



Executive Board

**Thursday, 15 March 2007 2.00 p.m.
Marketing Suite, Municipal Building**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David W R'.

Chief Executive

**ITEMS TO BE DEALT WITH
IN THE PRESENCE OF THE PRESS AND PUBLIC**

PART 1

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1. MINUTES	
2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST	
Members are reminded of their responsibility to declare any personal or personal and prejudicial interest which they have in any item of business on the agenda no later than when that item is reached and (subject to certain exceptions in the Code of Conduct for Members) to leave the meeting prior to discussion and voting on the item.	
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*Please contact Lynn Cairns on 0151 471 7529 or e-mail lynn.cairns@halton.gov.uk for further information.
The next meeting of the Committee is on Thursday, 29 March 2007*

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In accordance with the Health and Safety at Work Act the Council is required to notify those attending meetings of the fire evacuation procedures. A copy has previously been circulated to Members and instructions are located in all rooms within the Civic block.

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 15th March 2007

REPORTING OFFICER: Acting Strategic Director
Children & Young People

SUBJECT: Children's Disability Services

WARDS: All

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To outline the progress made in Children's Disability Services in Halton and seek agreement to the expansion of the Pooled Budget for Disabled Children and revised 'Building Bridges' Multi Agency Strategic Plan for Disabled Children.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION:

- (i) That the Executive Board agree to the expansion of the pooled budget as highlighted within this report.
- (ii) That the Executive Board approve the 'Building Bridges' Multi-Agency Strategic Plan for Disabled Children.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Children's Disability Mini Trust

3.1.1 The Children's Disability Mini Children's Trust was established in April 2006 and built upon an existing Section. 31 registered pooled budget, with a strong track record of partnership working and a multi-agency strategy for services to Children with Disability.

3.1.2 The key features of the Children's Disability Mini Children's Trust were agreed to be as follows:-

- Development of Vision statement
- Revision of the Multi agency Strategy for services to Children with Disability
- Co-location and joint management of services
- Joint funding (HBC & PCT) and appointment of a Strategic Manager post to manage services across the two agencies
- Definition of cohort of children and families to be served by the Children's Disability Mini Trust
- Expansion of pooled budget to include core services

3.1.3 The progress of these developments has been overseen by the Children with Disability Partnership Board, the Children & Young People's (C&YP) Commissioning Partnership and the C&YP Alliance Board.

3.2 Joint appointment of a Strategic Manager Post

3.2.1 The post of Strategic Manager (Children with Disabilities) has been implemented as a joint appointment between the Halton and St Helens PCT (HStH PCT) and the C&YP Directorate. The post provides the Disability Lead within the H&StH PCT and leads the newly established Complex Needs Division within the C&YP Directorate. This post is established as the joint lead for Children's Disability Services and as the lead for the Children's Disability Mini Trust, providing an integrated model of leadership and management.

3.2.2 The following services have now been brought under the management of the jointly funded Strategic Manager as part of the Children's Disability Mini Children's Trust

- Children's Disability Social Work team
- Inglefield Short Break Unit
- Woodview Child Development Centre
- Community Sick Children's Nursing Team
- Paediatric Physiotherapy
- Paediatric Occupational Therapy
- Specialist Speech and Language Therapists

The inclusion of these services into the Mini Trust alongside those services already in place within the Trust establishes the basis for developing integrated services to disabled children and their families.

3.3 Co-location and Joint Management of Services

3.3.1 The services outlined in 3.2.2, have been brought within the Children With Disabilities Mini Children's Trust. However, these services now need to be further re-organised into a coherent and effective management structure as outlined in Appendix 1.

3.3.2 It is planned that the post of Clinical Lead, Health will be established by the H&STH PCT to parallel the role of the Principal Manager, Social Care, within the overall structure. This role will provide operational leadership across the health service elements of the Mini Trust and will lead on the development of Continuing Care processes and leadership of the Shaping Services Team.

3.3.3 The staffing structure proposal will be established with an intention of reviewing roles and functions over the following year to identify further opportunities for front line integration.

3.3.4 It is the intention that all services outlined in 3.2.2 be co-located and appropriate premises are currently being sought.

3.4 Development of Vision Statement; Definition of Cohort

3.4.1 A development day was held on 4 July 2006 to establish the way forward for the CWD Mini Trust. The day was facilitated by Christine Lenehan, Director of the Council for Disabled Children a leading national figure in this service area. Senior managers and practitioners of the PCT and the Children and Young People's Directorate, schools and Connexions attended the day. The role and function of the CWD mini trust was encapsulated in the vision statement outlined below.

- *Every Child with a disability in Halton has the right to fully participate in all aspects of their community. Services will work in partnership with disabled young people and their families to achieve full participation alongside their peers.*
- *Specialist Services will be delivered in a co-ordinated, multi agency and multi disciplinary way on a continuum with preventative and universal services to ensure timely access to the appropriate service.*
- *The promotion of the needs of disabled children and young people and their families and carers will influence local policy and practice to ensure equity of access to all aspects of their communities.*

3.4.2 The cohort of children and young people that the CWD Mini Trust will serve was agreed as:-

A child with disabilities and complex needs is defined as a child whose needs would be encompassed by a combination of the definitions outlined above and who would require a wide range of support from specialist and universal services to enable the child and their family to maximise their opportunities, reach their potential and participate on an equal basis with their peers.

3.4.3 The CWD Partnership Board held a Stakeholder Event on 11 September 2006 at the Brindley. This was again facilitated by Christine Lenehan and provided the opportunity to outline the future direction of child disability services focussing on integration and partnerships. The day also provided an opportunity to consult stakeholders and to celebrate success so far. Feedback on the day has been excellent and reinforces the achievements so far in improving services for disabled children and their families.

3.4.4 A set of draft local performance indicators have been developed and the CwD Partnership Board has agreed to there being piloted from January 2007 for a period of 6 months. Work is also underway to

implement the Alliance Board performance management framework linking to these indicators.

3.4.5 In September Her Majesty's Treasury and the Department for Education and Skills visited Halton Child Disability Services as part of their fact finding toward the Comprehensive Spending Review. The information provided to them reflected the multi agency working and development of integrated working and good practice. The feedback from the visit has been very positive and Halton is seen an example of good practice in the development of services for disabled children.

3.5 Revision of the Multi Agency Strategy.

3.5.1 The Building Bridges Multi Agency Strategy has now been revised to bring it up to date with the Children Act 2004 and the Every Child Matters Programme and reflects the new Alliance Board Structure and the Children and Young People's Plan.

3.5.2 There has been wide consultation with stakeholders in the revision of the strategy and the final draft has now been agreed by the Children's Disability Partnership Board and the Children And Young People's Directorate SMT.

3.5.3 The final draft of the Building Bridges Multi Agency Strategy is attached as **Appendix 2**.

3.6 Expansion of the Children's Disability Pooled Budget

3.6.1 The Children's Disability Pooled Budget has operated formally within the Partnership Agreement since 2004. It has been a high functioning budget that has maintained a healthy balance sheet and is governed by a formal Partnership Agreement

3.6.2 The services that are currently within the Partnership Arrangements and the pooled budget are as follows:-

- Halton Information Exchange
- Shaping Services Team
- Strategic Management
- Support Services for children with a life limiting illness
- Child Development Centre Coordination
- Carers Short Break Commissioned Services

3.6.3 It is proposed that the following additional services are included in the Partnership Arrangement and Pooled Budget from 1st April 2007.

Halton Borough Council Services

- Child Disability Team
- Inglefield Short Break Unit
- Carers Support SLA
- Transition Co-ordinator

Halton and St Helens PCT Services

- Community Sick Children's Nursing Team
- 20% of Speech and Language Therapy Service relating to Children with Complex Needs
- Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy
- Woodview Administration
- Team Around the Child

3.6.4 The benefit of expansion of the Partnership Arrangement is that it will substantially increase the flexibility of developing integrated services for Disabled Children in Halton and further develop the Children's Trust arrangements.

3.6.5 The CWD Mini Trust will become the commissioner and provider of services to this group and will operate within the overall structure of the Halton Children's and Young People's Alliance, with a strong focus of linking to the preventative, universal and integrated process arms of the Alliance Boards work.

3.6.6 There is a robust model of governance in place through the Children and Young Peoples Commissioning Partnership, which provides the Executive Commissioning Function to the Mini Trusts. Budgetary performance and pressures would be managed through this process.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The proposals are consistent with the Council's agreed policy on the development of Mini Children's Trust's and the Every Child Matters, Change for Children Programme

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

None.

6.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 6.1 The plans for Children's Disability Services in Halton are seen as an example of good practice and have been praised by representatives of DFES, HM Treasury and DoH. The risk of not progressing with the plans would be higher in relation to the Joint Area Review planned for March 2008, which will expect to see significant progress.

7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The financial details of the proposal are outlined in **Appendix 3**, which sets out the current 2006/7 and proposed 2007/8 levels of contribution of each partner by total, percentage contribution, and whether the contribution is grant or core funding.
- 7.2 Financial risks are minimal as the demands on the pooled budget are predictable and stable and for the most part consist of staffing budgets. The management of the budget remains within Halton Borough Council and is governed by a robust Partnership Agreement previously agreed with this board and a history of strong performance.
- 7.3 Governance arrangements would continue to be prescribed within the Children's Disability Partnership Agreement, which has been agreed by the Council's Legal Department.
- 7.4 Risks are minimised as the contributions from each partner are in the form of existing posts and budgets with strict arrangements in place for managing the pool within the Partnership Agreement.
- 7.5 The Children's Disability Pooled Budget has demonstrated high performance and financial probity. This is an excellent basis to build upon and its expansion will enable further flexibility in delivering services to disabled children and their families in Halton.
- 7.6 There is no planned increase in expenditure and over time there should be opportunities for efficiencies and redesign as services are delivered in an integrated way.

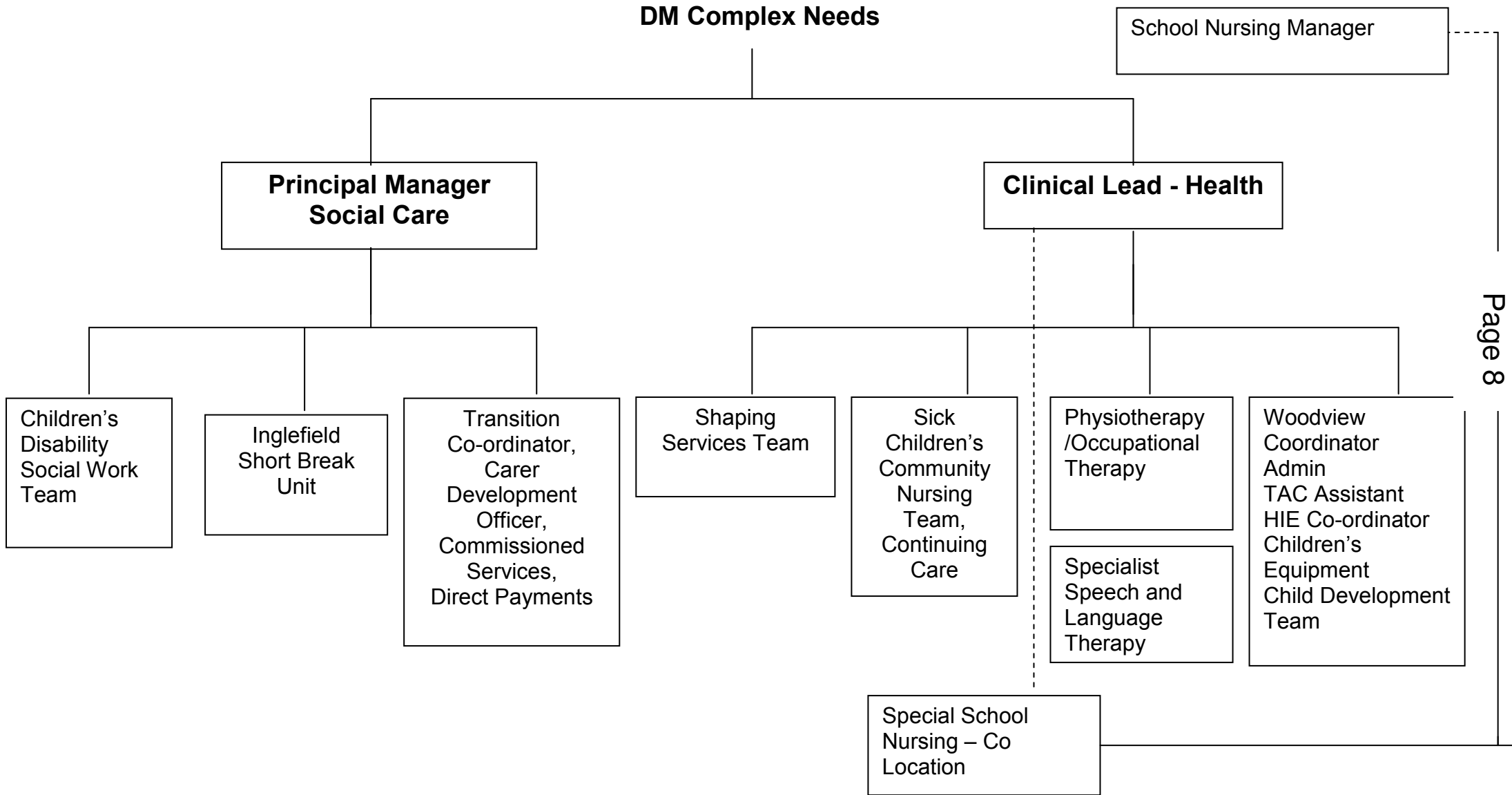
8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 8.1 The development of integrated services for children with complex needs in Halton will serve to support the delivery and equality and the promotion of diversity for children and young people in the Borough.

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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Children Act 2004 Every Child Matters 2003	Kath O'Dwyer's Office 4 th Floor Grosvenor House	Margaret Chaplin, Divisional Manager, Complex Needs.
NSF for Children, Young People and Maternity Services		

CWD Mini Trust Structure Proposal



Appendix 2



Building Bridges

**A Multi Agency Strategy
For Services for Children with Disabilities &
Complex Needs**

2006-09

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1. POLICY STATEMENT

Understanding and measuring the population of disabled children is complicated by differing definitions of disability across agencies, organisations and individuals and a lack of data. However, it is generally accepted that the population of disabled children is growing nationally and that the Halton population is increasing in line with this trend. Based on the national average rate of child disability recommended for service planning and a broad definition of disability it has been estimated that there are approximately 900 disabled children in Halton. Many will access mainstream and universal services and will not need specialist services to support them in this but a smaller, but very significant number will have complex needs and will need support from a range of health, education and social services to reach their potential.

This strategy is in its second phase, the initial phase from 2003 to 2005 predated the introduction of the Every Child Matters Programme, the National Service Framework for Children Young People and Maternity Services and the Children Act 2004 and the Halton Children and Young Peoples Plan. The initial phase of the strategy was in the vanguard of introducing multi agency working and co-ordinated services to children with complex disabilities and much progress has been made. This second phase will sit beneath the Halton Children and Young Peoples Plan will build upon the successes achieved so far, it will reflect the commitment of the Halton Children's Alliance to improve outcomes for disabled children in Halton and the strong commitment in Halton to the promotion of the rights of disabled children to be included in all aspects of the community and to ensuring that specialist services work closely with preventative and universal services to support inclusion.

2. INTRODUCTION:

Most children with a moderate level of disability will reach their potential without needing support from specialist disability services, some will need support from specialist services at particular stages and some will need support on an ongoing basis. In Halton there is a recognition that there needs to be a continuum of support available to children and their families and that specialist support should be available to disabled children and their families if it is needed. This strategy provides a focus for agencies to work together to improve outcomes for those children and their families with complex needs who will require specialist interventions and support.

Disabled children are amongst the most vulnerable groups in our communities and, as such, are at risk of social exclusion, the commitment of agencies to improving outcomes for this group is a significant measure of their effectiveness in meeting the needs of vulnerable groups.

The financial costs of caring for a child with a disability can be high - it costs on average three times as much to raise a child with severe impairment as a non-disabled child. Families also face other pressures, both physical and emotional. However, it has been shown that early intervention and the

provision of appropriate support can reduce the impact of these pressures on families and improve outcomes for children.

Most disabled children with complex needs receive services from health and education, and in 2004-5 ninety seven children and their families received ongoing support from social care services. Most disabled children with complex needs will also have special educational needs and this strategy sits alongside the Strategy for the Inclusion of Pupils with SEN. The two strategies converge to mutually support those children with the most complex SEN and/or disability where that child or young person requires specialist support and intervention across the statutory agencies of health, education and social care.

Services are also provided by the voluntary sector, sports and leisure, Connexions, Children's Fund and Sure Start. In order to have the greatest impact on the lives of children and young people with disabilities and their families, it is essential that all these services work to a single strategy for the commissioning, co-ordination and development of services.

Key partners in the development and delivery of the strategy are children and young people with disabilities and their families. The requirement to work in close partnership is laid out in all government policies and guidance, such as the Children Act 1989, The NHS Plan 2000, Together from the Start 2002, Every Child Matters Change For Children Programme, the Children Act 2004, the National Service Framework for Children, and the Valuing People White Paper 2002. Locally the need for this strategy was initially highlighted in a number of projects including the Ask Us Project, the Child Development Centre Review 2001, the Challenging Behaviour and Learning Disability Workshop 2001 and subsequent Shaping Services Project 2002 . All of these projects included consultation with parents, carers and, in the case of Ask Us, young people. The Building Bridges Strategy was initially developed in 2003 as a response to these consultations and since then parents and carers have played an active part in the work of the Children's Disability Partnership Board (CDPB) and its working groups.

The further development of this strategy will be based on a detailed local analysis of need and will continue to involve consultations with all stakeholders. It will be taken forward through the Children's Disability Partnership Board.

The Building Bridges Strategy contributes to the Children and Young Peoples Plan which is the overarching plan for children's services in Halton by setting out in detail the planning, commissioning and service delivery arrangements for services for children with disabilities and will give direction to the work of the disability mini trust.

The Strategy sets out the underpinning values and principles for provision of services to Disabled Children with complex needs and their families, the outcomes to be achieved the planning structure required to deliver the strategy and the actions which will support agencies in enabling disabled

children with complex needs to achieve the five high level outcomes set out in the Every Child Matters Framework.

3. DEFINITION OF DISABILITY

There are a number of definitions of disability used by different agencies and organisations:

- The Disability Discrimination Act 2005 defines a disabled person as “ someone who has a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities”. This is a broad definition that encompasses most groups across agencies.
- The education service focuses primarily upon children and young people with special educational needs as defined in the Education Act 1996. A learning disability within the Education Act 1996 may include health and social care needs where these present a barrier to learning
- Social care services provide services subject to threshold criteria to children and families with more complex needs based on the definition of disability within the Children Act 1989:

“a child is disabled if he is blind, deaf or dumb or suffers from mental disorder of any kind or is substantially and permanently handicapped by illness, injury or congenital deformity or such other disability as may be prescribed; and in this Part—

"development" means physical, intellectual, emotional, social or behavioural development; and

"health" means physical or mental health

- Together From the Start 2000 recognises that it is not easy to apply existing legal definitions of disability to children under 3 years and provides an effective working definition for this age group. “ A child under 3 yrs of age shall be considered disabled if he/she:
 - i. Is experiencing significant developmental impairment or delays, in one or more of the areas of cognitive development, sensory or physical development, communication development, social, behavioural or emotional development ; or
 - ii. has a condition which has a high probability of resulting in developmental delay
- The British Association for Community Child Health, Standards for Child Development Services, has a similar definition to that within the DDA but expands Communication to include speech and language.

- There is also a social definition of disability which defines disability as the system of social constraints that are imposed on those with impairments by the discriminatory practices of society.

The broad range of definitions highlights the difficulties in integrating services for children with disabilities and creating a common understanding of what disability is and what services for children with disabilities should encompass.

This strategy is aimed at children with complex disabilities and health needs and will need to be wide ranging in considering the needs of these children from early identification through to transition and adulthood. It will identify those areas where improvements can be made to promote early identification and support, family and carer support, participation and inclusion.

A child with disabilities and complex needs is defined as a child whose needs would be encompassed by a combination of the definitions outlined above and who would require a wide range of support from specialist and universal services to enable the child and their family to maximise their opportunities, reach their potential and participate on an equal basis with their peers.

4. VALUES AND PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING THE STRATEGY

The vision for Halton which is set out in the Children and Young People's Plan is :

'A community committed to realising high aspirations where all children, young people and families are valued and respected and where inclusion and diversity are promoted.'

The vision for this strategy and the Children's Disability Mini Trust is:

- Every Child with a disability in Halton has the right to fully participate in all aspects of their community. Services will work in partnership with disabled young people and their families to achieve full participation alongside their peers.
- Specialist Services will be delivered in a co-ordinated, multi agency and multi disciplinary way on a continuum with preventative and universal services to ensure timely access to the appropriate service.
- The promotion of the needs of disabled children and young people and their families and carers will influence local policy and practice to ensure equity of access to all aspects of their communities.

The services developed and delivered in Halton within the parameters of this Strategy are based on a belief that:

- ❖ Every child is of equal value,
- ❖ Every child has certain fundamental rights
- ❖ Good health, family life and education are important for all children
- ❖ Gender, race, age, disability, and sexual orientation should be respected
- ❖ Children, young people and their families and carers are key partners in the planning and delivery of services and in their individual service provision.
- ❖ All children should be enabled to achieve their full potential
- ❖ All children should be protected from harm
- ❖ All children should have the same opportunities to participate in cultural, leisure, educational, employment and independent living experiences

5. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

The rights of all children and their families and the framework for the provision of services are enshrined in key pieces of legislation and associated regulations and guidance:

- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child recognises the rights of all children to Protection, Provision and Participation
- The Human Rights Act (1998) recognises the right to privacy and family life, and protection from inhumane and degrading treatment
- The Children Act (1989) requires local authorities to identify children in need, to support families in caring for children and to develop services around the centrality of a child's best interests.
- Disability Discrimination Act (1995) amended 2005 gives children with disability equal access to goods and services
- The Children Act (2004) and the Every Child Matters, Change for Children programme set out a national framework for change in the delivery of services to children and their families to ensure integrated services with early identification of special needs and an integrated multi agency response.
- The National Service Framework for Children, Young People and Maternity Services establishes clear standards for promoting the health and well being of children and young people and for providing high quality services that meet their needs. There are eleven standards and Standard 8 relates to Disabled Children and Young People and those with Complex Health needs.

The main themes of this standard are:

- ❖ Services promote social inclusion for disabled children and young people, to enable them to participate in childhood, family and community activities.
- ❖ Disabled children and young people have increased access to hospital and primary health care services, therapy and equipment services and social services.

- ❖ Services are coordinated around the needs of the child and family.
 - ❖ Services provide early identification of health conditions, impairments and any social and physical barriers to inclusion, through integrated diagnosis and assessment processes.
 - ❖ There is better early intervention and support to parents of disabled children through the development of multi-agency packages of care, including the use of direct payments and employment of 'key workers'.
 - ❖ Palliative care is available for those who need it. A range of flexible, sensitive services is available to support families in the event of the death of a child.
 - ❖ Services have robust systems to safeguard disabled children and young people, who are more likely to be vulnerable to abuse than non-disabled children.
 - ❖ Multi-agency transition planning takes place to improve support for disabled young people entering adulthood.
- The Carers and Disabled Children's Act 2000 supplements the Carers (Recognition and Services Act) 1995 by enabling local authorities to provide carers services in response to an assessment of need and also enables carers to receive Direct Payments in lieu of services.
 - The SEN and Disability Act 2001 established legal rights for disabled children and young people in educational settings not to be discriminated against or treated 'less favourably' than a non-disabled person for a reason that relates to the person's disability.
 - The NHS Plan 2000, outlined a new delivery system for the NHS and changes for social services and changes for NHS staff groups. It also set out plans for cutting waiting times, clinical priorities and reducing inequality.
 - Together From the Start 2002, guidance was produced primarily for use by all professionals involved with the planning and delivery of services to disabled children.
 - The Valuing People White Paper 2002, outlined the government's plan for improving the lives of people with learning disabilities.

6. PRINCIPLES IN PRACTICE

Services for children with disabilities will be characterised by the following:-

- **Flexibility** –Services will be developed that put the needs of the child at the centre of service delivery.
- **Choice** – where possible we will have a range of different services available with elements of choice for children and families
- **Accessibility** – while some services provided by statutory agencies will be subject to assessment and threshold criteria, other services in

the community will provide open access to children and families and some services are universal. Whether services are universal or subject to assessment the process for accessing them will be simple and clear and will avoid duplication.

- **Transparency** - where access to services is subject to assessment, these processes will be fair and transparent with the child and family participating fully and having access to all information recorded about them.
- **Multi-Agency** – Social Services, Education, Health, the voluntary sector and other agencies will work in partnership, together with parents to improve outcomes for disabled children with complex needs.
- **Inclusion** - Disabled children have the right to be included and to access services and activities within their local communities. Halton adopts the Merseyside regional policy on Inclusion which promotes the inclusion of every child in the mainstream early years setting or school of parental choice.
- **Participative** – services promote participation of young people within their communities
- **Valuing** –services will promote self-esteem and self-reliance, value children and their families
- **Holistic** – the provision of services will not focus exclusively on needs arising from disability, but will take note of other needs of children and their families
- **Outcome Focussed** – services will focus on improving outcomes and will be able to evidence improvement.

7. Aims of the Strategy

The aims of the strategy are that:

1. Disabled children with complex needs are supported to participate in all mainstream and community services, so that they have the same opportunities and experiences as their non-disabled peers.
2. Disabled children with complex needs are actively involved in and supported to make informed choices about their own plans including assessments, treatment and care, and in planning and development of services that affect them.
3. Families of disabled children with complex needs receive support through co-ordinated multi agency services. All families with high levels of need should have access to a key worker/lead professional.
4. Processes are in place to support early identification and provide specialist multi agency assessment to those children identified as having complex needs.

5. Disabled children with complex needs and their families receive effective early interventions including timely therapy services and provision of equipment.
6. Disabled children with complex needs receive effective multi agency support to enable smooth transition at key stages in their lives.
7. Children with disabilities are protected from harm within their community.
9. Service users will have the choice of a range of services provided by a range of agencies

These aims reflect:-

- Issues which are important to children, young people and their families
- Priorities for agencies currently working with children with disabilities
- Current Government agendas for children with disabilities, including the Every Child Matters Change for Children Programme, the National Services Framework and Valuing People, the SEN and Disability Act 2001

8. Outcomes

The outcomes we aim to achieve for children with disability are based on the five outcomes outlined in Every Child Matters and the 25 broad aims of the Children Act 2004:

Outcome 1 - Be Healthy

All Children with Disabilities will be enabled to achieve a healthy lifestyle.

- 1.1 Being physically healthy.
- 1.2 Being mentally & emotionally healthy
- 1.3 Being sexually healthy
- 1.4 Eating well and exercising
- 1.5 Choosing not to take illegal drugs

Outcome 2 - Stay Safe

All Children with Disabilities will be protected from harm and neglect and provided with the opportunity to grow up to become as independent as possible.

- 2.1 Being safe from maltreatment, neglect, violence & sexual exploitation.
- 2.2 Being safe from accidental injury & death.
- 2.3 Being safe from bullying & discrimination.

- 2.4 Being safe from crime & anti-social behaviour in and out of school.
- 2.5 Having security, stability and are cared for.

Outcome 3 - Enjoy and Achieve

All Children with Disabilities will be provided with the opportunity to get the most out of life and to develop the broad skills needed for adulthood.

- 3.1 Having early years opportunities
- 3.2 Attending and enjoying school
- 3.3 Achieving educational standards at primary school
- 3.4 Developing personally and socially and enjoying recreation.
- 3.5 Achieving educational standards at secondary school.

Outcome 4 - Make a Positive Contribution

All Children with Disabilities will be supported in making a positive contribution to the community and in not engaging in anti-social or offending behaviour.

- 4.1 Engaging in decision-making processes within the community.
- 4.2 Engaging in law-abiding and positive behaviour in and out of school.
- 4.3 Developing positive relationships and choosing not to bully and discriminate.
- 4.4 Developing self-confidence & successfully dealing with significant life changes and challenges.
- 4.5 Developing enterprising behaviour.

Outcome 5 - Achieve Economic Well Being

All Children with Disabilities will be provided with support in achieving economic well being.

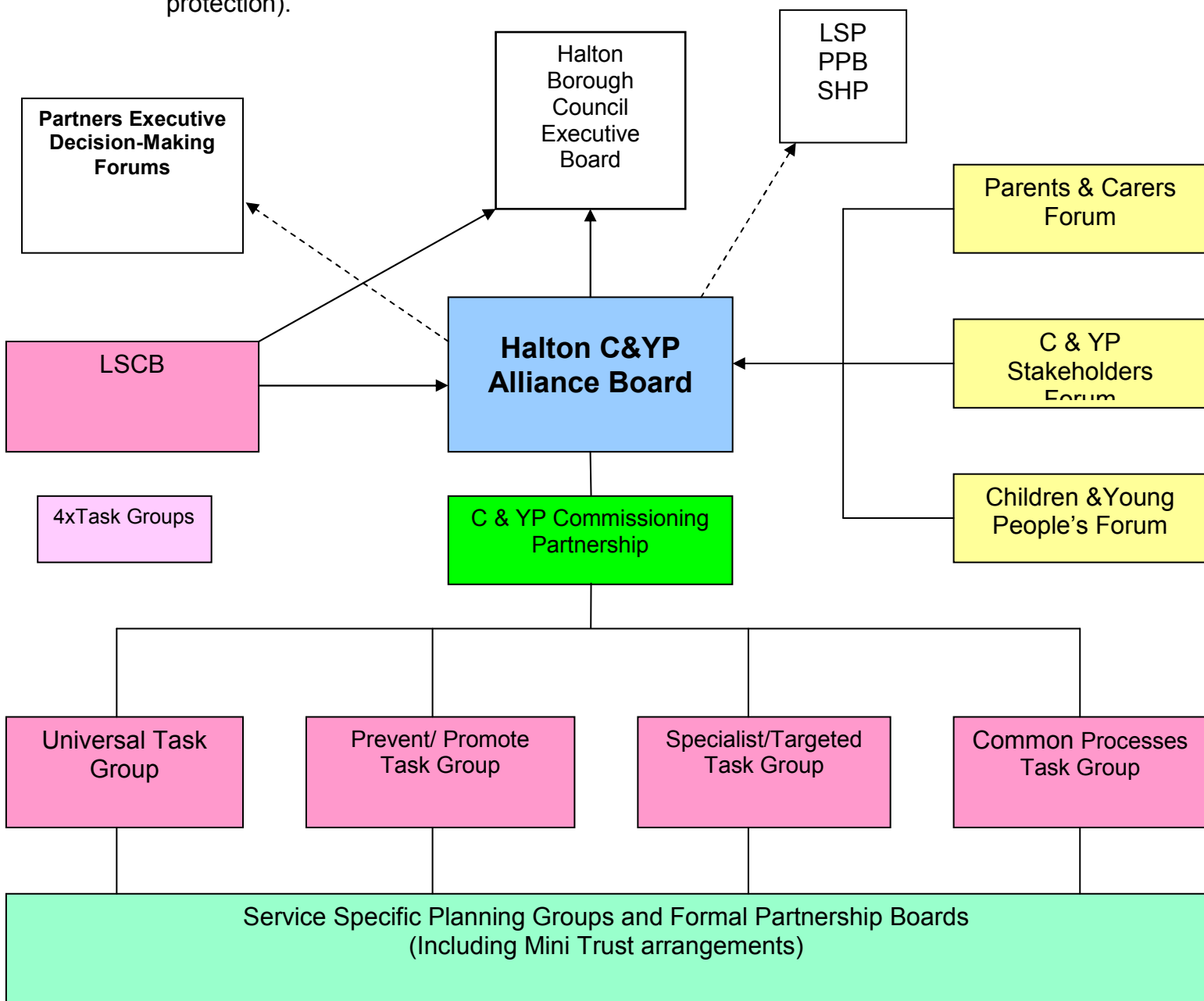
- 5.1 Engaging in further education, employment or training on leaving school.
- 5.2 Being prepared for employment.
- 5.3 Living in decent homes & sustainable communities.
- 5.4 Having access to transport & material goods.
- 5.5 Living in households free from low income.

9. PLANNING ARRANGEMENTS IN HALTON

1. Children and Young Peoples Alliance

A multi agency approach to meeting the needs of children and young people in Halton was initially developed in 2003 through the Children and Young Peoples Partnership.

The strategic role of the Children & Young Peoples Strategic Partnership is now being developed incrementally through six mini-trusts which in 2008 will become integrated into a single Children's Trust. The Children and Young Peoples Partnership has been re-constituted as the Children and Young Peoples Alliance Board to which the six mini trusts will report. From 1 April 2006 there will be mini trusts for CAMHS, Looked After Children, Children with Disabilities and Preventive Services. During 2006/07 mini trusts will be established for Children's Centres and Children in Need (including child protection).



The vision for such Trusts in Halton is based on a model of pooled budgets, joint commissioning, inter-agency governance arrangements, together with the joint management and co-location of staff where this makes sense to children, young people and their families. They will support those who work every day with children, young people and their families to deliver better outcomes – with

children and young people experiencing more integrated and responsive services, and specialist support embedded in and accessed through universal services. People will work in effective multi-disciplinary teams, be trained jointly to tackle cultural and professional divides and use a lead professional model where many disciplines are involved

Between 2006-7 the initial phase of service specific mini-trusts will seek opportunities for the co-location of staff teams where it makes sense to children and families receiving services, and will develop inter-agency governance arrangements.

The Alliance will be led by the local authority as this is where responsibility for some key statutory duties relating to children lie. The Director of Children's Services will be accountable for the services provided by the Alliance, and the Lead Member for children will be politically accountable.

The Alliance Board will:

- Develop joint measures for improving local outcomes for children and young people, including the establishment of pooled funds and the provision of staff, goods, services, accommodation or other resources as appropriate
- develop and implement the Children and Young People's Plan
- develop mechanisms for realigning resources and commissioning new services
- share information including performance management information and details of staffing, intervention/activity budgets and locally agreed performance targets
- develop reporting mechanisms for all agencies' performance information, and arrangements that address failures of services in meeting targets
- give consideration to and where appropriate ratify all significant service developments, strategies and plans concerning children and young people
- ensure wide participation in the planning and delivery of services via a robust communication/consultation/participation strategy, to include children, young people, parents and the stakeholders forum

The Alliance is underpinned by a **Compact** that sets out how the partners in Halton will work together to deliver better outcomes for children and young people. The range of new statutory duties for relevant partners introduced in the Children Act 2004 are included in the Compact. Each partner's contribution to the achievement of the Halton vision, together with the delivery of their statutory responsibilities forms part of the local strategic and operational arrangements. The Compact specifies who the partners and signatories are, what the expectations are of all partner agencies including adherence to the *Nolan principles*, information-sharing arrangements, accountability arrangements, responsibilities of the Alliance Board, structure and remit of all the sub-groups of the Alliance Board, the relationship of the Board to other strategic decision-making structures in Halton, and action to be taken in circumstances where agencies are identified as failing to co-operate.

10. STRUCTURE TO DELIVER THE STRATEGY

There are a number of organisations, agencies and providers who are involved in the delivery of services to children with disabilities. Each of these have service plans, structures and processes which govern their delivery of services. This multi agency strategy will co-ordinate these individual service plans with the aim of:

- integrating assessment processes for access to services
- providing both open access services and services to meet assessed needs.

•

In order to develop and deliver this strategy effectively there needs to be a robust and coherent structure that:

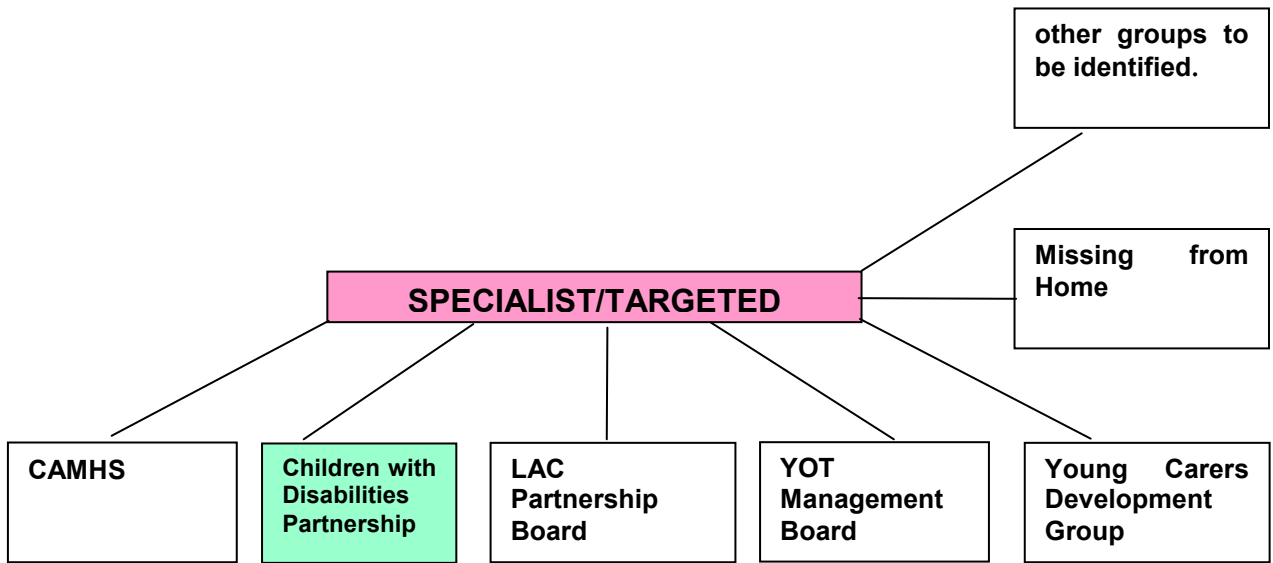
- Is easily understood by all stakeholders.
- Enables the participation of all stakeholders.
- Has the capability to change things for the better.
- Enables the work of the various stakeholders to be complementary and co-ordinated.

Children's Disability Partnership Board

The Children's Disability Partnership Board will oversee the implementation of the Strategy and for contributing to the delivery of the Children and Young People's plan.

The functions of the Children's Disability Partnership Board are:

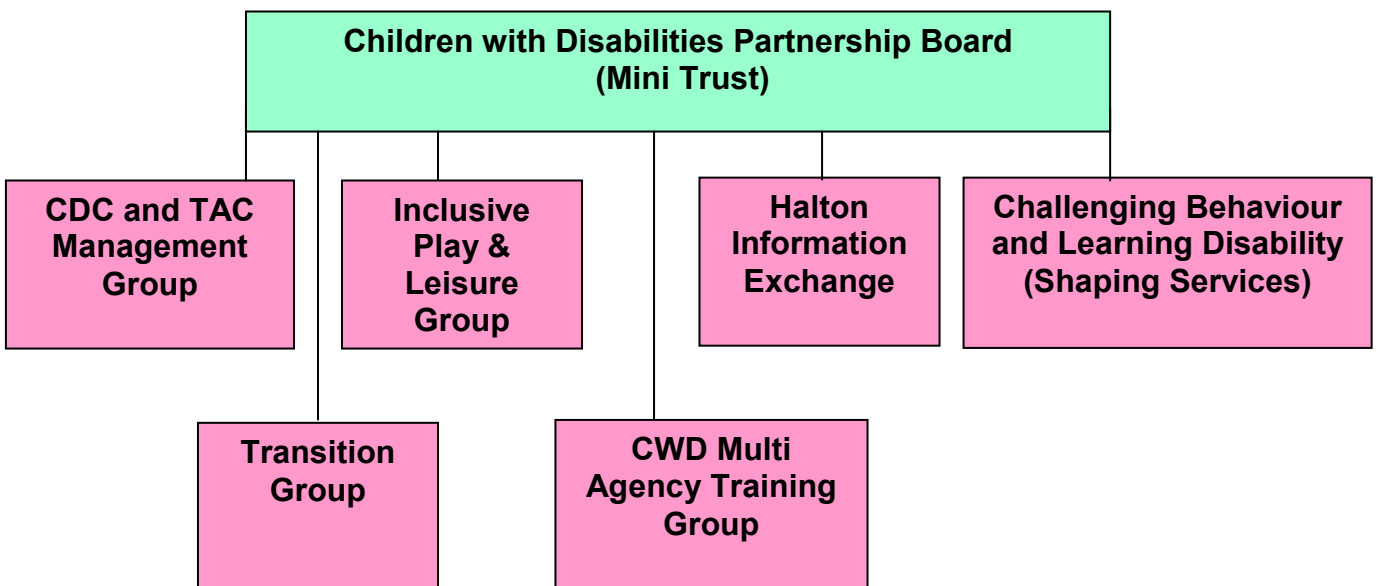
- To advise the Children and Young Peoples Alliance on all matters in relation to children with disabilities
- To develop and review Halton's strategic plan for children with disabilities as part of the overall strategic plan for children and young people
- To take account of research findings and government guidance and publications.
- To maintain an up-to-date analysis of local need.
- To identify service development needs.
- To promote multi agency training
- To monitor performance
- To develop integrated and co-ordinated multi agency working through the development of integrated teams with integrated governance arrangements.



Within this approach, three aspects of work will be piloted by the Children 's Disability Partnership Board, with the aim of developing single team governance and promoting the principles and aims noted throughout this document. The three aspects of work are:

- Integrated management and delivery of service,
- Co-location of staff
- Joint Commissioning from a Pooled Budget

A number of sub groups with a specific focus relating to the overall strategy will report to the Partnership Board:



The sub groups of the Partnership Board may change to reflect current needs and could therefore be short or long standing.

Membership

Agencies who are members of the Children's Disability Partnership Board are represented by senior managers at an appropriate level to influence the commitment of their agency's resources. Membership includes:

- The Children and Young People's Directorate
- Housing
- The Primary Care NHS Trust
- Connexions
- The Voluntary and Independent sector
- Schools
- Adult Services
- Elected members

Involvement of Parents, Children and Young People

A Parents Forum for parents and carers of children and young people aged 0 –19 living within Halton has been established to act as a reference group for the Children and Young People's Alliance Board and to enable the views of parents and carers to be integral in the developments of services. The Forum aims to be inclusive with membership from across all sectors of society and will include the parents of children with disabilities and other service specific groups.

The Forum will receive information on a range of key issues and consultations and will contribute views on the planning, implementation and development of services.

The Forum is supported by officers who engage with it at a variety of levels and outreach support is provided to canvas the views and contributions of parents and carers who are reluctant to fully engage with Forum meetings. The Forum will meet on a quarterly basis at a range of venues across the Borough.

The Children and Young People's Forum will also act as a reference and consultation group for the Alliance Board.

The aim is to create **Area Youth Forums** which will be co-terminus with the borough's areas and include youth representatives from all sectors of the partnership including voluntary youth organisations. Each area of the borough would elect two young people to form a Borough Youth Forum and to be candidates, should they wish, for the position of Member of Youth Parliament for Halton. The Borough Youth Forum would be involved in the development of the Children's Trust and inform and influence the development of the "Hear by Right" agenda within services and organisations for young people. It will

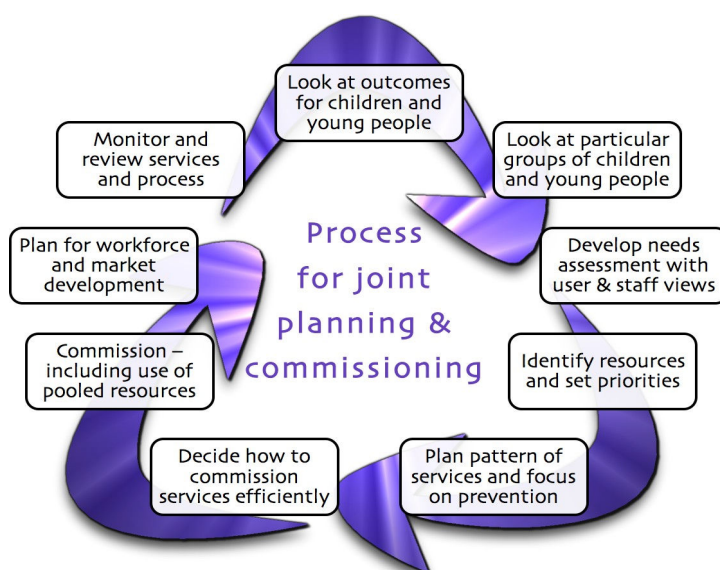
ensure that the views of children and young people, including children with disabilities, are taken into account at all stages of the planning and delivery of services.

Issues from these two forums which affect children with disabilities and their families will feed into the work of the Children’s Disability Partnership Board and Mini Trust and issues on which the Trust requires consultation with parents, children and young people will be referred to both Forums for advice and consultation.

11. COMMISSIONING

Commissioning is the process of:

- ❖ assessing what services are needed in conjunction with all stakeholders in order to improve the outcomes for children and young people and mapping current provision(needs analysis).
- ❖ prioritising against national, local and service specific priorities
- ❖ putting into place those services in the most effective way to meet local needs (Planning the pattern of services)
- ❖ identifying where resources can be pooled between children’s alliance partners (pooling budgets and joint commissioning)
- ❖ ensuring that the workforce is in place to deliver those services across the statutory, voluntary and independent sectors (Workforce and Market development)
- ❖ allocating resources to secure those services against outcome based targets (contracting)
- ❖ monitoring and reviewing services against the delivery of the outcomes for children and young people.



The commissioning process should ensure that;

- ❖ there is an understanding across agencies on the needs of children with disabilities and their families that is informed by local and national priorities and by the view and experiences of service users.
- ❖ Services are planned to meet those needs in a multi agency context
- ❖ Resources are identified and where appropriate pooled to provide the most effective services.
- ❖ Services are measuring success based on the outcomes for children

The commissioning of services for children with disabilities will link to the overall Halton Children and Young People's Joint Commissioning Strategy and will further develop the overarching needs analysis with a more detailed and specific needs analysis for children with disabilities and a detailed commissioning plan. All commissioning activity will be overseen and co-ordinated by the Children and Young People's Integrated Commissioning Partnership and reported to the Children's Disability Partnership Board and will ensure the achievement of best value, economy, efficiency and effectiveness in the provision of services to all children and young people in Halton.

Pooled Budget

A Pooled Budget is in existence that is registered under S31 of the Health Act 1999, and is a partnership between Halton Borough Council and Halton Primary Care Trust. The partnership jointly provides the following services

- Child Development Team Co-ordination
- Challenging Behaviour Service (Shaping Services)
- Halton Information Exchange (Child Disability Register)
- Strategic Management
- Carer Short Breaks

Further opportunities will be sought to jointly commission services through increasing the pooled budget or other opportunities.

12. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

To measure how well the outcomes for children and young people in Halton are being achieved, all partners have adopted a unified Performance Management Framework

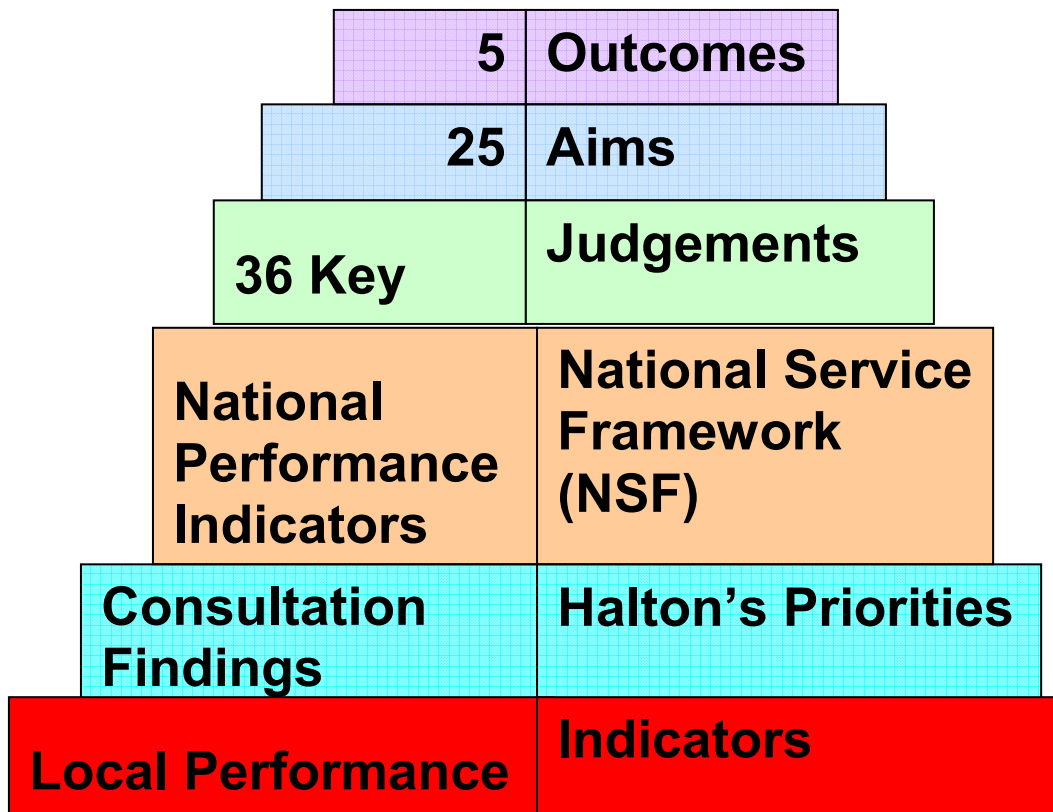
Performance will be measured against Local Targets that have been developed based on local need and against National Targets and Indicators across agencies involved in delivering services to Children with Disabilities.

The framework interweaves the Children Act Outcomes Framework with the range of national and local performance indicators for services to children and families, the key judgments of the Joint Area Review and the Halton Local Priorities. The framework will ensure the development of local performance indicators for the Children's Disability Partnership Board to effectively measure the outcomes of the services it provides for children with disabilities.

It will also provide the basis for the identification of service gaps that will inform the commissioning process. The framework allows for remedial action to be taken through the monitoring process using the 'traffic light system'

Each service provider fills in a quarterly data monitoring form which is submitted to the Children and Young People Directorate. Performance against national and local indicators will then be collated both by the Children and Young Peoples Directorate Quality and Data Division and by the Children's Services Quality Assurance Unit and will be reported to the Children's Disability Partnership Board and the Children and Young People's Alliance Board. Detailed quarterly performance management reports will be prepared for the Children's Disability Partnership Board, which detail performance against outputs and outcomes during the previous quarter and report on issues which arise from this performance. In addition, a more detailed annual business performance report will be produced. The Building Bridges Strategy and associated Plans will be reviewed on an annual basis.

The framework below gives a diagrammatic overview of the system for mapping all services for children and young people in Halton against the Children Act Outcomes Framework, national priorities and local priorities which include the findings of a major consultation exercise undertaken between November 2004 and February 2005 and will include the findings of a consultation on the Children and Young People Plan via the Halton Borough Council web site.



Reporting Requirements

The Children and Young Peoples Directorate Quality and Data Division receive information from all partner agencies which is then incorporated into the Children and Young Peoples database. The database can be interrogated to provide a wide range of information on individual children which assists in the early multi agency assessment of need and provides comprehensive performance information on children with disability issues which is reported to the Children's Disability Partnership Board and the Children and Young People's Alliance Board on a quarterly basis.

13. GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

The six core principles of good public service governance identified by the Independent Commission on Good Governance in Public Services (OPM and CIPFA (2004) *The Good Governance Standard for Public Services*), have been adopted by the Children's Disability Mini Trust. These are:

➤ **Focusing on the organisation's purpose and on outcomes for citizens and service users**

The Alliance and Children's Disability Mini Trust Business Plans, associated Strategies and the Halton Performance Management Framework fulfil the requirement to be clear about the organisation's purpose and its intended outcomes for service users.

All significant disability service developments, strategies and plans will be ratified by the Children's Disability Partnership Board and will be reported to the Children and Young People's Alliance Board. The outcomes to be achieved for children and families will be the foundation of all agreed service developments, strategies and plans.

➤ **Performing effectively in clearly defined functions and roles**

In Halton the Director of Children's Services has the lead role in establishing and maintaining inter-agency governance arrangements; the Lead Member for Children's Services has responsibility for ensuring that sound governance arrangements and a clear framework of accountability are in place, and has a leadership role in engaging local communities within the local authority and across partner agencies. The Halton Children and Young People Alliance Board is responsible for monitoring compliance with governance arrangements and offering strategic leadership and direction to drive through change.

In respect of children with disabilities and their families, the Children's Disability Partnership Board will be chaired by an Elected Member of the Halton Borough Council .The Multi Agency Strategy Manager for

Children with Disabilities will have lead responsibility for ensuring that a clear framework for the monitoring performance is in place.

➤ **Promoting values for the whole organisation and demonstrating the values of good governance through behaviour**

Members of the Children's Disability Partnership Board have collective responsibility and accountability for its decisions. Members should strive to make decisions that further the aims of the Trust in promoting outcomes for children with disabilities rather than the interests of their own agency.

Members of the Children's Disability Partnership Board are expected to work in partnership in line with the *Nolan principles* for the conduct of people in public life:

- Selflessness
- Integrity
- Objectivity
- Accountability
- Openness
- Honesty
- Leadership

➤ **Taking informed, transparent decisions and managing risk**

The Children's Disability Partnership Board will be the forum for considering issues in respect of children with disabilities. Decisions will be recorded and the minutes available for professional scrutiny. The Board will be supported by professional officers and will receive regular performance management and professional information which will indicate whether any of the Boards strategies, policies or performance areas are at risk.

➤ **Developing the capacity and capability of the governing body to be effective**

Agencies will be represented on the Children's Disability Partnership Board by a senior manager with the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to undertake the functions of a Board member. The Children's Disability Mini Trust Business Plan will be developed jointly by agency Board members and will be reviewed annually at a Board business planning day which will evaluate performance in relation to children with disabilities.

➤ **Engaging stakeholders and making accountability real**

The Children's Disability Partnership Board is the forum within which agencies are engaged with the process of delivering services for children with disabilities. The new integrated inspection framework, led by Ofsted, will inspect how Children's Services work together and the

development and outcomes delivered by Children's Trust arrangements in each area and will be significant in assessing the engagement of all stakeholders.

In addition forums have been established for parents, children and young people and institutional stakeholders. These forums will receive information on key issues and consultations and will contribute views on the planning, implementation and development of services.

The range of public information leaflets on children with disability processes also increase the accountability of agency members to the public in the execution of their professional responsibilities.

14. NEEDS ANALYSIS

This needs analysis sits beneath and links to the overall needs analysis for the Halton Children and Young Peoples plan and extends the detailed information on the needs of disabled children with complex needs in Halton in as far as the limited data allows and much of this is based on the current service usage as this can provide a good indication of need, although it is accepted that this is limited and improved data collection is needed to fully understand the needs of this population.

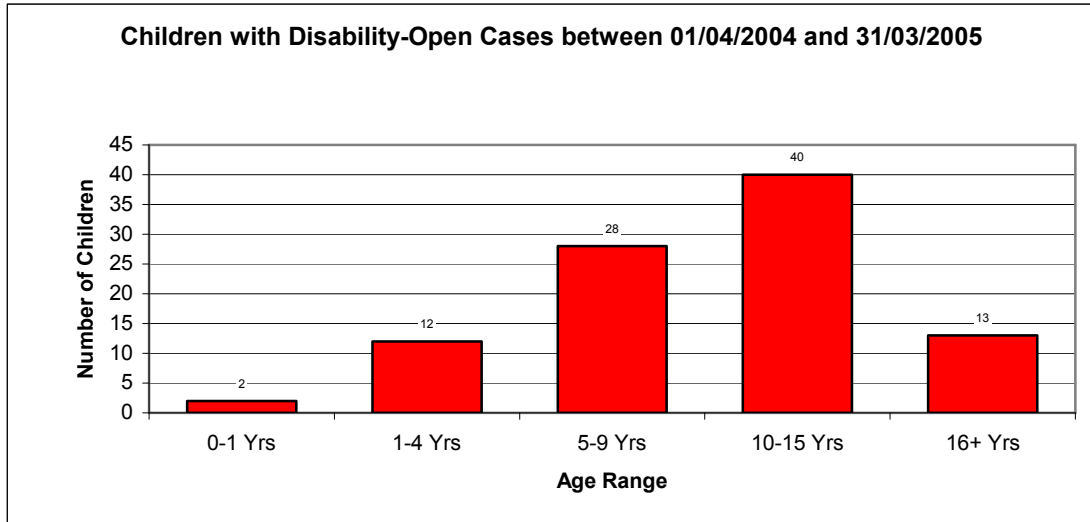
Counts of people with disabilities in the population as a whole are difficult to obtain and doubly so for any sub groups of the population. To some degree the Census can be used as a proxy measure of disability by using it's limiting long - term illness measure. This data has been analysed in the overarching Halton Children and Young People's Needs Analysis and has showed that there were 1,358 children with limiting long-term illness. The first phase of the Building Bridges Strategy indicated that there were over 600 disabled children living in Halton in 2002/3 and that this number was increasing in line with national trends. Reporting on 'disability ' is difficult due to the varying definitions; the national prevalence of Child Disability reported through DFES is 7% (770,000) whilst 'Together From the Start' suggests a prevalence of 3% for planning.

This needs analysis will focus on a smaller cohort of disabled children who have complex needs and who receive services from a range of agencies. It will examine the data available and the analysis of the information will be reflected in the Action Plan.

Child Disability Social Work Team

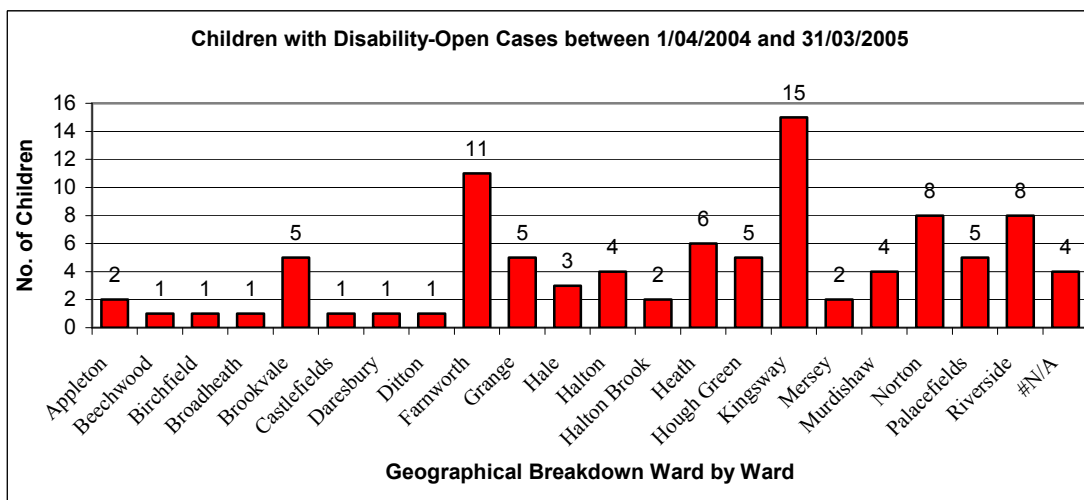
The Children with Disabilities Team is a specialist team that provides social work support, community services and residential provision for children with disabilities and their families. The staff group consists of 28 people including Social Workers, Community Support Workers, Care Workers, Administrative staff, a Cook, General Assistants and Handymen. The team is based on two sites with the Principal Manager, Practice Manager and the residential staff based at Inglefield Children's Centre in Runcorn and Practice Manager, Social Workers and support staff at Peelhouse Family Centre in Widnes. This enables the provision of a localised service to families throughout the Borough. In 2004/5 95 children received a service via the Child Disability Social Work Team.

Fig. 1



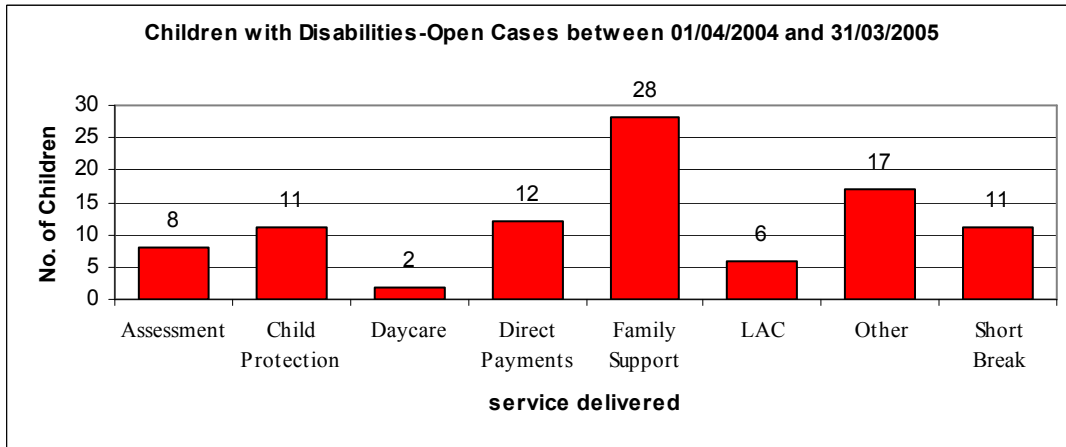
Most current involvement is in 5 to 15 yr age group with fewer young people over 16yrs receiving a service, although this could be because they are receiving a service from another council service.

Fig 2



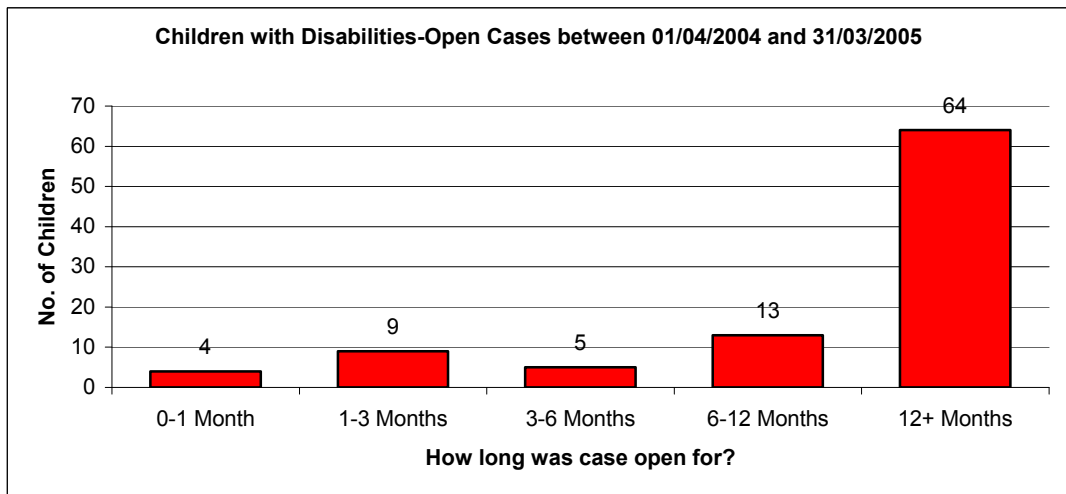
Farnworth, Kingsway, Norton and Riverside wards have the highest prevalence of disabled children living within their boundaries.

Fig 3



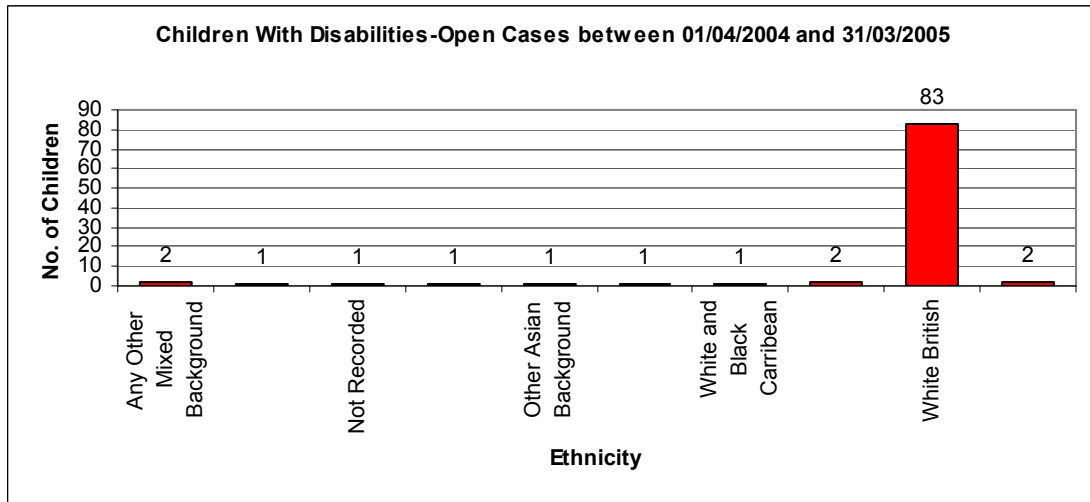
The greatest service demand was for family support, short breaks and direct payments. Families receiving direct payments can find it difficult to purchase a service if they require support for children with the most challenging behaviours and complex needs.

Fig 4



Most cases remain open for 12 months or more, this is due to the ongoing need for family support amongst families with children with the most complex needs. Disabled Children and their families who meet the threshold to receive a Social Care service will most likely be those with complex needs.

Fig 5



There were very few open cases involving children from minority backgrounds reflecting the overall population of Halton.

Equipment and Adaptations

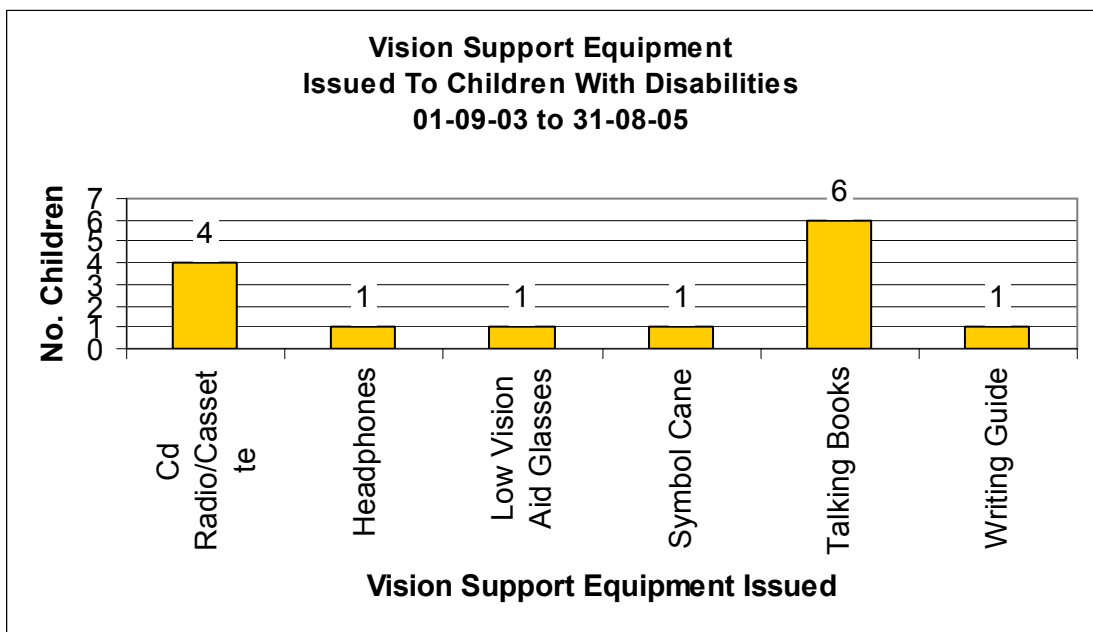
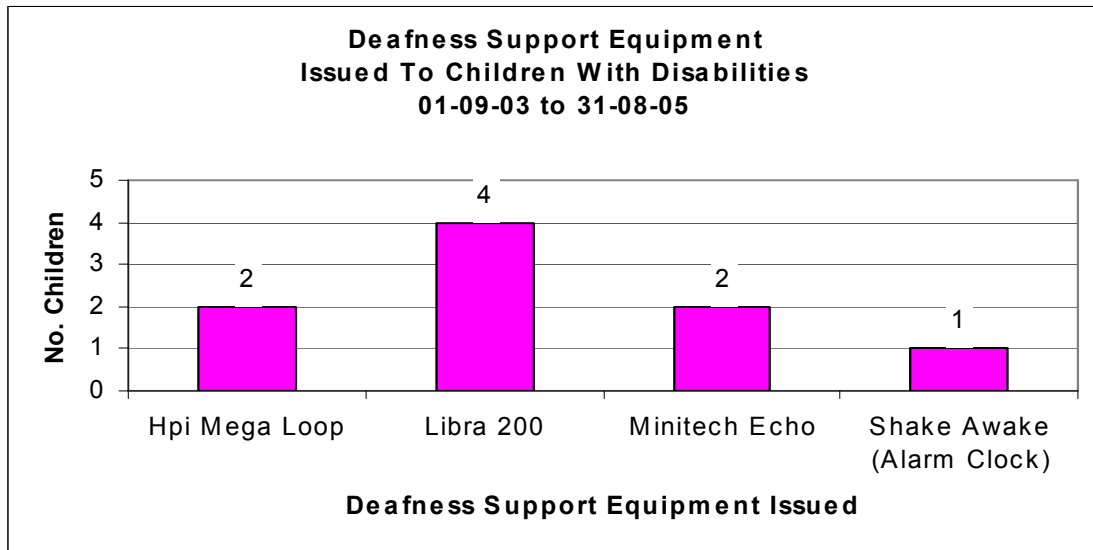
Specialised bespoke equipment is prescribed by the paediatric physiotherapy and occupational therapy service within Halton PCT and is procured by the Halton Equipment Service. Other equipment and adaptations to the home are assessed through the Independent Living Team, a cradle to grave service within the Health and Community Directorate of Halton Borough Council, that provides children's equipment through a Service Level Agreement with the Children and Young People's Directorate.

The most frequently needed minor equipment between September 2003 and August 2005 was bathing equipment and bath steps. Between the above dates 35 children were referred for assessment and 46 children were issued with equipment

Occupational Therapy	23
Vision Support	14
Deafness Support	9

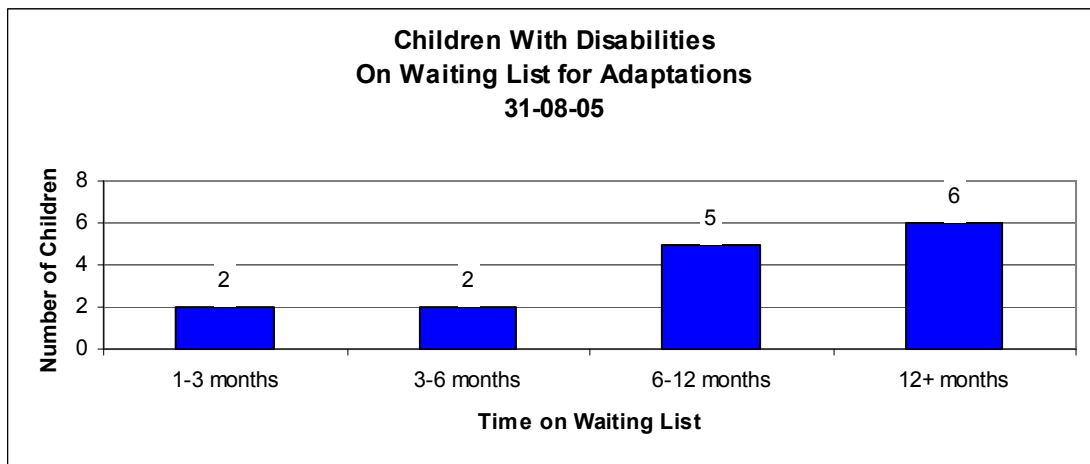
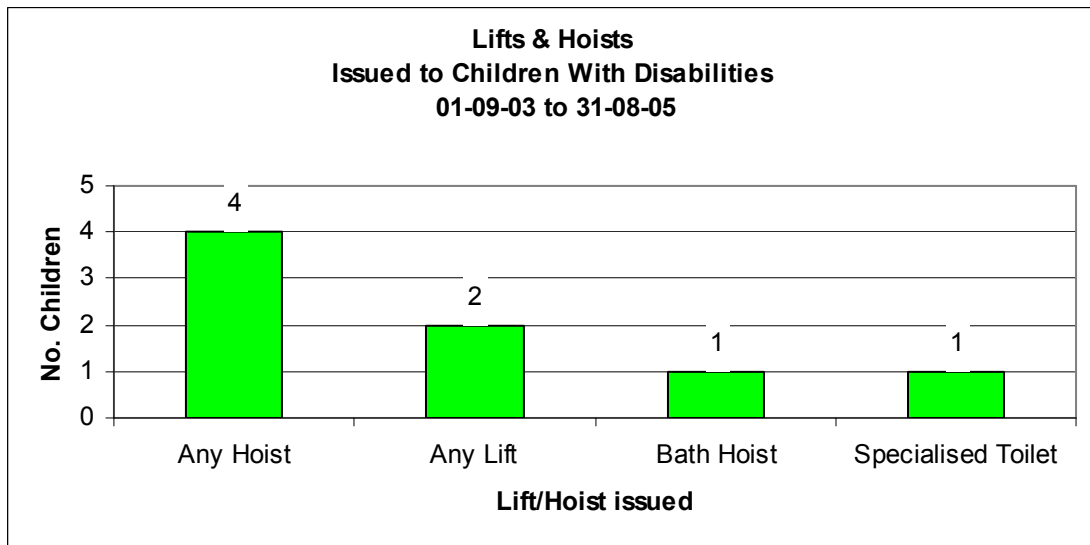
Vision and Deafness support equipment is provided to children at home by the Physical and Sensory Disability team which is a cradle to grave service based in the Health and Community Directorate, through service level agreements.

Fig6/7



Adaptations to the home are provided following an assessment by the Independent Living Team through the use of Direct Facility Grants. These are no longer means tested for children. The data shows that adaptations were recommended for four children, ordered for eleven children. 15 children were on the waiting list for an assessment by an occupational therapist for adaptations to the home with six of these waiting for more than 12 months and a further five waiting between 6-12 months.

Fig 8/9



Early Identification and Assessment

Multi Agency baseline assessment is undertaken by the Child Development Team . Fig 10 shows a sharp increase in referrals since 1995, this is attributed to improved referral criteria and improved referral rates.

Fig 10

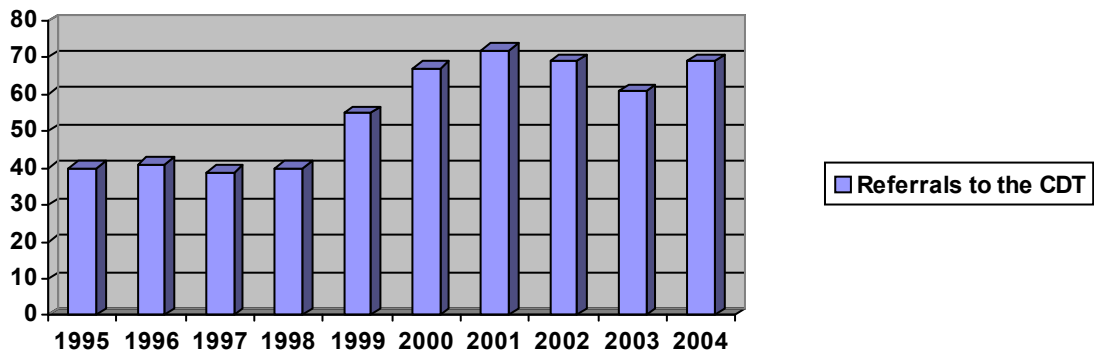
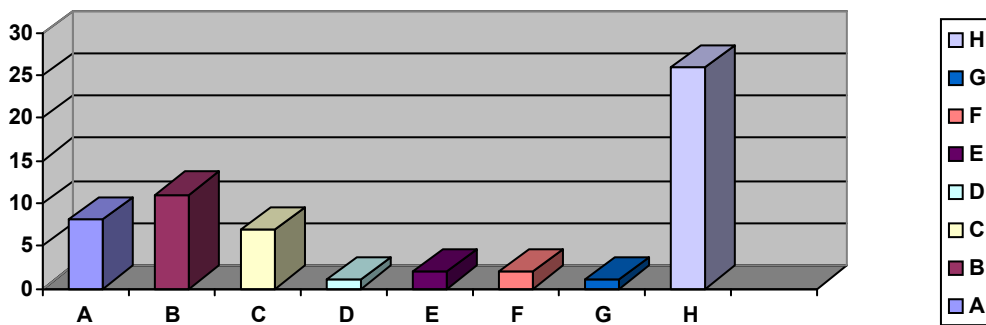


Fig 11



- A = Social Communication Problems / Behavioural
- B = Speech and Language Problems / Behavioural (including disorder)
- C = Physical
- D = Complex Medical
- E = Syndromes

F	=	Hearing / Developmental Delay
G	=	Visual Impairment / Developmental Dela
H	=	Global Delay / Developmental Delay

Fig 11 shows a snapshot of data from 2003 showing the number children by referral. The majority of referrals from 2003 show developmental delay issues. From 2004 to 2006 the Child Development Team reports an increase in referrals re social and communication problems.

The Child Development Centre provides an assessment nursery for those with the most complex needs. Fig 12 shows the outcomes for children attending the nursery between September 2004 and July 2005

Fig 12

- 28 children accessed places in the CDC nursery during September 2004 – July 2005. These children are now placed as follows:

Education Setting	Number of children
Special schools	11: 10 Brookfield 1 Chestnut
Resource bases	4; 2 Oakfield, 2 The Brow
Reception classes	4: 3 EYA+. 1 statement
Early Years settings	4 EYA+
Ongoing assessment	5 continue placement in September '05.

This shows that of the 23 children attending the nursery during this period 11 moved on to Special Education, 4 to Resource bases, 8 to mainstream provisions.

Fig 13

Shows the figures of children that have been given an ASD diagnosis. I have the information for the last five years. The numbers of children diagnosed are in academic years from September to July.

Children who have received an ASD diagnosis

Dates:	Number of ASD children
September '01- July '02	5
September '02- July '03	7
September '03- July '04	10
September '04- July '05	10
September '05- February '06	2

September 05 to February '06

Total number S.C. pathway	Diagnosis confirmed	Ongoing assessment	No further assessment
11	2	6 *	3

* These children are likely to have an ASD diagnosis.

- There may be further children who are placed on this pathway who may need nursery placements, which may lead to a diagnosis before the end of this academic year.

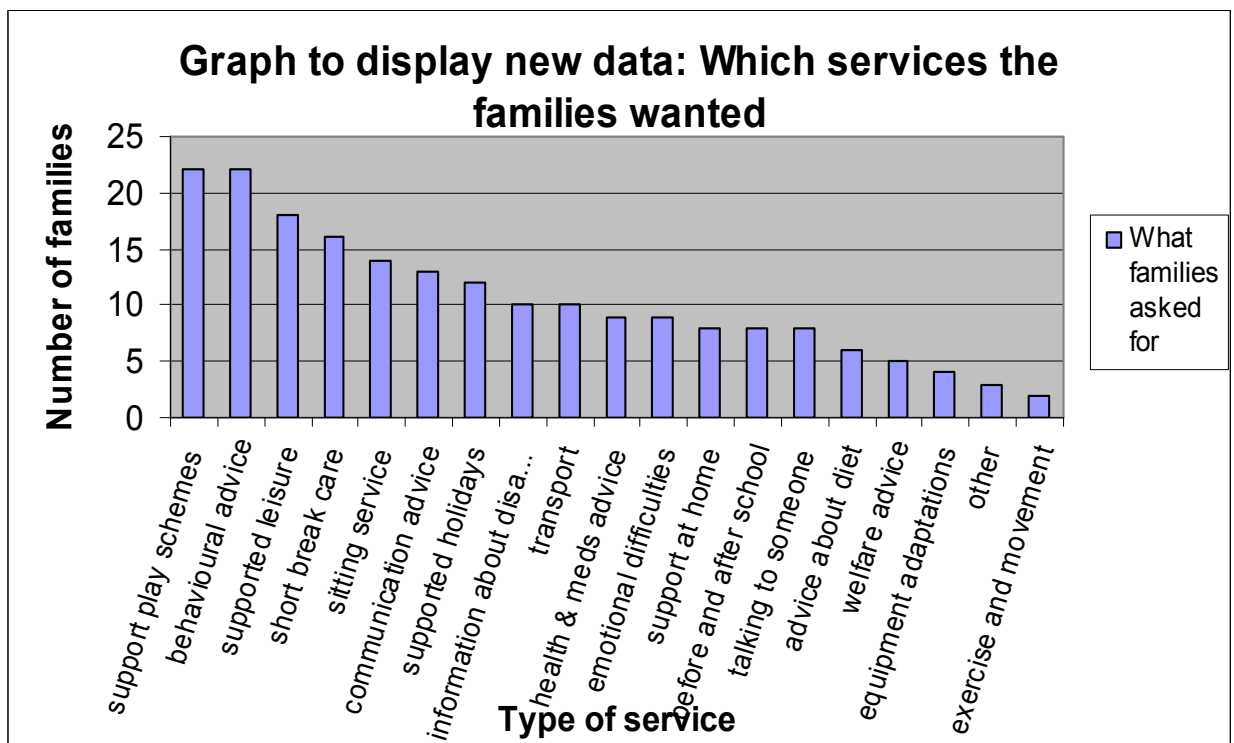
The figures show a significant increase between 2001 and 2005.

Severe Learning Disability and Challenging Behaviour

The Shaping Services Team is a multi disciplinary team offering assessment, behavioural advice and communication support to this group of children and young people and their families. All children and young people receiving a service from the team have severe learning difficulties and over half have ASD traits , other conditions include epilepsy, specific chromosome abnormalities and physical and sensory disabilities. The service has a strong service use influence with families being involved in the steering group. The service was introduced following consultation with families and the identification of gap to meet the needs of this group. Demand upon this service grows and a waiting list is now in place. Many of these children and young people and their families need ongoing support to ensure positive outcomes. Research in 2005 (Fig.14)indicated that families continue to prioritise their needs as

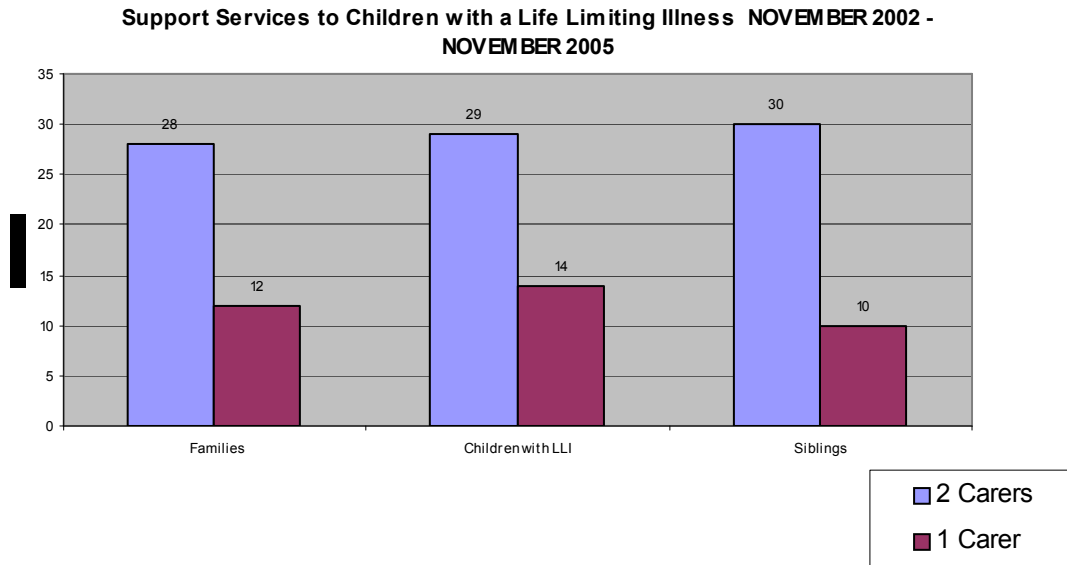
- ❖ Supported playschemes
- ❖ Behavioural advice
- ❖ Supported leisure

Fig 14



Support Services to Children with a Life Limiting Illness and their Children.

Fig 15 shows the number of families supported between 2002 and 2005.



Between these dates 28 families were offered a range of practical and emotional support.

Short Breaks

A range of carer short breaks are commissioned from the Voluntary Sector providing a variety of experiences for children including after school clubs and inclusive leisure breaks with a focus on providing a break for carers through a positive and enriching experience for the child and maintaining the child in their own home.

Overnight short breaks are provided, subject to an assessment of need by the Inglefield Unit and there are 5 Foster Carers offering short break foster placements.

Communication Aids

All children need to be able to communicate and to have access to the curriculum. However, some pupils have a significant difficulty in communicating with others, whether that's with regard to:

- understanding language
- communicating verbally

using written communication

Fortunately, there are a range of technological aids which can help.

Up until 31st March 2006 The CAP project managed a process of multi agency referral, assessment and provision of additional equipment and technology for pupils in England who have significant communication difficulties. CAP acknowledged that 'Communication difficulties may be the primary problem for a pupil (a severe hearing impairment, for example) or form part of a more complex picture (such as where a child has severe cerebral palsy and multiple learning difficulties)'.

The project was established initially through funds made available by Treasury's Capital Modernisation Fund. A grant of £10m was awarded over three years ending March 2004 (£1.5m, £3.5m, £5m respectively). Further funding was secured from the DfES to extend the project until March 2006. CAP, therefore, represented a significant initiative in the provision of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) to children with disabilities in England.

CAP had at its centre BECTA and the six CAP Centres: Abilitynet, ACE North, ACE Oxford, Deaf Children's Communication Aids Project (DCCAP), London CAP and SCOPE. Halton children were largely managed by ACE Centre North. The agencies involved were primarily Health and Education.

The intention was for CAP to leave a legacy of skilled personnel across the regions of England to continue providing support for pupils with communication difficulties in accessing the curriculum and the community. Halton's position now is that there is a mechanism to refer and assess children for this equipment, with an expectation that Special Schools should provide whatever the child needs.

Summary of Needs Analysis

1. The Child Disability Team provides services to a fairly stable group of children with complex needs and their families who often require ongoing support throughout their childhood.
2. The needs of families of children with SLD and challenging behaviour continue to grow with the caseloads for the Shaping Services Team growing and a waiting list developing. These families need ongoing clinical and family support services to maintain the family unit and improve outcomes for the disabled child and their siblings.

3. There is a steady increase in the identification of children with complex needs who require a multi agency assessment with an increase in the incidence of social and communication problems being reported
4. Almost 50% of children assessed with complex needs following the multi agency assessment then move on to special schools.
5. There is a significant demand for specialised equipment to meet the needs of children with complex disabilities. The waiting list for assessment and completion of applications for home adaptations is too long.
6. There is insufficient data to fully understand the population and it's needs
7. The take up of open access short breaks indicates that this a significant area of need and provides a level of family support that supports improved outcomes for children and families and meets a key area of need.
8. The number of children with a life limiting illness where the families sought support has remained stable over the past 3 years.
9. The pattern of service delivery for this group is complex and requires co-ordination between services and between specialist, preventative and universal sectors.

15. ACTION PLAN 2006-09

TARGET FROM	KEY TASK	ACTIONS	OUTCOME	TARGET/TIMESCALE	LEAD
CYPP p4	Ensure service planning and development regarding Disabled Children and Young People is based on robust analysis of need.	Undertake data and trend analysis to predict future needs regarding Disabled Children Establish improved data collection systems	Needs analysis complete, reported and used to inform future planning.	Dec 2006	Div Quality and Data Service Devt Advisor
CYPP P50	Develop, pilot and evaluate a framework for integrated delivery of services to Disabled Children and Young People with Complex needs.	Develop proposals for integrated and co-located multi-agency teams with integrated management based on co-location or virtual co-location. Develop framework for integrated front-line services, including the establishment of protocols for leadership, management and governance arrangements.	Options identified and way forward established Improved multi-agency working	Nov 06 March 07	Strategic Manager CWD Strategic Manager CWD Strategic Manager CWD

		Develop, and evaluate systems to rationalise assessment processes for professionals and families across agencies working with Disabled Children.	Duplication is reduced for families and professionals	2007-2008	
CYPP p51	Resources will be used more effectively by the use of pooled budgets	Explore expansion of pooled budget to include all services that will be delivered or commissioned through the Children's Disability Mini Trust	Resources will be used more efficiently and barriers to integrated working will be reduced	2007	Strategic Manager CWD
CYP p4	Parents and Carers will be supported to be partners in all levels of service planning and delivery	Carer Representation on Partnership Board and sub groups will be promoted and supported	Parents and carers are partners in planning	2006	Strategic Manager CWD
CYPP Be Healthy	Ensure that Children with complex health needs and disability receive co-ordinated multi agency assessment and support.	Develop agreed care pathways with maternity hospitals and Alder Hey Hospital Develop agreed Sharing the news protocols with hospitals regionally	All children with complex needs are offered timely intervention and support Consistency of practice is achieved for all families Families will receive	2007 2008	Strategic Manager CWD Woodview Co-ordinator Strategic Manager CWD Div Mgr SEN

		<p>Key working will be extended to all children with complex needs a part of a continuum of service linking to services for children with moderate needs based on embedding best practice of ESP and TAC .</p> <p>Develop multi agency service to Children with a Life limiting illness and their families.</p>	co-ordinated multi agency services		Principal Mgr CWD Social Work Team/ Mgr Community Nursing Team
CYPP Be Healthy	Ensure that disabled children are provided with appropriate equipment.	<p>The process for the provision of equipment will be mapped</p> <p>The feasibility of developing a single equipment service in all settings will be explored and recommendations made</p>	Disabled children and those with complex health needs will receive appropriate equipment timely to their needs.	2008	Strategic Manager CWD Equipment Service Manager
CYPP Be Healthy	Provide specialist multi agency assessment in universal settings	Explore feasibility of delivering multi agency assessment in universal settings	Children with complex needs access services locally and in	2008	Woodview Co-ordinator

		Explore feasibility of increasing locally delivered tertiary health services	mainstream settings		Consultant Community Paediatrician/Strategic Manager
CYPP Be Healthy	Provide information to families re disability and maintain register of disabled children.	Halton Information Exchange will establish links with Children's Information Exchange Numbers registered with Halton Information Exchange are increased year on year to agreed targets	Information is widely available in universal settings	2006	HIE Co-ordinator
CYPP H2	Improve the mental health of Disabled Children and Young People	100% of Disabled Children referred to CAMHS are offered an appropriate service 24hr CAMHS services is available to young people with learning disabilities	Disabled children and young people have stable emotional and mental health	2009	CAMHS Partnership
CYPP P17	Provide support to families of children and young people with severe learning difficulties in managing challenging behaviour	Co-ordinated specialist multi agency assessment, support and therapy is provided through the Shaping Services Team	100 % Children with SLD and Challenging behaviour are maintained in their own communities and families.	2009	Shaping Services team

CYPP S5	Ensure Children and Young People with Disabilities have security and stability and are cared for	All eligible families of disabled children will be offered a carers assessment by the Child Disability Social Work Team	CWD will have improved security, stability and care within their own home	2009	Principal Manager Child Disability Team
LAC Strategy	Ensure Looked After Children and Young People with disabilities have safety and security and are cared for.	Increase the number of foster carers offering short breaks to children and young people with disabilities. Commission a range of short break activities to provide carer breaks and leisure and social opportunities for disabled children and young people	Children and young people with disabilities have increased choice of placement type. Children and young people with disabilities will be offered a choice of open access specialist and inclusive leisure opportunities that also provide a break for carers	2008 5 additional carers	Principal Manager Adoption and Fostering Service
CYPP S5	Ensure Disabled Children and Young People have safety and security and are cared for	Ensure all contracts are routinely monitored. Ensure all contracts meet essential standards, including safety standards.	All CWD are kept safe with regard to all services they receive from contracted services	2009 100%	Strategic Manager CWD
CYPP (Background	Ensure Disabled Children and Young People have	Establish a baseline for the number of short	Children and Young People with	2009	Strategic Manager CWD/

information p12 and EA4)	safety and security and are cared for	breaks provided in 2006 and increase year on year through commissioning inclusive short breaks and building capacity within mainstream provision whilst maintaining a continuum of choice between specialist and mainstream provision	disabilities have increased opportunities to access mainstream social and leisure provision		Inclusive Play and Leisure group/ Quality and Data Division
CYPP (Background information p12)	Ensure Disabled Children and Young People have safety and security and are cared for	Develop systems and processes to build on yr 9 Transition reviews to ensure that all young people in Transition have the opportunity to have a person centred plan	All eligible young people will have a person centred plan.	2009	Transition Co-ordinator
CYPP EA4	Improve the educational achievement of Disabled Children and Young People	Reduce the number of pupils requiring a Statement of Special Educational Needs Reduce the numbers of children placed in special schools	More children will enjoy an inclusive education	2008 1.45% 2008 2.95%	Universal Task Group
CYPP MPC4	Improve the educational achievement of Disabled Children and Young People	Commission advocacy workshops to be delivered in partnership with special schools.	Disabled Children and Young People will develop improved confidence and social skills to enable them	2007	Strategic Manager CWD

			to express their views and participate		
CYPP MPC2	Ensure Looked After Children and Young People engage in law-abiding and positive behaviour in and out of school.	Develop a version of the year 9 Transition Pack for Children with Disabilities	Young People will experience improved transitions between services	2008	Targeted Task Group
CYPP MPC4	Ensure that young People develop self confidence and successfully deal with significant life changes and challenges	Barriers to effective transition from child to adult health services will be explored	Gaps in provision will be identified	2007	Strategic Manager
CYPP MPC4	Ensure that young People develop self confidence and successfully deal with significant life changes and challenges	100%of disabled young people progress into further education, work or other positive destinations each year			Preventative Task Group
CYPP MPC Background information p8	Children and Young People with physical disabilities and/or learning disabilities are helped to make a positive contribution	Evaluate Person Centred Planning Project and Explore alternative options for the delivery of Person Centred Planning for all young people with complex needs f Implement agreed option	All eligible young people will have a person centred plan.	2009	Transition Co-ordinator
CYPP MPC Background information	Children and Young People with physical disabilities and/or learning disabilities are helped to	Inclusive Play and Leisure Opportunities for children and young people with complex		2007	Inclusive Play and Leisure Group

p8	make a positive contribution	needs will be provided			
CYPP MPC	Ensure that young People develop self confidence and successfully deal with significant life changes and challenges	A programme of Disability Awareness training will be offered to mainstream providers	Disabled children and young people will have more opportunities to access mainstream services	2007	Multi Agency Training Group
CYPP p48	Disabled young people are supported to make a positive contribution to strategic planning and contribute to local issues.	The Borough Wide Youth Forum will link to Area Forums and provide a forum for young people, including disabled young people to influence local policy	Disabled young people will be represented in Borough Wide groups	2006	Youth Service

Local Performance Indicators

Measure	Data Source	Reporting Frequency
% of Parents/Carers of children with complex needs with access to information about services	Halton Information Exchange	6 Monthly
% Carers of children with complex needs whose assessed needs are met by Children's Services	Reviews Monitoring	6 Monthly
% Children with complex needs receiving Multi-Agency Assessments who access services to meet their identified needs	Reviews Monitoring	6 Monthly
% of Children with complex needs receiving family support rather than residential services	CYP Database	6 Monthly
Reduce waiting time for adaptations to safeguard children with complex needs in their homes	PCT	6 Monthly
% of Children assessed with complex needs accessing mainstream education	CYP Database	6 Monthly
% of Children with complex needs meeting education targets set in their Individual Education Plan	SEN	Annual
% of Children with complex needs accessing inclusive play and leisure opportunities	CYP Database	Annual

% of Children participating in person centred transition reviews to enable them to influence their own outcomes	Review Monitoring	6 Monthly
% of Children accessing more flexible and individual services through Direct Payments	DP Team	6 Monthly

GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS

CWD	=	Children with Disabilities
CDPB	=	Children's with Disability Partnership Board
DFES	=	Department for Education and Science
SEN	=	Special Educational Needs
TAC	=	Team Around the Child
DDA	=	Disability Discrimination Act
NHS	=	National Health Service
UN	=	United Nations
CYPP	=	Children and Young Peoples Plan

Children's Disability Pooled Budget**2006/7 Contributions**

	Core Funding	% Contribution by core funding	Grant Funding	% Contribution including grant funding	Budget Total	% Of Total Budget that is grant funded
HBC	£49,870	39%	£259, 100	80%	£308,970	
H&StH PCT	£78,565	61%	None	20%	£78,565	
Total	£128,435	100%	£259,100	100%	£387,535	67%

2007/8 Expansion Proposals (based on 2006/7 indicative levels)

	Core Funding	% Contribution by core funding	Grant Funding	% Contribution including grant funding	Budget Total	% Of Total Budget that is grant funded
HBC	£944,292	58%	£137,100	62%	£1,081,932	
H&StH PCT	£674,921	42%	None	38%	£674,921	
Total	£1,619,213	100%	£137,100	100%	£1,756,313	8%

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 15 March 2007

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director Health & Community

SUBJECT: Housing Allocations Policy

WARD(S) Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To seek approval to change the Council's Allocations Policy with regard to offers to homeless households and undertaking first stage reviews of homelessness decisions.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: that the Board agrees to the changes outlined in the report for consultation purposes, and that a further report be brought back to the Board when the consultation exercise has been completed.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

OFFERS TO HOMELESS HOUSEHOLDS

3.1 Over the last 18 months the number of homeless households having to be temporarily accommodated in bed and breakfast has increased significantly. Early work to examine the reasons behind this has revealed that whilst the number of homeless acceptances in 2004/05 and 2005/06 was relatively static, there has been an increase in 2006/07.

3.2 More significantly the supply of relets to accommodate homeless households and others in housing need has declined by more than 20% over the last 4 years. It is believed that this is because of the effects of the Right to Buy, and increasing house prices inhibiting the usual movement out of the rented sector into owner occupation. This has resulted in an inability to move homeless households into settled accommodation quickly enough, so that when Grangeway Court is full, Bed & Breakfast has to be used.

3.3 This problem is compounded by the Council's Allocations Policy (see Appendix 1) which to some extent seeks to offer homeless households the same degree of choice in housing as other applicants on the waiting list. A homeless household is entitled to up to 3 offers of accommodation in their preferred areas, but if they are still homeless after 12 weeks, their position is reviewed and they may be given one final offer within the Borough in discharge of the Council's legal duties.

3.4 Under homelessness legislation the Council is only required to make one offer of suitable accommodation in order to discharge its duty, and there is guidance and case law for what constitutes a "suitable offer" to protect the client's

interests. Halton operated the “one offer” approach for many years but changed this in May 2000 as part of a review of the Allocations Policy. The 12-week limitation was introduced in January 2005 at a time when the average time spent in temporary accommodation was rising, but not as acutely as recent times.

- 3.5 With the current reducing supply of housing the position has clearly worsened since the Board last considered the matter, and there are now Government targets to reduce the use of Bed & Breakfast, particularly for families. It is therefore proposed that the policy be amended to restrict the number of offers to statutory homeless households to one suitable offer within the Borough.

HOUSING REGISTER REVIEWS

- 3.6 A homeless applicant has the right to request a review of most decisions made in relation to their homeless application. The Allocations Policy currently states that an officer of Halton Housing Trust (HHT) will undertake any first stage reviews. If an applicant is still dissatisfied they have an opportunity to request a second stage review, which is considered by a panel of Elected Members.
- 3.7 It is proposed that the Council’s Service Development Manager for Homelessness conduct future first stage reviews with respects to homelessness decisions. This will provide a greater degree of independence to the process, and be a valuable tool in terms of monitoring the quality of decisions made by the Trust. The second stage review by Elected Members would remain unchanged.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There is a duty to consult with Housing Associations, and recommended good practise to consult other stakeholders, on any significant changes proposed to the Council’s Allocations Policy, and to notify them subsequently of any adopted changes. This will have to be undertaken before the proposals contained in this report can be formally agreed.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Any agreed changes will need to be reflected in the Council’s Contract with HHT, which currently provides the Homelessness and Housing Advice service on behalf of the Council.

6.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 6.1 If the policy remains unchanged homeless applicants’ length of stay in temporary accommodation may increase, which will be detrimental to the aim of reducing reliance on Bed & Breakfast accommodation, and financial pressures on the Council may increase.

7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

7.1 There is a risk that the change will be seen as detrimental to homeless households as they will be eligible for only one offer of suitable accommodation. However in reality applicants are not currently offered three properties, as the turnover of available properties is insufficient at this point in time.

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

Document	Place of inspection	Contact Officer
Housing Allocations Policy	Runcorn Town Hall	Service Development Manager Homelessness



It's all happening IN HALTON

Health and Community
Directorate

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HOUSING ALLOCATIONS POLICY

Revised October 2005

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1. **INTRODUCTION**

The Council no longer provides its own rented accommodation, having transferred ownership of its housing to Halton Housing Trust in December 2005. However, it does still maintain a Housing Register, which Halton Housing Trust (HHT) operates on the Council's behalf, and can secure accommodation for people on the Housing Register through "nomination" agreements that it has with HHT and other local Housing Associations.

1.1 Through its Housing Allocations Policy the Council aims to provide access to good quality social housing for those in greatest housing need. Applicants will be awarded points to reflect varying degrees of housing need and, generally, applicants with the highest number of points will be given priority for rehousing. This document explains who we will accept onto the Housing Register, how we will house them, and the points scheme.

1.2 Our aims are:

To meet the housing needs of the individual:

- By giving reasonable preference to those assessed to be in housing need
- By maximising the choices available to applicants
- By providing information to applicants to enable them to make informed choices
- By balancing the needs of the individual with the needs of the wider community.
- By working closely with other relevant service providers, e.g. Social Services, Health Services, the Police and other social landlords, in assessing an individual's need for rehousing and making the best match within available resources.

To create balanced and sustainable communities through:

- Enabling people to live in safe, secure and good quality homes
- Working in partnership with the Police and other agencies to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour in Halton

To assist the Council to achieve these aims, applicants are required to complete an application form which enables the Council to assess their housing needs and to ensure those with the greatest priority are assisted the earliest. Applicants will be required to provide references to substantiate information provided in their applications.

2. **ACCESS TO THE HOUSING REGISTER**

2.1 The Housing Register is open to all applicants, except those who do not qualify as defined by legislation (Housing Act 1996 as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002.)

People who do not qualify to go on the Housing Register are as follows:

- i) persons subject to Immigration Control, unless they fall within a class of persons prescribed in regulations made by the Secretary of State;
- ii) persons who are not habitually resident in the UK;
- iii) persons with a history of unacceptable behaviour where current evidence suggests they are deemed unsuitable to be a tenant. Further details of this are provided in Appendix A.

2.2 The Council, when adhering to 2.1 (iii), may make a decision to exclude the following from the Housing Register. In order to make a decision we may consider any tenancies held over the past five years.

- Significant rent arrears (12 months arrears would normally be considered as significant), however, each case will be considered on its merits and the reason(s) for the accrual of arrears may be a significant factor.
- Serious anti-social behaviour that has affected or could affect the community at large.
- The Applicant or a member of their household or a visitor to their property has been convicted of an offence contrary to the "Misuse of Drugs Act 1971" or any amendment to or re-enactment of this Act.
- The Applicant or a member of their household or a visitor to their property has been convicted of a criminal offence that has involved the use of a tenancy for illegal or immoral purposes.
- If the applicant or a member of their household or a visitor to their property neglects or has seriously damaged a property.

Applicants will be informed in writing of the reasons for exclusion and will be advised that they have the right to request a review of the decision made. Requests for a review of the decision made will be considered in the first instance by a senior officer of HHT i.e. someone senior to the officer taking the original decision. The outcome of the review will be confirmed in writing to the applicant. Where the review

upholds the decision to exclude, the applicant will be advised that they have the right to request a further review by a panel of Councillors.

2.3 **Collusion**

Applicants who deliberately engineer their circumstances to improve their position on the Housing Register will have their application suspended for a period of six months.

2.4 **False Information**

If any applicant is found to have knowingly given false information, or withheld information reasonably required by the Council, either at the time of application or subsequently, the Council will have discretion to suspend that applicant from the Housing Register. The Council may take legal action if a tenant had gained accommodation by such action.

2.5 **Homeless Applicants Right to Review**

Homeless applicants have the right to request a review of any decision on their homelessness application in relation to:

- Eligibility for assistance
- What duty is owed to them by the Council
- Referral to another authority because they appear to have a local connection
- Suitability of an offer.

Requests for such a review will be considered by a senior officer of HHT i.e. someone senior to the officer involved in the original homelessness decision. The outcome of the review will be confirmed in writing to the homeless applicant, and they will be advised of:

- their statutory right of appeal to the County Court within 21 days of receipt of the review decision, and;
- their right to request a further internal review by a panel of Councillors.

The applicant will be advised that from the date they receive notification of the decision the County Court limitations apply.

3 GENERAL INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Council aims to provide applicants with as much information and advice as possible to enable them to complete application forms and consider their housing options. In turn, we expect a high degree of co-operation when it comes to providing information and details of housing circumstances.

Every person who applies to us for housing will have their application form processed within 15 working days in order to:

- determine their eligibility for acceptance onto the register
- assess their housing needs
- check the information contained on the application form is correct
- complete a medical assessment if appropriate
- ensure that, in the case of Council tenants, the property has been maintained to an acceptable standard
- give information to assist them to assess when an offer is likely to be made
- fully explore other housing options.

Anyone on the Housing Register may see a copy of their entry on request.

The Council will, from time to time, contact applicants for further information, to attend for interview or appointments for home visits, in writing or by telephone. Applicants are expected to respond to such requests within 48 hours. Applicants failing to respond within this timescale are written to, giving a further 7 working days in which to make contact. If no response is received, the application cannot proceed any further and will be cancelled. There may be exceptional circumstances which prevented the applicant making contact, and in these cases a decision may be made to reinstate their application.

3.2 Statement of Choice

When making application to join the Housing Register, applicants are free to ask to be considered for any area of the Borough where the Council has nomination rights against Housing Association property.

However, it is important to realise that the demand for accommodation is greater in some areas than others and waiting times will therefore vary. Applicants will be nominated on the basis of assessed needs with the person with the highest assessed need (in Halton need is reflected by points) being nominated to any available property first.

In making decisions about the choices available, applicants therefore need to consider their priority for rehousing on the Housing Register (depending on their points) against the availability of property in any given area. In order to make best use of the stock available, applicants will normally only be offered accommodation in keeping with

the criteria set out in 4.6 of this policy. However, if an applicant has an exceptional need to be considered for other types of property or for larger accommodation each case will be considered on its merits. Notwithstanding this, if demand for any property is exhausted, applicants from any household type will be considered for it.

4. TENANT SELECTION

4.1 When a Housing Association invites a nomination for a vacant property, only applicants on the Housing Register will be considered. Selection of nominees will be based on the number of points, choice of area and property type needed. The exceptions to this will be:

i) Adapted Properties

Nomination to adapted or purpose built disabled persons accommodation will be on the basis of greatest need and suitability of the accommodation for an individuals needs. Nominations will be made in consultation with relevant Social Care staff. Position on the Housing Register will only be material if there are two or more applicants with equal need of the facilities.

ii) Renovation Grant Works

Private occupiers needing temporary rehousing to enable Council funded renovation grant works to proceed will be assisted, subject to the availability of suitable accommodation. Whilst every effort will be made to take account of expressed preferences, any assistance provided may be constrained by property availability within the timescale and demand from other applicants on the Housing Register.

iii) Compulsory Purchase

Outright priority will be given to those applicants needing to be rehoused due to the Council exercising Compulsory Purchase Powers, or acting by negotiation in the knowledge that compulsory purchase powers would be available.

4.2 Where there are two or more applicants with equal points, length of time on the Housing Register will determine relative priority. Where there are two or more applicants with equal points, and equal length of time on the Housing Register, the comparative priority of each case will be considered. Medical and social points can be used as a determining factor to ensure that the applicant in the most housing need is accommodated.

4.3 In cases where an applicant has been allowed to join the Housing Register but has current or former arrears, they will normally only be eligible for an offer at the time the debt has been reduced to £200.

4.4 Eligibility

The following households would be eligible for the property types described:

Single person no dependants	Flat/maisonette
Couple without dependants	2 bed house / flat/maisonette
Single person/couple with dependants	House or maisonette/flat
Single person or couple and aged 60 or over	Ground floor flat or Bungalow, sheltered housing

4.5 Offers

All applicants will be entitled to 3 reasonable offers of accommodation. A “reasonable offer” is defined as an offer of accommodation which meets both of the following criteria:

- a. adequate size and type of accommodation to meet the needs of the applicant
- b. accommodation in the area(s) of the applicant’s choice.

Where an application for housing is in joint names, it is normal practice for any tenancy offered to be made as a joint tenancy.

If an applicant refuses two offers of accommodation, a visit will be undertaken in order to assess

- a. the accuracy/quality of information recorded on the application form regarding properties and areas chosen;
- b. the reasons for refusal of previous offers;
- c. the need to update the applicant’s details.

The visit will enable the collection of further details from the applicant, thus allowing a better match on allocation.

If 3 reasonable offers are refused by an applicant, their application will be suspended for 6 months. This is considered necessary to avoid the situation where a person constantly refuses reasonable offers, thus causing a “bottle neck” and delaying relet times. During the period of suspension they will not be eligible for time in waiting points.

Furthermore, where an applicant has been awarded medical points and refuses offers of accommodation suitable to meet their medical condition, then after 2 years the medical points will be moved.

Where a homeless applicant is accepted as unintentionally homeless and in priority need, and is placed in temporary accommodation as part of their support plan, they will be advised of the realistic prospects of accommodation becoming available within their area of choice. At this stage they will be eligible for three offers of suitable accommodation in

their area of choice. If, after 12 weeks, they are still placed in temporary accommodation, their application will be reviewed, they will be advised to widen their choice of area, and they will be informed that they will be made one offer of suitable accommodation as far as possible in their area of choice. If this cannot be accommodated, the applicant will be made one offer of suitable accommodation within the Borough. This will be deemed to discharge the Council's duty to the individual under the Homelessness Legislation.

4.6 Annual Review

To ensure that the Housing Register contains the fullest and most up-to-date information, applications will be reviewed annually.

Applicants will be sent a letter asking for confirmation that their housing situation is the same as at the time of acceptance on the Housing Register. Failure to respond within 4 weeks will result in the assumption that accommodation is no longer required, and the application will be cancelled.

4.7 Change of Circumstances

Where an applicants housing situation has changed it will be re-pointed and re-assessed accordingly.

We also ask applicants to let us know directly if their housing situation changes, or if they no longer need housing.

Applicants who disagree with the outcome of any periodic review are able to appeal against the decision. Details of this are available on request.

4.8 Customer Care

The Council wishes to provide a quality service to applicants. To this end, we are committed to providing all applicants for housing with full information about our policy and procedure. A copy of the Allocations Policy can be made available to any applicant requesting it, as can details of both the appeals and complaints procedures.

5. THE POINTS SYSTEM

5.1 The Council's allocations policy must by law ensure that reasonable preference is given to certain categories of applicant as defined in section 167 of the Housing Act 1996, as amended by the Homelessness Act 2002. Appendix B details the specific categories.

5.2 The aims of the points system are:

- i) to provide a way of measuring housing need to give the Council an objective way of giving priority to applicants in the greatest need and with the most limited alternative sources of housing;
- ii) to ensure that our allocation policy and practice are accountable to applicants, partners in housing provision and the general public.

The section below shows the level of points awarded to applicants accepted onto the housing waiting list.

Points System for the Housing Register	
Housing Circumstances	Points
<u>Statutory Homeless</u> – households owed a duty under the 1996 Housing Act as amended by the Homeless Act 2002.	700
<u>Shared/Lacking Amenities</u> – these points are awarded where the applicant has to share with someone who is not part of their intended household <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No hot water • Share/lack bath/shower • Share/lack kitchen • Share/lack w.c. N.B. Points eligibility restricted to maximum of 150 points.	100 25 25 25
<u>Disrepair</u> – property unfit as determined by Principal Housing Inspector.	200

Housing Circumstances	Points
<p><u>Overcrowding</u> – points awarded where applicants are overcrowded for each bedroom they are short</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One bedroom short <p>Each subsequent bedroom shortfall increases by an additional 100 points i.e. 2 beds 175 3 beds 275</p> <p>N.B. An additional 200 points will be awarded to all tenants/owner occupiers who have been registered as overcrowded for 2 years or more and have not yet been rehoused.</p>	75
<p><u>Under-occupation</u> – all applicants wishing to transfer to a smaller property receive points for each bedroom surplus to their need at the rate of 25 points, the first surplus bedroom is not counted i.e.</p> <p>1 bed surplus 0 2 bed surplus 25</p>	25
<p>Lodgers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lodging with family • Lodging with friends/non family 	200 300
<p><u>Hostel</u> – applicant residing in hostel accommodation.</p> <p>Additional points awarded for sharing amenities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share bath/shower • Share w.c. • Share kitchen 	300 100 100 100
<p><u>Care Leaver</u> – young person who is leaving care.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could attract homeless points at the time of leaving care. 	350

Housing Circumstances	Points
<p><u>Medical</u> – points are awarded on the recommendation of the Council's medical advisor. Medical points can be accumulated for each individual within the household to be rehoused.</p> <p>Points are awarded depending on level of medical need.</p>	<p>Ranging from 50-500</p>
<p><u>Social Need</u> - points will be awarded by a Social Panel after consideration of supporting information. The level of points awarded will be dependent on circumstances. Cases that may be eligible for social need points are: social isolation, foster carers, carers, victim of severe anti-social behaviour, evidence of financial hardship and where accommodation issues are hindering a child returning home from care or the discharge of a Care Order.</p>	<p>Range from 100-300</p>
<p><u>Children in Flats/Maisonettes</u> –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families with children in ground floor flat • Families with children above ground floor in flat/maisonette. 	<p>300 500</p>
<p><u>Families forced to live apart</u> – points will be awarded to applicants who normally live together, but are unable to do so for no other reason than there is no accommodation in which they can live together.</p>	<p>175</p>
<p><u>Relationship breakdown</u> – evidence from both parties to support the relationship has broken down.</p> <p>Applicants may also be eligible for other housing need points dependent on their circumstances.</p>	<p>100</p>
<p><u>Residency</u> – awarded to applicants who have lived in the Borough for any period of five years.</p>	<p>25</p>
<p><u>Time on list</u> – awarded on the first and subsequent anniversary.</p>	<p>5 per year on list.</p>

5.3 For illustration purposes, the table below sets out a range of example household types and the points that they might attract in typical circumstances.

<i>Points Category</i>	Household Type			
	<i>Single Parent/one bedroom short living with family</i>	<i>Separated Couple/one bedroom short/lodging with friends</i>	<i>Single Person living in Hostel</i>	<i>Elderly owner-occupier/under occupying property/lacking no facilities</i>
Sharing bath	25	25	100	
Sharing kitchen	25	25	100	
Sharing toilet	25	25	100	
Overcrowded				
1 bedroom short	75	75		
Under occupation				25
Lodging with family	200			
Lodging with friends		300		
Living in Hostel			300	
Residency	25	25	25	25
Waiting time	5			
Total	380	650	625	50

6. EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

6.1 Introduction

The Council is committed to the principles of equal opportunities in the provision of its services. It has a legal responsibility to ensure that there is no unlawful discrimination and will strive to eliminate discrimination through its policies and procedures.

6.2 Objectives

In promoting equal opportunities with regard to access to housing, the Council aims to:

- ensure that everyone applying for housing will be treated equally regardless of their race, culture, religion, gender, physical disability, mental disability, marital status or sexual orientation.
- provide information and advice in a variety of formats to allow all individuals equality of access to and assistance regarding the lettings and homeless service.
- monitor the effectiveness of the Allocations Policy.

6.3 Action

The Council is committed to a programme of action to make the Allocations Policy fully effective. It will:

- Ensure that anyone applying for housing is dealt with fairly and without discrimination.
- Keep a record of everyone who applies for housing and monitor this information to ensure that housing is provided on an equal basis.
- Arrange for a Housing Officer to contact the applicant personally, should they require assistance in completing a housing application form or should they require information or advice about access to housing.
- Provide relevant information and advice about the Allocation Policy, in a format that meets any special requirements you might have e.g. use of an interpreter and sign language.
- Respond promptly to any complaints received about unlawful discrimination and unfair treatment.
- Ensure that the personal conduct of all employees reflects the objectives of this Equal Opportunities Policy.

UNACCEPTABLE BEHAVIOUR

The only behaviour which may be considered unacceptable is that for which the Council would be entitled to an immediate Possession Order on one of the grounds in Part 1, Schedule 2, of the Housing Act 1985, as listed below.

Main Grounds in Part 1, Schedule 2:

- Rent due not paid (Ground 1).
- Obligation of the tenancy broken or not performed (Ground 1).
- Tenant or person residing with or visiting them is guilty of conduct causing nuisance or annoyance to another in the locality (Ground 2).
- Tenant, co-resident or visitor convicted of arrestable offence in the locality or using the house for illegal or immoral purposes (Ground 2).
- Property condition (Ground 3).
- Inducing the grant of a tenancy by a false statement (Ground 5).

REASONABLE PREFERENCE

In framing their allocation scheme so as to determine priorities in the allocation of housing, housing authorities must ensure that reasonable preference is given to the following categories of people, as set out in s167 (2) of the 1996 Housing Act. These include:

- (a) people who are homeless (within the meaning of Part 7 of the 1996 Act); this includes people who are intentionally homeless, and those who are not in priority need;
- (b) people who are owed a duty by any housing authority under section 190(2), 193(2) or 195(2) of the 1996 Act (or under section 65(2) or 68(2) of the Housing Act 1985) or who are occupying accommodation secured by any housing authority under section 192(3);
- (c) people occupying insanitary or overcrowded housing or otherwise living in unsatisfactory housing conditions;
- (d) people who need to move on medical or welfare grounds; and
- (e) people who need to move to a particular locality in the district of the housing authority, where failure to meet that need would cause hardship (to themselves or to others).

It is important that the priority for housing accommodation goes to those with greater housing need. In framing their allocation scheme to give effect to s.167(2), housing authorities must have regard to the following considerations:

- (a) the scheme must include mechanisms for:
 - i) ensuring that the authority assess an applicants housing need,
and for
 - ii) identifying applicants in the greatest housing need.
- (b) the scheme must be framed so as to give reasonable preference to applicants who fall within the categories set out in s.167(2), over those who do not;
- (c) the reasonable preference categories must not be treated in isolation from one another. Since the categories can be cumulative, schemes must provide a clear mechanism for

identifying applicants who qualify under more than one category, and for taking this into account in assessing their housing need.

- (d) there is no requirement to give equal weight to each of the reasonable preference categories. However, housing authorities will need to be able to demonstrate that, overall, reasonable preference for allocations has been given to applicants in all the reasonable preference categories. Accordingly it is recommended that housing authorities put in place appropriate mechanisms to monitor the outcome of allocations; and
- (e) a scheme may provide for other factors than those set out in s.167(2) to be taken into account in determining which applicants are to be given preference under a scheme, provided they do not dominate the scheme at the expense of those in s.167(2). (See para. 5.25 below.)

Otherwise, it is for housing authorities to decide how they give effect to the provisions of s.167 (2) of the 1996 Act in their allocation scheme.

From: Allocation of Accommodation (Code of Guidance for Local Housing Authorities). ODPM, November 2002.

REPORT TO: Executive Board
DATE: 15th March 2007
REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director Health and Community
SUBJECT: Housing Capital Programme
WARD(S): Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To inform the Board of the forecast outturn for the 2006/07 housing capital programme, and to seek approval for the 2007/08 programme.

2.0 RECOMMENDED – that the position regarding the 2006/07 programme be noted, and the proposed programme for 2007/08 as set out in the report and Appendix be recommended to Council for approval.

3.0 INTRODUCTION

3.1 The Appendix compares the approved 2006/07 programme with the forecast outturn position, and shows also the proposed programme for 2007/08.

3.2 Total resources available for 2006/07 amounted to £3.717m (although only £3.664m was programmed), whereas the projected spend is estimated at £1.662m. The reasons for variations to the programme are set out in section 4 below.

3.3 Section 5 of the report sets out the level of resources likely to be available in 2007/08 based on the forecast outturn for 2006/07, and a proposed programme of work is set out in the final column of the table in the Appendix.

4.0 2006/07 PROGRAMME - VARIATIONS

4.1 Housing Grants – Whilst only committing schemes to the value of the budget, a small number of schemes have incurred substantial additional costs due to unforeseen major works. Examples of this include the need to rebuild external and party walls due to structural instability revealed when plaster is removed, piled foundations being necessary due to poor ground conditions, and the discovery of rot in roof timbers when the tiling is removed. Slippage on other projects means that this will not result in the overall budget being overspent.

4.2 Disabled Facilities Grants – The budget was increased by £25,000 in late summer following a successful bid to the Regional Housing Board for additional grant. Work to the budget value is committed/ordered, and failing delays caused by bad weather, should spend to target.

- 4.3 Energy Promotion – This project actually spent to budget but spend was offset by a credit due to an overpayment in 2005/06.
- 4.4 Castlefields Equity Release Loans – Last year’s budget report highlighted the difficulties being experienced in spending this “ring fenced” fund for its intended purpose, despite active marketing of the loans. Government Office has acknowledged these difficulties and agreed that £644,000 be vired to fund the additional costs of refurbishing the Riverview Gypsy site. Further discussions are planned with Government Office to determine how the uncommitted balance of approximately £549,000 can be spent. Proposals for committing this money will be presented to a future Board meeting.
- 4.5 Riverview Gypsy Site – Significant delays have been encountered in progressing this project, arising firstly from the need to secure resources to cover increased costs, and then to identify an alternative site to temporarily relocate residents during the works. It is now anticipated that work will start in April 2007 resulting in most of the financial commitment slipping to 2007/08.
- 4.6 Adaptations Initiative – Proposals to establish a term contract for the fast track supply, fitting and maintenance of stairlifts outside the DFG process has been more complex than envisaged, and spend will now slip to 2007/08.

5.0 2007/08 PROPOSALS

- 5.1 Based on the forecast outturn for this year’s programme, the following resources are likely to be available to finance works in 2007/08 -

	<u>£000’s</u>
B/fwd from 2006/07	2,055
New capital grant	889
DFG subsidy	385
DFG capital growth	300
 TOTAL	 3,629

- 5.2 The proposed programme of work shown in the Appendix maintains support for annual programmes such as housing grants (increased to reflect demand in 2006/07), disabled facilities grants (increased to start to tackle the backlog of applications) and energy efficiency.
- 5.3 It also makes provision for previously approved schemes with committed slippage from 2006/07, together with a contingency sum of just over £100,000.

6.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 None.

7.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

7.1 None.

8.0 RISK ANALYSIS

8.1 In relation to DFGs the spend required to secure the full Government subsidy allocation is £642,000. Failure to achieve this level may prejudice future allocations, but given existing commitment levels and waiting lists this should not be a problem, indeed the planned programme is well in excess of this figure.

9.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

9.1 The proposed programme of work will help tackle the housing problems of some of those in greatest housing need.

10.0 REASON FOR DECISION

10.1 The proposed programme will enable the Council to make continued progress in addressing the priorities set out in its Housing, Homelessness, Private Sector Renewal and Supporting People strategies.

11.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

11.1 The strategies referred to in 10.1 have previously examined a range of options for meeting housing needs in the Borough, and the proposed programme of work is based on priorities already identified.

12.0 IMPLEMENTATION DATE

12.1 April 2007.

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

Document

Place of inspection

Contact Officer

Not applicable

HOUSING CAPITAL PROGRAMME 2006/07/08 (£000s)

	Original Budget 2006/07	Revised Budget 2006/07	Probable Outturn 2006/07	Proposed Budget 2007/08
Housing Grants/Loans	484	484	608	586
Disabled Facilities Grants	660	685	685	942
Home Link	10	10	10	10
Energy Promotion	75	35	35	75
Castlefields Equity Release Loans	1,343	1,358	165	549
West Bank Neighbourhood Renewal Assessment	11	27	27	0
Housing Needs Survey	8	7	8	0
Refurbishment of Riverview Gypsy site	891	838	37	1,269
Belvedere Repairs	87	87	87	0
Adaptations Initiative	95	92	0	92
Uncommitted				106
TOTAL	3,664	3,623	1,662	3,629

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 15th March 2007

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Environment

SUBJECT: Review of Natural Assets Strategy

WARDS: Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The current Natural Assets Strategy was approved in September 2000 and defines the Council's corporate policies for our trees, woodland, and nature conservation resource. The action programme of the Strategy has been implemented and a new replacement programme is proposed. The review also reflects the changes in the wider environment in which the Strategy operates, recent changes in legislation and highlights the success of the raised profile of Halton's natural environment.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- (1) the review of the Natural Assets Strategy be approved by the Executive Board and published as a document available to the public;**
- (2) the policies and actions contained in the Natural Assets Strategy are noted by all Services and followed whenever any of the Council's activities would potentially impact on the natural environment;**
- (3) a public launch of the document to take place in 2007.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The current Natural Assets Strategy is ready for review. Its work programme of 64 actions has been followed and reported over the last five years through the Quarterly Monitoring process and the Safe & Attractive Policy and Performance Board. In November 2005, the Board recognised the many and varied achievements of the Strategy and supported the recommended review process.

3.2 The Strategy is both a policy and action document and is as much about people as about the resources themselves. Halton's natural assets provide an attractive and interesting setting for work and leisure, with known social and health benefits towards raising the quality of life for local people.

3.3 Topics covered in the Strategy have been updated and include the effect of recent legislation changes. For instance, since October 2006,

section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act gives a specific duty to local authorities to consider biodiversity in the work that they do.

- 3.4 Through the actions in the strategy, there has been a marked increase in the environmental profile of Halton both locally and regionally. Initiatives such as the promotion of Local Nature Reserves have raised expectations amongst users and there is now solid community engagement in local environmental matters.
- 3.5 The Strategy has helped to bring about an increased awareness of the environmental value of trees and woodlands and, consequently, there have been significant improvements to the number of trees being successfully established, responsibly managed and legally protected. However, one shortcoming has been identified that needs to be addressed. This concerns the setting up of a system for regularly inspecting the health and safety of trees owned by the Council. The additional funding for this required survey work should be regarded as a high priority and found from existing budgets.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Strategy is set within the context of statutory land use policies in the existing Halton Unitary Development Plan. Its status in the emerging Local Development Framework will mirror its Supplementary Planning Guidance function and will be taken into account when deciding planning applications and appeals. The Strategy is a firm statement of the Council's corporate policies towards its natural resources and contributes to all of the five strategic themes in the Community Plan. It has been prepared in accordance with the key Urban Renewal objective to enhance, promote and celebrate the quality of the built and natural environment in Halton in the Council's Corporate Plan 2006-2011.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The actions proposed in the Strategy can be undertaken within the Council's existing budgets, or by making use of external sources of funding.
- 5.2 The policies and actions in the Natural Assets Strategy have been prepared against the backdrop of the Council's response to climate change, which will appear in a separate document.

6.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 6.1 Failure to review the Natural Assets Strategy could result in a downturn to the natural environment improvements of the last five years. Failure to inspect trees on a regular basis could leave the Council vulnerable

to claims of negligence if an accident were to occur in circumstances that were foreseeable.

7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

7.1 There will be general equality and diversity benefits through a well managed natural environment.

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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Natural Assets Strategy	Picow Farm Depot	John White, Paul Oldfield



NATURAL ASSETS STRATEGY 2007-2012

FOREWORD

A healthy natural environment should be of concern to everyone, as the quality of human life depends fundamentally on the quality of the environment.

Since 2000, the Borough Council has been carrying out its Natural Assets Strategy. This has provided measurable improvements to the natural environment and its importance to the people of the Borough. The highlights of this work programme include a marked increase in the number of tree preservation orders, an increase in woodland management schemes, the expansion of a network of Local Nature Reserves and an enhanced system of biological recording with community involvement.

The Council has five strategic priorities for the Borough, which will help to build a better future for Halton. These were reviewed by the Halton Local Strategic Partnership during 2005/6 in its new Community Strategy. These are Healthy Halton; Safer Halton; Children & Young People in Halton; Employment, Skills and Learning in Halton; and Urban Renewal in Halton.

This review highlights the Council action on our natural assets for the next 5 years, taking the strategy forward until 2012 and cutting across all the strategic priorities. We will continue with those policies that are tried and tested, and introduce new actions that reflect the changing environmental circumstances in which we live. The document continues to provide the framework from which to develop and apply understandable and workable policies for our trees, woodlands and nature conservation resource.

(Signed by Leader of Council, when the strategy is approved)

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 ORIGIN AND PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGY

1.1.1 This strategy is both a policy and an action document. It provides information on the natural environment of Halton and how actions will be carried out to protect, manage and enhance this resource.

1.1.2 It is as much about people as about the resources themselves. Halton's natural assets provide an attractive and interesting setting for work and play, with known social and health benefits towards raising the quality of life for local people.

1.1.3 Since the first Natural Assets Strategy in 2000, the messages on sustainability and biodiversity have continued to be refined and kept high in the public domain. Halton's rôle remains as part of a global need to protect and improve the environment whilst also finding ways to meet social and economic needs.

1.1.4 Sustainability requires effective integration of social, economic and environmental policies, a full appreciation of environmental carrying capacities (limits and impacts) and the maintenance of our total stock of natural assets. This strategy is part of Halton's commitment to sustainable development.

1.1.5 The strategy highlights opportunities for action by a wide range of people and organisations, acting on their own or in partnership. The strategy provides a focus for actions with the overall aim of promoting Halton's natural assets resource for the future.

1.2 STATUS OF THE STRATEGY

1.2.1 The strategy is set within the context of the statutory land use policies in the Halton Unitary Development Plan (UDP) [*ref. 1*]. It will be taken into account when determining planning applications and appeals. Sections of the strategy will be used as the basis for Supplementary Planning Documents in the Local Development Scheme, which will take over from the UDP in 2008.

1.2.3 The strategy is a firm statement of the Council's corporate policies towards its natural resources and its actions form part of Halton's Community Strategy. It has been prepared in accordance with "Building a Better Future", Halton's Corporate Plan and Community Strategy.

2.0 A REVIEW OF 2000 - 2006

2.1 NATIONAL POLICIES

2.1.1 Central government has made a firm commitment to Sustainable Development. This is taken forward through Community Strategies and Local Strategic Partnerships, [ref. 2] where local authorities have an obligation to develop an environmental programme based on the principles of sustainable development, partnership and local community involvement. This provides the opportunity to develop a comprehensive and corporate approach to protecting irreplaceable natural assets and by compensating for damage or losses through habitat replacement or enhancement. Local authorities have to demonstrate, for instance, that local biodiversity planning has been considered within their community strategy and LSP.

2.1.2 The principles of the UN's Convention on Biological Diversity, together with the UK government's Sustainable Development drive, underpin all local authority work on their natural assets. Biodiversity is the variety of life, and the overall goal of the UK's Biodiversity Action Plan is "to conserve and enhance biological diversity within the UK and to contribute to the conservation of global diversity through all appropriate mechanisms". In October 2002, the England Biodiversity Strategy was published, establishing the government's vision for conserving and enhancing biodiversity in England. It expects to secure targets for species and habitat recovery. The targets will have a role in helping to meet the Government's commitment made at the 2002 Johannesburg world Summit to significantly reduce the rate of biodiversity loss by 2010. More recently, the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006 places greater responsibility upon public sector bodies to consider biodiversity in the work they do.

2.1.3 Recent changes in the planning system reflect these sustainability and biodiversity issues. Planning Policy Statement 9: Biodiversity and Geological Conservation (PPS9) marks a significant advance in how the planning system supports the conservation of the natural environment while delivering sustainable development. PPS9 requires planning policies to be based on up to date environmental information and acknowledges that natural asset issues have a key role to play in other policy agendas for rural renewal, urban renaissance, green space provision, quality of life and well-being. It also recognises that local wildlife sites, currently called SINC's in Halton, have a fundamental role to play in helping to meet national biodiversity targets

2.1.4 Parks and open spaces are very much back on the national agenda, so that everyone has access to attractive, well managed and safe greenspace within a short walk of home. This requires such areas to be multi functional, combing the natural environment with policies for recreation, heritage, social inclusion and regeneration agendas. CAFE Space is part of the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment and was set up in May 2003. It champions excellence in the design and management of parks, streets, squares and other open spaces in our towns and cities.

2.1.5 Climate change presents a series of important and immediate challenges to our natural assets. There is already clear evidence to show that plants and animals, including those characteristic of the England's countryside and seas, are being affected by climate change. This includes changes in populations, ranges, migration patterns, and seasonal and reproductive behaviour of certain species. Such effects will become more apparent and extensive as climate continues to change, with local species extinctions and habitat-loss becoming increasingly probable. Current work nationally suggests that green space may be the key to making cities liveable in future. Parks, gardens, street trees, living roofs and walls, ponds and rivers can help with overheating and the problems of both too much water and not

enough. National policies are emerging, and Halton's response will be published in due course.

2.1.6 Changes in the objectives and priorities for woodland management have been brought about by The England Forestry Strategy [ref. 3] and the introduction of a new Woodland Grant Scheme. The system of grants has been radically revised to reflect the values that are most desired by today's society. These include the creation and maintenance of habitats for wildlife, producing healthy and pleasing living and working environments for people, protecting biodiversity and aspects of our cultural heritage, and providing safe areas for recreation and sport.

2.1.7 The two British Standards which are most commonly used in arboriculture have been extensively revised to include recent advances in best practice. BS3998 recommends how tree surgery operations should be carried out in a safe and responsible manner. BS5837 gives recommendations and guidance on the principles to be applied when considering which trees should be retained on development sites and how those trees should be protected from the construction works.

2.1.8 New legislation about High Hedges was contained in Part 8 of the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003. This gave local authorities the power to investigate complaints made by local residents about evergreen hedges in neighbouring properties.

2.2 REGIONAL ISSUES

2.2.1 The Regional Spatial Strategy for the North West [ref 4] sets out the future framework for development, including the adoption of sustainability principles, and covers a broad range of targets for the environment. In delivering these targets, Local authorities should afford the highest level of protection and management to those resources which are important or irreplaceable; ensure there is no net loss in the value of other biodiversity resources in the region; and return key biodiversity resources to viable levels in accordance with the targets in UK and Local Biodiversity Action Plans. The North West Biodiversity Forum provides a co-ordinating mechanism to assess biodiversity sustainability in the region.

2.2.2 Halton is part of a regional Natural Area put forward by English Nature called the Urban Mersey Basin [ref. 5]. This is not a formal designation but a way of combining physical features, wildlife habitats, land use patterns and culture. The Urban Mersey Basin covers approximately 2,360 square kilometres and contains all of Halton that is above the mid-tide level of the Mersey Estuary: permanently submerged marine habitats are in the Liverpool Bay Natural Area. Despite the pressures of manufacturing and service activities, agriculture still remains the most widespread use of land stretching from the Cheshire plain to the south and to the north of St. Helens. The estuaries of the Dee, Mersey and Alt are of international importance, saltmarsh and lowland heath of national importance, ancient woodland and ponds of regional importance and industrial sites with calcicole (alkaline-loving) vegetation of more local importance.

2.2.4 The Regional Forestry Framework for England's Northwest [ref. 6] was published in 1995 with the aim of helping to shape the woodland and forestry sector in the region for the next twenty years. The Framework is based on six Action Areas:-

- Enterprise and Industry
- Regional Image
- Biodiversity and Landscape
- Health, Well-being and Quality of Life
- Climate Change and Energy

- Supporting and Resourcing the Sector.

2.3 LOCAL INFLUENCES OF THE NATURAL ASSETS STRATEGY

2.3.1 The Council has five strategic priorities for the borough, which will help to build a better future for Halton. These were reviewed by the Halton Local Strategic Partnership during 2005/6 in its new Community Strategy. These are Healthy Halton; Safer Halton; Children & Young People in Halton; Employment, Skills and Learning in Halton; and Urban Renewal in Halton. The action programme of the Natural Assets strategy cuts across these priorities.

2.3.1. The Borough Council's Unitary Development Plan (UDP) provides a development control framework for enhancement and the current Natural Assets Strategy has been adopted as Supplementary Planning Guidance. Further changes are now required to ensure our natural assets are included in the Local Development Scheme which is taking over from the UDP.

2.3.2 Community involvement in the Natural Assets Strategy continues to grow. Area forums have been in place since 2003 and successfully and quickly tackle local issues. At the same time, our Area Forums provide a vehicle for community empowerment, engagement and participation. On specific environmental matters, Halton's Natural Environment Roundtable brings together a wide range of organisations and individuals with an interest in the local environment.

2.3.3 Participation in the national Green Flag Awards has risen, with 6 of our open spaces regularly receiving this award. The Green Flag standard includes recognition of the natural element within site management plans and has further helped to carry out the natural assets work programme.

2.3.4 The Council's web site has developed significantly over the last five years, not least with its content regarding the natural environment. Information and guidance about many local issues of interest and concern can now be accessed in this way.

3.0 A STRATEGY FOR TREES & WOODLANDS

3.1 THE IMPORTANCE OF TREES & WOODLANDS

POLICY ONE The Council recognises the important contribution made by trees and woodlands to the environment and is committed to the responsible and sustainable custodianship of this resource on any land which it owns or influences.

3.1.1 Trees and woodlands are of vital importance in maintaining and improving the quality of life for those who live or work within the Borough. Trees are the most obvious of our natural assets, by virtue of their size and prominence, but they do not last for ever and are vulnerable to changes in their surroundings. The many benefits that trees bring to the environment have been well documented [ref. 7] and it is our duty to ensure that, as well as ourselves, future generations are also able to enjoy these benefits.

3.1.2 Trees have great visual amenity value which can significantly enhance the appearance of the locality. They provide contrasts of size, colour and texture to the urban landscape and effectively reflect the changing seasons, bringing nature into towns. Prominent trees become accepted as landmarks and are often held in high regard by local residents.

3.1.3 Of increasing value to modern living is the contribution that trees make to improving the quality of the air that we breathe. As well as removing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and releasing oxygen, trees also improve air quality by filtering out harmful pollutants (such as ozone, ammonia, sulphur dioxide, nitrous oxides and dust particles). A number of scientific studies have demonstrated these properties, which are of benefit to us all but are of particular importance to the growing numbers of people with respiratory ailments.

3.1.4 Trees in towns can screen unsightly structures and activities. They can give privacy and help to reduce noise from traffic and industry. They can have a limiting effect on the extremes of weather by providing shelter from wind and shade from the sun. They are effective in intercepting rainfall, thus reducing problems of rapid water run-off from hard surfaces.

3.1.5 Woodlands, and parklands which contain trees, provide essential space for quiet, informal recreation activities such as walking, jogging and cycling. The opportunity to escape briefly into these areas from the hustle and bustle of modern life is very important and should not be taken for granted. Woodlands are also important for landscape and wildlife reasons, and for the production of timber, a renewable resource.

3.1.6 Halton is situated at the heart of The Mersey Forest, the largest of England's twelve designated community forests. The Council is an active partner in this project, which was launched in 1994 with the aim of dramatically increasing woodland cover in the region over the next 30 years. In Halton, the successful outcome has been the creation of more than 100 hectares of new woodland to date.

3.1.7 This strategy concerns all trees in the administrative area of Halton; whether old or young, whether urban or rural, whether publicly or privately owned and whether they are growing in woodlands or groups, or as individual specimens. All trees should be regarded as parts of the living landscape and subject to the principles of sustainability. Following sections of this strategy will describe the characteristics of these various components of the treescape, and the Council's policies towards them. The main purpose of these policies is to raise awareness of the value of trees, so that decisions affecting them are not taken without due consideration.

3.1.8 Only 7% of England's surface area is made up of woodland (greater than 0.25 hectare in size) and Halton has less than half of this national average. The resource of smaller wooded areas (less than 0.25 hectare in size) and individual trees in Halton is very varied, with some parts of the Borough being very poor in tree cover whilst other parts have relatively high numbers of trees. Runcorn New Town has an abundance of both mature woodlands and developing semi-mature trees, and is a good example of an urban forest.

3.1.9 Ancient woodlands are of particular historical and ecological importance, requiring special attention [see 3.4.13 & Appendix 3]. Halton has a number of ancient woodland sites but very few ancient individual trees, usually termed "veteran" trees. An explanation for this could be that dramatic losses of trees were caused by pollution in the 1880's, when emissions from chemical factories at Weston killed trees within a distance of eight miles, including 5,000 trees on the Norton Estate [ref. 8].

3.1.10 In the traditional urban and suburban areas, there are a significant number of trees in streets, parks and gardens which are fully mature (more than 60 years old). These trees are mainly of large-growing species such as Oak, Ash, Beech, Horse Chestnut, Sycamore and Lime. Post-war planting of verges and open spaces has tended to use a wider variety of species, with a higher proportion of smaller-growing varieties such as Cherry, Rowan, Thorn and Birch.

3.1.11 Runcorn has expanded greatly since its designation as a New Town in 1964 and large numbers of trees have been planted since then to landscape the new roads, housing estates and industrial units. A wide variety of tree types have been planted, including the full range of native species, some decorative exotics and fast-growing species such as Poplar, Alder and Willow. These trees are now semi-mature and in need of attention, as many are still at close spacing and some are situated close to properties.

3.1.12 Most of the larger and mature woodlands in the Runcorn area are managed by The Woodland Trust. These woods are essential to the local environment and are open to public access at all times. The grounds of Norton Priory contain some fine specimen trees, some of them being of rare species.

3.1.13 Widnes is very much associated with the chemical industry and has in the past been regarded as a hostile environment for tree establishment. Tree cover is still relatively poor but, in recent years, extensive planting has been carried out on reclaimed sites and within the corridor of the new trunk road system. These trees will become more noticeable in the landscape as they grow.

3.1.14 Outside Halton's principal towns of Runcorn and Widnes, are the villages of Moore, Preston Brook, Daresbury and Hale, and the adjoining countryside. Trees are significant and characteristic features of these areas too. Changes in agricultural practices and other factors have influenced the rural landscape over the last thirty years or so, with declining numbers of hedgerows and hedgerow trees. On a more positive note, there are some good local examples where new hedges and woodlands have been successfully planted on farmland.

3.1.15 Despite a general awareness of the tree stock and the pressures it is under, there is not enough detailed information available for it to be managed effectively. Surveys need to be undertaken to record the numbers, distribution, age and health of the Borough's trees. The data gathered could then be used to assist in making decisions about how they can be managed responsibly and sustainably.

3.1.16 The key objective of management should be to establish and maintain a resource of trees and woodlands which:-

- is sufficiently high in number to meet environmental needs,
- is diverse in species, but with a preponderance of native origin,
- is suited to location,
- is in a good state of health, and
- has balanced proportions of mature, semi-mature and young trees, thus ensuring continuity of cover in the future.

3.2 TREES ON DEVELOPMENT SITES

POLICY TWO The Council will seek, through the development control process, to retain and protect trees of high amenity value, to replace any trees which are unavoidably lost, and overall to increase the number and quality of trees in the Borough.

3.2.1 Existing trees in prominent locations are usually held in great esteem by the public and it is therefore not surprising that such trees can become the subject of controversy when threatened by a development proposal. The careful retention of healthy trees can give a sense of maturity to a development and be a significant asset when selling new properties. However, there is no point in trying to keep trees which are overmature or defective and which could soon become dangerous in their new surroundings.

3.2.2 The relevant British Standard [*ref. 9*] should be regarded as an essential reference for all those concerned with the development of sites where trees are present. It gives valuable guidance, following a logical sequence of events from the initial survey through the design period to the protection of retained trees from site works by the provision of temporary fencing. All developers of land in Halton where trees are present should be expected to adopt these principles when submitting applications for planning permission.

Action 1 The Council will require developers of sites containing trees to demonstrate that the principles of BS 5837 are being followed during the planning process, and will not grant permission if this is not the case.

3.2.3 The input of an experienced arboriculturalist at an early stage of the planning process is strongly recommended and, whenever the opportunity arises, the Council should encourage pre-application discussions with developers about the relative importance of existing trees. An information leaflet giving further advice on this topic is available from the Council, which will be updated and formally adopted as supplementary planning guidance.

Action 2 The Council will publish a Supplementary Planning Guidance document about trees on development sites.

3.2.4 An essential first stage of planning a development should be to carry out a thorough survey of existing natural features. Such a survey should plot all trees accurately and record details of species, size, approximate age and physical condition. The trees should then be categorised in accordance with the BS5837 guidelines and the information taken into account when designing possible layouts for the site.

3.2.5 Where significant trees are present, developers should engage a specialist consultant to prepare a detailed report about the arboricultural implications of the development and any special methods of working which need to be applied to ensure that important trees are retained in a healthy condition. Such a commitment may be necessary to show that all the factors relating to trees have been properly considered and that the granting of planning permission will not result in a net loss to the environment.

3.2.6 The Council has the opportunity to protect existing trees on a development site by making new tree preservation orders (TPOs) and by attaching conditions to any permission granted. The Council should take this responsibility seriously by carrying out surveys of potential development sites to assess the amenity value of any trees present and taking appropriate action.

Action 3 The Council will seek to protect trees of high amenity value on development sites by making tree preservation orders where appropriate and by attaching conditions to planning consents.

3.2.7 Under certain circumstances, trees can cause structural damage to buildings with inadequate foundations. To eliminate any potential threat of this type of damage, the National House Building Council (NHBC) has produced guidelines for determining the appropriate depth of foundation when building near to trees [ref. 10]. These standards should be applied to all new building operations, hopefully allowing trees and buildings to co-exist in the future without conflict.

Action 4 The Council will ensure that adequate foundations are provided for new buildings when they are constructed close to trees, in accordance with NHBC Standards, Chapter 4.2.

3.2.8 In situations where it is determined that the needs of development outweigh the amenity value of existing trees, there should be adequate compensatory planting. If there is insufficient space to plant suitable replacements within the site, the developer should be asked to fund planting on Council land in the vicinity.

3.2.9 The Council's minimum arboricultural target for development sites should be to maintain the number and quality of trees, in accordance with the principles of sustainability. However, where appropriate, opportunities to increase tree cover in the Borough should be taken and high quality landscaping schemes should be required as a condition of all planning permissions.

Action 5 The Council will seek to at least maintain, and wherever possible increase, the tree cover of the Borough as part of the development control process.

3.2.10 In summary, the Council's policies towards trees on development sites should aim to:-

- Retain wherever possible all trees which are of value to the environment, ensuring that they are fully protected from site works and successfully incorporated into their new.
- Ensure that appropriate replacement planting is carried out to compensate for any unavoidable loss of trees.
- Overall, to increase the quantity and quality of trees in the Borough.

3.3 THE SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF TREES & HEDGES

POLICY THREE The Council will manage its own stock of trees and hedges in a sustainable manner which takes into account both safety and amenity issues, and encourage other landowners to do likewise.

Council owned trees

3.3.1 The environmental benefits of trees and woodlands are great, but so are the responsibilities of management and the possible consequences of negligence. Trees are

living, changing entities and can sometimes develop into potentially dangerous structures which can cause serious damage to people and property [ref. 11].

3.3.2 Under Common Law, all landowners have a duty of care to manage trees in their ownership, in the interests of the safety of their neighbours and the general public. Where the owner is a large organisation such as a local authority, it is clear from past court judgements that a high level of expertise is expected in the management of trees in public places. The Council thus has an obligation to have its trees inspected on a regular basis by a qualified person, in order to detect any indications of disease, decay or structural defects, and to take any action found to be necessary.

3.3.3 The Council has set up a system for recording information about trees, but the process of data collection has been constrained by the limited availability of qualified staff. During the next five years, it is proposed to allocate funds for the appointment of an arboricultural consultant to assist with this task. To demonstrate that the available resources are being used as effectively as possible, trees in areas of high public usage (such as those in proximity to buildings and principal roads) will be designated as a high priority for regular inspection.

Action 6 The Council will continue to monitor the trees in its ownership by carrying out regular inspections and by storing information about their quantity, distribution, size, species, age, health and condition.

3.3.4 As well as the removal of trees which are found to be diseased or dangerous, trees which are unsuitable for their position should also be felled. Otherwise, they will become more of a problem in the future and more expensive to deal with by then. Thinning of groups of trees to promote healthy growth of the better ones should be regarded as an important investment for the landscape of the future.

Action 7 The Council will, subject to available finance, carry out all work recommended by the tree survey programme. Priority will be given to any works deemed necessary for safety reasons.

3.3.5 By inspecting trees and carrying out any recommended work proactively, the Council should be better placed to demonstrate that it is fulfilling its duty of care. In time, this should also help to reduce the number of complaints and emergency call-outs, as developing problems are dealt with at an earlier stage. However, with human nature and the weather being what they are, it will never be possible to remove this reactive type of work completely.

3.3.6 The Council regularly receives letters and telephone calls complaining about its trees, usually from those living nearest to them. Some complaints seem to be of a trivial nature, but others have more substance and are made with good justification. Trees can obstruct light and views, interfere with TV reception, and generally become troublesome because of honeydew drip and falling leaves. However, the positive benefits of the tree should always be weighed against any cited problems before deciding what action, if any, to take.

3.3.7 Requests to fell trees which are in a healthy condition and of high amenity value should usually be resisted; conversely, trees which are in poor condition or clearly unsuited to their location are best removed. Requests to reduce the height of trees should in most cases be turned down, but crown lifting or thinning may be an acceptable alternative. The Council has the technical knowledge and experience to make these judgements, including the priority and seasonal timing to be given to each agreed task.

Action 8 The Council will treat all communications about trees courteously and in compliance with the published standards of the Council. However, there will

be a presumption against felling or reducing the height of trees which are owned by the Council without good justification.

3.3.8 Whenever work is carried out on trees owned by the Council, it should be in accordance with good arboricultural practice [ref. 12]. Any pruning undertaken should not be detrimental to the general health, shape and character of the tree concerned. All work should also be carried out in compliance with all the current health and safety regulations.

Action 9 The Council will carry out all tree work in accordance with British Standard 3998 (latest revision) and all relevant health and safety regulations.

3.3.9 Street trees are probably the most prominent category of trees of the urban forest, but are usually the ones which face the most stressful growing conditions. As well as having to function in poor and compacted soils, often beneath hard surfacing, the roots have to share this space with the various utilities. This means that trenches are regularly dug by the statutory undertakers to install new services or to maintain existing ones. This ground disturbance, particularly when roots are severed, is a real threat to tree health and stability. National codes of practice have been produced to describe the best working methods to be adopted when carrying out excavation or other highways works close to trees [ref. 13]. The Council should insist that these standards are adhered to by all the utility companies and by its own contractors.

Action 10 The Council will expect and require all utility companies to carry out any essential trenching work close to trees in accordance with NJUG 10. The Council will apply the same principles when planning or undertaking its own work close to trees.

3.3.10 Claims are frequently made against the Council because of alleged damage to property by tree roots. Roots can cause damage either directly or indirectly. Direct damage can occur when an expanding trunk or root is in contact with hard surfacing such as paths and lightly-loaded structures such as garden walls. This type of damage is relatively common but remedial work is usually straight-forward and can often be carried out without felling the tree.

3.3.11 Indirect damage can occur when trees extract water from shrinkable soils, leading to subsidence of nearby buildings with inadequate foundations [ref. 14]. This type of damage is much less common, but potentially has more serious consequences. The interaction between trees, soils and buildings is complex and, unfortunately, assumptions that the trees are responsible for any damage are too often made before a proper investigation has been carried out. The Council should ensure that important trees are not needlessly felled because of unproven accusations.

Action 11 The Council will refer any claims of damage by trees to its insurers, together with a full report on the incident. The report will include recommendations for appropriate tree work, or for further investigation if necessary.

Privately owned trees

3.3.12 Trees are always the responsibility of the owner of the land on which they are growing. The Council can thus only influence the management of privately owned trees by giving advice when requested or by using legislation when applicable.

3.3.13 The Council does not have the resources to give detailed advice about privately owned trees, even if it were considered to be a proper function of local government. This is rightly the role of private consultants, and should remain so, particularly in cases where the trees may become a matter of dispute between two adjacent landowners. However, the

Council regularly receives enquiries from tree owners and should continue to offer initial guidance about good arboricultural practice and about the importance of choosing a reliable specialist contractor to carry out any work.

3.3.14 A proportion of the trees which were planted as part of the development of Runcorn New Town are now owned by various housing associations. Trees of certain species may not be suitable for long-term retention close to houses and it is accepted that some may have to be removed. However, such work should ideally be prioritised and phased over a number of years, in accordance with a set of agreed environmental principles. It is particularly important that trees which are well suited to their location and have the potential to develop into key landscape features of the future should be protected, either by designation in a management plan or by making them subject to a tree preservation order.

Action 12 The Council will, subject to staff resources, encourage and assist any housing association which is preparing a strategy for the management of its trees in the Borough.

3.3.15 Under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990, the Council has the power to protect trees in the interests of amenity by making tree preservation orders (TPOs). The effect of a TPO is to prohibit the felling or pruning of the trees concerned without the permission of the Council. Trees in conservation areas which are not protected by TPOs are subject to other controls. Generally, anyone who proposes to fell or prune a tree over a certain size in a conservation area must give the Council six weeks notice. This is intended to give the Council a chance to make a TPO if it sees fit.

3.3.16 Although there are limitations to the TPO system, in that it is mainly preventative and can therefore be seen as a disincentive to positive management, it has been in existence for more than fifty years and has stood the test of time. A thorough review of the legislation was carried out in 1994 and this indicated widespread support for TPOs as an effective means of protecting trees which make a significant impact on the amenity of local areas. The Government believed that this review struck a good balance between the need to deliver effective protection of trees and the need to retain public confidence in a system which directly affects the freedom of the individual.

3.3.17 Following the 1994 review, new TPO Regulations came into force in 1999 [ref. 15]. The Government then published a document which gives guidance to local authorities about TPO legislation [ref. 16].

Action 13 The Council will make tree preservation orders to protect healthy trees which are of significant amenity value to the general public, particularly those considered to be under threat.

3.3.18 There are more than 100 TPOs, covering more than six thousand trees, in operation in Halton. The Council should administer these orders in a positive manner and not unreasonably refuse consent to carry out work. When deciding applications to fell or prune trees which are subject to a TPO, the issues to be considered should include both safety and public amenity. When requested, free advice about principles and procedures should be given to owners of protected trees.

Action 14 The Council will give free advice on the management of protected trees and will aim to issue a decision on all applications to carry out work on them within six weeks. However, there will be a presumption against granting consent to fell without good justification.

3.3.19 Anyone who cuts down a tree without consent is liable to a maximum fine of £20,000 in the Magistrates' Court (or an unlimited fine in the Crown Court). A lower fine of up to £2,500 may be imposed on anyone who deliberately damages a tree without destroying it. Failure to give the required notice to carry out work on a tree within a conservation area could result in penalties similar to those for contravening a TPO. To maintain the credibility of this legislation, the Council must be prepared to take the necessary action when there are any infringements.

Action 15 The Council will investigate all unauthorised work on protected trees and, if considered appropriate, prosecute those responsible.

3.3.20 Where privately owned trees are in such a condition as to present an imminent danger to persons or property, or where overhanging branches obstruct the highway, the Council has powers to serve notice under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1974 or the Highways Act 1980. This legislation should be used when necessary to make sure that action is taken, but with discretion and with the offer of free advice in the first instance.

Action 16 The Council will take appropriate action to ensure that privately owned trees which are in a dangerous condition or which obstruct the highway are felled or pruned to remove the danger or obstruction.

Hedges

3.3.21 Hedgerows are the most traditional form of field boundary in the local countryside and are important for historical, landscape and nature conservation reasons. They form distinctive visual features which contribute positively to the rural landscape. They often contain a great diversity of plant and wildlife species in their own right, but perhaps their greatest value to nature in this area are the links that they provide between habitats. A good network of hedgerows can enable wildlife to move freely along these corridors.

3.3.22 The loss of hedgerows from the countryside over the last thirty years or so has been a continuing cause for concern throughout England. A survey carried out by the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology [ref. 17] revealed that between 1984 and 1990 the total hedgerow length in England had fallen by more than 20%. However, a later survey [ref. 18] showed that the rate of hedgerow removal had slowed down to approximately 3,600 kilometres per year and that the rate of new planting had increased to 4,400 kilometres per year. The gains therefore now appear to be outweighing the losses in numerical terms, but there are still concerns about the dramatic losses of the past and the protection of those important hedgerows for which no amount of replanting can substitute.

3.3.23 The Environment Act 1995 included an enabling clause to allow the introduction of regulations to protect certain categories of hedgerows. These were then defined in The Hedgerows Regulations 1997 and guidance given to local authorities about the administration of the system [ref. 19]. In essence, a farmer or landowner must notify the local authority before removing a rural hedge which is at least 20 metres long, at least 30 years old and which meets at least one of a set of archaeological, historical, landscape or wildlife criteria. The local planning authority generally has 42 calendar days from receipt of notification in which to give or refuse consent. If the authority does not respond within this period, the hedgerow may be removed. Removal in contravention of these regulations is a criminal offence and liable to a fine of up to £5,000.

3.3.24 It is fair to say that the 1997 Regulations have been widely criticised by environmental organisations as being too weak, probably only giving some degree of protection to less than 20% of hedgerows. The present Government has acknowledged this

and announced that the regulations will be reviewed in due course. It is anticipated that any revision will extend the number of hedgerows which can be protected.

Action 17 The Council will administer and enforce the Hedgerow Regulations in the Halton area. In doing so, the Council will ensure that the procedures used are in accordance with the current legislation.

3.3.25 Irrespective of any legislation, the most effective means of protecting hedgerows remains in the hands of the farmers and landowners. They should be encouraged to manage their hedgerows in an environmentally sympathetic manner, including the use of traditional hedge laying. There are examples of good practice in hedgerow management, including renovation by laying operations, on the Daresbury Estate and adjoining the Runcorn Expressway.

Action 18 The Council will promote the management of hedgerows with landowners, colleges and voluntary groups, including the use of traditional hedge-laying techniques when and where appropriate.

3.3.26 In residential areas, conifer hedges which have been allowed to grow unchecked can reach excessive heights and thereby become a source of annoyance to neighbours. Since 2005, local residents have been able to complain to the Council about such hedges, provided that all other avenues for resolving the dispute have been tried and exhausted.

3.3.27 The role of the Council is not to mediate or negotiate between the complainant and the hedge owner, but to adjudicate on whether (in the words of the Act) the hedge is adversely affecting the complainant's reasonable enjoyment of their property. In doing so, the authority must take account of all relevant factors and must strike a balance between the competing interests of the complainant and hedge owner, as well as the interests of the wider community.

3.3.28 If the circumstances justify it, the Council will issue a formal notice to the hedge owner which will set out what action must be taken to remedy the problem, and by what date. Failure to carry out the works required by the local authority is an offence which, on prosecution, could lead to a fine of up to £1,000. The Government has published a document which gives guidance to local authorities about the administration of this legislation [ref. 20].

Action 19 The Council will investigate and determine all complaints made about high hedges under Part 8 of the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003.

3.4 THE SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF WOODLANDS

POLICY FOUR The Council will manage its own woodlands in a sustainable manner which takes into account all landscape, silvicultural, recreational and nature conservation issues, and encourage private landowners to do likewise.

Council owned woodlands

3.4.1 The Council does not own extensive areas of woodland; most of the urban woodlands in Runcorn are owned by the Woodland Trust and the rest of the district is relatively poorly wooded. It is therefore all the more important that the woods which are owned by the Council are managed in a sustainable manner to maximise their benefit to those who live or work within the Borough.

3.4.2 The principal areas of mature woodland owned by the Council are at Daresbury Firs, Norton Priory, Pickerings Rough, Runcorn Hill and Clinton Wood. The Council has in the last twenty years also created substantial new areas of developing woodland at Boston Wood, Beaconsfield Wood, Moore Meadows, Pickerings Pasture, Sunnybank, Arley Wood, Hale Road Woodlands and the extension to Clinton Wood.

3.4.3 In addition to these woodlands, the Council is also responsible for substantial areas of structure planting which were established as part of the development of the New Town. These small wooded areas can be found on open spaces and road embankments throughout the Borough and are already very important in landscape terms.

3.4.4 Daresbury Firs is the largest Council-owned woodland (approx. 11ha.) and consists mainly of Corsican, Scots and Lodgepole Pine. It was established as a commercial forestry plantation in 1978 and acquired by the Council in 1996, since when it has been successfully managed on behalf of the Council by Groundwork Mersey Valley. The path network has been improved, bracken has been controlled and a programme of thinning has been started. A comprehensive management plan was produced in 2005 to guide future works.

Action 20 The Council will, in consultation with the Forestry Commission and other appropriate bodies, manage Daresbury Firs and its other principal areas of woodland in accordance with good forestry practice.

3.4.5 The woodland areas at Norton Priory have many valuable and interesting characteristics, such as the rare tree species within a woodland garden setting and the rejuvenated orchard area. The Council should sustain its support for the Museum and Gardens Trust in their management of these priceless natural assets for the benefit of visitors and the environment generally.

Action 21 The Council will sustain its support for the work of the Norton Priory Museum Trust in managing the grounds of Norton Priory, including the provision of forestry and arboricultural advice on a regular basis.

3.4.6 The maintenance of recent woodland planting and the selective thinning or coppicing of semi-mature groups of trees should be regarded as important investments for the future environment. This work can too easily be neglected in favour of projects which may appear to be of a more immediate priority. If this were allowed to happen, then the result would be an unacceptable failure rate of new planting (with consequent liability to pay back any grant) and a new generation of poor spindly trees (probably of the wrong species and more vulnerable to disease and windblow). The areas of structure planting need management of a specialist nature if they are to realise their full potential.

Action 22 The Council will, subject to budget limitations, carry out the maintenance, thinning and coppicing work necessary to establish new multi-purpose woodlands for the future, in accordance with good forestry practice.

3.4.7 Where semi-mature trees are felled as a thinning operation, replacement planting is not needed for reasons of sustainability because the remaining trees will exploit the extra space and increase in size accordingly. There will thus be no net loss in leaf area and all the environmental benefits will be retained, but the individual trees will be larger, healthier and more stable.

Privately owned woodlands

3.4.8 Mature woodlands are relatively scarce in Halton and therefore of all the more significance. Woodlands can provide timber and generate employment. They can enhance

the beauty of the countryside, reduce pollution, improve health and provide wildlife habitats. They can also provide opportunities for sporting and recreational activities, and improve the quality of life in and around towns by screening development and improving the setting for housing and industry. Few other land uses can provide such a diverse range of benefits to society and the Council's policies towards them should reflect this value.

3.4.9 Control over woodland management in general, including tree felling, is exercised by the Forestry Commission through the voluntary Woodland Grant Scheme (WGS) and the statutory felling licence regulations. Anyone proposing to fell more than five cubic metres of timber in a three month period must, with few exceptions, first obtain a felling licence.

3.4.10 All new applications to enter the WGS or to obtain a felling licence are listed by the Forestry Commission in a public register. After inclusion in the public register, there is a consultation period of 28 days for any comments to be submitted for consideration. All applications must meet the Forestry Commission's own published environmental standards, but it is right that any local concerns such as the effect on landscape or nature conservation are also taken into account at this stage. Any proposal which involves clear felling, inappropriate restocking or which would result in a net loss of woodland should be subject to particular scrutiny.

Action 23 The Council will object to, or seek revision of, any application appearing on the Forestry Commission's public register which is considered to be unjustifiably detrimental to the local landscape or to nature conservation.

3.4.11 The Council should welcome the sensitive and sustainable management of private woodlands for multipurpose objectives, mindful that it is the woodland as a whole which is important, not the individual trees within it. There is nothing wrong with cutting trees down for timber at the right time, provided that it is done in accordance with an approved plan which takes into account all the environmental constraints. In fact, the introduction of an uneven age structure usually benefits wildlife and is often the best way of conserving a woodland for the future. The Mersey Forest team can assist landowners in the Halton area to draw up plans for their woodlands and this should be welcomed by the Council.

Action 24 The Council will encourage private landowners to prepare management plans for their woodlands, and to seek advice from the Mersey Forest team if required.

3.4.12 In Runcorn most of the town's woodlands are managed by the Woodland Trust, a very large and successful charity organisation which is dedicated to acquiring and managing woodlands for the benefit of amenity and wildlife. The public has free access to all of its woodlands at all times and the Council recognises the importance of this natural resource for informal recreation, as well as all the other environmental benefits it provides.

Action 25 The Council will support in principle the objectives of the Woodland Trust in the management of its woodlands in Halton.

3.4.13 Ancient semi-natural woodlands (defined as those sites which have been continuously wooded since at least the year 1600) are a precious natural asset deserving particular attention. This is recognised by central government in the England Forestry Strategy [ref. 3]. The Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership has prepared a Biodiversity Action Plan for Ancient Woodlands in this region and the Council is represented on the Working Group. The known ancient woodland sites in Halton are listed in Appendix 3.

Action 26 The Council will seek to prevent any loss of ancient semi-natural woodland and will assist Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership in the implementation of a Biodiversity Action Plan for ancient woodlands in Halton.

3.5 THE ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW TREES & WOODLANDS

POLICY FIVE The Council will seek through its own actions, and in partnership with others, to establish new trees and woodlands in appropriate locations.

3.5.1 Trees are part of a living landscape which is not constant, but is changing with time. It is inevitable that some trees will be lost each year, for one reason or another, and a sustained effort is therefore needed to establish enough young trees to keep the numbers at an acceptable level. This is fundamental to the concept of sustainability and should be regarded as our responsibility to future generations. Just as we are able to enjoy the trees which our forefathers planted, so must we ensure that our successors will have the opportunity to appreciate trees which were planted during our era of land custodianship.

3.5.2 Where individual trees owned by the Council are felled, appropriate replacement planting should be carried out within the ward boundary. This need not necessarily be of the same species in the same location, as unsuitability may well have been the reason for removing the tree in the first place. However, it should be the intention to at least maintain, preferably increase, the number of trees overall within the Borough.

3.5.3 In all tree planting schemes, the choice of species is important. Planting trees of large ultimate size in confined locations can only be of short-term benefit and will produce a management problem and a financial burden for the future. Conversely, planting trees of only modest ultimate size in large open spaces can be a wasted opportunity. To create natural assets for the future which maximise the benefits and minimise the potential problems, any trees planted as individual specimens should be suited to the site and have sufficient space to grow to maturity.

Action 27 The Council will carry out suitable planting to replace every mature tree that has to be felled, thereby sustaining the number of trees on Council land.

3.5.4 Acting alone, the Council cannot hope to achieve the levels of planting needed to realise an increased tree cover for the future. The efforts of other organisations and private landowners are required, acting independently or in partnerships. Nationwide campaigns such as the annual “National Tree Week” are helpful in raising public awareness and the Council should support these locally, as far as resources allow. A good example of this is the work done at Norton Priory in raising seedlings from local seed sources, to be used in new planting schemes throughout the Borough.

3.5.5 The involvement of local communities and schoolchildren in tree planting schemes should be encouraged wherever possible. A welcome development in this respect would be an increase in the number of tree wardens in the Borough, to represent the urban areas as well as the areas covered by parish councils. The tree warden scheme is organised locally by the Cheshire Landscape Trust.

Action 28 The Council will support the aims of the Tree Warden Scheme and will encourage communication with any appointed tree wardens based in the Halton area.

3.5.6 The Mersey Forest is one of twelve community forests in England to be promoted by the Forestry Commission and the Countryside Agency. Halton Borough Council is one of the nine local authority partners in the project, which aims to substantially increase the woodland cover of the Merseyside and North Cheshire area over the next 30 years or so. The Forest Plan was first published in 1994 and reviewed in 2001 [ref. 21] and set out six central themes for creating the Forest:-

- Converting wasteland to woodland
- Creating networks of wooded greenways
- Greening key transport routes
- Returning farmland to forestry
- Weaving woodland into new development, and
- Capitalising on the existing woodland assets.

3.5.7 The guiding principles for The Mersey Forest in Halton are:-

- Provide a woodland buffer around the urban edge and create a wooded edge to the Mersey Estuary.
- Extend planting into the urban area using all appropriate and available land, including derelict land.
- Provide a new woodland structure for surrounding agricultural areas.
- Protect and manage the existing resource of urban trees and woodlands in a sustainable manner.

3.5.8 Following on from the guiding principles, the Plan contains a list of specific policies and opportunities which make up the “Halton planting strategy”. These policies are linked to areas of the Borough and have been incorporated into the Unitary Development Plan.

3.5.9 Since the concept of The Mersey Forest was adopted, more than 100 hectares of new woodland has been created in Halton. The Council should continue to play its part in the partnership and pursue the policies contained in The Mersey Forest Plan.

Action 29 The Council will remain an active partner in The Mersey Forest and maintain its input into the project.

4.0 A STRATEGY FOR BIODIVERSITY

4.1 PROTECTING THE BEST SITES & AREAS FOR WILDLIFE

POLICY SIX The Council will identify and protect the most valuable wildlife resources in Halton.

Protecting the best sites

4.1.1 A most important issue for Halton is to protect established habitats of greatest value. Recognition of some of the best sites has already taken place including the internationally important Mersey Estuary, designated as a RAMSAR site and a Special Protection Area. Halton has three nationally important SSSI's, including the River Mersey, Floodbrook Clough which is an example of a steep sided old wooded valley and Red Brow Cutting, designated for its geological formations. Hale Duck Decoy, part of the Mersey Estuary SSSI is a Scheduled Ancient Monument. There are also locally designated non-statutory sites in the Borough, called Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC's). 47 SINCs are recognised in the adopted Unitary Development Plan. [ADD MAP] Annual biological recording takes place to ensure that all local site designations are up to date and reflect their nature conservation value. Halton additionally has 10 Local Nature Reserves (LNR's), designated for their wildlife and educational value, and form the cornerstone for policies connecting people with wildlife.[ADD MAP OF LNR'S].

Action 30 The Council will identify all wildlife sites defined against clearly stated criteria that are relevant to Halton and including locally rare or outstanding wildlife habitats and sites of special community, amenity, access and educational value for their natural features.

4.1.2 The most important sites for biodiversity are those identified through international conventions and European Directives. In Halton, the Mersey Estuary is both a RAMSAR site and a Special Protection Area and is Halton's single most important natural asset.

Action 31 The Council will protect and preserve the Mersey Estuary RAMSAR and Special Protection Area through statutory protection in the Habitats Regulations.

4.1.3 Allied to this is also a need to maintain the level of the other sites, habitats and species which make up Halton's stock of environmental capital. They also contribute so much to local biodiversity and public enjoyment and the overall quality and character of the environment. Halton is a relatively densely populated and urban area in need of extensive regeneration. Sustainability principles must therefore include the need for evolution and change in the natural assets of the Borough, as with all its land uses. In April 2006, new national guidance from DEFRA will help to review the successful SINC system as part of the process to maintain the balance of environmental capital and to assist in their management wherever possible. PPS 9 recognises

Action 32 The Council will review the Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) system in line with DEFRA guidance

4.1.4 The Mersey Estuary is a particular case in point. The Borough Council is promoting a Second Bridge Crossing - the Mersey Gateway - over the Upper Mersey Estuary. Baseline survey data that has been gathered as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment for the Bridge Crossing is invaluable in shaping the ideas for an associated nature reserve. The information shows that the Upper Mersey Estuary is already of value for estuary wildlife, in

terms of its terrestrial and aquatic ecology and birdlife. This is an opportunity to create an Upper Mersey Estuary nature reserve in conjunction with the required mitigation as part of the planning process.

Action 33 The Council will create a significant new nature reserve which supports the council's efforts to deliver urban renewal through the Mersey Gateway.

4.1.5 Brownfield sites and post industrial land are being recognised as valuable for wildlife, often providing a refuge for species that can no longer thrive in the countryside. Research by English Nature reveals that such land supports 194 invertebrate species of conservation concern, often can be very important for urban birds and is where you find ordinary plants that have been tidied away from the countryside. Brownfield sites are the new flower-rich meadows and areas brimming with diversity: they have much more in common with the historic wildlife-rich countryside than the most of the intensively farmed modern landscape. Most of Halton's best grasslands are associated with its industrial past, and 13 of the 47 designated SINC's have an industrial connection. Some brownfield site can be viewed as the nature resource of the future, as an important habitat in their own right. As part of the continued re-use of post industrial sites in Halton, there are more extensive opportunities for sites of brownfield biodiversity.

Action 34 Biodiversity interests on brownfield sites are to be investigated through biological survey work as part of the overall re-use of land policies.

Protecting the best areas

4.1.5 While protecting the best sites helps those species that need relatively small areas of habitat, they do little to sustain those species that range over wider areas, for example, birds and mammals. If sites alone are protected without corridors or wedges, then less mobile species are prevented from appearing in the urban areas. Isolated sites increasingly become under threat and their attractiveness to both wildlife and to human visitor's declines.

4.1.6 There is a parallel need to protect a network of open spaces linking together sites of quality and special habitats. Such a network can also provide easy access to recreational facilities and recreational footpaths of great value to people.

4.1.7 This network has been partly identified in Halton's Biodiversity Action Plan as a series of wildlife corridors. In Halton, this includes the Mersey Estuary, river valleys, farmland, canals, highways, disused railway lines, public open space, allotments, golf courses, school playing fields, gardens and cemeteries. Areas of public open space are particularly important for wildlife management. These areas are an essential component of urban wildlife planning and a necessary complement to the protected sites.

4.1.8 The adopted Unitary Development Plan has a comprehensive Greenspace system that identifies key open areas of the Borough. The protection and enhancement of this infrastructure is important to conserve natural assets, protect local distinctiveness and minimise habitat fragmentation.

Action 35 The Council will develop and refine the nature value of the Greenspace system through the Halton Biodiversity Action Plan, in particular land within the ownership of Halton Borough Council, to assess its potential and to identify any areas of deficiency.

Action 36 The Council will seek to safeguard wherever possible the intrinsic value of any land or natural features having a corridor function, in terms of nature conservation value and associated access and amenity.

A Sound evidence base: habitat and species information

4.1.19 The evidence base for the above policies has been based largely around a Biodiversity Audit which was carried out in 1999 using habitat information from the 1990's. It is increasingly recognised that up to date information and regular monitoring is required to make sure the right actions are taken.

Action 37 The Council will maintain an up to date evidence base of its natural assets. This will include a review of the Borough's Phase 1 Habitat survey to be complete by 2007/8.

4.1.10 Halton has made a solid start to build up a biological recording database in partnership with RECORD, the Cheshire Local Records Centre. The number of individual species records has risen from 33,000 at the start of the Biodiversity Audit in 1999 to 83,000 by the end of 2005. Ultimately, this information will be linked to the National Biodiversity Network to improve access to reliable wildlife information and to ensure that decisions affecting wildlife are based on sound, quality data. Through the use of the Halton web site, the analysis of this data can be made widely accessible to Halton residents.

Action 38 The Council will remain a partner of RECORD, the Local Record Centre for Cheshire and develop a Halton database of biological information.

Action 39 The Council will continue to implement a regular and co-ordinated programme of biological recording.

4.2 HALTON'S BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN

POLICY SEVEN The Council will implement the Halton Biodiversity Action Plan in conjunction with its partners.

4.2.1 A key action from the first Natural Assets Strategy has been Halton's Biodiversity Action Plan, published in February 2003. This is a detailed contribution to the Cheshire region Biodiversity Action Plan and contains a series of over 50 actions for two habitats and seven species, as well as information on wildlife corridors and action areas for People & Nature. This is not a static document and progress against the actions is reviewed every two years. This review can now be carried out in conjunction with the revised Natural Assets Strategy. Progress towards the targets in the Biodiversity Action Plan is also monitored by Halton's Local Strategic Partnership as part of the Community Strategy.

4.2.2 The emphasis is on practical delivery and some of the targets are specifically within the responsibility of the Borough Council. It is not, however, just a local authority document. It has been produced in conjunction with the Halton Natural Environment Roundtable which brings together up to 18 environmental organisations and individuals.

Action 40 Implement the Biodiversity Action Plan habitat and species targets as part of the work programme of the Natural Assets Strategy and carry out regular monitoring of progress.

4.2.3 The habitat and species targets stand alone in their own right but are also linked to other exciting initiatives that are taking place in Halton, in particular the creation of Local Nature Reserves and the involvement of local schools and people in their local environment.

Species protection

4.2.4 Urban nature conservation has an important role to play in protecting rare and declining species and in providing conditions that will help maintain their populations. Runcorn Hill Local Nature Reserve, for example, has regionally important heathland communities, which are being managed to maintain a stable population. The great crested newt, bats and badgers are protected species under Section 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, and may be found in both rural and urban areas. Many species have become dependent upon buildings for roosting or nesting, such as, swifts, house martins and bats.

Action 41 The Council will seek to ensure that laws in relation to protected species are implemented.

4.2.5 The growth of our biological record database has already highlighted other species which are locally important to Halton. In both Runcorn and Widnes, we now know there are significant breeding populations of swifts, a bird which spends the winter in the southern hemisphere. Buildings are vital to this hole-nesting bird, but repairs and renovations can threaten their breeding. Fortunately, plenty can be done to ensure that swift colonies continue to thrive, requiring the goodwill and co-operation of planners, architects and developers, and solutions to help breeding swifts are relatively straightforward and inexpensive. The introduction of nest boxes to a new housing development in Widnes is underway and if successful, it will pave the way for similar schemes.

Action 42 The Council will promote all aspects of species protection and will adopt the swift as a flagship species for suitable new development schemes and housing renovation projects.

Geodiversity

4.2.6 Recent national interest in geology, now termed geodiversity, has allowed Halton to look again at its earth science resource. Halton has a wealth of geological outcrops in both Widnes and Runcorn, each with a different story to tell about the local landscape of former times. More work needs to be carried out to identifying our best geodiversity assets. Halton is a partner of the Cheshire region Geodiversity Action Plan Action Group, who is able to assist in evaluating our resource. This is in line with PPS9 advice on protecting the best geodiversity areas, with the possible inclusion of Regionally Important Geological Sites (RIGS) in the Local Development Framework.

Action 43 The Council will promote all aspects of geodiversity, in partnership with the Cheshire region Geodiversity Action Plan Action Group.

Making the most of Halton's ponds

4.2.7 Ponds are a valuable aquatic habitat as well as a traditional landscape feature. Over 250 ponds were identified during the Biodiversity Audit in 1999, varying between 1 square metre and 2 hectares in size. Some were excavated on the Cheshire Plain to extract marl or boulder clay for spreading on surrounding fields. Many of these pits have since filled with water to form ponds. Elsewhere in Halton, ponds have been dug for a variety of reasons, including amenity and educational purposes.

4.2.8 Making the most of Halton's ponds has been a successful project during 2003-2006, involving 36 ponds, professional ecologists, volunteers and local residents and community groups. All the ponds have been surveyed for their wildlife value, followed by a management prescription and practical conservation work. Over time, this approach to pond management

can result in Halton having a representative selection of the different stages of the pond cycle, from open water through to damp, overgrown shaded areas, each having their own mix of wildlife species.

Action 44 The Council will continue to make the most of its ponds through projects to encourage biological recording and practical management.

4.3 PEOPLE AND WILDLIFE

POLICY EIGHT The Council will continue to promote the interest and involvement of local people in issues and projects concerning Halton's natural assets.

Local Nature Reserves

4.3.1 The Borough Council has adopted a successful policy of creating Local Nature Reserves (LNR's). LNR's have an important part to play in biological conservation, the protection and interpretation of wildlife features and the Borough wide strategic approach to nature conservation. The designation equally is about contributing to the quality of the environment to local people, the part they can play in community development and to providing space and resources for environmental education.

4.3.2 The Borough Council has 10 LNR's which are listed in Appendix 2. This amounts to 143 hectares of land or the equivalent of 1 hectares per 833 head of population. This figures exceeds the English Nature / Natural England standard of 1 hectare per 1000 head of population and makes Halton one of the top urban local authorities in achieving LNR's.

Action 45 The Council will continue to develop a programme of Local Nature Reserves.

4.3.3 Designation of Local Nature Reserves is one thing: managing them to a high standard for both people and wildlife is another matter. Between 2002 and 2005, three Local Nature Reserves under the English Nature funded Wildspace! scheme were funded to great affect. This money from English Nature has allowed Halton to employ a Wildspace Officer to "do things that local authorities don't normally do". This Wild About Halton programme has been extended up to 2009 with grant aid support from the Heritage Lottery Fund and landfill tax credits from WREN. This has firmly put the role of Local Nature Reserves and the Wildspace officer on the map

4.3.4 Wild About Halton is about reconnecting people with nature. The Wildspace Officer works with schools and community groups through a variety of mediums, including the web, to explain the environmental role of the reserves. This includes school visits to the Local Nature Reserves, with follow up work on the web. There is an emphasis on developing an educational resource centred around Key Stages 3 & 4 of the school curriculum. The Wildspace Officer encourages community involvement in the management of the reserves through the development of an Advisory Groups, Friends Groups and Halton's Natural Environment Roundtable. Regularly information is presented in the continuously evolving interactive web site at www.halton.gov.uk The project has seen the development of a web cam network and mpeg movie resource to enable people visiting the web site to view highlights from the natural environment of the reserves.

Action 46 The Council will continue to employ a Wildspace Officer and to deliver the Wild About Halton programme beyond 2009.

Participation

4.3.5 People's knowledge and understanding of the natural world are key factors in shaping their attitudes and responsibility towards it. Environmental education can play a vital role in building up knowledge and skills, helping people to make informed decisions in relation to nature conservation and enabling them to look after the environment.

4.3.6 Halton Borough Council has an important role in the delivery of environmental education, through the Wild About Halton project working alongside other key services.. These include:

- Education and Social Inclusion Directorate, including the Parks & Countryside Service and the Science Advisors
- Environment and Development Directorate, including Landscape Services, Waste & Recycling and Environmental Health

Action 47 The Council will seek to ensure that biodiversity continues to play an important part in the environmental education elements of schools, colleges and adult education centres.

Action 48 The Council will encourage the voluntary and private sectors to play a full and active part in the delivery of biodiversity related, environmental education services.

4.3.7 People can greatly benefit from close contact with nature. The environment is too important to be left to the environmental professionals: equally, the environment is too important to be conserved and managed without them. Since 1996, Halton's Natural Environment Roundtable (NER) has become firmly established as a community led body working with the local authority on all biodiversity issues in the borough. The NER chooses six projects a year for practical involvement and has an important part to play in identifying locally distinctive features of biodiversity interest.

Action 49 The Council will continue to act as the secretariat for the Natural Environment Roundtable.

4.3.10 Support by the council is provided through Service Level Agreements to a number of organisations with a wildlife and public involvement interest in Halton. These Agreements are important acknowledgement that partnership working is a key way forward on biodiversity issues.

Action 50 The Council will, through Service Level Agreements, support the activities of environmental groups such as Cheshire Wildlife Trust, RECORD and British Trust for Conservation Volunteers.

Awareness

4.3.11 A lot is already happening to promote the Natural Assets of Halton, through the Borough Council and its partners. The Borough Council has a Nature Conservation Officer, a Tree Officer, a Wildspace Officer and a Parks & Countryside Service whose role includes introducing children and adults to Halton's natural heritage. Groundwork Mersey Valley is committed to the conservation of the natural environment and works in partnership with the public, private and voluntary sectors. Norton Priory Museum Trust has an events and activities programme and active voluntary groups cover a wide range of interests; despite this, there are still people who do not realise what they have on their doorstep.

Action 51 The Council will promote awareness, understanding and enjoyment of nature in Halton.

4.4 NEW OPPORTUNITES

POLICY NINE The Council will promote suitable new initiatives and projects to further Halton's biodiversity resource.

4.4.1 Much of urban nature conservation is concerned with the protection of existing sites. However, dynamic situations in urban areas give many opportunities to add to the nature conservation value within Halton. Planning for wildlife offers many opportunities for creative thinking. The Mersey Forest and Wild About Halton are projects that are making a significant impact in Halton.

4.4.3 The creation of new places for wildlife, such as ponds and wetlands, can bring it into new areas. This is especially valuable in those parts of the strategic Greenspace network and in areas of deficiency. Moore meadows at Moore village is a recent example of new wildflower meadows especially created in conjunction with local consultation. Creative conservation can also add to existing sites of quality or special habitats, for example at Pickerings Pasture Local Nature Reserve.

4.4.4 Responsibility for the management of sites of quality, special habitats and other open spaces rests with a variety of owners and agencies in the public, private and voluntary sectors. The role of Halton Borough Council in managing its own land is very significant. Nearly 700 hectares of land is owned and managed as open space, including grassland, woodland and street trees, allotments and cemeteries

4.4.5 The management of Council owned open space within the Greenspace network is important for both nature conservation and people. It is this land which provides the most important experience of nature for the greatest numbers of people. Recent land at Manor Park that has come over to the Borough Council from English Partnerships has a high biodiversity potential. With suitable planning, consultation, design and management, there is scope for considerable biodiversity benefits with a new change of use.

Action 52 The Council will promote the biodiversity potential of land coming into its ownership, including a significant area of land at Manor Park.

4.4.6 Under the umbrella of Halton Natural Environment Roundtable, there is great scope in Halton for getting involved in biodiversity projects. Recent examples include

- bluebell recovery project,
- biological recording including a 5 year bird atlas
- wild flower meadows,
- geology in Halton
- bird box making
- Charcoal burning
- Making the most of Halton ponds

Action 53 The Council will continue to promote suitable new initiatives and projects to further Halton's biodiversity resource.

4.4.7 It is almost impossible to create high quality nature sites such as ancient woodlands and heathland in terms of their habitats, species and human experiences. It is possible

however to plant new woodlands, hedges and street trees, to encourage natural regeneration of scrub, to plant wild flower meadows and to create ponds and wetlands. Even something as simple as erecting a bird nestbox creates a feature for wildlife. [ref. 22].

4.4.8 The varying nature conservation value within Halton leaves room for habitat creation measures. These add to and support the existing wildlife resource. There is also a need to replace habitats lost or damaged through development, poor management or neglect. For instance, Halton constructed its first “green roof” at Victoria Park pavilion, Widnes in 2006. Green roofs are no longer a novelty item for specialist buildings and are becoming more mainstream for architects and engineers. Green roofs offer several benefits including providing habitats for plants and animals, reducing stormwater runoff and the risk of short term flooding, and the preservation and cooling of surface roof membranes, avoiding the “urban heat island” effect. There is great scope for the use of more green roofs in future developments

Action 54 The Council will seek through its own actions and through influencing others, to promote the use of green roofs in new developments.

4.4.8 As with green roofs, Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS) aim to use nature to provide a solution to a development issue. Natural drainage of new developments can reduce the impact on potential flooding and pollution to rivers, streams and ponds. Such systems offer the chance to enhance the urban environment and provide wildlife habitat. As yet, there has not been an uptake to SUDS in Halton but recent design advice may be able to remove perceived barriers that relate to technical and management issues.

Action 55 The Council will seek through its own actions and through influencing others, to promote the use of Sustainable Drainage Systems.

Exotic species control

4.3.22 Some species are not wanted! Most areas of the United Kingdom have species that exotic species and provide varying degrees of harm to our native species. In Halton, the biggest problem is the spread of Japanese Knotweed, Giant Hogweed and Himalayan Balsam on land, and the introduction of different pond species, including Mink, *Crassula helmsii* and floating Pennywort that damage our native pond species. Some work is carried out annually on Council owned land to control problem species but more is required to prevent a significant loss of our more valuable habitats and species.

Action 56 The Council will develop systems for the control of unwanted exotic species

5.0 IMPLEMENTATION AND ACTION PROGRAMMES 2007 - 2012

Action no.	Implementation & Action	By whom	Timescale	Budget
	TREES ON DEVELOPMENT SITES			
1	Require developers of sites containing trees to demonstrate that the principles of BS 5837 are being followed during the planning process.	Planning Officers, with advice from Trees & Woodlands Officer	On-going	Existing
2	Publish a Supplementary Planning Guidance document about trees on development sites.	Planning Officers, with advice from Trees & Woodlands Officer	2008	Existing
3	Protect trees of high amenity value on development sites by making tree preservation orders and by attaching conditions to planning consents.	Planning Officers, with advice from Trees & Woodlands Officer	On-going	Existing
4	Ensure that adequate foundations are provided for new buildings when they are constructed close to trees, in accordance with NHBC Standards, Chapter 4.2.	Building Control Officers, with advice from Trees & Woodlands Officer	On-going	Existing
5	Seek to at least maintain, and wherever possible increase, the tree cover of the Borough as part of the development control process.	Planning Officers, with advice from Trees & Woodlands Officer	On-going	Existing
	SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF TREES			
6	Continue to monitor the trees in its ownership by carrying out regular inspections and by storing information about their quantity, distribution, size, species, age, health and condition.	Trees & Woodlands Officer, Arboricultural Consultant, Officers in Landscape Services	All trees in high priority areas to be inspected before 2012 and a system for reinspection set up.	Meeting the timescale will be dependant on additional funding.
7	Carry out all work recommended by the tree survey programme. Priority will be given to any works deemed necessary for safety reasons.	Officers in Landscape Services, with advice from Trees & Woodlands Officer	On-going	Existing
8	Treat all communications about trees courteously and in compliance with the published standards of the Council.	Officers in Landscape Services, with advice from Trees & Woodlands Officer	On-going	Existing
	Carry out all tree work in accordance with British	Officers in Landscape Services,		

9	Standard 3998 (latest revision) and all relevant health and safety regulations.	with advice from Trees & Woodlands Officer	On-going	Existing
10	Require all utility companies to carry out any essential trenching work close to trees in accordance with NJUG 10. The Council will apply the same principles when planning or undertaking its own work close to trees.	Highways Officers, with advice from Trees & Woodlands Officer	On-going	Existing
11	Refer any claims of damage by trees to its insurers, together with a full report on the incident. The report will include recommendations for appropriate tree work, or for further investigation if necessary.	Trees & Woodlands Officer	On-going	Existing
12	Encourage and assist any housing association which is preparing a working plan for the management of its trees in the Borough.	Trees & Woodlands Officer	On-going	Dependant on staff time available
13	Make tree preservation orders to protect healthy trees which are of significant amenity value to the general public, particularly those considered to be under threat.	Trees & Woodlands Officer	On-going	Existing
14	Give free advice on the management of protected trees and will aim to issue a decision on all applications to carry out work on them within six weeks. However, there will be a presumption against granting consent to fell without good justification.	Trees & Woodlands Officer	On-going	Existing
15	Investigate all unauthorised work on protected trees and, if considered appropriate, prosecute those responsible.	Trees & Woodlands Officer, with advice from Legal Services	On-going	Existing
16	Take appropriate action to ensure that privately owned trees which are in a dangerous condition or which obstruct the highway are felled or pruned to remove the danger or obstruction.	Highways Officers, with advice from Trees & Woodlands Officer	On-going	Existing
17	The Council will administer and enforce the Hedgerow Regulations in the Halton area. In doing so, the Council will ensure that the procedures used are in accordance with the current legislation.	Trees & Woodlands Officer, with support from Nature Conservation Officer and Planning Officers	On-going	Existing
	The Council will promote the management of			

18	hedgerows with landowners, colleges and voluntary groups, including the use of traditional hedge-laying techniques when and where appropriate.	Nature Conservation Officer	On-going	Existing
19	The Council will investigate and determine all complaints made about high hedges under Part 8 of the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003.	Planning Enforcement Officer, with advice from Trees & Woodlands Officer	On-going	Existing
	SUSTAINABLE MANAGEMENT OF WOODLANDS			
20	Manage Daresbury Firs and its other principal areas of woodland in accordance with good forestry practice.	Trees & Woodlands Officer, with support from Groundwork Mersey Valley & other partners	On-going	Existing, supported by external grants
21	Sustain its support for the work of the Norton Priory Museum Trust in managing the grounds of Norton Priory, including the provision of forestry and arboricultural advice on a regular basis.	Trees & Woodlands Officer and Nature Conservation Officer	On-going	Existing
22	Carry out the maintenance, thinning and coppicing work necessary to establish new multi-purpose woodlands for the future, in accordance with good forestry practice.	Landscape Services	On-going	Existing
23	Object to, or seek revision of, any application appearing on the Forestry Commission's public register which is considered to be unjustifiably detrimental to the local landscape or to nature conservation.	Trees & Woodlands Officer	On-going	Existing
24	Encourage private landowners to prepare management plans for their woodlands, and to seek advice from the Mersey Forest team if required.	Trees & Woodlands Officer	On-going	Existing
25	Support in principle the objectives of the Woodland Trust in the management of its woodlands in Halton.	Landscape Services	On-going	Existing
26	Seek to prevent any loss of ancient semi-natural woodland and will assist Cheshire region Biodiversity Partnership in the implementation of a Biodiversity Action Plan for ancient woodlands in Halton.	Trees & Woodlands Officer and Nature Conservation Officer	On-going	Existing
	ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW TREES &			

	WOODLANDS			
27	Carry out suitable planting to replace every mature tree that has to be felled, thereby sustaining the number of trees on Council land.	Landscape Services	On-going	Existing
28	Support the aims of the Tree Warden Scheme and encourage communication with any appointed tree wardens based in the Halton area.	Trees & Woodlands Officer	On-going	Existing
29	Remain an active partner in The Mersey Forest and maintain its input into the project.	Landscape Services	On-going	Existing
	PROTECTING THE BEST SITES & AREAS FOR WILDLIFE			
30	Identify all wildlife sites defined against clearly stated criteria that are relevant to Halton and including locally rare or outstanding wildlife habitats and sites of special community, amenity, access and educational value for their natural features.	Nature Conservation Officer, with Local Wildlife Sites Partnership	On-going	Existing
31	Protect and preserve the Mersey Estuary RAMSAR and Special Protection Area through statutory protection in the Habitats Regulations.	Nature Conservation Officer, with Natural England	On-going	Existing
32	Review the Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) system in line with DEFRA guidance.	Nature Conservation Officer, with Local Wildlife Sites Partnership	2007	Existing
33	Create a significant new nature reserve which supports the council's efforts to deliver urban renewal through the Mersey Gateway.	Nature Conservation Officer and Wildspace Officer	2009	Mersey Gateway project, and external sources
34	Biodiversity interests on brownfield sites are to be investigated through biological survey work as part of the overall re-use of land policies.	Nature Conservation Officer	On-going	Existing
35	Develop and refine the nature value of the Greenspace system through the Halton Biodiversity Action Plan, in particular land within the ownership of Halton Borough Council, to assess its potential and to identify any areas of deficiency.	Planning Officers, with advice from Nature Conservation Officer	On-going	Existing

36	Seek to safeguard wherever possible the intrinsic value of any land or natural features having a corridor function, in terms of nature conservation value and associated access and amenity.	Nature Conservation Officer	On-going	Existing
37	Maintain an up to date evidence base of its natural assets. This will include a review of the Borough's Phase 1 Habitat survey to be complete by 2007/8.	Nature Conservation Officer, with consultants	2008 for the Phase 1 Habitat survey, then on-going	External grants may be required
38	Remain a partner of RECORD, the Local Record Centre for Cheshire and develop a Halton database of biological information.	Nature Conservation Officer and Planning Officers	On-going	Existing
39	Continue to implement a regular and co-ordinated programme of biological recording.	Nature Conservation Officer, with Local Wildlife Sites Partnership	On-going	External grants are required when current funding runs out in March 2009: Natural England to be approached
HALTON'S BIODIVERSITY ACTION PLAN				
40	Implement the Biodiversity Action Plan habitat and species targets as part of the work programme of the Natural Assets Strategy and carry out regular monitoring of progress.	Nature Conservation Officer, with Local Wildlife Sites Partnership	On-going	External grants are required when current funding runs out in March 2009: Natural England to be approached
41	Seek to ensure that laws in relation to protected species are implemented.	Nature Conservation Officer	On-going	Existing
42	Promote all aspects of species protection and adopt the swift as a flagship species for suitable new development schemes and housing renovation projects.	Nature Conservation Officer and Wildspace Officer	On-going	Existing, working with development partners
43	Promote all aspects of geodiversity, in partnership with the Cheshire region Geodiversity Action Plan Action Group.	Nature Conservation Officer	On-going	Existing, supported by external grants
44	Continue to make the most of Halton's ponds through projects to encourage biological recording and practical	Nature Conservation Officer	On-going	Seek external funds to replace lottery

	management.			funding
	PEOPLE AND WILDLIFE			
45	Continue to develop a programme of Local Nature Reserves.	Nature Conservation Officer and Wildspace Officer	On-going	External grants are required when current funding runs out in March 2009: Natural England and other bodies to be approached
46	Continue to employ a Wildspace Officer and to deliver the Wild About Halton programme beyond 2009.	Wildspace Officer and Nature Conservation Officer	2009	To be approved as a growth item
47	Seek to ensure that biodiversity continues to play an important part in the environmental education elements of schools, colleges and adult education centres.	Wildspace Officer and Nature Conservation Officer	On-going	Existing, with external grants required by 2009
48	Encourage the voluntary and private sectors to play a full and active part in the delivery of biodiversity related, environmental education services.	Wildspace Officer and Nature Conservation Officer	On-going	Existing, with external grants required by 2009
49	Continue to act as the secretariat for the Natural Environment Roundtable.	Nature Conservation Officer	On-going	Existing
50	Through Service Level Agreements, support the activities of environmental groups such as Cheshire Wildlife Trust, RECORD and British Trust for Conservation Volunteers.	Nature Conservation Officer and Wildspace Officer	On-going	Current funding needs to be secured
51	Promote awareness, understanding and enjoyment of nature in Halton.	Nature Conservation Officer and Wildspace Officer	On-going	Existing
	NEW OPPORTUNITIES			
52	Promote the biodiversity potential of land coming into its ownership, including a significant area of land at Manor Park.	Landscape Services	On-going	Existing, supported by external grants
53	Continue to promote suitable new initiatives and projects to further Halton's biodiversity resource.	Nature Conservation Officer and Wildspace Officer	On-going	Existing, supported by external grants
54	Seek through its own actions and through influencing others, to promote the use of green roofs in new	Nature Conservation Officer and Wildspace Officer	On-going	Existing, supported by external grants

	developments.			
55	Seek through its own actions and through influencing others, to promote the use of Sustainable Drainage Systems.	Landscape Services and Highways Division, Maintenance.	On-going	Existing, supported by external grants
56	Develop systems for the control of unwanted exotic species.	Nature Conservation Officer	On-going	Existing, supported by external grants

APPENDIX 1 SITES OF IMPORTANCE FOR NATURE CONSERVATION

1. International Designations

RAMSAR and Special Protection Area	These are good examples of:
Mersey Estuary	Intertidal ecosystems

2. National Designations

Sites of Special Scientific Interest	These are good examples of:
Mersey Estuary, including Hale Duck Decoy	Intertidal ecosystems
Floodbrook Clough	Ancient woodland
Red Brow Cutting	Triassic sandstone outcrop

3. Local Designations

Local Wildlife Sites	These are good examples of:
Barkers Hollow Wood, Preston Brook	Ancient Woodland
Beechwood, Runcorn	Ancient Woodland
Big Boar's Wood, Hale	Woodland
Big Wood, Runcorn	Woodland
Clifton Cloughs, Runcorn	Ancient Woodland
Clifton Lagoon, Runcorn	Grassland of industrial origin
Clincton Wood, Widnes	Woodland, grassland, ponds
Clough Wood, Runcorn	Ancient Woodland
Daresbury Firs LNR	Conifer Woodland
Disused Railway Line, south of Warrington Rd, Widnes	Grassland
Dorchester Park, Sandymoor	Woodland, grassland
Dutton Hospital Wood, Dutton	Ancient Woodland
Green Wood and Pitts Heath, Runcorn	Woodland
Haddocks Wood Pasture, Runcorn	
Haddocks Wood, Runcorn	Woodland
Hale Road Woodland LNR	Woodland
Haystack Lodge, Runcorn	Woodland, grassland
Hopyard Wood, Hale	Ancient Woodland
Land adjacent Preston Brook Marina	Grassland
Land north of Hallwood Park, Runcorn	
Land off Lunts Heath Road, Farnworth	
Little Boar's Wood, Hale	Woodland
Lodge Plantation, Runcorn	Woodland
Manchester Ship Canal Bank, Astmoor	Grassland of industrial origin
Manor Park 3 Woodland, Moore	Woodland
Mill Wood LNR, Hale	Ancient Woodland
Morts Wood, Daresbury	Woodland

Murdishaw Wood and Valley LNR	Ancient Woodland, grassland
Norbury Wood and Marsh, Runcorn	Woodland
Norton Priory, Runcorn	Woodland, grassland, ponds
Old Plantation, Hale	Woodland
Oxmoor Wood and ponds, Runcorn	
Pickerings Pasture LNR, Widnes	Grassland
Pond at Delphfield, Runcorn	Pond
Pond off Meadway and adjacent grassland, Widnes	Pond
Ramsbrook Plantation, Hale	Woodland
Rows Wood, Daresbury	Ancient Woodland
Runcorn East railway station area	Grassland, woodland
Runcorn Hill LNR	Heathland
Sandymoor Wood, Sandymoor	Ancient Woodland
Southern verge embankment A533, Brookvale	Grassland
St. Helens Canal, (reclaimed), Widnes	Open water
Stenhills Open Space, Runcorn	Grassland, heathland
The Glen, Runcorn	Ancient Woodland
Upper Mersey Estuary	Intertidal ecosystems
Weston Marsh lagoons	Grassland of industrial origin
Windmill Hill Wood, Runcorn	Woodland

APPENDIX 2 LOCAL NATURE RESERVES

Local Nature Reserves	These are good examples of:
Runcorn Hill	Heathland
Pickerings Pasture	Wildflower meadows
Clincton Woods	Woodland, grassland, ponds
Dorchester Park	Birch –oak woodland, grassland
Oxmoor	Grassland, reedbed, lagoon
Wigg Island	Grassland, open water, saltmarsh
Hale Road Woodland	Grassland, woodland, reedbed
Mill Wood	Woodland
Murdishaw Wood And Valley	Woodland, grassland
Daresbury Firs	Conifer woodland

APPENDIX 3 ANCIENT WOODLANDS

Mill Wood, Hale	Flood Brook Clough, Runcorn
Hopyard Wood, Hale	The Glen, Runcorn
Old Plantation, Hale	Murdishaw Wood, Runcorn
Clifton Cloughs, Runcorn	Sandymoor Wood, Runcorn
Clough Wood, Runcorn	Rows Wood, Daresbury
Beech Wood, Runcorn	Barkers Hollow, Preston Brook
Dutton Hospital Wood, Runcorn	

APPENDIX 4 ORGANISATIONS CONSULTED

British Trust for Conservation Volunteers
British Waterways
CDS Housing Association
Cheshire and Wirral Ornithological Society
Cheshire County Council
Cheshire Landscape Trust
Cheshire Wildlife Trust
Council for the Protection of Rural England
Daresbury Parish Council
Daresbury Properties Ltd
English Partnerships
Environment Agency
Environment Forum, Natural Environment
Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group
Forestry Commission
Groundwork Mersey Valley
Hale Conservation Group
Hale Estate
Hale Parish Council
Halton Friends of the Earth
Ineos Chlor
Knowsley MBC
Liver Housing Association
Liverpool City Council
Liverpool Housing Trust
Mersey Basin Campaign
Mersey Conservancy
Mersey Estuary Conservation Group
Moore Parish Council
Natural England
North West Naturalists Union
North West Water
Norton Priory Museum Trust
PondLife Project
Preston Brook Parish Council
Riverside Housing Association
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds
St. Helens MBC
The Mersey Forest
The Woodland Trust
Vale Royal BC
Warrington Borough Council

APPENDIX 5 USEFUL CONTACTS

Arboricultural Advisory & Information Service, Alice Holt Lodge, Wrecclesham, Farnham, Surrey, GU10 4LH (tel Tree Helpline £1.50 per minute 09065 161147)

Arboricultural Association, Ampfield House, Romsey, Hants, SO51 9PA (tel 01794 68717)

British Trust for Conservation Volunteers, Trafford Water Mill, Warrington Road, Mickle Trafford, Chester, CH2 4EB (tel 01244 300230)

Cheshire Landscape Trust, Fountains Building, Upper Northgate Street, Chester, CH1 4EF (tel 01244 376333)

Cheshire Wildlife Trust, Grebe House, Reaseheath, Nantwich, CW5 6DA (tel 01270 610180)

Natural England (Area Office), Pier House, Wallgate, Wigan, WN3 4AL (tel 01942 820342)

Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group, Reaseheath College, Nantwich, CW5 6DF (tel 01270 627938)

Forestry Commission (Area Office), Linnere, Delamere, Northwich, CW8 2JD (tel 01606 889912)

Groundwork Mersey Valley, Phoenix House, Spring Street, Widnes, WA80NL (tel 0151 257 2720)

Halton BC Landscape Services, Picow Farm Depot, Picow Farm Road, Runcorn, WA7 4UB (tel 01928 583900)

Halton BC Parks & Countryside Division, Town Hall, Heath Road, Runcorn, WA7 5TD (tel 0151 424 2061)

The Mersey Forest, Risley Moss, Ordnance Avenue, Birchwood, Warrington, WA3 6QX (tel 01925 816217)

The Norton Priory Museum Trust, Tudor Road, Manor Park, Runcorn, WA7 1SX (tel 01928 569895)

REFERENCES

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2. Local Government Act 2000
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4. The North West Plan : The Regional Spatial Strategy (2006)
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6. The Regional Forestry Framework for England's Northwest (2005)
7. National Urban Forestry Unit (1998) – Trees matter! The benefits of trees & woods in towns
8. Dodd J. P. (1987) – A history of Frodsham and Helsby
9. British Standards Institution (2005) – British Standard 5837, Trees in relation to construction - Recommendations
10. National House Building Council (1992) – NHBC Standards, Chapter 4.2, Building near trees
11. DETR (1999) – Principles of Tree Hazard Assessment and Management
12. British Standards Institution – British Standard 3998, Recommendations for tree work
13. National Joint Utilities Group (1995) – Publication 10, Guidelines for the planning, installation and maintenance of utility services in proximity to trees
14. Biddle P. G. (1998) – Tree root damage to buildings
15. HMSO (1999) – The Town and Country Planning (Trees) Regulations 1999
16. DETR (2000) – Tree Preservation Orders, A guide to the Law and Good Practice
17. Institute of Terrestrial Ecology (1991) – Changes in hedgerows in Britain between 1984 and 1990
18. Institute of Terrestrial Ecology (1994) – Hedgerow survey 1993
19. Department of the Environment (1997) – The Hedgerows Regulations 1997, A guide to the Law and good practice
20. HMSO (2005) – High Hedge Complaints: Prevention and Cure
21. The Mersey Forest (1994) – The Mersey Forest Plan
22. Making contracts work for wildlife: how to encourage biodiversity in urban parks. CABI 2006

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 15 March 2007

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director – Health and Community

SUBJECT: Voluntary Sector Funding – Grant Allocation 2007/08

WARD(S): Borough-wide

1.0 Purpose of Report

1.1 To recommend Voluntary Sector Grant Awards for 2007/08.

2.0 Recommended that:

(1) the board approve the recommended grant allocations; and

(2) further applications be approved by the Strategic Director – Health and Community, in consultation with the Neighbourhood Management and Development Portfolio Holder.

3.0 Supporting Information

3.1 In a report to the Executive Board on 3 January 2002 the expectations for voluntary sector funding were established. It was agreed that awards be judged against agreed criteria and actual targets be negotiated prior to signing a service level agreement. Targets are now linked to both departmental and corporate priorities reflecting a more targeted approach to funding.

Applications are assessed and recommendations agreed by a Members Panel consisting of the Executive Board Member with portfolio responsibility for the voluntary sector and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Employment, Learning and Skills Policy and Performance Board.

3.2 Monitoring Arrangements

- 1) All grants in excess of £5k must agree a service level agreement and provide quarterly monitoring reports. Grants under £5k provide mid year & end of year reports.
- 2) Quarterly/half yearly monitoring reports are required and copies are made available in the Members' room at the Municipal Buildings.
- 3) Review meetings take place with the Voluntary Sector Co-ordinator on a quarterly basis.
- 4) Half yearly written reports summarising monitory data are provided to the Employment, Learning and Skills Policy & Performance Board.

4.0 Approval of Grants 2007/08

4.1 Voluntary Sector Core Funding Grants

The recommended grants are listed below; the recommendations are in the context of the budget allocation and the panel's assessment.

	2007/08	2006/07
Cheshire Asbestos Victims Support	15,000	15,000
Cheshire Racial Equality Council	6,615	6,615
Cheshire Victim Support	8,400	8,400
Halton Citizens Advice Bureaux	152,403	179,755
Halton Talking Newspapers	3,500	3,500
Halton Voluntary Action	63,586	75,000
Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre	3,397	3,397
Relate	10,300	10,300
Runcorn & Frodsham Mencap	2,402	2,402
Samaritans	4,000	4,871
Vision Support	9,545	9,623
Warrington Law Centre	15,000	15,000
Widnes & Runcorn Cancer Support Group	13,000	12,787
TOTAL	307,148	346,650

Applications not recommended to receive funding are: -

- Halton Disability Advice & Appeals Centre - £9,100
- Shelter - £7,824

4.2 It is recommended these grants be awarded for one year, 2007/08. Halton Voluntary Action and Citizens Advice Bureau previously had a three year funding agreement however the current budget position does not provide the required level of sustainability. Faced with the uncertainty of funding within the comprehensive spending review it is not possible to continue funding these organisations at previous rates.

5.0 Policy and other Implications

5.1 None.

6.0 Other Implications

6.1 The approved applications do not exceed the current budget allocations in the general grants budget.

6.2 The work of the voluntary sector receiving core funding grants impacts greatly on social inclusion, community involvement, anti-poverty and diversity issues.

7.0 Risk Analysis

7.1 The reductions in the grant may impact upon the organisations capacity to deliver services and there may be the subsequent staffing implications for the organisations where the greatest reductions apply.

7.2 The PPB will monitor how the grants are being spent and ensure that the Council and Halton people receive value for money.

8.0 Equality and Diversity Issues

8.1 To receive a grant, organisations have to demonstrate that acceptable equality and diversity policies are in place.

9.0 List of Background Papers Under Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

9.1 None under the meaning of the Act.