

Public Document Pack



Corporate Policy and Performance Board

Tuesday, 28 July 2020 6.30 p.m.

Via public remote access (please contact Clerk named below for instructions)

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'David WR'.

Chief Executive

BOARD MEMBERSHIP

Councillor Robert Gilligan (Chair)	Labour
Councillor Ged Philbin (Vice-Chair)	Labour
Councillor John Abbott	Labour
Councillor Harry Howard	Labour
Councillor Martha Lloyd Jones	Labour
Councillor Chris Loftus	Labour
Councillor Alan Lowe	Labour
Councillor Angela McInerney	Labour
Councillor Norman Plumpton Walsh	Labour
Councillor Joe Roberts	Labour
Councillor Kevan Wainwright	Labour

*Please contact Gill Ferguson on 0151 511 8059 or gill.ferguson@halton.gov.uk for further information.
The next meeting of the Board is on Tuesday, 8 September 2020*

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

Part I

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1. MINUTES	1 - 4
2. DECLARATION OF INTEREST (INCLUDING PARTY WHIP DECLARATIONS)	
Members are reminded of their responsibility to declare any Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or Other Disclosable Interest which they have in any item of business on the agenda, no later than when that item is reached or as soon as the interest becomes apparent and, with Disclosable Pecuniary Interests, to leave the meeting during any discussion and voting on the item.	
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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.

CORPORATE POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD

At a meeting of the Corporate Policy and Performance Board on Tuesday, 28 January 2020 in the Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn

Present: Councillors Gilligan (Chair), Philbin (Vice-Chair), Abbott, Howard, M. Lloyd Jones, C. Loftus, A. Lowe, A. McInerney, N. Plumpton Walsh and Wainwright

Apologies for Absence: None

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: G. Cook, E. Dawson, G. Ferguson, W. Rourke and M. Baker

Also in attendance: N/A

**ITEM DEALT WITH
UNDER DUTIES
EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD**

	<i>Action</i>
CS29 MINUTES	
<p>The Minutes from the meeting held on 12th November 2019 were taken as read and signed as a correct record.</p>	
CS30 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME	
<p>The Board was advised that no public questions had been received.</p>	
CS31 EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES	
<p>The Board was presented with the Minutes relating to the Corporate Services Portfolio which had been considered by the Executive Board since the last meeting of this Board.</p>	
<p><u>EXB57</u> – Members were advised that this item would be discussed at the Boundary Working Party once the new Ward Boundaries were confirmed.</p>	
<p>RESOLVED: That the minutes and comments made be noted.</p>	

CS32 COMMUNICATIONS, DESIGN AND MARKETING SERVICE UPDATE

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director Enterprise, Community and Resources and received a presentation, which provided an overview of the work of the Communications, Design and Marketing Service. Work within the department had been prioritised against a number of criteria, these being:

- An income would be generated for the authority;
- There would be a reduction in cost/improved efficiency;
- The reputation of the authority would be significantly enhanced/or risk to reputation would be reduced; and
- There was a statutory duty.

It was noted that as the Team had reduced in capacity over the years its key priority was to support and market those Council owned venues which generated income namely The Brindley, Stadium, Widnes Market and since 2016 Halton's Leisure Centres. There had also been ongoing support for major projects and regeneration activity.

Members were also advised on the use of social media which had provided a fast, inexpensive and effective way to reach increased numbers of our community, paid for advertising opportunities across these platforms and the role of the central press office.

The Board discussed how Members were kept up to date by the Team on key issues and it was agreed that in light of their comments this would be reviewed.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

CS33 2019 GOVERNMENT REPORT ON LEASEHOLD REFORM: THE FUTURE OF GROUND RENTS, SERVICE CHARGES AND SELLING PRACTICES

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director Community, Enterprise and Resources, which provided an update on the Government Report (2019) on Leasehold Reform and if any of the recommendations outlined in the report could be implemented in Halton.

It was noted that at a previous meeting of the Council held in October a motion was approved in respect of Leasehold Ownership. The background to the motion was that in 2017 the Government had commissioned an Inquiry

into unfair practices in the leasehold market and the Inquiry concluded in April 2019. Following the Inquiry, a report was produced which identified some areas of concern such as:

- Onerous ground rents;
- High and unclear service charges;
- Frequent one off bills;
- Alleged miss-selling of leasehold properties by developers;
- Unbalanced dispute resolution mechanisms;
- Unreasonable costs to enfranchise or extend leases; and
- Future leasehold tenure.

In the government's response to the report, it was suggested that developers would be required to establish voluntary compensation schemes to assist leaseholders with onerous ground rent terms but if it did not see the sector responding proactively then it would take further action. It also stated an intention to make it easier for leaseholders to buy the freehold on their property.

Members were advised that subsequent Private Members Bill had its first reading in the House of Commons on 25th June 2019 but the Bill failed to make its passage through Parliament. Therefore, the report was a series of recommendations which were not currently supported by legislation. Unfortunately, without legislation, it would not be possible to apply retrospective measures to support existing leaseholders in Halton. Similarly, the Council could not place a ban on leaseholders on non-Council land or land that had been sold to developers in the past.

The Council could consider mechanisms for either capping or removing the costs for leaseholders on land it proposed to sell for housing development in the future. This would need to be a condition of any future Development Agreement. Arising from the discussion, the Board agreed that any Council owned land sold to housing developers should contain a condition that it is for freehold development only. It was agreed that the suggestion should be submitted as a proposal to the Liverpool City Region Planning Committee for adoption across the Region.

RESOLVED: That any Council owned land sold to housing developers should contain a condition that it is for freehold development only. It was agreed that the suggestion should be submitted as a proposal to the Liverpool City Region Planning Committee for adoption across the Region.

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Meeting ended at 7.50 p.m.

REPORT TO: Corporate Policy & Performance Board

DATE: 28th July 2020

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources

SUBJECT: Public Question Time

WARD(s): Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To consider any questions submitted by the Public in accordance with Standing Order 34(9).
- 1.2 Details of any questions received will be circulated at the meeting.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That any questions received be dealt with.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Standing Order 34(9) states that Public Questions shall be dealt with as follows:-
- (i) A total of 30 minutes will be allocated for dealing with questions from members of the public who are residents of the Borough, to ask questions at meetings of the Policy and Performance Boards.
 - (ii) Members of the public can ask questions on any matter relating to the agenda.
 - (iii) Members of the public can ask questions. Written notice of questions must be given by 4.00 pm on the working day prior to the date of the meeting to the Committee Services Manager. At any one meeting no person/organisation may submit more than one question.
 - (iv) One supplementary question (relating to the original question) may be asked by the questioner, which may or may not be answered at the meeting.
 - (v) The Chair or proper officer may reject a question if it:-
 - Is not about a matter for which the local authority has a responsibility or which affects the Borough;
 - Is defamatory, frivolous, offensive, abusive or racist;
 - Is substantially the same as a question which has been put at a meeting of the Council in the past six months; or

- Requires the disclosure of confidential or exempt information.
- (vi) In the interests of natural justice, public questions cannot relate to a planning or licensing application or to any matter which is not dealt with in the public part of a meeting.
- (vii) The Chair will ask for people to indicate that they wish to ask a question.
- (viii) **PLEASE NOTE** that the maximum amount of time each questioner will be allowed is 3 minutes.
- (ix) If you do not receive a response at the meeting, a Council Officer will ask for your name and address and make sure that you receive a written response.

Please bear in mind that public question time lasts for a maximum of 30 minutes. To help in making the most of this opportunity to speak:-

- Please keep your questions as concise as possible.
- Please do not repeat or make statements on earlier questions as this reduces the time available for other issues to be raised.
- Please note public question time is not intended for debate – issues raised will be responded to either at the meeting or in writing at a later date.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

None.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

None.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 **Children and Young People in Halton** - none.

6.2 **Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton** - none.

6.3 **A Healthy Halton** – none.

6.4 **A Safer Halton** – none.

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal** – none.

7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

7.1 None.

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

8.1 There are no background papers under the meaning of the Act.

REPORT TO: Corporate Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 28 July 2020

REPORTING OFFICER: Chief Executive

SUBJECT: Executive Board Minutes

WARD(s): Boroughwide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The Minutes relating to the Corporate Services Portfolio which have been considered by the Executive Board are attached at Appendix 1 for information.
- 1.2 The Minutes are submitted to inform the Policy and Performance Board of decisions taken in their area.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the Minutes be noted.

3.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 None.

4.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 None.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

5.1 Children and Young People in Halton

None

5.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

None

5.3 A Healthy Halton

None

5.4 A Safer Halton

None

5.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

None

6.0 RISK ANALYSIS

6.1 None.

7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

7.1 None.

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

8.1 There are no background papers under the meaning of the Act.

APPENDIX 1

Extract of Executive Board Minutes Relevant to the Corporate Policy and Performance Board

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 16TH JANUARY 2020

RESOURCES PORTFOLIO

EXB72 POLICY CHANGES RELATING TO REAR LOADING FULLY ACCESSIBLE HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLES WHERE THE WHEELCHAIR USER IS SECURED IN A FORWARD FACING POSITION

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources, relating to policy changes to the current Hackney Carriage and Private Hire vehicle policy. This was in respect of rear loading fully accessible vehicles, where the wheelchair user was fully secured in a forward facing position.

The Board was advised that the Regulatory Committee at its meeting on 27 November 2019, had considered the proposals and recommended adoption. It was noted that the policy changes were the culmination of a consultation exercise via the Taxi Consultative Group.

Appendix 1, attached to the report, contained a copy of the Regulatory Committee Resolution (Minute REG 6 referred); Appendices 2 and 3 contained the report considered by the Committee and responses to the proposals from the UNITE Union, respectively.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the policy changes as recommended by Regulatory Committee at item 1 of Minute Number REG 6 and as detailed in the Regulatory Committee Agenda dated 27 November 2019, be adopted as Council Policy; and
- 2) the consequential matters set out in items 2, 3 and 4 of Minute Number REG 6 and as detailed in the Regulatory Committee Agenda dated 27 November 2019, be endorsed.

Strategic Director
- Enterprise,
Community and
Resources

EXB73 POLICY CHANGES RELATING TO TAXI LICENSING

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources, relating to the adoption of policy changes to taxi licensing.

The Board was advised that the Regulatory Committee at its meeting on 27 November 2019, had considered six changes to the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Policy. Appendix 1, attached to the report, contained a copy of the Regulatory Committee Resolution (Minute REG 7 referred); Appendix 2 and 3 contained the report considered by the Committee and responses to the proposals from the UNITE Union, respectively.

The Board noted that the only completely new proposal was the introduction of a ten year maximum age for tyres which was part of an initiative being promoted by the licensing authorities throughout the Liverpool City Region area.

RESOLVED: That the Policy changes, as recommended by Regulatory Committee Minute Number REG 7 and as detailed in the Regulatory Committee Agenda dated 27 November 2019, be adopted as Council Policy.

Strategic Director
- Enterprise,
Community and
Resources

EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING HELD ON 27TH FEBRUARY 2020

RESOURCES PORTFOLIO

EXB81 BUDGET 2020/21 - KEY DECISION

The Board considered a report of the Operational Director, Finance, which outlined a recommendation to Council in respect of the Budget, Capital Programme and Council Tax for 2020/21.

It was noted that at the time of writing, the Cheshire Fire Authority and the Cheshire Police and Crime Commissioner had not set their budget and Council Tax precept. However, final figures would be reported to Council when the information was available.

The Board was advised that the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), approved at its meeting on 14 November 2019, had identified funding gaps of around £7.9m in 2020/21, £15.1m in 2021/22 and £4.4m in 2022/23. The Strategy had the following objectives:

- Deliver a balanced and sustainable budget;
- Prioritise spending towards the Council's priority areas;
- Avoid excessive Council Tax rises;
- Achieve significant cashable efficiency gains;
- Protect essential front line services and vulnerable members of the community; and
- Deliver improved procurement.

In terms of consultation, it was noted that the Council used various methods to listen to the views of the public, and Members' own experiences through their Ward work was an important part of that process. Individual consultations had taken place in respect of specific budget proposals and equality impact assessments would be completed where necessary.

Appendix B outlined proposed budget savings for 2020/21, totalling £4.230m. The departmental analysis was shown in Appendix C and the major reasons for change from the current budget were shown in Appendix D.

The Board was advised the final Local Government Finance Settlement figures were awaited, along with confirmation on some 2020/21 grant allocations including the Public Health grant. It was confirmed that the Council would continue to participate in the pilot of the 100% Business Rates Retention Scheme, as part of the Liverpool City Region (LCR).

Further information was provided on the budget outlook, Halton's Council Tax, Precepts for Parishes, Police, Fire and Liverpool City Region Mayor, the Capital Programme, Prudential Code and School Budgets.

Reason(s) for Decision

To seek approval for the Council's Revenue Budget, Capital Programme and Council Tax for 2020/21.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

In arriving at the budget saving proposals set out in Appendix B, numerous proposals had been considered, some of which had been deferred pending further information, or rejected.

Implementation Date

4 March 2020.

Operational
Director - Finance

RESOLVED: That

- 1) Council be recommended to adopt the resolution set out in Appendix A attached to the report, which includes setting the budget at £115,770m, the Council Tax requirement of £52.179m (before Parish, Police, Fire and LCR Combined Authority precepts) and the Band D Council Tax for Halton of £1,475.70;
- 2) Council be recommended to approve the revenue budget proposals for 2020/21 set out in Appendix B and Capital Programme set out in Appendix F, both attached to the report; and
- 3) from 1 April 2020 the level of Empty Homes Premium on dwellings that have been unoccupied for between 2 and 5 years remain at 100%. The level of Premium on dwellings unoccupied for more than 5 years be increased to 200%.

EXB82 2019/20 QUARTER 3 SPENDING

The Board considered a report of the Operational Director, Finance, which reported on the 2019/20 Quarter 3 spending as at 31 December 2019.

A summary of spending against revenue budget up to 31 December 2019 was attached to the report at Appendix

1. This provided individual statements for each department. The Board was advised that, in overall terms, revenue expenditure was £3.790m above the budget profile. Whilst the overspend position had increased since Quarter 2, the trend had slowed over the previous 3 months as action taken by all departments continued to restrict spending.

The Board was advised that a number of budget savings proposals approved by Council in March 2019 were yet to be implemented. These were detailed in Table 1. The main budget pressures continued to be within the Children and Families Department. In addition, service demand for Adult Social Care had increased over the year.

The report also provided details of other services which had experienced budget variances including the Children and Families Department; Community and Environment Department; the Education, Inclusion and Provision Department; ICT and Support Services; Adult Social Care including the Complex Care Pool. An underspend in Corporate and Democracy was noted.

The Capital Programme had been revised to reflect a number of changes in spending profiles as schemes had developed, and these were detailed in the report.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) all spending continues to be limited to only absolutely essential items;
- 2) Departments continue to seek to implement the 2019/20 budget savings proposals listed in Table A, which were approved by Council in March 2019;
- 3) Strategic Directors take appropriate action to ensure that overall spending was contained as far as possible within their total operational budget by year-end; and
- 4) Council be recommended to approve the revised Capital Programme as set out in Appendix 2 attached to the report.

Operational
Director - Finance

EXB83 CAPITAL STRATEGY 2020/21

The Board considered a report of the Operational Director, Finance, on the Council's Capital Strategy for 2020/21.

It was reported that all councils were required to produce a Capital Strategy annually, the aim of which was to ensure that the Council understood the overall long-term policy objectives and resulting capital strategy requirements, governance procedures and risk appetite.

Members were advised that the Capital Strategy should be read in conjunction with the Treasury Management Statement, included on the same agenda. It was noted that the successful delivery of the Capital Strategy would assist the Council in planning and funding its capital expenditure over the next three years.

RESOLVED: That Council be recommended to approve the 2020/21 Capital Strategy, as presented in the Appendix attached to the report.

Operational
Director - Finance

EXB84 TREASURY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY STATEMENT 2020/21

The Board considered a report of the Operational Director, Finance, proposing the Treasury Management Strategy Statement (TMSS) which incorporated the Annual Investment Strategy and the Minimum Revenue Provision Strategy for 2020/21.

The TMSS was attached to the report and detailed the expected activities of the treasury function in the forthcoming financial year (2020/21).

The Local Government Act 2003 required the Council to "have regard to" the Prudential Code and to set Prudential Indicators for the next three years, to ensure that the Council's capital investment plans were affordable, prudent and sustainable. The Act therefore required the Council to set out its treasury strategy for borrowing as well as an Annual Investment Strategy, which set out the Council's policies for managing its investments and for giving priority to the security and liquidity of those investments. However,

Government guidance stated that authorities could combine the statement and the strategy into one report, and the Council had adopted this approach.

Members noted that the provision of a Minimum Revenue Provision Policy Statement was required and a formal statement for approval was contained within the report at paragraph 2.3, with Appendix A detailing the full policy.

RESOLVED: That Council be recommended to adopt the policies, strategies, statements, prudential and treasury indicators outlined in the report.

Operational
Director - Finance

EXB85 DIRECTORATE PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW REPORTS FOR QUARTER 2 2019 - 20

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources, on progress against key objectives/milestones and performance targets for the second quarter to 30 September 2019.

The Board was advised that the Directorate Performance Overview Report provided a strategic summary of key issues arising from the relevant quarter for each Directorate. The Board noted that such information was key to the Council's performance management arrangements and Executive Board had a key role in monitoring performance and strengthening accountability. Performance Management would continue to be important in the demonstration of value for money and outward accountability.

RESOLVED: That the report, progress and performance information be noted.

EXB86 CALENDAR OF MEETINGS 2020/21

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources, which set out the proposed Calendar of Meetings for the 2020/21 Municipal Year, which was appended to the report for information.

RESOLVED: That Council be recommended to approve the Calendar of meetings for the 2020/21 Municipal Year, as appended to the report.

Strategic Director
- Enterprise,
Community and
Resources

EXB88 SCHEDULE 12A OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 AND THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

The Board considered:

- 1) whether Members of the press and public should be excluded from the meeting of the Board during consideration of the following item of business in accordance with Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 because it was likely that, in view of the nature of the business to be considered, exempt information would be disclosed, being information defined in Section 100 (1) and paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972; and
- 2) whether the disclosure of information was in the public interest, whether any relevant exemptions were applicable and whether, when applying the public interest test and exemptions, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed that in disclosing the information.

RESOLVED: That as, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighed that in disclosing the information, members of the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business in accordance with Section 100A (4) of the Local Government Act 1972 because it was likely that, in view of the nature of the business, exempt information would be disclosed, being information defined in Section 100 (1) and paragraph 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

RESOURCES PORTFOLIO

EXB89 DISPOSAL PROGRAMME - KEY DECISION

The Board considered a report of the Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources, which sought approval to the Council's Disposal Programme.

The Board was reminded that in September 2019, it had approved an asset, acquisition and retention strategy, which formed the rationale for the proposals outlined in Appendices A and B, attached to the report.

Reason(s) For Decision

The approval to the schedule would form the Council's disposal programme for assets, surplus to the requirements of the Council.

To allow development of the sites for alternative uses.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

The approval to declare sites surplus to requirements was necessary under the Council's Constitution.

Implementation Date

Once approved, recommendations would be immediately acted upon.

RESOLVED: That Executive Board

- 1) approves the Disposal Programme and sites identified in Appendix A attached to the report, as surplus to requirements and to be sold;
- 2) approves the sites to be retained in Council ownership identified in Appendix B attached to the report; and
- 3) authorises the Operational Director, Economy, Enterprise and Property and the Operational Director, Legal and Democratic Services, in consultation with the Resources Portfolio holder, to progress the implementation of the Disposal Programme.

Strategic Director
- Enterprise,
Community and
Resources

REPORT TO: Corporate Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 28 July 2020

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Enterprise, Community and Resources

PORTFOLIO: Resources

SUBJECT: Member Development Group Notes

WARDS: N/A

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To consider the notes of the Member Development Group held on 26 September 2019.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That the report be noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

The notes of the last meeting of the Member Development Group are before CSPPB as stated in the Constitution.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS – None.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS – None.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 **Children and Young People in Halton – None.**

6.2 **Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton – None.**

6.3 **A Healthy Halton – None.**

6.4 **A Safer Halton – None.**

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal – None.**

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS – None.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES – None.

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

None.

Member Development Group

At a meeting of the Member Development Group held on 26th September 2019
at the Municipal Building, Kingsway, Widnes

Present: Councillors J. Stockton (Chairman), R. Gilligan, M. Wharton and G. Zygadlo.

Officers: K. Mackenzie and Alison Scott.

Apologies for absence: Councillors J. Abbott, J. Bradshaw, C. Rowe, K. Wainwright and P. Wallace

MDG1	NOTES OF THE LAST MEETING	
	The notes of the last meeting held on 21 March 2019 were approved as a correct record.	
MDG2	REVIEW OF CURRENT PERFORMANCE AGAINST TARGETS	
	<p>LOD2 – Number of Members with a Member Action Plan (MAP)</p> <p>The Number of Members with a MAP to date since April 2019 was 55 of 56, which remained unchanged. New MAPs would be sent to Members at the beginning of 2020 for completion.</p>	KM
	<p>LOD3 – Percentage of Members attending at least one organised training event in the current financial year.</p> <p>Since April 2019, 89% (50 of 56 Members) had attended at least one training and development event. The target was 100% for the year 2019-2020.</p>	
MDG3	LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT UPDATE	
	<p>Briefing Sessions had been provided for Members:</p> <p>17 June – Emergency Planning Refresher Briefing</p> <p>9 July – Welfare Benefits Seminar</p> <p>4 September – Health Seminar</p> <p>A Local Government Finance Seminar would be arranged for late 2019/ 2020.</p> <p>One officer had volunteered to be a new Member Mentor for the 2020 elections. Any further officer or Member volunteers would be welcomed. On-line training was available that could be completed at the users convenience.</p> <p>The 2020 New Member Induction Programme had been booked, and would be arranged in January 2020.</p>	<p>KM/ SB</p> <p>RR</p> <p>KM</p>

	<p>Mindfulness was a new offer for elected Members. It was suggested that at the next meeting, a short introductory session be held for Members at the end of the meeting as a 30 minute taster session. The same offer had recently been offered to officers and had been well received. Members would be asked for their own feedback following the session.</p> <p>Alison would also e-mail members of the group a range of mobile apps that also offered mindfulness, such as</p> <p>www.headspace.com/headspace-meditation-app www.calm.com www.smilingmind.com.au</p> <p>Members were reminded of the on-line offer that was available to all staff and Members, which included around 120 courses. There were other health and wellbeing related courses on offer via the portal, such as stress and time management. The portal could be accessed via the Intranet – Members courses.</p>	AS
MDG 4	ANY OTHER BUSINESS/MEMBER SUPPORT ISSUES	
	No other issues to report.	
MDG 5	DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING	
	RESOLVED: The next meeting to be held on 30 January 2020 at 5.30pm in the Willow Room.	
	The meeting closed at 6pm	

REPORT TO:	Corporate Policy & Performance Board
DATE:	13 July 2020
REPORTING OFFICER:	Strategic Director – Enterprise, Community & Resources
PORTFOLIO:	Resources
SUBJECT:	Corporate PPB Update
WARDS:	Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of the report is to bring to Members' attention activity in areas within the responsibility of the Board over recent weeks and to invite Members to ask questions on issues of interest to them

2.0 RECOMMENDATION:

2.1 That the report is noted

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Since the Prime Minister announced lockdown measures on 23 March 2020, the Council has been involved in vast amounts of work in support of the community.

3.2 The report sets out a number of examples of activity carried out by teams which report to the Board, which are contained in updates in the appendix in respect of

- Finance
- Legal & Democratic Services
- Markets
- Policy, People, Performance & Efficiency
- School Meals, Community Meals & Stadium
- IT & Support Services

3.3 Members' questions would be welcomed. It would be particularly helpful if these could be submitted in advance in order to enable the provision of the fullest possible responses.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no specific implications in respect of Council policy.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1 There are no specific implications. The report details a significant amount of work across a range of Council services.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

There are no specific implications.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

There are no specific implications.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

There are no specific implications.

6.4 A Safer Halton

There are no specific implications.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

There are no specific implications.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

No risks have been identified which require control measures,

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

None.

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

No background papers have been used in the preparation of the report.

FINANCE DEPARTMENT

1. Staffing

- 1.1 All Finance Department staff, except for six, are working full-time from home. All systems and processes are continuing to operate as normal under this arrangement, with a few changes being made to processes and procedures where considered necessary.

2. Business Rates

- 2.1 A number of business rate relief changes announced by the Chancellor for 2020/21 have been implemented and the relevant businesses have been re-billed. As a result, the total mandatory rate reliefs for Halton businesses now total £17.3m, which are fully funded by Government grant and now represents 29% of the total business rates due per annum.
- 2.2 To date we have agreed revised payment plans for 155 businesses, whereby they will pay monthly instalments from June to March rather than from April to January. The collection rate to 31st May 2020 is 2.9% down on the same point last year. Adjusting for the revised payment plans, the collection rate is down by 2.0% which appears similar to the other LCR councils.
- 2.3 The Government provided £20.1m of funding to enable Covid19 Business Support Grants to be paid to eligible businesses. In the main, eligible businesses are those who were trading on 11th March 2020 and are in receipt of small business rate relief or extended retail rate relief. In total grants have so far been paid to 1,419 businesses, totalling £16.5m and we have paid out 82% of the available Government grant funding to 96% of the businesses considered to be eligible for such grants.

3. Council Tax

- 3.1 The Government provided £1.6m from the Covid19 Hardship Fund, to enable a £150 reduction in council tax for all those taxpayers in receipt of Council Tax Reduction. The reduction has been implemented for 8,063 taxpayers to date and they have been re-billed to reflect the £150 reduction in their council tax. We are currently receiving significantly more new claims each week for Council Tax Reduction and these are also eligible for the £150 reduction in council tax. The significant increase in new claims is primarily due to the increased numbers of claimants for Universal Credit, who are in the main also entitled to Council Tax Reduction.
- 3.2 The increasing numbers of new claimants for Council Tax Reduction is a concern, as these taxpayers are only required to pay approximately 22% of their council tax and therefore the Council loses the remaining 78% of council tax income. If the increased level of weekly claimant numbers continues for the next few months, we may see an increase in total claimant numbers of up to 20% which would be a cost to the Council in terms of lost council tax of around £2m. This has therefore been included within our estimated Covid19 costs return to Government.
- 3.3 To date we have agreed revised payment plans for 2,918 council taxpayers. The collection rate to 31st May 2020 is 0.95% down on this point last year, however, adjusting for the revised payment plans results in the collection rate being 1.0% higher than last year.

4. Covid19 Related Costs and Income Losses

4.1 A monthly return is being submitted to MHCLG which details Covid19 related expenditure and estimated income losses to date, along with a full year estimate for 2020/21. Expenditure is therefore being separately coded as far as possible within the Agresso system, in order to identify it as Covid19 related. The June return shows estimated full year Covid19 related costs of £8.5m and income losses of £13.6m, so a total net cost for the Council of £22.1m. Government have thus far only provided £7.9m towards funding these costs. There are indications that a further funding allocation will be forthcoming, but this is still awaited.

5. Supplier Payments and Debt Recovery Procedures

5.1 During the Covid19 crisis all supplier payments have been made immediately, once invoices are authorised as correct for payment via the Agresso system. We are currently writing to all suppliers (excluding social care providers) to inform them that from 20 July 2020 the Council will revert to paying their invoices in accordance with their normal terms of business.

5.2 Debt recovery procedures for general debtors, council tax and business rates have been suspended during the Covid19 crisis. Arrangements are being made for normal debt recovery procedures to be re-introduced from 1st July 2020, however, support and payment arrangements will continue to be provided where individuals or businesses can demonstrate they are still having difficulties paying.

6 Budget and Medium Term Financial Forecast

6.1 Once confirmation is received regarding whether the Government will provide further grant funding towards meeting the cost of Covid19, a review will be undertaken of the 2020/21 budget to establish the implications of Covid19 and any shortfall in Government grant funding. On the basis of this review a revised/emergency budget for 2020/21 will be reported to Council. Similarly, the Medium Term Financial Forecast will be updated to establish the ongoing impact upon the Council's financial position over the next three years, as a result of Covid19.

LEGAL & DEMOCRATIC SERVICES

1. Legal & Democratic Services
- 1.1 All staff throughout the department are working from home.
- 1.2 There are no members of staff presently off sick.
- 1.3 Members of the Democratic Services team are supporting the Hub, and several members of the Legal team have offered their assistance as capacity allows.
- 1.4 The Committee Services team have been successfully administering school admission appeals remotely, meeting the challenges very successfully.
- 1.5 Marketing & Communications and the Customer Intelligence Unit are operating as normal, albeit remotely. Clearly, there are considerable additional demands, which are being responded to in exemplary fashion.
- 1.6 The solicitors dealing with child care matters are still experiencing a high volume of cases.
- 1.7 There are significant pressures with regard to adult social care work.
- 1.8 Arrangements have been put in place to ensure that the Operational Director or a Group Solicitor are able to attend the office as and when required so that the sealing of urgent documents can be attended to.
- 1.9 Support is being given to the Council's decision making processes by means of advising on, publishing and maintaining a record of officer decisions.
- 1.10 Work continues on considering how best to ensure that decisions continue to be made on an efficient and transparent basis as the crisis continues.
- 1.11 The Schools Forum meeting took place remotely on 18 June and was successful.
- 1.12 Successful trial remote meetings with members of the Executive Board took place on 28 May and 11 & 18 June and meetings of PPBs and the Business Efficiency Board have now been arranged.
- 1.13 Members of the Licensing team have expressed the wish to return to the office on a part time basis, as Lowerhouse Lane Depot is opening for taxis. Work is underway to move towards allowing this to happen as soon as possible.
- 1.14 The Operational Director is representing the Council on a task & finish group across Cheshire authorities in relation to legal powers in the event of outbreaks.

MARKETS UPDATE

1. Markets

- 1.1 Following the Prime Minister's statement on Monday 23rd March, all non essential shops and stalls in the Market closed. A small number of essential shops remained open. However, a decision was taken to close the market completely on 28th March because it became difficult to manage the social distancing requirements as outlined in the newly released guidance.
- 1.2 During the week commencing 23rd March, the Council contacted Indoor and Outdoor Traders to confirm that they would be given a three-month rent free period, which would be backdated to 16th March. Footfall had already fallen dramatically that week, probably due to the Prime Minister's earlier statement regarding 'lockdown' on Monday 16th March.
- 1.3 On Sunday 24th May, the Prime Minister announced that all none essential retail shops, with some minor exceptions, could probably re-open from Monday 15th June. He also stated that outdoor markets could re-open from Monday 1st June.
- 1.4 This would have meant that, in theory, the outdoor Market in Widnes could re-open on Monday 1st June. However, NABMA (National Association of British Market Authorities) stated that market operators should only take the decision to reopen when they are confident that they manage the facility in a safe manner.
- 1.5 There were a number of factors that were then considered to ensure that the markets complied with Government guidelines.
- 1.6 Clearly, the Council needed to ensure that all signage and social distancing measures were in place. The Market needed to be adequately staffed and more resource would need to be brought in to support the management of the new arrangements. In addition, all traders had to be briefed and receive training in respect of the revised protocols and procedures that had to be put in place.
- 1.7 The availability of staff to work from the market office had been an issue, primarily because of childcare. The reopening of schools has helped. A further issue has been capacity. There are three market officer posts, but one of these is vacant. The support and goodwill from other officers within the department has been important, and now there is confidence that adequate capacity in the short-term can be provided.
- 1.8 A phased reopening of the market was considered by the market office. This would have resulted in the indoor market opening first, followed by the outdoor market. However, given the Prime Minister's announcement, it was proposed that both the indoor and outdoor markets would open from **Monday 15th June**. A small number of stalls have remained closed, as they relate to hair and beauty.
- 1.9 The opening of both the indoor and outdoor market concurrently has helped ensure that procedures and protocols can be managed consistently. It also has provided a significant and positive news story for the borough's residents, many of whom will have missed their regular visits to the market.

POLICY, PEOPLE, PERFORMANCE & EFFICIENCY DEPARTMENT

1. Staffing

- 1.1 All staff within the service are routinely working from home, with a requirement for a few staff to attend the office for a couple of days per month to complete some elements of payroll processing that require manual intervention. All HR systems are operating as normal under this arrangement.

2. Pay & Pensions

- 2.1 Pay & Pensions activity has continued uninterrupted. A number of additional pay transactions have been accommodated and processing has been completed fully and accurately

3. Employment Relations

- 3.1 This service has been on the sharp-end of providing advice to managers in the Council and Head-teachers across the Borough's schools on a wide range of unfamiliar HR matters that emerged as a result of the pandemic and associated lockdown. Most of the routine work of this service has been held. Face to face processes such as hearings and consultation exercises are not possible under current guidelines as they constitute a 'mass gathering'. Alternative approaches are being considered currently. There will however be significant backlog of work in this area for many months to come.

4. Efficiency, Recruitment & Resourcing

- 4.1 Some staff roles have been re-purposed with a few changes being made to processes and procedures to support the Council response to the pandemic. Recruitment & Resourcing Officers have worked on the redeployment and transfer of staff to support activities such as the Shielded Individual Hub, PPPE Hub, Adult Care, Bereavement Management, and voluntary sector activity. In many cases, this is now being reversed, and staff repatriated to their substantive roles.
- 4.2 There has been significant demand for agency workers, particularly in the Adult Care area since February. This has created an ongoing and consistent work demand which continues. Some demand could not be met by the marketplace, resulting in additional procurement arrangements being put in place by colleagues in the Procurement team.

5. Organisational Development

- 5.1 Face to Face training and L&D work was suspended in March, however training provision has continued in many respects through webinars. The service has contributed heavily to the well-being agenda, providing support, intervention and sign-posting to staff wanting to access well-being support. The service has worked closely with colleagues in Public Health to launch the 'wellbeing portal', which has been very positively received

5.2 The take up of e-learning increased significantly following lockdown. The availability of e-learning had meant that we have continued to support staff with L&D resources during this difficult time. This higher level of delivery and usage will be retained in the post-COVID environment. 10,600 e-learning interventions have been completed so far in 2020, compared to 4,600 in the whole of 2019.

6. Policy, Partnerships & Business Support.

6.1 The Policy and Business Support functions within the service have become an integral part of the collaborative programme to reinstate services as lockdown eases. This work will continue for some time, using the clear method that has been devised.

6.2 The Partnerships Officer has, and continues to play a key role in a number of strands of activity that have resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes liaison and coordination activity with stakeholders in the voluntary and community sector, input and support to the Shielded Individual Hub, assurances and support to refugee families in the Borough, and input to the coordination and support of asylum seekers who have been located within the Borough during the pandemic.

7. Trade Union Liaison

7.1 It should be noted that the level of collaboration and mutual respect that exists between the Council's joint Trade Unions, Members and management has proved a very solid platform for the exploration and resolution of issues during the pandemic. This has enabled a constructive approach to the management of the range of unexpected HR and people management issues that the pandemic has presented the Council with.

SCHOOL MEALS, COMMUNITY MEALS AND STADIUM

1. School Meals

- 1.1 Open throughout the pandemic, including normal school closures to provide key worker pupils school meals.
- 1.2 Provided packed lunches and hampers to vulnerable families throughout the pandemic.
- 1.3 Briefed all staff on opening up to the wider school community Years R,1 & 6 and provided briefing guidance and relevant signage and risk assessments completed.
- 1.4 School meals staff distributed the emergency Inside Halton COVID edition to over 30,000 residents.
- 1.5 Redeployed assistant manager to Social Services to help co-ordinate the request for COVID test and Track & Trace.
- 1.6 Redeployed kitchen assistants to Care Homes to assist in the preparation of food

2. Community Meals

- 2.1 Continued to operate from the stadium providing hot community meals and tea packs to the vulnerable adults of Halton.
- 2.2 Increased by over 20 a day compared to before the pandemic

3. Stadium

- 3.1 The stadium has been used throughout the pandemic to provide a hub for the delivery of food packs for the Shielded community in Halton.
- 3.2 The Stadium has been utilised to operate and coordinate the distribution of PPE during the pandemic. Stadium employees redeployed to manage and co-ordinate.
- 3.3 Stadium employees redeployed to assist in the operating of the emergency Ice Rink project.

Support Services: - ICT/Admin/Customer Services Update

1. Staffing

1.1 All Staff are working from home with the exception of approximately 20 members of staff supporting services such as the contact centre and life-line, administrative requirements and ICT device repair from within those locations that remained open.

2. ICT

2.1 The service continues to support all iterative changes as the authority evolves its systems management process whilst supporting services to deal with the current situation. Software Systems and Hardware maintenance plans remain in place linked to out of hours and weekend working to compliment extended front-line working hours.

2.2 The Halton Cloud continues to support all 2600 desktop users with an average of 1500 concurrent users connected into services at anyone time, system uptime over this period has been excellent, whilst accommodating a considerable number of changes and adaptations to the requirements profile of our user base over this period of lockdown.

2.3 Skype for business remains the primary communications solution as this contains the authority's main telephony system that also runs our contact centre and many of the external services supported and hosted by Halton such as the Emergency Duty Teams for out of hours social care provision across Halton/St Helens and Knowsley.

2.4 Office 365 or M365 as it is now known is now in place and this will encompass the release of the Teams application, but given the complexities of any changes to the phone systems at such a key time together with the need to upgrade certain server-based hardware systems it was deemed an unnecessary risk to deploy at this stage. As such the wider deployment of Teams apart from those with a clear business requirement in line with an immediate COVID requirement will be on-hold until late August.

2.5 Teams within Schools: Teams is currently under trial within a primary school and will be released along with other variants of conferencing solutions once the trial and security configurations are completed over the next few weeks.

2.6 Laptop's for pupils all devices are now with the schools and children – in total 760 devices together with 140 Mobile Routers.

2.7 Social Care data matching is currently underway integrating Halton Social Care Data Sets with NHS Data Sets through a solution known as Graphnet. One of the Halton developers has now completed the 1st of personal data extracts from within the NHS systems literally a couple of days ago. We will be working on the reverse extracts from within our systems. Given the scale of the request this is a considerable piece of work and complex – In the main this will be utilised for Tracking and Tracing but will allow further benefits down the line, such as integration and the development of the One Halton Care Record.

- 2.8 Eclipse the new Social Care Application - training is now underway, with a go-live date for all Children's Teams by the end of August. This will comprise of one – one training, group training and Video training.
- 2.9 Social Care management reporting – local reporting solution under development in-house to cover all Care First and Eclipse management reporting requirements through the development of a dedicated data warehousing solution managed by SSIS and SSRS reporting. Project to be completed in line with the go live date for the Eclipse delivery within Children's.
- 2.10 Agresso developments are also underway with additional FMS and BACS service delivery options now in place with Mersey Travel and Sefton.
- 2.11 Following the delivery of the Phase 1 aspect of the ICT restructure in April the revision of the management structure within the ICT area of the department will take place on the 10th of June. The ICT service was currently managed through 3 Divisional Managers posts this will now reduce to Two posts:

The Two new Divisions will comprise of:

- Technology Services Division, Divisional Manager Pat Oliver
- Compliance and Data Management, Divisional Manager Jon Greenough

Sadly, as part of this process Peter Richmond has taken the decision to retire left the authority on the 10th of June.

3. Admin

- 3.1 Following the Phase 1 aspect of the management and departmental restructure I am pleased to announce Mike Horsley will remain as the Divisional Manager Administrative and Customer Support Services covering the areas of Central Admin, RMU, Print and Customer Services.
- 3.2 The service continues to support all teams with a mix of officers working from home and within the offices.
- 3.3 The Print Unit has now re- opened with staff operating on a rota basis (one member of staff in on each day). Entry to the premises is now strictly restricted to Print Unit and Design staff only. This is to support demand for signage that is being produced in advance of individual business units returning to some degree of physical presence on site.
- 3.4 The Records Management Facility is fully operational and supporting the authority and its clients.
- Incoming mail scanning (corporate)
 - Hybrid mail (corporate)
 - RMU Office now open at Picow Farm Road
 - Sefton contract services delivered throughout the lockdown
 - Cemeteries support
 - Open Spaces Service support
 - Courier service

Warehouse: RMU staff, observing social distancing, are continuing to work on warehouse tasks as required.

4. One Stop Shop's

- 4.1 All of the shop teams are working from home supporting the contact centre and many of the schemes in place to identify and support all Shielded and Vulnerable residents within the borough.
- 4.2 Reset plans are currently under development in terms of the reopening of the shop facilities within Runcorn and Widnes.
- 4.3 This will include the provision of Face to Face services – discussions are underway with property services to consider and deliver the most appropriate and safe solution for this.
- 4.4 Back office work will continue within the locations and from home utilising the current technologies and new ways of working.
- 4.5 Customer services and Admin management are part of the reset working group and will develop plans in line with colleagues from across the authority supporting the current situation and existing working practices and customer support solutions.

5. Contact Centre

- 5.1 Considerable efforts have been made by the Contact Centre and One Stop Shop Teams and management who have been at the fore front of unravelling and delivering many of the often complex and ill prepared Government Led Schemes aimed at supporting and identifying those within the Shielded and Vulnerable groups within the borough.
- 5.2 With extended opening hours for the support lines whilst maintaining existing services as many residents and businesses contacted the authority for a range of services. To offer some scale to the level of contact across this period the average cost of monthly outbound calls within the authority is approximately £5'000 this rose to over £15'000 per month over this period. To support the considerable efforts delivered across the whole of the authority.
- 5.3 Over 50% of the Contact Centre team are now working from home effectively and will continue to do so in line with the current restrictions and guidelines.

REPORT TO: Corporate Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 28th July 2020

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director Enterprise, Community & Resources

PORTFOLIO: Resources

SUBJECT: Progress Updates regarding the Discretionary Support Scheme, Discretionary Housing Payments and Universal Credit.

WARD(S): Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1. To provide updates regarding the delivery of the Discretionary Support Scheme, Discretionary Housing Payments and Universal Credit

2.0 RECOMMENDATION That the latest position regarding the Discretionary Support Scheme, Discretionary Housing Payments and Universal Credit, be noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Discretionary Support Scheme

3.1 The Discretionary Support Scheme is now in its eighth year of operation. Over this period the Scheme has been developed and amended where necessary by the Board.

3.2 When responsibility was passed from the Department for Work and Pensions to the Council and the Discretionary Support Scheme (DSS) was established, the associated grant funding was significantly reduced by Government. The staffing cost of the DSS Team and a proportion of the DSS awards made, are grant funded. However, the Board previously agreed to carry forward any unspent DSS funds, in order to provide a reserve which would be used to sustain the Scheme for as long as possible.

3.3 Details of expenditure during 2019/20 are provided in Section 1 of the Appendix. The DSS made 523 awards during 2019/20 totalling £143,598. The analysis of applications by type and awards granted are also set out in the Appendix.

Discretionary Housing Payments

- 3.4 In 2019/20 total grant funding of £469,587 was received for Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP). Actual expenditure totalled £469,579 representing 1,391 DHP awards and giving an under spend of £8. This compares with 2018/19 where 1,544 awards were made with total expenditure of £535,414.
- 3.5 The decrease in the number of awards and total expenditure in 2019/20 compared to the previous year, has been caused by a reduction in Government funding of £66,947. Section 2 of the Appendix provides further details of DHP spend during 2019/20 and a comparison with previous years.

Universal Credit

- 3.5 On 27th July 2016, the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) commenced the roll out of Universal Credit (UC) Full Service in Halton. This meant that all new working age claimants must now claim UC, and all claims must be made on-line. According to the DWP as at May 2020 there were 14,070 Halton residents now claiming UC. Section 3 in the Appendix provides details of the UC caseload in Halton since April 2015.

4.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

- 4.1 The Discretionary Support Scheme, Discretionary Housing Payments and Universal Credit have the potential to affect all of the Council priorities.

5.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 5.1 DSS and DHP payments will be monitored to ensure they remain within budget.

6.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 6.1 The eligibility criteria and application process for DSS and DHP ensure that no particular groups of individuals are excluded.

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

- 7.1 There are no background papers under the meaning of the Act.

APPENDIX

1.0 Discretionary Support Scheme

The expenditure for the Scheme during 2019/20 is shown in the table below.

Expenditure 2019/20

	£
DSS team staffing expenditure	107,048
DSS awards expenditure	143,598
Total expenditure	250,646

1.1 Expenditure during 2019/20 was spread as follows;

Month	Total Awarded (£)
April	8,893
May	9,897
June	4,929
July	9,740
August	12,495
September	7,866
October	20,399
November	12,090
December	8,629
January	24,336
February	12,259
March	12,065
Total	143,598

1.2 The number of awards and average amount of each award paid during 2019/20 was as follows;

Type of Award	Number Granted	Cost (£)	Average Award (£)
Emergency Support	329	17,215	52.33
Community Support	194	126,383	651.46

Total	523	143,598	274.57
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- 1.3 The following table shows the number of applications received during 2019/20, together with the number of awards granted, analysed between Emergency Support and Community Support;

Breakdown Of Applications		Emergency Support		Community Support	
		Runcorn	Widnes	Runcorn	Widnes
Applications received	2,378	999	754	324	301
Number of awards granted	523	176	153	95	99
Awarded amount	£143,598	£8,883	£8,124	£66,049	£60,542
Percentage awarded	100%	6%	6%	46%	42%
Applications rejected	1,855	823	601	229	202

- 1.4 Over two thirds of the applications received were rejected and the reasons for rejection are detailed below;

Reasons For Rejection	
Excess income	96
Non-dependent in the property	43
Not liable for council tax	129
Police reference required (e.g. if money lost or stolen)	44
Security check, I.D. validation failed	35
Relying too much on Discretionary Support Scheme	20
Homeless	19
White goods (washing machine & fridge for medical needs only)	57
Not receiving a means tested benefit	35
Alternative help available	436
Requested a replacement item	152
Non-Halton resident	372
Sanctioned by DWP	55
Two awards	44
Three awards	0
Requested cash	92
Application withdrawn	52
UC budgeting issue	16

UC delay issue	35
Payment due	120
General budgeting	367
Payment delay	8
Total	2,227

- 1.5 Of those applications which were approved, the main categories of award were as follows;

Awarded Items	Number
One Adult to last up to 2 weeks food award	245
Additional adult	13
Child pack award	124
2 Adults food award	47
Toiletry Pack	62
Vegetarian food award	3
Gluten Free food award	2
Nut Allergy food award	2
Cold food award	3
Household Items	0
Bedding Only	46
Single Bed with Bedding	135
Single Bed	0
Single Mattress	6
Single Bed Frame Only	3
Double Bed	0
Double Bed with Bedding	4
Double Mattress	28
Double Bed Frame Only	6
Bunk Beds with Bedding	4
Bunk Beds	0
Cot with Bedding	11
Sofa	145
Set of Curtains	158
Cooker	59
Washing Machine	5
Fridge	1
Kitchen Equipment	157
Fuel	77
Removal	11
Cooker Connection	3

1.6 The table below shows where referrals to the DSS were received from;

Sign posting (referrals received from)	Referrals
Food bank	7
Creative Support	178
Children's Duty Team	18
Citizens Advice Team	50
DWP	1,690
Fuel Supplier	28
Grangeway Court	20
Halton Direct Link	38
Halton Housing Trust	43
Housing Solutions	13
Halton People Into Jobs	6
Local Housing Association	27
Police	0
Changing Lives	24
SHAP	41
Social Services	53
Welfare Rights	8
Brennan Lodge	15
Family & friends	23
Total	2,282

1.7 The onset of Covid19 in March 2020 has clearly impacted everyone's lives in the whole country, and the table below shows awards made from the Discretionary Support Scheme that are Covid19 related.

Month	No. of emergency support awards	Value	No. of community support awards	Value
March	15	£890	0	0
April	30	£1,655	2	£2,686
May	12	£632	0	0
June	5	£392	0	0
Total	62	£3,569	2	£2,686

1.8 Based upon the experience of 2019/20 and the impact of Covid19, there is clearly a continued need for the Discretionary Support Scheme and it

appears to be operating well. At this stage it is not proposed to make any changes to the Scheme's application criteria.

2.0 Discretionary Housing Payments

The table below shows an analysis of DHP expenditure for 2019/20

Purpose of DHP award	Total amount of DHP award £
Benefits cap	49,721
Under occupancy (Bedroom Tax)	259,110
LHA reform	29,503
Other	131,245
Total	469,579

2.1 Of the 1,391 DHP awards made during 2019/20, 766 were to UC claimants with a total value of £177,888.

2.2 The table below provides a summary of DHP grant funding and expenditure since April 2013;

Year	Grant Funding £	Amount Spent £	Council contribution £	No. of awards
2013/14	382,452	413,562	31,110	2,620
2014/15	386,553	518,310	131,757	2,016
2015/16	343,725	361,381	17,656	1,516
2016/17	388,533	379,974	-	1,201
2017/18	406,692	412,767	6,075	1,403
2018/19	536,534	535,414	-	1,544
2019/20	469,587	469,579	-	1,391
2020/21 (to 25/6/20)	527,810	204,782	n/a	719

2.3 We have continued to grant full year awards to those customers who are in properties adapted for a disability.

- 2.4 Rent in-advance cases are only supported through DHP payments if the household are receiving assistance from Housing Solutions, either through statutory homeless duties or those where homeless prevention assistance has been granted.
- 2.5 The Council's DHP grant funding for 2020/21 has increased by £58,223 compared to 2019/20.
- 2.6 To assess the impact of Covid19 we have carried out a comparison of the number of DHP applications received in March, April, May and June 2020 with the same months in 2019. The table below illustrates the difference between the two years.

	Year	
	2019	2020
Month	Number of DHP applications received	
March	201	151
April	103	81
May	97	60
June	89	53

- 2.7 The above figures indicate a reduction in the number of DHP applications received in 2020 in the months from March to June compared to the same months in 2019. This represents a 30% decrease in the number Halton residents applying for DHP for help with their rent compared to last year. All the other Liverpool City Region (LCR) Councils report the same trend of reduced DHP applications over this period. The view across LCR Councils is that landlords, particularly registered providers are not pursuing rent arrears during Covid19 lockdown, and therefore tenants are not being encouraged to apply for DHPs. When lockdown restrictions are eased and there is a return to 'normality' then the Council may experience a surge in demand for DHPs with Halton residents requiring help with their rent.

3.0 Universal Credit

3.1 As of May 2020 there were 14,070 Universal Credit (UC) claimants in Halton. The table below shows the growth in the UC caseload in Halton since April 2015;

Date	UC caseload
April 2015	720
Sept 2015	1,592
Dec 2015	1,901
May 2016	1,990
Aug 2016	2,171
Oct 2016	3,330
Nov 2016	3,779
Dec 2016	4,122
April 2017	5,941
May 2017	6,185
Aug 2017	7,148
Nov 2017	7,492
Feb 2018	8,210
May 2018	8,969
June 2018	9,242
Nov 2018	10,390
March 2019	10,631
May 2019	9,702*
Sept 2019	10,179
November 2019	10,296
14 th March 2020	10,918
May 2020	14,070

*DWP Revision

3.2 The effect of Covid19 and the lockdown is clearly illustrated in the table above on the UC caseload, which after March 2020 shows a significant increase in the number of people claiming UC in Halton.

REPORT TO: Corporate Policy & Performance Board

DATE: 28 July 2020

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director Enterprise Community & Resources

PORTFOLIO: Resources

SUBJECT: Business Rates Section 44A Discretionary Rate Relief Policy Statement

WARD(S): Borough-wide

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To seek approval to the Business Rates Section 44A Discretionary Rate Relief Policy Statement, to allow discretionary relief for a short term period for unoccupied or partly unoccupied business premises

2. RECOMMENDED: That Executive Board approve the Business Rates Section 44A Discretionary Rate Relief Policy Statement, as presented in the Appendix.

3. SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Section 44A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended) provides the Council with discretionary powers to allow discretionary rate relief for unoccupied or partly unoccupied business premises for a short term period.
- 3.2 The provision of Section 44A relief is aimed at situations where there are practical difficulties in occupying or vacating part of a property. Therefore it is not intended that all properties which temporarily become unoccupied should have their liability reduced.
- 3.3 Whilst the Council recognises that awarding relief is beneficial to local businesses, it must also consider the benefit to the local community. The principle consideration is that any relief granted is in the best interests of the taxpayers of Halton.
- 3.4 The full Section 44A Discretionary Rate Relief Policy Statement is presented in the Appendix.

4. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Policy Statement presented in the Appendix would meet the requirements of Section 44A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended).

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Under the current business rate retention scheme the Council retains 99% of all business rate income generated during the year. The cost of any relief will impact directly on the finances of the Council. Approved relief under this scheme must demonstrate the wider benefit to the community within Halton.

The total cost of the relief proposed cannot be determined precisely, it is dependent on the value of each relief given and the number of approved applications.

6. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

6.3 A Healthy Halton

6.4 A Safer Halton

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

Depending upon the specific circumstances, the award of discounts under the Section 44A Policy have the potential to affect all of the Council priorities above.

7. RISK ANALYSIS

- 7.1 The total cost of awards granted may become significant. The number and cost of awards will therefore be monitored and included in the quarterly performance monitoring reports to the Board.

8. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 8.1 The eligibility criteria and application process in relation to the Section 44A Policy will ensure that no particular groups of business are excluded.

In accordance with our equality duty, this proposal will remove some financial barriers, resulting in increased opportunities for employment and local economic growth;

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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Section 44A Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended)	Revenues & Financial Management Division Stadium Widnes	Louise Bate

Business Rates
Section 44A Discount
Policy Statement

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Section 44A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 (as amended) provides the Council with discretionary powers to allow discretionary rate relief for unoccupied or partly unoccupied business premises for a short term period.
- 1.2 The definition 'short term period' is not prescribed by law and therefore the Council has the discretion to decide the period relief should be awarded.
- 1.3 The discretionary power does not alter the general rule that occupation of part of a premises constitutes occupation of the whole premises.

2. STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 The provision of Section 44A relief is aimed at situations where there are practical difficulties in occupying or vacating part of a property. Therefore it is not intended that all properties which temporarily become unoccupied should have their liability reduced.
- 2.2 The circumstances when it appears that Section 44A should apply are reasonably infrequent but generally are found in respect of large manufacturing hereditaments. In these cases it is often difficult to vacate the property quickly due to the size and nature of the equipment used. Conversely there are often difficulties in occupying a property for the same reason.
- 2.3 Whilst the Council recognises that awarding relief is beneficial to local businesses, it must also consider the benefit to the local community. The principle consideration is that any relief granted is in the best interests of the taxpayers of Halton. Changes to local government finance now mean that income from business rates directly impacts the Council's finances. Any relief granted has a direct impact on the Council's income and ultimately on Council taxpayers in the area.

3. QUALIFYING FOR SECTION 44A

- 3.1 The use of Section 44A is intended to apply to those properties where there are practical difficulties in either occupying the property or vacating the property. Therefore it is not intended that all properties which temporarily become partly unoccupied should have their liability reduced.
- 3.2 **Some examples where it may be deemed reasonable to award the relief are:**
 - Where full occupation is being phased in over a period of time, this may be due to relocation to the area.
 - Where there are difficulties in occupying the whole of the property due to short term practical or financial restraints.

- Temporary occupation, for example due to remedial building works or refurbishment, fire damage or similar.

3.3 The following conditions are unlikely to be awarded relief:

- Full vacation occurring in stages over a period of time, taking the business out of the area.
- Where there is no intention to occupy the whole of the property.
- Where the property has already received the benefit of the relief for the same area
- Where unoccupied areas are continuously rotated to consecutively apply for the relief.

If a ratepayer is moving to different parts within the same property more than once, the Council will require a business case to be submitted in support of this approach. The business case will need to explain clearly why such changes to the business are required and the reason this results in another part of the premises being temporarily unoccupied.

4. RETROSPECTIVE CLAIMS

4.1 Relief will only be considered if the Council has the opportunity to conduct an inspection during the period requested.

4.2 Relief will not normally be granted for retrospective claims, however, consideration will be given where:

- The applicant is newly liable for business rates and an application is received within 1 calendar month of the new liability arising or;
- There are exceptional circumstances and the ratepayer can demonstrate good cause for not submitting the application earlier.

4.3 No consideration shall be given to an award for a retrospective period where the Council is not able to verify to its satisfaction that the circumstances giving rise to the application pertained for that period.

5. MAXIMUM AWARD

5.1 A maximum of 3 months relief will be awarded for a non-industrial hereditament and 6 months relief for an industrial hereditament. Amendments to any existing reliefs will be carried out at the time of the award being approved.

The relief will cease on the day the following arises;

- The occupation of any of the area of the unoccupied parts of the premises.
- The ending of the rate period in which the apportionment was requested.
- A further apportionment is required.
- The area becomes reoccupied completely.

6. APPLICATION PROCESS

- 6.1 The Council will consider applications for changes to the amount charged under the Section 44A legislation from ratepayers, based on their own merits, on a case by case basis.
- 6.2 The Council will require a written application and the applicant must supply a plan of the property, with the unoccupied portions clearly identified.
- 6.3 If the application is successful, then the Council will request a certificate from the Valuation Office Agency indicating the relevant values for the occupied and unoccupied portions and this certificate is binding upon the Council.
- 6.4 Section 44A applications will be considered by a panel made up of:
- Revenues Manager – Business Rates
 - Divisional Manager – Revenues and Financial Management

7. REVIEW PROCEDURE

- 7.1 Where an application is refused, any requests for a review of the decision will be considered by the Operational Director, Finance.
- 7.2 The Applicant will be allowed to submit additional information or evidence to support the review of the application.
- 7.3 As the decision to grant a Section 44A relief is discretionary, any challenge relating to the Council from not granting relief would be in accordance with Section 138 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988 by way of judicial review.

8. NOTIFICATION

- 8.1 A letter of notification will be sent to the ratepayer and an amended bill to show;
- The period of the award; and
 - The amount of relief
- 8.2 The letter will also inform the ratepayer that regular unannounced visits to the premises will be made by Council inspectors and that the Council must be informed immediately of any changes of circumstances that may affect the relief.

8.3 Where the Applicant is not successful, the notification will provide full reasons for the decision.

9. FRAUD

9.1 The Council is committed to prevent fraud. Any applicant who tries to fraudulently claim a Section 44A rate relief might have committed an offence under the Fraud Act 2006. If the Council suspects that fraud may have occurred, the matter will be investigated as appropriate and this could lead to criminal proceedings.

REPORT TO: Corporate Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 28 July 2020

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director Enterprise, Community & Resources

PORTFOLIO: Resources

SUBJECT: Collection Fund Progress Report and Covid-19 Response

WARD(S): Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1. To provide an update on the Council's Collection Fund position on council tax and business rates. To provide an update on the impact of Covid-19 on the Collection Fund

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the latest position regarding the Collection Fund be noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Council Tax Position Statement as at 30 June 2020

3.1 The 2020/21 council tax net collectible debit (the billed amount) is £64.210m, to date £17.322m of this has been collected which results in a collection rate of 26.98%, down by 1.00% on the same period last year.

3.2 Whilst the 'in-year' council tax collection rate has been steadily decreasing since 2013 the year on year reduction of 1% is significant. The reason for the drop can be attributable to the number of payment plan deferrals the Council has agreed to in the current year as a result of the hardship being created by the Covid-19 pandemic. To date the Council has agreed to 3,636 deferral plans which allow the taxpayer to switch their payment plan from 10 payment periods commencing in April to instead start from June.

3.3 Agreement to the deferral plans should result in the collection rate effectively catching up towards the end of the year as cash receipts in February and March should be higher than compared to previous years. This is all dependent on accounts being paid as per the agreed payment plan.

3.4 As well as in-year collections the Council also actively pursues council tax debt from previous years. For the year to date the Council has collected £0.438m of old year debt. This enables the Council to reach the target council tax collection rate of 97%, used in setting the Council's net budget.

- 3.5 Table A below shows the impact and importance of collection of arrears. This compares the actual in-year collection rate to the collection rate to date.

Table A – Arrears Collection Rate

	% Collected In-Year	% Collected to 30 June 2020
2014/15	95.47	98.73
2015/16	95.21	98.42
2016/17	95.04	98.00
2017/18	94.62	97.29
2018/19	94.75	96.73
2019/20	94.57	94.92

Council Tax Reduction Scheme

- 3.6 It is expected that working age applications for the local council tax reduction scheme (CTRS) will increase over the short term due to the pandemic. The increase since 31 March 2020 is approximately 250 and the caseload currently stands at 7,765.
- 3.7 The risk to the Council is that the number of applications to the CTRS increases significantly over the course of the year. The Furlough Scheme put in place by Government to protect workers will unwind over the next 4 months, unemployment numbers are expected to increase which in turn will result in greater numbers accessing the local council tax reduction scheme and therefore reduce the amount of collectible council tax. Projections show that a 35% increase in the CTRS will reduce the amount of council tax which can be collected by £2.006m.
- 3.8 The 35% increase is based on 2012 council tax benefit numbers, the peak position since 2010.

Hardship Funding

- 3.9 As part of its response to COVID-19, the Government announced in the Budget on 11 March that it would provide local authorities in England with £500m of new grant funding to support economically vulnerable people and households in their local area.
- 3.10 The Government's expectation was that billing authorities will provide all recipients of working age council tax reduction with a further reduction in their 2020/21 council tax bill of £150, to reduce the liability of council tax payers outside of their formal CTRS scheme design.
- 3.11 The Hardship funding allocation to Halton was £1.619m, to date £1.204m has been allocated to 8,198 accounts. The projection increase of 35% to the CTRS caseload will add a further cost of £0.431m, fully consuming the available grant.

Business Rates Position Statement as at 30 June 2020

- 3.12 The 2020/21 business rates net collectible debit (the billed amount) is £47.725m, to date £12.990m of this has been collected which results in a collection rate of 27.22%, down by 3.49% on the same period last year.
- 3.13 The drop in the rate is substantial after only three months of the year, reasons for the decrease will be as a result of both non-payment of accounts and payment plan deferrals. To date 148 accounts have had deferrals added to their accounts and of these 59 will only start paying in June and July, 43 have made a June payment and 46 have not paid anything.
- 3.14 As per council tax, agreement to the deferral plans will result in the collection rate effectively catching up towards the end of the year as cash receipts in February and March should be higher than compared to previous years, pending actual collection.
- 3.15 Recovery of arrears will continue to be pursued, to date arrears of £0.105m have been collected.

Covid19 – Business Rate Reliefs

- 3.16 On 17 March 2020 Government announced an extension to the business rate relief scheme for the retail, leisure and hospitality sector. This provided 100% rate relief to all businesses within the sector regardless of their rateable value. An additional announcement was made in April 2020 to provide 100% rate relief for nurseries (Ofsted Early Years Registered). The value of these additional reliefs to businesses in Halton to date amounts to £12.338m. The Council will receive a grant payment from Government to reimburse the reliefs provided.

Covid19 – Business Rate Grants

- 3.17 The Business Rates team have been administering business support grants on behalf of Government to help smaller businesses and those in the retail, leisure and hospitality sector. Payments have been made on the following basis:
- Businesses eligible for Small Business Rates Relief would receive a grant of £10,000 each to help with the impact of Covid-19.
 - Businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure sectors would receive a cash grant of up to £25,000 per business. Recipients will receive one grant per eligible property:
 - For businesses in these sectors with a rateable value of under £15,000, they will receive a grant of £10,000
 - For businesses in these sectors with a rateable value of between £15,000 and £51,000, they will receive a grant of £25,000
- 3.18 To date the Council has made grant payments to 1,438 businesses out of a total 1,490 eligible businesses, a return of 96.5%. The value of the grant payments made to date amounts to £16.690m.

Collection Fund Recovery Procedures

- 3.19 The impact of the pandemic resulted in the Council suspending recovery on both council tax and business rates. Formal recovery recommenced in June 2020 with reminders letters being sent to those in council tax arrears and reminders sent at the start of July for business rate arrears.
- 3.20 Whilst recovery action was suspended it was considered vitally important that the Council did not neglect taxpayers struggling to pay council tax during such a difficult period. In May a social media campaign was run and 4,335 letters were sent advising of arrears but also signposting to help those in need, this included:
- Urging residents to contact the Council if they were struggling to pay, there was an offer to recalculate instalments.
 - Advising to claim Universal Credit and Council Tax Reduction where eligible.
 - Signposting residents to advice from Citizens Advice Bureau and Step Change.
- 3.21 The Council is currently limited to what steps it can take with regard to recovery action, reminder letters will be sent out and attachment to earnings and benefits will be pursued where an existing liability order is in place. We will also work with enforcement agencies, again where an existing liability order allows this. The continued closure of Warrington Magistrate Court during the current period prevents new liability orders being obtained, this will slow the normal recovery procedure on new arrears.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 The decrease in the collection rate for both council tax and business rates will have an adverse impact on what the Council will have set aside at financial year end in terms of a bad debt provision. It is difficult to say at this point what that will be until it is further understood how the economy and business sector reacts to the pandemic and government attempts to mitigate the risk.
- 4.2 Using current collection rates, as a worst case scenario, forecast losses on the Collection Fund are

	£m
Business Rate Receipt Losses	6.767
Council Tax Receipt Losses	1.200
Increase to Working Age CTRS cases (as per para 3.7)	2.000
Total Loss	9.967

- 4.3 Losses to the Collection Fund create a deficit which would usually have to be addressed in the following financial year. Government have recently confirmed they will allow Local Government to spread the loss over three years. This

support will give breathing room in setting budgets for next year before a fuller announcement at the Spending Review.

5 Implications for the Council's Priorities

5.1 Children and Young People in Halton

5.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

5.3 A Healthy Halton

5.4 A Safer Halton

5.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

5.6 The financial implications outlined in the report could potentially have a detrimental impact on funding services to deliver the priorities.

6. Risk Analysis

6.1 The report is based on latest available information. The unique situation of the pandemic creates a risk in the lack of understanding of how the situation will develop.

7. Equality and Diversity Issues

7.1 Not Applicable