender pay gap. From April 2017, gender pay reporting legislation required all organisations that employed over 250 employees to publish statutory calculations every year showing how large their pay gap was between their male and female employees. The gender pay gap was defined as the difference in the average earnings of men and women over a specified period, regardless of their role or seniority. Halton Borough Council's information had been published on 30 March 2018 and full details were outlined in the report.

## **DISCRETIONARY SUPPORT SCHEME**

In September, the Board received a comprehensive report providing updates on the Discretionary Support Scheme (DSS), Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) and Universal Credit (UC).

DSS was now in its sixth year of operation and during 2017/18, 863 awards were made totalling £175,317. Full details of funding and expenditure were outlined in the report. In respect of DHP, Members were advised that in 2017/18 grant funding of £406,692 was received and actual expenditure totalled £412,767 representing 1403 awards. The increase in the number of awards and total expenditure in 2017/18 compared to the previous year had been caused by the increasing number of residents becoming eligible for Universal Credit.

In addition, Members noted that Halton Job Centres had commenced the roll out of UC on 27 July 2016. The report provided details on the case load in Halton and the changes introduced by Government since the introduction.

## **ICT AND SUPPORT SERVICES – SERVICE UPDATE**

A presentation was given to Members at the January meeting by the Operational Director, ICT and Support Services, giving an overview of the make-up of the department to highlight the number of service delivery teams and the breadth of services delivered by them. The ICT Department had reduced staffing by over half in the last 10 years but efficiencies delivered through effective use of technology and the dedication of those working within the specialist areas had allowed the Authority to change in line with its efficiency targets. The Department had taken the opportunity to offer similar innovative platforms to external organisations where appropriate, increasing

income levels and providing opportunity for growth. Commercial opportunities were also expected to expand through the development of school clients.

### **PROPERTY SERVICES**

Also in January, Members considered a report providing an update on initiatives and actions delivered within the Property Services team during the previous 12 months, which included a list of items which would be prioritised over the next 12 months. The report also contained a section dealing with current issues regarding market arrears and developments.

### **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
- Sickness and absence
- School catering and the operation of the Stadium

### **WORK PROGRAMME 2018/19**

During 2018/19, the Board retained the expanded Topic Group which oversaw the operation of the Council's Discretionary Support Scheme and included scrutiny of Univeral Credit. The Board agreed that additional topic groups would be established when the need arose.