

CORPORATE SERVICES POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD

At a meeting of the Corporate Services Policy and Performance Board on Tuesday, 5 June 2007 in the Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn

Present: Councillors Gilligan (Chairman), A. Lowe (Vice-Chairman), Bradshaw, Bryant, Dennett, Edge, Loftus, Nolan, Norddahl and Wainwright

Apologies for Absence: Councillor C Inch

Absence declared on Council business: (none)

Officers present: G. Ferguson, E. Dawson, J. Goacher, R. Mackenzie; S. Riley and M Winstanley.

Also in attendance: Councillor Cargill (in accordance with Standing Order 33)

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

		<i>Action</i>
CS1	MINUTES The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 th February 2007, having been printed and circulated, were taken as read and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.	
CS2	PUBLIC QUESTION TIME It was noted that no public questions were received.	
CS3	MINUTES OF EXECUTIVE BOARD The Minutes of the Executive Board and the Executive Board Sub-Committee relating to the work of the Corporate Services Policy and Performance Board since its last meeting were submitted for information. Under Minute EXB99 the Board requested that its concerns be noted regarding the proposal to relocate Halton Lea Post Office to within the branch of WH Smith at Halton Lea.	
CS4	ANNUAL REPORT	

The Board considered a copy of the Annual Report for the Corporate Services Policy & Performance Board for 2006/07.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

CS5 WORK PROGRAMME 2007-08

The Board considered the draft work programme for the coming year, which included the proposed method of working, timetable and anticipated outcomes.

The draft topic briefs for learning for complaints, disabled access and Performance Management were also circulated. A topic brief for the development of web-based service delivery would follow shortly.

At its previous meeting, the Board had agreed the lead member for each topic group. However, the Membership of the Board had subsequently changed and the following lead members were proposed:

Topic	Lead Officer	Lead Member	Membership
Learning from Complaints	Rob McKenzie	Cllr. Lowe	Cllrs. Norddahl, Bradshaw, Edge Wainwright, & Gilligan
Development of web based service delivery	S.Riley/R.Dart	Cllr. Wainwright	Cllrs Gilligan and Bradshaw
Disabled access to Council Buildings and services	J. Goacher	Cllr. Loftus	Cllrs. Wainwright, Gilligan and Bryant
Performance Management	R. Mackenzie	Cllr. Dennett	Cllrs. Gilligan, Nolan & C Inch

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the work programme as outlined above be agreed;
- (2) the membership of the Topic Teams is confirmed; and
- (3) the Topic Briefs be approved.

CS6 REVIEW OF AREA FORUMS

The Sub-Committee was advised that the Topic Group of Board Members had conducted a review of Area Forums, involving surveys, Focus Groups, interviews, and

visits to other local authorities. The review looked at how Forums had evolved in Halton and identified recommendations for further improvement.

The report proposed that the current forum arrangements be retained, but their role be developed to increase participation by residents and partners. Once the three neighbourhood management pilots had become established and some lessons began to emerge, the process would be evaluated to see whether there were any improvements which could be rolled out across the whole Borough.

Members considered a number of recommendations to improve the current forum arrangements and discussed the following issues:

- under 5.3 'Involving Young People' it was proposed that the invitation to attend Area Forum meetings apply to all young people including representatives of the Youth Forum, Schools Forum and the member of the Youth Parliament;
- under 5.11 'Publicity and Promotion' it was requested that the communications strategy including costs be brought back to the Board for consideration; and
- it was agreed that recommendation 5.13 be deleted

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Board agreed the recommendations set out in Appendix A to these Minutes;
- (2) the Executive Board be requested to approve the recommendations set out in Appendix A;
- (3) a further report be submitted to the Board summarising the response of the Executive Board; and
- (4) subject to the decision of the Executive Board regular progress reports be made to the Board.

CS7 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORTS

The Board considered a report which outlined the progress of the Performance Management – 4th Quarter – against the service plan objectives, the performance targets, the performance trends/comparison and factors affecting the service etc for the following areas:

- Exchequer and Customer Services;
- Financial Services;
- ICT Services;
- Legal Services;
- Personnel Services;
- Policy and Performance;
- Property Services; and
- Stadium and Hospitality.

Arising from the discussion the Board requested that representatives from Corporate Communications Division be invited to attend a future meeting to provide an outline of the service.

As part of the report, the Board discussed the following issues:

- the investment income earned was 0.05% below benchmark for the year;
- the recruitment and retention problems with regard to surveyor posts within Property Services; and
- the difficulties faced by traders at Runcorn Market.

RESOLVED: That the Board

(1) receive the 4th Quarter Year end Performance Management Reports;

(2) request that representatives from the Corporate Communications Division attend a future meeting to provide an outline of the service.

N.B COUNCILLOR NELSON DECLARED A PERSONAL INTEREST IN THE ABOVE ITEM AS A FAMILY MEMBER HAS A BUSINESS ON WIDNES MARKET

CS8 COUNCIL-WIDE TRAINING PROVISION

The Board had previously been provided with information on the nature and type of training provided to Council staff and Members within three directorates, Corporate & Policy; Health and Community and Children and Young People.

The Board had recognised the importance to the Council of having staff who were appropriately trained and the positive impact that had on the provision of services.

The Board was satisfied from the information

provided that there was no duplication taking place in actual training provision, but questioned the need to have three separate training sections carrying out the administrative functions in organising training activity, which, by and large, would be of a similar nature irrespective of the type of training being provided. The Board considered the potential strengths and weaknesses of bringing these activities together.

In addition, it considered the administration costs of providing this training in each of the settings.

RESOLVED: That the Executive Board be requested to consider combining the administrative sections of the training departments within Corporate & Policy, Health and Community and Children and Young People Directorates

CS9 INDUSTRIAL ESTATES PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Board had previously requested information on the performance of the Council's Industrial Estates.

The Council's Industrial Estate comprised 69 units across 5 estates, with a total asset value of £7.3m. As at 31st March 2007 the units were 81% let producing a monthly income of £56,701. Over the preceeding 12 month period occupancy averaged at 78% and the actual income received was £539,064. This gave an overall return of 7%. At this general level, the income was greater than could be achieved from the financial market, and therefore any disposal would have a detrimental effect on the Council's revenue.

The Board received a breakdown of the 5 estates which included Seymour Court, Runcorn, Dewar Court, Runcorn, Astmoor Industrial Estate, St. Michaels Industrial Estate, Widnes, Black Cat Industrial Estate, Widnes.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

CS10 FACILITIES LET TO COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

At the previous meeting of the Board held on 27th February 2007, further information was requested on the buildings leased to voluntary organisations. The Board also asked for information on their location, the type of organisation and the rent charged.

The Board considered a report which outlined the number, nature and lease terms of community lettings within

Council property.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.



5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

There is government encouragement to develop neighbourhood engagement, and neighbourhood management. Area Forums may not provide the best geography for that, but have the advantage of being established, and service delivery has been designed around them. Three strategic options are available:

Option 1 - map out neighbourhoods which residents would identify with and reconfigure area forums onto these boundaries. This could lead to a large number of smaller forums. It would only be worth doing if we could resource it and had a clear vision of how to operate on a neighbourhood basis.

Option 2 - move towards a neighbourhood management model in each area forum area, with a partnership board replacing the area forum. Forums could be convened as a consultation mechanism for the partnership board. This approach would imply significant investment and the reconfiguration of services (the concept knowsley model).

Option 3 - retain current forum arrangements, but develop their role to increase participation by residents and partners.

Given our current arrangements, it would make most sense to follow option 3 for the time being. Once the three neighbourhood management pilots have become established and some lessons begin to emerge, we could then evaluate whether there were any improvements which could be rolled out across the whole borough.

The remainder of this section is based on option 3 - that is improving current forum arrangements.

5.1 The Role of Area Forums

In the course of its research, no single view of the purpose of Area Forums emerged. It is important that residents know what to expect, and that Officers and Members are clear about the purpose of Forums.

It is **recommended** that

- i. *the following Statement of Purpose be agreed for Area Forums, and that this statement be incorporated into the Constitution, displayed at meetings, and publicised through other appropriate means:*

“the role and purpose of the Area Forum is:

- ***to listen** to the concerns and problems of residents and to engage in joint problem solving*
- ***to inform** residents about what is going on in their area, and about decisions of the Council and its partners*

- *to enable residents to influence the planning and delivery of services*
- *to commission improvements using the Area Forum budget.*

5.2 Involvement of Partners

In discussion with partners, some expressed willingness to become more involved in Area Forums. Some partners hold their own local meetings (for example residents forums organised by landlords, PADS and CAMS organised by the Police). There has been mixed experience of linking Area Forums to PADS and the Cheshire Constabulary are in the process of reviewing their approach to neighbourhood Working.

It is **recommended** that the Borough Council:

- i. formally invites the Police, Fire Service, registered social landlords, and Youth Service to attend Area Forum meetings regularly*
- ii. provides space on the agenda for updates from each of the key partners subject to advance notice being given of issues that they wish to cover*
- iii. regularly invites partners to put forward suggestions for future agenda items*

and that:

- iv. members and the lead officer from each Forum identify meetings organised by other partners in their area and explore the scope for combined meetings, but the joint meetings with the Police be not pursued at this stage pending their review of their own neighbourhood arrangements.*

5.3 Involving Young People

With the support of the Youth Service, Youth Area Forums have been established mirroring the Council's Area Forums. Two representatives from the Youth Forum attend Area Forum meetings. The extent and manner in which they are encouraged to contribute varies from Forum to Forum. It is important that the voice of young people is heard at Forum meetings.

It is **recommended** that:

- i. the attendance and participation of young people including the member of the Youth Parliament, representatives from school forums and from all school councils at all Area Forum meetings be welcomed and encouraged*
- ii. that once a year, a joint meeting of the Area Forum and the Youth Forum be held*
- iii. the Youth Forum to be invited to put forward items for inclusion in future forum agendas*

5.4 Governance

Area Forums are established in the Council's constitution (Article 11 2006/07). Their activities are reported to Corporate Services Policy & Performance Board to provide accountability. However, there is a lack of clarity about how decisions are made (particularly with respect to Area Forum expenditure). To clarify this, it is **recommended that**

- i. the Constitution be amended to clarify that whilst Area Forums are not decision making bodies, the Lead Officer has delegated authority to authorise expenditure of Area Forum funds in consultation with Members.*

Practice varies between Forums as to where and when funding commitments are made, and how such decisions are publicised. Whilst it is appropriate for Forums to adopt their own way of working, in order to ensure transparency, it is **recommended** for the avoidance of doubt that:

- ii. any decisions made outside of a public meeting of the Forum about the allocation of forum funds should be reported to the next public meeting*

It is important that if members are unable to resolve issues raised at an Area Forum, they can, when it is a matter of sufficient significance, refer it to Executive Board or the appropriate Policy & Performance Board. This clarifies current custom and practice. It is **recommended** that

- iii. the Constitution be amended to make it clear that Area Forums may refer matters of significance which they are unable to resolve to the Executive Board or to the appropriate Policy & Performance Board.*

5.5 Neighbourhood Charters

The Topic Group considered the merit of producing area plans as seen in Tameside. Area Renewal Plans were produced in Halton in 2003, but it proved difficult to encourage "bottom up" engagement from residents. Given the resources required to do this properly, the Group concluded it was not appropriate at this stage to revive this process. However, some value was seen in producing a Neighbourhood Charter setting out what levels of service residents could expect in each Area Forum area. It is **recommended** that:

- i. the production of Neighbourhood Charters be investigated and a further report made to Corporate Services Policy & Performance Board about the feasibility of this proposal.*

5.6 Frequency of Meetings

Area Forums currently meet three times a year. For Forums which rotate meetings around wards, this typically means one meeting in each venue per year. The gaps between meetings generate discontinuity. It was felt desirable to increase the frequency of meetings. However, the Topic Group is aware of the already heavy workload of members, and so it is **recommended** that:

- i. the frequency of Area Forum meetings be increased to four a year from the 2008/09 municipal year, including joint meeting with the Area Youth Forum.*

5.7 Area Forum Budgets

The Area Forums have a total budget of £600,000 per year, divided between the Forums on a per capita basis. Of this total, £300,000 is funded by the Council, and £300k is contributed by the Halton Strategic Partnership from the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF). The Government's commitment to NRF ends in March 2008 resulting in a potential 50% reduction in funding to Area Forums. The Topic Group felt that the Area Forum funding is a valuable tool for forums to address local problems, and **recommends**:

- i. that consideration be given in the 2008/09 Medium Term Financial Strategy and budget to replacing any loss of NRF from the Council's own resources.*

5.8 Time and Place of Meetings

The review clearly revealed that there is no time of day which suits everyone. Overall, there is a clear preference for continuing with the current practice of evening meetings. However, this does present difficulties for some groups of residents (for example, the elderly and those reliant on public transport). To help residents to access meetings, a dial-a-ride service could be provided, although costs would have to be met from Area Forum budgets. It is also possible to engage with groups of residents who find it hard to attend forum meetings by other means. It is **recommended** that:

- i. the normal time for forum meetings continues to be 7.00pm*
- ii. the cost and effectiveness of a dial-a-ride service to transport residents to meetings be investigated*
- iii. the existing practice of some forums in holding additional meeting with particular sections of the community at suitable venues and times be commended to all Forums*

The location of meetings was also covered in the review. Some Forums hold all meetings in one place, other rotate around venues in different wards. During the review, the option to use a central venue more easily reached by public transport was investigated. There is a clear preference that Forum meetings should take place in the area, and it is **recommended** that:

- iv. no change be made to the current choice of venues*

5.9 Format and conduct of meetings

Whilst each Area Forum has its own style, the majority adopt a "top table" layout with some or all of the elected members sitting at a table facing the audience. Meetings tend to be conducted in a formal manner. Some Forums

only take questions submitted in advance. The general feedback from residents during the review was that this could be a little intimidating and a more informal approach would be preferred. In some venues, it can be difficult to hear what is said. As each venue is different, it is not appropriate to be prescriptive, but the following approach is **recommended**:

- i. a less formal room layout be adopted with as few barriers as possible between residents and Councillors*
- ii. partners and youth representatives be invited to sit with Councillors*
- iii. investigate the provision of microphones and amplification where necessary;*
- iv. questions can be accepted on the night up to the start of the meeting, provided that they are in writing with the questioner's name and address provided*
- v. where feasible, tea and coffee should be provided to help to create a more relaxed atmosphere*

5.10 Agenda Setting

The agenda for meetings clearly influences attendance, and the effectiveness of the Forum. Residents would like the opportunity to influence agendas, and would like updates on progress from earlier meetings. They would also be interested to hear from partner organisations. It is **recommended** that every agenda should include:

- i. feedback on progress with items raised at the last meeting and on progress with projects funded by the Forum*
- ii. updates from key partners (eg Police and Fire Service) on their activities in the area*
- iii. an opportunity for the Youth Forum to bring items to the Area Forum*
- iv. an opportunity for the residents to put forward suggested items for the next meeting*

To assist with public understanding of proceedings, and to emphasise the importance of resident's contributions it is **recommended** that:

- v. agendas be split into:*
 - *questions from residents*
 - *items and presentations for information*
 - *feedback and progress reports*

There was a mixed response to the practice of formal presentations to Forums, but the consensus was to keep them brief and to the (local) point. It is **recommended** that:

- vi. presentations be kept brief (normally not more than 10 minutes) and made relevant to the particular Area being addressed.*

Area Forums vary considerably in length. In the interest of maximising attendance and participation, the aim should be to avoid running on too late. It is **recommended**:

- vii. that meetings should finish by 9.00pm*

It has been suggested that if there is a pattern of service requests or complaints in an area, this might be included on the Forum's agenda. It is **recommended** that

- viii. the possibility of identifying particular local issues being dealt with by Halton Direct Link be investigated*

5.11 Publicity and Promotion

One of the most frequently raised issues during the review was the lack of public awareness of Forums. It is vital that this is addressed so that residents can at least choose whether to attend or not. Some promotional activities will have resource implications, and funding will need to be provided from the Area Forum budgets. It is **recommended** that

- i. a Communications Strategy for Area Forums be developed with costs and brought back to the Board for consideration to include:*
 - *promotion of Forums in Inside Halton and the Council website*
 - *publicity for the achievements of Area Forums*
 - *a leaflet distributed to all households in each Forum area once a year with an annual report and calendar of future meetings*
 - *the use of press releases and paid for advertisements*
 - *suitable acknowledgement by projects funded by the Area Forum (“badging”)*
 - *promoting the involvement of young people in conjunction with the Youth Forum, possibly through schools*
 - *the use of other Council publications such as the Council Tax leaflet and the refuse collection calendar*
 - *the use of prepaid envelopes to encourage questions and funding suggestions to be returned*
- ii. the random mail out of agendas to 45 residents adopted by Appleton, Kingsway and Riverside Area Forum be trialled with other Forums and the results monitored*
- iii. feedback on progress be available to residents between meetings via the website and the early production and circulation of minutes*
- iv. scope for joint promotion with partners (and joint funding) be investigated*

5.12 Information About Council Services

One of the main reasons given for attending Area Forums is to “find out what is going on in my area”. It is therefore **recommended** that:

- i. a selection of leaflets about forthcoming activities and key Council services be displayed at Forum meetings*

5.13 How will we know if it works?

We need to be able to judge the success (or otherwise) of these changes. The most obvious measure is attendance and the numbers of questions asked. However, there are two weaknesses in this.

- i. There are many reasons why residents may not attend, not everyone wants to go to a public meeting, and there are other ways of engaging with the Council.
- ii. Attendance on its own is not sufficient to say we are successful - residents must feel it was a worthwhile experience.

Other indicators we could use are the extent to which residents believe they can influence decisions, and satisfaction with opportunities for local participation in decisions.

We could also survey the satisfaction of the residents attending the meetings.

As part of the development of these proposals, a clear set of measures and baselines needs to be established and members might like to consider setting targets.

It is **recommended** that

- i. *a performance framework be brought back to Corporate Service Policy & Performance Board for approval.*

