

CORPORATE POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD

At a meeting of the Corporate Policy and Performance Board on Tuesday, 30 October 2012 in the Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn

Present: Councillors Roberts (Vice-Chairman), E. Cargill, Dennett, C. Loftus, A. Lowe, A. McInerney and Wainwright

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Gilligan, S. Hill, N. Plumpton Walsh and G. Stockton

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: M. Reaney, A. Jones, I. Leivesley, E. Dawson, H. Coen, T. Dean, P. McCann and W Rourke

Also in attendance: None

ITEM DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

Action

CS18 MINUTES

The Minutes from the meetings held on 31 July 2012 and 4 September 2012 were taken as read and signed as a correct record.

CS19 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

The Board was advised that no public questions had been received.

CS20 EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES

The Minutes relating to the Corporate Services Portfolio which had been considered by the Executive Board were submitted to the Board for information.

RESOLVED: That the minutes be noted.

CS21 SSP MINUTES

The minutes relating to the Corporate Services Portfolio which had been considered by the Halton Strategic Partnership Board (HSP) were submitted for information.

It was noted that the HSP Topic Group Review report would be included on the Executive Board agenda on 8 November 2012.

RESOLVED: That the minutes be noted.

Councillor Wainwright declared a Disclosable Other Interest in the following item as he was the Vice President of the National Association of British Market Authorities (NABMA).

CS22 MARKETS UPDATE

The Board was presented with a report which updated them on changes to how the Borough's markets were being managed and set out proposals for improving the markets offer.

It was noted that this report was presented following a request from the Council's Executive Board that the National Association of British Market Authorities (NABMA) recommendations contained in their markets' review from January 2012, would need to be evaluated and a further report provided if there were any financial implications associated with the implementation of their recommendations, which was the case.

The report provided Members with information on the management and staffing of the markets; meetings held with traders; marketing and promotion events that had taken place during this year and stalls' occupation data.

Further, following the market staffs' evaluation of the NAMBA report and its recommendations, some proposals were made for Members consideration, which were aimed at improving the markets. These were listed in the report.

Following debate, the following points were noted:

- A formal liaison committee had been set up between traders and the Council;
- The uptake of the market stalls had recently improved with younger entrepreneurs coming through;
- The footfall figures had increased, particularly during the recent promotional events;
- Traders encroachment onto the corridors of the market was continually monitored to ensure accessibility at all times; and
- The related costs to the proposed improvements would be sent to Members of the Board.

RESOLVED: That

1. The changes made to the management of the markets be noted; and
2. The list of actions be supported and referred to the Executive Board for approval.

Councillor Dennett declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in the following item has he owned a second home and received Council Tax discount. He left the room during the presentation and debate of the entire item.

CS23 TECHNICAL REFORM OF COUNCIL TAX

Following the Local Government Finance Bill currently passing through Parliament, the Strategic Director, Policy and Resources, presented a report which detailed a number of technical changes to Council Tax billing which would be introduced once the Bill was passed.

The proposals outlined in the Bill gave billing authorities greater discretion over the reliefs from Council Tax available in respect of second homes and some empty properties.

The proposed changes were announced as follows:

1. Giving billing authorities the power to levy up to full Council Tax on properties designated as Second Homes;
2. Replacing exemption Classes A and C with discounts, the amount of which would be for the billing authorities to determine;
3. Allowing billing authorities to levy an 'empty homes premium' in respect of dwellings liable for Council Tax;
4. Allowing authorities to publish online the 'information to be supplied with demand notices'; and
5. Reduce the discount on long term empty properties to 0%.

Following the clarification of some questions that arose from Members, the Board agreed to the proposed changes to Council Tax discounts and billing as mentioned above, and that the proposals be referred to the Executive Board for approval.

RESOLVED: That Executive Board be

recommended to approve the proposed changes to Council Tax discounts and billing as outlined above.

CS24 LOCALISATION OF COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT

The Board was presented with the results of the public consultation on the 'Council Tax Reduction Scheme'. Attached at Appendix 1 were the Council Tax Reduction Scheme Consultation responses, which consisted of 39 in total. These were presented to the Board following the Special Corporate PPB meeting that was held in July 2012, which stated that the details of the consultation would be referred to the Board once completed.

The Board was reminded that as part of the 2010 Spending Review the Government announced an intention to localise support for Council Tax 2013-14 and to reduce expenditure on this benefit by 10%. The Welfare Reform Act 2012 provided for the abolition of Council Tax Benefit. Provisions for the localisation of Council Tax support were included in the Local Government Finance Bill, which was currently before Parliament. Further, it was expected that a one off transition to the new localised schemes of support would take place from 1 April 2013.

It was explained that although local authorities would be required to draw up their own scheme, there were certain areas which the Government was not leaving to local discretion. The Government had stated that there would be a 10% overall reduction in the amount of expenditure on this scheme which meant that approximately £1.4m less would be paid out in help towards Council Tax in Halton. Presently, Halton had a Council Tax Benefit caseload of 15,400; of these 6,400 were pensioner households (which it was intended would be no worse off) so non pensioner households would face an overall reduction of around 17%.

It was announced that the new scheme needed to be in place by April 2013 but in reality, due to the setting of Council Tax and billing process, a new scheme would need to be in place by October 2012.

It was reported however that since the publication of this paper, central Government announced that a grant of £100m would be divided between all Councils/Local Authorities across the Country to assist with the shortfalls they would be experiencing for the year 2013/14. This would mean that £266,000 would be allocated to Halton, subject to a number of criteria being met.

The Board debated the matter and agreed that they would not recommend using the allocation of the £266,000 grant from the Government, based on the information they had available to them at the meeting, for the following reasons:

1. Lack of clarity surrounding the rules;
2. Timing of the application process, ie decisions from Government would not be given until January, giving insufficient time to implement the new arrangements;
3. Even if the grant could be accessed, meeting its terms would still leave the Council around £600,000 still to find, depending on the final level of grant, money it had not got following the loss of £38m of various other grants over the last couple of years;
4. It was a one-off payment, so only affected 2013/14. The scheme would need revising again in 2014/15;
5. We may have to reconsult on a new/different scheme and there was no time; and
6. Time was running out to have the new scheme in place by January.

It was agreed therefore that the originally proposed 'Council Tax Reduction Scheme' be recommended to the Executive Board for adoption by the Council from 1 April 2013.

RESOLVED: That the 'Council Tax Reduction Scheme' be recommended to the Executive Board for adoption by the Council from 1 April 2013.

CS25 BUSINESS PLANNING 2013-16

The Board was invited to contribute to the development of Directorate Business Plans for the coming financial year.

It was reported that the Council had a requirement to develop a medium-term business plan, in parallel with the budget, that was subject to annual review and refresh. The process of developing such plans for the period 2013-16 was just beginning and members were invited to identify a small number of priorities for development or improvement that they would like to see reflected within these plans. Strategic Directors would then develop draft plans which would be available for consideration by Policy and Performance Boards early in the New Year. It was commented that it was important that Members had the opportunity to provide input at this development stage of the planning process, particularly given the anticipated funding

announcement, to ensure that limited resources may be aligned to local priorities.

Members were provided with an overview of the key strategic issues facing the Board over the medium term which provided details of the primary drivers that would shape the work of the Directorates in supporting and delivering the Council's organisational priorities and in meeting business needs. This overview was provided for each of the functional areas that fell within the remit of the Board, namely: finance; legal and democratic services; HR and learning and development; ICT and support services; policy and performance; property services; stadium and catering services and registration services.

RESOLVED: That the Board indicate priority areas for service development and improvement over the next 3 years and advise the Resources portfolio holder accordingly.

CS26 STAFF ACCIDENT/VIOLENT INCIDENT STATISTICS

The Strategic Director, Policy and Resources, presented a report on corporate accident statistics and identified associated trends for the period 1 April 2012 to 1 September 2012.

Included in the report was an update on progress of action taken against the recommendations made by the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) following an inspection made in December 2011. A further inspection had been carried out in September 2012 and despite one or two items that required clarification, this went well.

The report further highlighted that there had been a reduction in 'over 7 day' accidents, although it was noted that these could be attributed to the change to reporting from 'over 3 day' accidents. It also highlighted an increase in both significant accidents and violent incidents. The former consisted of an increase in manual handling incidents involving reablement services staff and the latter was mainly due to 3 service users who were responsible for 46 physical incidents between them.

Following Members discussion the following was noted:

- The staff who were in direct contact with the service users responsible for the violent incidents mentioned above, were receiving ongoing training to deal with this, additionally the situation was being carefully

monitored by management;

- The Chair of the Health Policy and Performance Board had met with managers from the services who were in contact with the violent service users;
- Health and Safety staff were continuing to enforce the usage of the Lone Working Monitoring System through managers who were being requested to cascade the importance of this to their staff; and
- If a requirement was identified in the lone working risk assessment then it was a legal duty to employ the system when required.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

Meeting ended at 8.20 p.m.