

Public Document Pack



Corporate Policy and Performance Board

Tuesday, 1 November 2022 6.30 p.m.
Civic Suite - Town Hall, Runcorn

S. Young

Chief Executive

BOARD MEMBERSHIP

Councillor Robert Gilligan (Chair)	Labour
Councillor Ged Philbin (Vice-Chair)	Labour
Councillor Noel Hutchinson	Labour
Councillor Peter Lloyd Jones	Labour
Councillor Alan Lowe	Labour
Councillor Norman Plumpton Walsh	Labour
Councillor Gareth Stockton	Liberal Democrats
Councillor Angela Teeling	Labour
Councillor Sharon Thornton	Labour Party
Councillor Kevan Wainwright	Labour
Councillor Andrea Wall	Labour

Please contact Kim Butler on 0151 511 7496 or kim.butler@halton.gov.uk for further information.

The next meeting of the Board is on Tuesday, 24 January 2023

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

Part I

Item No.	Page No.
1. MINUTES	1 - 4
2. DECLARATION OF INTEREST (INCLUDING PARTY WHIP DECLARATIONS)	
<p>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.</p>	
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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, 6 September 2022 in the Council Chamber - Town Hall, Runcorn

Present: Councillors Gilligan (Chair), Hutchinson, P. Lloyd Jones, A. Lowe, N. Plumpton Walsh, G. Stockton, Wainwright and Wall

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Philbin and Thornton

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: M. Reaney, E. Dawson, G. Ferguson, P. Garnett and R. Rout

Also in attendance: None

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

	<i>Action</i>
CS10 MINUTES	
The Minutes from the meeting held on 7 June 2022 were taken as read and signed as a correct record.	
CS11 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME	
The Board was advised that no public questions had been received.	
CS12 EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES	
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.	
RESOLVED: That the Minutes be noted.	
CS13 MEMBER DEVELOPMENT GROUP NOTES	
The Board considered the minutes of the Member Development Group meeting held on 10 February 2022.	
RESOLVED: That the minutes be noted.	
CS14 HOUSING SUPPORT FUND 2022	
The Board considered a report of the Operational	

Director – Finance, which provided an update on the progress of the delivery of the £1.3m grant allocation received by the Council for the six month extension to the Government’s Household Support Fund (HSF). Halton’s allocation of grant funding was £1,297,880, for the period 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022, of which 5% was permitted to provide for the costs of administering the grant. A spending plan had been prepared and was attached as Appendix A to the report. Detailed information relating to spending for the period 1 April to 30 June 2022 was included as Appendix B.

It was noted that the DWP were currently working through the design and governance of the new HSF for the period 1 November 2022 to 31 March 2023. No details of the scheme were as yet available, however one change highlighted was there would be requirement to spend on particular groups of people as stipulated in the current HSF.

It was proposed that once the DWP had issued final guidance for the new HSF the Operational Director – Finance, in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Corporate Policy and Performance Board (PPB), would recommend the new HSF scheme for approval by Executive Board. A further progress report would be submitted to the Board at its meeting in November.

RESOLVED: That

1. progress with delivery of the Household Support Fund, as outlined in the report, be noted;
2. a further progress report be brought to the next meeting of the Board; and
3. the Operational Director Finance in consultation with the Chair and Vice Chair of the Corporate PPB recommend the new Household Support Fund scheme for approval by Executive Board.

Operational
Director –
Finance

CS15 RESOURCING THE COUNCIL – CURRENT CHALLENGES

The Board considered a report of the Operational Director – Policy, People, Performance and Efficiency, which provided Members with an overall view of the resourcing challenges currently faced by the Council, their impact, implications and options.

It was noted since the start of 2021/22 financial year, the number of Council service vacancies submitted for advertisement had increased significantly. The rise in

numbers had created a significant challenge as the Council's recruitment service was not resourced at a level sufficient to manage workflow of such volumes. This had created delays in service provision, which remained prevalent. The key reasons for the increase in volume of vacancies were set out in the report. However, in addition to these reasons, there was also a failure to attract candidates to some roles which resulted in re-advertising and repeated recruitment activity.

The Board was also advised that the recruitment service also processed recruitment for schools on a chargeable Service Level Agreement basis. Forty five schools had bought into the service and Members were updated on revised legislation in respect of school recruitment which was introduced in April 2020 and the impact this had on the recruitment service.

Members noted data outlined in the report which showed an upswing in vacancies across both the public and private sectors and in particular across the Liverpool City Region (LCR). All local authorities in the LCR were reporting recruitment issues and certain post types continued to provide the highest level of challenge across the City Region, namely social worker roles, caring posts in the adult care sector, nursing posts in the adult care sector, technical and professional roles across a broad range of service areas and more recently administrative type posts.

In order to address some of the recruitment issues experienced, a revised approach to attracting candidates to Council roles was to be explored. The report detailed the measures which were under consideration as part of this new approach. In addition, the Council was also engaged in a strategic programme of work with the other five LCR Council's headed up by the Chief Executive of the LCR Combined Authority, designed to consider the high level challenge of resourcing the local government sector more generally in the short, medium and long term.

RESOLVED: That the Board note the report and the actions being taken to mitigate the challenges.

CS16 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REPORTS FOR QUARTER 1 OF 2022/23

The Board received a report of the Operational Director, Policy, People, Performance and Efficiency, which presented the Performance Monitoring Report for Quarter 1 of 2022/23.

The reports related to the following functional areas which reported to the Board and detailed progress against service objectives and milestones and performance targets, and provided information relating to key developments and emerging issues that had arisen during the period:

- Finance;
- Human Resources and Organisational Development;
- ICT and Administrative Support;
- Legal and Democracy;
- Catering, Stadium and Registration Services; and
- Property Services.

Arising from the discussion, the Board:

- requested further information on the Council's financial return on its solar panels and also on solar panel tariffs for the public; and
- requested that Executive Board provide the Board with an opportunity to provide some input into the Market report which is an item on Executive Board - 15 September 2022.

Chief Executive

RESOLVED: That the Quarter 1 Performance Monitoring reports be received and noted.

Meeting ended at 8.00 p.m.

REPORT TO: Corporate Policy & Performance Board

DATE: 1st November 2022

REPORTING OFFICER: Chief Executive

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 & Performance Board
DATE:	1 st November 2022
REPORTING OFFICER:	Operational Director – Policy, Planning & Transportation
PORTFOLIO:	Leader's
SUBJECT:	Corporate Accident / Incident Report 1.4.22 to 31.8.22
WARD(S)	Borough-wide

1.0 **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 To report on the performance of health safety management within the Authority for 1st April 2022 to 31st August 2022.

2.0 **RECOMMENDATION: That**

i) **the report be received; and**

ii) **the Board notes the contents of the report including the recommendations and actions for 2022/23.**

3.0 **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 The health and safety report on the performance of health and safety management in relation to Key Performance Indicators for the current financial year is appended.

3.2 It highlights health and safety information.

3.3 The report includes information around the number of actual near misses, over 7 day and significant accidents.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 The report assists in the delivery of the Corporate Health and Safety Policy.

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 There are no financial implications.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

The provision of a safe working environment and reduction in accidents is important in order to provide:

6.1 A Healthy Halton

6.2 A Safer Halton

6.3 Efficient and Effective Delivery of Services

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 Accidents which lead to lost time have financial implications for the authority (although these are always secondary to our concern for the well-being of staff and customers).

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 There are no direct equality and diversity issues arising from this report.

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

None.



**CORPORATE ACCIDENT / INCIDENT REPORT
MANAGEMENT TEAM
1st April 2022 to 31st August 2022**

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 General

The Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974 clearly places responsibility on those who create the risk to manage it. The new HSE Strategy “Protecting People and Places 2022 to 2032’ allows for the HSE to adapt and respond to a changing landscape. It also allows it to continue to support the delivery of wider government priorities including the move towards net zero and improving the health of the nation.

The HSE now also has added responsibilities, such as becoming the appointed ‘Building Safety Regulator’ and also has an extended role in chemical regulation following Brexit.

It remains the same that the fundamental principle of health and safety law is that those who create risks are best placed to manage them. The expectations and evidence suggest that most workplaces have the necessary skills, knowledge and experience to manage safety for themselves.

1.2 Health and Safety Management System

In order to demonstrate how Halton Borough Council as an employer is delivering the HSE Strategy, this report is to provide Management Team with details of health and safety performance in relation to Key Performance Indicators (KPI). Details of KPI’s are as follows:

LEAD INDICATORS

Proactive action taken and any outcomes

KPI

1. **Number of risk assessments completed on corporate systems**
Rationale – creating a safe working environment
2. **Number of Near Misses**
Rationale – action taken to prevent further similar incidents and before injuries
3. **Percentage of registered staff on the Lone Working Monitoring System who are utilising the system**
Rationale – demonstrating effective management of lone working risks

REACTIVE [Lagging] INDICATORS

Reactive action taken in response to accidents/incidents

4. **Number of Significant¹ and RIDDOR Reportable Accidents²**
Rationale – identify accident/incident trends and actions required to prevent similar occurrences

¹ Accidents that either require more than basic first aid, incur time lost or arise from a failure in health and safety management

² Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations, (RIDDOR) 2013, including Fatalities, Specified Injuries, Over 7-day Injuries, Reportable Occupational Diseases & Dangerous Occurrences

5. Number of Violent Incidents

Rationale – identify incident trends and actions required to prevent similar Occurrences. Encourage all staff to report incidents to give a true picture and enable appropriate mitigations to be put in place.

National and Local Information together with performance gaps and incident trends form the basis for the Recommended Actions for 2022/2023.

By responding positively to identified trends, the Authority can demonstrate compliance with the recommendations of the Health and Safety Executive's guidance HS (G)65 "Management for Health and Safety".

2. SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Summary

As the authority moves forward from the pandemic an expected rise in accidents and violent incidents could occur as services are returning to their pre pandemic status. This will show over the next 6 months.

Reportable and significant accidents for Halton Employees are currently at a total of 8 across both directorates plus 10 near misses.

Violent Incidents corporately are showing currently as 10 verbal and 7 physical incidents. Within schools for this period there were 14 physical incidents and 3 verbal.

Lone Working Contact Centre Monitoring update – registered users have decreased from the same period last year whilst actual use has increased. The decrease could be attributed to the pandemic and homeworking but as 'face to face' visits resume this should reflect in the figures. Monitoring is now taking place to further encourage relevant staff to use the system after cascade communications from the Chief Executive Officer.

Risk Assessments completed on the corporate risk assessment system are 1936 for both Enterprise, Community and Resources and People, compared to 1559 last year. This is an increase in figures.

The HSE recently released their annual statistics which includes 123 workplace fatalities (Construction, Agriculture and Manufacturing are the top 3 workplace categories).

The HSE have announced they are to conduct checks on school premises to ensure correct management of asbestos that is required under the Control of Asbestos Regulations 2012.

Work on maintaining appropriate Bomb and Lockdown procedures in HBC buildings is continuing with a number of exercises are planned. In addition staff have been reminded regarding to importance maintaining both personal and building security via the corporate bulletin system.

2.2 Recommendations 2022/23

The following recommendations are as a result of the accident analysis data for the first half of 2022 from 1st April and will be actioned during the period 2022/23.

No.	KPI No.	ACTION	RATIONALE	RESPONSIBLE
1.	1	All managers and assessors to ensure risk assessments on the corporate risk assessment system across all areas are reviewed and up to date as per safety bulletin 2021 8.	Position statements, section 7 below.	All managers and assessors
2.	3	Lone working audit of all systems, communications, staff usage and any other contributing factors	Reinforce Management Team decision and safety of lone working employees	Health & Safety Team – Completed. Monitoring now in place, following CEO communication.
3.	3	Ensure staff follow Safe Systems of Work (SSOW) to reduce likelihood of involvement in an accident.	Reduction of accidents, suffering and associated financial implications.	All managers - ongoing

GENERAL ACTIONS

Action a series of Lockdown/Bomb Threat Exercises across main Council buildings	2022/23	Health and Safety Team
Review and update Health and Safety policies (Corporate & Schools) requiring timescale or legislation reviews	Ongoing	Health and Safety Team
School Audit and Healthcheck visit programme	Ongoing	Health and Safety Team
Programme of departmental audits actioned and ongoing for all corporate areas	2022/23	Health and Safety Team and Team Managers.
Action security risk assessments across main council buildings	2022/23	Health and Safety Team - Completed

3. INFORMATION

3.1 Local/National Information

National:

The HSE recently released their annual report which gives current statistics in relation to workplace incidents 2021 /2022.

- **1.7 million** Working people suffering from a work-related illness of which **822,000** workers suffering work-related stress, depression or anxiety.
- **470,000** workers suffering from a work-related musculoskeletal disorder.
- **93,000** workers suffering from COVID-19 which they believe may have been from exposure at work.
- **2,544** mesothelioma deaths due to past asbestos exposures (2020)
- **123** workers killed at work (2021/22)
- **441,000** working people sustained an injury at work according to the Labour Force Survey
- **51,211** injuries to employees reported under RIDDOR.

Prior to schools closing for their summer break, the HSE announced that they would be undertaking spot checks at schools in relation to Asbestos management, to ensure compliance with Asbestos regulations. Schools have been informed of this intention, but to date there has been no contact by the HSE to any Halton school.

Local:

As staff return to the workplace managers have been encouraged to ensure that not only are work areas suitable but that the welfare of staff is paramount. HBC are currently running a number of mental health sessions which are open to staff.

Retraining of staff is also underway with trainers (e.g. Evac chair) now having undergone their own requalification thus allowing cascade training to take place. This again ensures appropriate mitigations can be put into place by managers, in the event of an emergency evacuation.

As an authority Halton Borough Council has for many years been working on implementing Bomb/Lockdown procedures and policies in all buildings and schools as well as actioning Bomb/Lockdown exercises in main buildings. The HBC Bomb/Lockdown policy was first produced in 2009. Work will be continuing to review and improve this process. In addition staff have received reminders in relation to staff and building security via the corporate bulletin system.

4. LEAD INDICATORS

4.1 . Number of risk assessments completed on corporate systems

4.1.1 An electronic risk assessment system, based on the Intranet, has been 'live' since September 2011.

- Actual number of assessments completed up to 01/09/22 are; 1936

Enterprise, Community & Resources – 1226
People – 710

See section 7 for position statements and comparisons.

4.2 Number of Near Misses

4.2.1 The number reported in the last 3 years are:

2019/20	2020/21	2021/22
8	2	10

From the 1st April 2022 to 31st August 2022 there have been 10 near misses reported on the corporate accident/incident system.

4.3 Percentage of registered staff on the Lone Working Monitoring System who are utilising the system

4.3.1 Lone Working – The Lone Working Review has been completed. Contact Centre Monitoring update – registered users have decreased from the last period, however, the usage by those who are registered has increased. This may be in part to an increase in face to face visits and encouragement by senior management to use the system. These increases should continue as visits increase. This will be monitored from the data provided.

	June – Sept 2021		June – Sept 2022	
	Registered Users	No's Using System	Registered Users	No's Using System
Enterprise Community & Resources	82	25	61	37
People	310	89	253	113
TOTAL USERS	392	114	314	150
% OF USE	29%		47%	

5 REACTIVE ['Lagging'] INDICATORS

5.1 Number of Significant and RIDDOR Reportable Accidents

5.1.1 The number of significant accidents and RIDDOR reportable to the HSE for each Directorate excluding schools that took place from 1st April 2022 to 31st August 2022 is 8, the same as this time period last year.

Directorate	Specified Injury	> 7-Day	Significant
Enterprise, Community and Resources	0	2	5
People – excluding schools	0	0	1
TOTAL 2021/2022	0	2	6
TOTAL 2020/2021	1	3	7
TOTAL 2019/2020	1	16	28

5.2 Number of Violent Incidents

5.2.1 From 1st April 2022 to 31st August 2022

Directorate	Verbal	Physical
Enterprise, Community and Resources	8	3
People	2	4

Directorate	Verbal	Physical
TOTAL 2022/23	10	7
TOTAL 2021/22	12	0
TOTAL 2020/21	8	1
TOTAL 2019/20	30	12

EC&R- HDL sites (5), Street scene (2), Libraries (2), Markets (1), Leisure (1).

People Directorate – PBSS (6).

5.2.2 Schools

From 1st April 2022 to 31st August 2022 there have been 14 physical violent incidents and 3 verbal incidents within schools.

Schools	Verbal	Physical
TOTAL 2022/23	3	14
TOTAL 2021/22	2	16
TOTAL 2020/21	4	11
TOTAL 2019/20	0	45

Risk Assessment Position Statements

Risk Assessment Position Statement - All Directorates

01 September 2022

		Enterprise, Community & Resources				People			
		Expected No. RAs	Actual No. RAs (up-to-date)	%	Earliest Review	Expected No. RAs	Actual No. RAs (up-to-date)	%	Earliest Review
Risk Assessment Type	Home Working Risk Assessment	401	245	61.1	01/09/2022	276	122	44.2	14/09/2022
	Environmental/Fire Risk Assessment	60	39	65	01/09/2022	80	54	67.5	13/09/2022
	Fire Risk Assessment								
	Lone Working Risk Assessment	30	13	43.3	14/09/2022	24	9	37.5	14/09/2022
	Manual Handling Risk Assessment	7	4	57.1	17/11/2022	3	2	66.67	30/05/2023
	Occupational Risk Assessment	251	198	78.9	06/09/2022	53	27	50.94	03/09/2022
	Ladder Checklist	10	9	90	14/09/2022				
	General Risk Assessment	114	63	55.3	10/09/2022	144	61	42.36	06/09/2022
	COSHH Risk Assessment	53	53	100	07/09/2022	71	46	64.79	06/12/2022
	COSHH (Advanced) Risk Assessment	14	12	85.7	08/11/2022	7	6	85.71	24/05/2023
	Transport in Depots Risk Assessment	1	1	100	16/08/2023				
	Workstation Risk Assessment	721	589	81.7	03/09/2022	621	383	61.67	02/09/2022
	Total	1662	1226	73.8	-	1279	710	55.51	-

September 2020 Enterprise, Community & Resources 1255 People 650September 2021 Enterprise, Community & Resources 1052 People 507September 2022 Enterprise, Community & Resources 1226 People 710

Lynn Pennington-Ramsden
Principal Health and Safety Advisor,
Risk and Emergency Planning
1st September 2022

REPORT TO:	Corporate Policy & Performance Board
DATE:	1 st November 2022
REPORTING OFFICER:	Operational Director Economy, Enterprise and Property
PORTFOLIO:	Corporate Services
SUBJECT:	Widnes Market - Business Plan
WARD(S)	Borough-wide

1.0 **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Members that Widnes Market Management will provide a presentation on the proposed Market Business Plan to outline its contents and to seek a recommendation for approval.

2.0 **RECOMMENDATION: That Members consider the Market Business Plan and recommend it for approval at Executive Board.**

3.0 **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

- 3.1 Over recent years the retail sector has seen a significant shift from in person to online shopping as people's habits change. It's estimated that circa 20% of all sales will be made online in 2022, thus putting further pressure on retail environments. The pandemic had a significant impact on the Market but irrespective of that footfall has dropped by circa 25% over pre-pandemic levels thus highlighting the trend to more online shopping.
- 3.2 The Business Plan identifies the priorities and actions to be undertaken by the Market Management team over the period April 2022- April 2025 to ensure the Market remains a successful trading environment into the future. The overarching vision for the Market is to ensure that it remains a shopping destination at the heart of the town centre, where people want to shop and where there is a wide variety of quality products at competitive prices, and where traders are able to thrive and grow their businesses.

3.3 There are a number of main themes in the business plan that the Market team intend to focus on moving forward, these can be summarised as follows:-

- Improve the online and social media presence for the Market in general, and in particular to help and support Traders to improve their online presence
- To actively encourage a more diverse and unique range of products and services on offer by attracting new Traders to the Market
- Continue to offer free public interest events to help promote the Market to the public and to potential new traders alike.
- To proactively promote the Market as a shopping destination via a variety of media.
- To ensure the Market remains economically viable as a business model.

3.4 In order to achieve the above the business plan has a number of key priorities and actions that will be the focus of the Market Managements team's work. These include ensuring we have high quality traders, ensuring there is a good mix of products for sale, ensuring a successful promotions and marketing strategy and ensuring the Market remains economically viable by focussing on the financial aspects around income and expenditure.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 There are no significant policy implications arising from the above

5.0 **OTHER/FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 There are no other or financial implications arising from the report.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

None

6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**

Having a healthy vibrant Market can provide employment opportunities for residents.

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

None

6.4 **A Safer Halton**

None

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

None

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 There are no risks identified.

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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Market Business Plan	See document attached	Catherine Haworth

WIDNES MARKET BUSINESS PLAN 2022-2025



**Prepared by:-
Technical Support & Markets Team
Property Services
Economy, Enterprise & Property**



Contents

1.0 Executive Summary

2.0 Introduction to Widnes Market

3.0 Vision and Strategy

4.0 Marketing Strategy

5.0 SWOT Analysis

6.0 Business Priorities and Actions

7.0 Financial Information

8.0 Conclusions

1.0 Executive Summary

This Business Plan for Widnes Markets identifies the priorities and actions to be undertaken by the Market Management Team during the period April 2022 to 2025. The Performance targets outlined in the document will be monitored by the Market Management Team.

The Business Plan sets out the environment in which Widnes Market is operating. It identifies the key ingredients needed to continue to make Widnes Market successful. The Business Plan also highlights the priorities and actions needed to grow and sustain the market in the future.

The Business Plan provides financial information relating to income generated and expenditure incurred in operating Widnes Market, and current levels of outstanding trader debt. Overall, the market generates a modest profit.

An analysis of occupancy and footfall rates is provided, however there is a downward trend in relation to the footfall figures, but Widnes Market is still a place that people either wish to visit, or set up and run their retail business.

The Business Plan does not focus on operational detail but allows the organisation to take a long-term strategic view of the key priorities and actions needed to make our market commercially viable and successful. This Plan will also help us to respond more proactively to any changes in the retail sector including online and social media influencers. The market team will refresh the plan on an annual basis.

2.0 Introduction to Widnes Market

Based in the town centre on Bradley Way since a change of location in 1995, Widnes Market is positioned as an alternative shopping venue in a competitive marketplace. Primary competitors are made up of a number of private sector retailers, mainly Green Oaks, Albert Square, Widnes Shopping Park, four local supermarkets, the High Street and of course, online retailers.

The venue will aim to remain competitive in the marketplace by continuing to be a traditional and alternative option for the local community, giving a unique experience to visitors, and offering something its competitors cannot.

The Market encourages a varied and unique range of traders, offering visitors a personal service, which will drive retention and repeat visits, helping sustain a consistent footfall, which will support local traders.

Its position will be underpinned by improving the marketing structure, enhancing and developing its relationship with new and existing customers and further building its online presence.

Developing a strong offer is a key challenge for Widnes Market in its bid to develop its position in the marketplace, given the competitive environment and potential threat of large brands in the retail sector.

Widnes Indoor Market : The indoor market consists of 185 stalls and is open from 9:00am to 4:30pm five days a week - Monday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday.

Widnes Outdoor Market : has 80 stalls with space for 2 food vendors, and has the following markets:-

Retail Market - open from 9:00am to 3.00pm three days per week – Monday, Friday and Saturday.

Flea and Collectibles Market – every Wednesday from 7am which offers a vibrant mix of second hand goods.

Best of Both - an exciting new venture which runs every Thursday and is a mix of both retail traders and flea and collectible traders, offering the customer the “best of both” new goods and second hand goods.

Staff Resources

Widnes Market employs the following staff:-

Technical Support and Property Manager – 1 FTE

Market Officer – 1 FTE

Trader Liaison Officer – 0.8 FTE

Sales & New Business & Marketing Officer – 0.8 FTE

Security Guard – 2 FTE

Market Attendants – 2 FTE

Market Attendants – 2 x 0.6 FTE

The Markets Management Team also utilises the support services from other teams within the Council, such as:-

- Property Services
- Legal Services
- Accountancy Division
- Communications and Marketing

3.0 Vision and Strategy

Our vision for Widnes Market, is:

“To maintain Widnes Market at the heart of our town centre as a friendly, well-loved, quality place in which to shop, feel inspired and build lasting memories. To help businesses grow and expand by offering competitive rates for a traditional Market in a modern setting”.

This vision is based on emphasising the different retail offer provided by the market compared with the rest of the retail offer in Widnes, and keeping up to date with retail and experience trends on all social media platforms.

The vision for Widnes Market is also entwined with Halton Borough Council’s vision:-

“Halton will be a thriving and vibrant Borough where people can learn and develop their skills; enjoy a good quality of life with good health; a high quality, modern urban environment; the opportunity for all to fulfil their potential; greater wealth and equality; sustained by a thriving business community; and safer, stronger and more attractive neighbourhoods.”

The long-term strategy for Widnes Market must focus on improving the retail offer/shopping experience of the market, and identifying priority commodities that shoppers cannot get or have difficulty in getting elsewhere. The main focus will be on providing customers with an experience and a memory alongside a great retail offer. Therefore, we want our market to be a thriving local Market offering a mixed commodity of food and an area for experiences and events.

The future success of Widnes Market will be measured by:-

- More people shopping in our markets;
- More traders trading in our markets;
- More people seeing our markets as key assets within the town centres;
- More partners and businesses using the markets for promotions and partnership working.

4.0 Marketing Strategy

As the availability of internet and broadband has increased, online technology has become more readily available and affordable, with the vast majority of residents increasingly technologically capable, with access to a computer or tablet at home and most of all with smart phones, allowing people to check the news and interact on the go.

By harnessing the convenience of this technology, we will be able to improve the market's online and digital brand to new audiences, whilst remaining mindful of existing customers who are still more reliant on traditional marketing methods.

The challenge is to identify what we can do to ensure a strong, positive and sustained image for the market. It will be essential to identify the planning and preparation needed; and more importantly, what it is that we can deliver, what should we facilitate, prompt, trigger etc. and who else should be involved in the planning, delivery and implementation. It will be imperative to engage with all stakeholders to identify all issues and aspirations.

Consumers have adopted new patterns of purchasing during the COVID lockdowns, these have now become part of the new 'normality' for some consumers. Supermarkets will have strengthened their bond with consumers, attracting more frequent visits and more on-line usage.

An active recovery plan through multiple advertising platforms is going to be vital in the ongoing marketing of Widnes Market,

This is important in day-to-day operations but much more so now as we aim to inject enthusiasm into shoppers to both re-attend and re-introduce the market into their normal shopping habits.

7 P's of Marketing Mix

This is the application of the effective marketing method model which can help to review and define key strategy for marketing products and services, which has been applied to Widnes Market.

PRODUCT	Our aim is to actively encourage more diverse products and services to offer the alternative shopping experience that we need to promote to help compete with the local supermarkets and shopping centres
PRICE	Regarding market commodities and services, each should be sold at a price which the target audience deems to be good value-for-money. The market is still seen as a place to 'grab a bargain'. With this in mind, we should enthuse traders towards emphasising this and along with other sales benefits when compared to using competitors
PROMOTION	The market is promoted to the appropriate audience via effective channels, using advertising methods which resonate with that audience. These channels may include (and are not limited to): branding, advertising, PR, corporate identity, a more market-centric social media ethos, promotions, events and special offers
PLACE	This is an observation of the premises and the ease of finding what the customer needs. An overhaul of the market map with a clearer plan to offer simple directions has been implemented with the maps located at the main entrance. The map could also potentially be produced as a handout guide which could also deliver valuable marketing messages and a diary of upcoming events.
PEOPLE	Traders should possess the skills and qualities needed to ensure business success. This is perhaps especially true of customer facing staff, whose communication and behaviour will greatly impact the audience's perception of the overall market. We could well have developed the best market – but if the customer facing people are off-putting to customers, the project will not reach its full commercial potential. For the purposes of the overall impression of the market, we should encourage traders to engage customers positively and helpfully, possibly offering training projects to ensure that helpful customer service is part of the experience of visiting Widnes Market
PROCESSES	Office processes have been adapted to help with the efficient running of the office and the benefits should filter down to both the traders and customers. These processes include (and are not limited to): Streamlining, primarily, of the up-to-date and coordinated sharing of information to ensure the most efficient use of time and resources. The re-design of the website, to improve the user experience, and an overhaul of the social networking integration.
PHYSICAL EVIDENCE	This refers to the physical context and paraphernalia (such as branded carrier bags, leaflets etc.) that come along with a purchase. In order to reinforce the market's brand credibility, this should exhibit a clear and prominent image to help reinforce the market's presence throughout the town. This also assists in creating a consistent and convincing experience for the customer.

Advertising

The strategy in recent years at Widnes Market has been to use a mixed approach to advertising when launching each new campaign. This has worked to a certain extent through radio, television, print and digital marketing, but a consistent reminder of the market's availability and benefits would now seem to be a more aggressive approach when attempting to be a part of the retail 'mix' for shoppers in Widnes.

Local Public Transport

Specifically, local buses. We now advertise with a local bus company which displays a Widnes Market poster on the rear of a bus which highlights the opening days and times of Widnes Market.

Social Networking

The market management team now take a much more 'hands-on' approach when broadcasting the market through the social networking platforms.

Local Radio

Widnes Market has previously used local radio to broadcast advertisements, The idea is that if Widnes Market is prominent through an audio medium, in radio advertising, it acts as a subliminal trigger which is backed up through alternative channels such as local transport advertising and digital marketing.

Social Media

More and more shoppers are turning to the internet to not only shop, but to find out how to shop locally. We must be more pro-active and prominent in this area.

- To improve our chances of success, the approach is as follows:-
- To market the wide range of commodities at Widnes Market, rather than focusing on individual traders
- To create more of a 'buzz' by creating themed weeks on social networking platforms, i.e. 'Vegan Week' where we focus on the great list of vegan goods we have to offer. This could incorporate an incentive, in agreement with the traders, for shoppers to benefit from these 'themed weeks' by means of discounts or vouchers, giving the customer a reason to specifically shop by the theme.
- To utilise Instagram much more by both offering more visual impact of the benefits and commodities at the market and also by creating interactive competitions, sponsored by the market, to incentivise younger users and students to get involved and see the market as a progressive shopping venue that has a relevance to them.
- We also under utilise the testimonial aspects of Widnes Market. The social networking platforms offer a great opportunity for us to show positive reactions from the local community to further enhance the markets profile to a wide audience.

Website

The Widnes Market website has been overhauled to refresh the look, usability and interactive flow of the platform, which has the following information available at the touch of a button:-

- Stall Directory - A comprehensive stall directory which includes trader contact details, web addresses and social networking links, alongside a brief but descriptive introduction of each trader.
- What's On Guide - A 'What's on' section which clearly lists a calendar of upcoming events to be held at Widnes Market.
- Trader Application - Our 'become a trader' section is now fully interactive and simple to use, that allows the user to complete an online application and upload relevant documentation to assist with a much more streamlined process. However, a paper application form is also still available from the market office which can be completed by the prospective trader and handed to a member of the market management team.
- Social Networking Feeds - To promote the social networking aspects of promotions, a feed of our posts through the website would act as a second opportunity for users to see our online publicity output.

Public Relations

The strategy of offering public interest events in the market will continue. They act as an attraction for new visitors, but they have also drawn in visitors that had not previously used the market, that have since become regular customers.

The events need to remain free and entertaining for all the family, helping to promote the community aspects and approach of Widnes Market staff and traders.

We are always looking to introduce incentives to shop at the market whether it be through savings, promotions or discounts. We are currently offering loyalty cards to generate consistent custom that would potentially offer a reason for customers to shop more with us, and less on-line.

5.0 SWOT Analysis

The following SWOT analysis has been carried out to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses at Widnes Market. It has also helped to identify the opportunities and threats that Widnes Market faces.

S	W	O	T
Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<p>Good Value for Money Accessibility (bus links) Good Amenities Good Product Knowledge Variety and quality of stalls Reputation of the market Friendly Customer loyalty Excellent Customer service Wide customer base High Occupancy levels 'All under one roof' concept New management team 4.2-5 star reviews on Google 'Door always open' approach to traders and customers. Social media presence out of working hours. Clear and transparent communication with traders. 'All in it together' attitude from traders and Management team. Promote and support local talent and business. Focussed on providing experiences and creating friendships and memories for customers. Inclusive and open minded</p>	<p>Reducing footfall (Parking charges, bus strikes, cost of living crisis) Unwillingness of some traders to change Unwillingness of some traders to introduce card payments. Unwillingness of some traders to adapt selling space, visual merchandising or sales skills. 'Snob' value – some people will not shop at the market Competition from high street retail. Mixed ownerships i.e. Morrisons' own the site and use outside space for their purposes Functionality of entrances – not inviting. Lack of clarity regarding role of Council – are we landlords, revenue generators or custodians of a town centre social value asset? Limited ICT connectivity Lack of ability to use the outdoor space in front of TJ Hughes.</p>	<p>Coach trips. Marketing Outside opportunity/stalls/entertainment Make the market relevant to young people. Promotions/offers – people want 'freebies' Better road access Link to radio station/charity (partnerships/personalities) Link to Widnes Vikings Improved signage Improved stall infrastructure Visible on all social media platforms. Ability to host Sunday Markets with The Studio's support. A new WIFI system will be installed.</p>	<p>Internet Shopping Supermarket Offer Changing Customer Shopping habits. Car parking charges introduced in 2022. Public transport strikes. Cost of living increases. Street licence applications issued by HBC Legal Services. Other local events and attractions Other local markets e.g. The Barnyards Lack of Police/PCSO presence</p>

6.0 Business Priorities and Actions

This section identifies the priorities and actions required if we are to achieve Our Vision as set out in section 2 of this Business Plan.

The business priorities are based on:

- Reducing costs and being more efficient with our human and financial resources;
- Improving the customer experience;
- Protecting Income ;
- Creating ways to generate income;
- Consolidating our markets at the heart of our town centre.

There are eight business priority areas:

1. Traders

To be a successful market we need the right traders. Traders need to sell goods which are of the correct quality for the market and be able to present their products in a way which is attractive to the customer. It is important that traders possess qualities such as high level of customer service and sales and retention techniques which will benefit the market, and enable them to operate on a long-term basis. Our unique environment means we can make a member of the public a friend, not just a customer.

Actions

In order to ensure that the right type of traders are occupying the market, prospective new traders will be invited to an interview with the Market Management team to discuss their business plans and to ensure they are fully aware of their responsibilities as a trader at Widnes Market.

2. Right Products

Traders also need to offer products which are competitively priced and what customers want and provide a good service which encourages customers to return to our markets. In a highly competitive retail trading environment, a high standard of customer service is key to ensuring customers return to the market. The public receive high service quality when they shop in other retail environments and have high expectations when they visit the market. 'People buy people before products' If you like the trader, you will buy from them. Customer service is key to customer retention.

Actions

A retail survey which provides a summary of the trader service standards within the market should be undertaken every year to ensure that high standards are maintained. A Trader Information Pack will be created by the market team containing helpful sales and customer service techniques, important dates for future events, current trends and much more. This is designed to keep traders motivated and supported by the market management team, and ensure we focus on retaining more customers each year.

3. Right Location

Successful markets have to be in the right location which is visible, accessible and in a location where people naturally come together. They need to be easy to navigate around for customers to enable them to find their way around. They also need to be located close to other retailers, housing and work places to ensure footfall. Markets also need to be located close to public transport and car parking to enable customers to get to the market. Signage has been updated and installed within the Market to help customers. Signage has improved links between the indoor and outdoor markets.

Actions

In the wider town centre area there are pedestrian signs to the market and the local road network has a number of signs for the market.

A map of the market and stalls is visible at each entrance to the market to ensure our customers find it easy to navigate and therefore visit more stalls they may not have known where there. This map is easy to modify as we increase our capacity and add events to the public and outdoor area. Customer Leaflets are being created to include maps of the Indoor and Outdoor markets, event plans and interesting historical facts about the market and its traders.

4. Right Commodity Mix

A further business priority is the right mix of products on sale. This will enable competition between traders and ensure the market is not saturated by one type of product or service. The right commodity mix is important to ensure that businesses are sustainable over the long-term. We do not have one of any commodity, and the decision to approve or decline a request will also be based on the popularity and need for the product/service being requested.

Actions

The market team consisting of our Technical Support and Property Manager, Market Officer, Trader Liaison Officer and Sales & New Business & Marketing Officer will approve or decline all new trader applications and commodity requests on a weekly basis. This will enable current traders to increase and diversify their products/services quickly and recruit new traders/entrepreneurs to Widnes.

5. Right Environment for Business

Successful markets are those which provide the right environment for business and create new opportunities for new entrepreneurs to set up businesses within the market. They should also be flexible enough to allow businesses to expand and contract within the market.

Actions

The installation of Wi-Fi for traders is a step in the right direction and will help traders to deal online and order stock online. However, the HBC network is very restrictive and has not helped a number of traders. The Wi-Fi is also not currently available for the public to use. This will be installed in 2022/2023.

There are financial incentives in place to help traders expand the number of stalls they have but giving them 50% off the additional stalls for a period of six months. Traders can also receive a 10% discount if they pay their rent in full, annually. We also offer incentives to potential traders that provide commodities not currently sold at Widnes Market.

We have introduced 'Pop up Stalls' for any new businesses to try Market life and give them the space to experiment with new business ideas.

6. Right Public Space

A further quality markets need to have is to the right public space. There needs to be an area where people can linger and stop to communicate with others. Successful markets are those which are well maintained and have flexible space which can house different activities and promotions.

Actions

The market needs to have additional public space which would include seating areas to encourage people to spend time in the market. Such areas should be in different locations within the market and location may be dependent upon where vacant stalls are. Making the locations flexible may be an option over time. In 2022 we have introduced outdoor picnic seating areas to help combat loneliness and encourage customers to linger and shop.

Promotions and events currently take place relatively close to stalls which has resulted in complaints from traders affected. An area could be created in the market where such events and promotions can be carried out. Consultations with traders in advance will now take place to ensure events and promotions are only affecting traders which welcome the increased footfall and gatherings of potential customers near their stalls.

7. Right Business Model

The successful markets are those which are self-sustaining economically. They need to operate with fair rents which are affordable and provide business opportunity. Markets are natural incubators for small businesses which, in turn, create employment. Successful markets will also keep spending within the local area instead of spend within out of town shopping centres.

Actions

The Widnes Market Charging Policy has ensured that current and prospective traders are aware of the charges for stall rents and other services which the Council offers. All businesses can see that they are treated equitably and fairly.

We will display all vacant stalls rent prices including electric and promotional charges visible on our website and within the markets notice boards. This will make it easier for potential traders to make the decision to start their business at Widnes Market and maintain our high occupancy levels. The ability to apply to be a trader is now easier to do online with a new, more detailed application form. We will be able to request a financial reference which will ensure we recruit financially stable traders which will result in more businesses coming to the borough and staying in the borough. This will also result in a market filled with better skills, work ethic and stronger relationships whilst we make effective use of the Council's land assets such as the unused outdoor market every Thursday.

8. Right Promotions and Marketing

A good promotions programme is also essential, including advertising and press releases. Events and demonstrations of products will bring people in to the market. Promotions partners are also essential as they will use the market to educate or sell their products and services. Connecting to the local community particularly via sponsorships and fundraisers is also important and will give the market value and a connection to its customers.

The market should be a focus for the local community which would be enhanced via local sports sponsorship and schools and college related events.

An additional area which promotions need to focus on, relates to the letting out of market stalls. Advertising banners are installed on all current vacant stalls to include help for new businesses. Social media advertising has been introduced to attract commodities which are required in the market and this should continue in the future. Internal departments, for example, Business Development, should be used also to advertise vacant stalls.

The market needs to use promotional events to attract footfall from the local area and beyond. In order to maximise the effectiveness of promotional events, the market needs to know the target audience and ensure spend is used efficiently to attract increased footfall. A survey conducted internally by our Customer Intelligence Unit would enable the market to know more about the customers who use the market, why they chose to visit the market or why they do not use the market.

In November 2020, a survey was completed and below are a few key areas of interest.

178 Responses.

Online: 119 Paper: 59

Female: 118 Male: 51

Postcode: Halton 43% (61)

Have you made a special trip for an event?: No 76% (131) Yes 24% (42)

How do you travel here? Car 55% (94) Bus 25% (43)

How do you rate Widnes Market? Excellent 53% (78)

Overall, how would you rate our promotions/Events? Excellent 45% (18) Good 38% (15)

Another survey will be conducted in 2022, to also ascertain what opening and closing times the public want from Widnes Market.

7.0 Financial Information

This section provides information on income and expenditure and also provides details on occupancy rates, footfall and arrears.

In financial terms Widnes Market is successful as the market generates a modest profit for the Council.

A summary of income and expenditure is outlined below. It should be noted that the details provided take into account annual rental arrears. The markets also make a significant contribution to 'Central Recharges'.

2021/2022			
Income		Expenditure	
Rent	£717,783	Supplies and services	£26,831
Reimbursement for electricity	£38,589	Premises	£90,693
Total	£756,372	Repairs and maintenance	£19,310
		Staff	£225,747
		Security	£38,000
		Recharges	£93,699
		Total	£494,280
Profit : £262,092			

Income Forecast 2022/2023

At this stage it is difficult to anticipate the likely income in 2022/23, however based on the 1st quarter income for 2022/23, if stall occupancy rates remain the same we could forecast a total income of £797,324.

Expenditure Forecast 2022/2023

An assessment of inflation uplift has been provided by the Accountancy Department. It is anticipated that a 2% increase will be applied to markets related costs for 2022/23.

Trader Stall Occupancy Rates

The current rate as at August 2022 is 92%.

Year	Occupancy Rate
2018/19 – quarter 4	84%
2019/20 – quarter 1	87%
2020/21 – quarter 2	91%
2021/22 – quarter 1	94%
2021/22 – quarter 2	97%
2021/22 – quarter 3	97%
2021/22 – quarter 4	95%
2022/23 – quarter 1	92%

Markets Arrears

As at 11th July 2022 the amount of arrears for current indoor traders is £3,848.

There is no current outdoor trader debt.

The amount owed by ex-traders is £32,481. There was a 16% reduction in the ex-trader debt in December 2021 from the previous December 2020 figure. Each year there is a target of the debt to be reduced by 5%, which is currently being met.

2022 will result in all indoor traders paying their rent via direct debit. Any current and future arrears will be monitored closely and actions will be taken to resolve this issue within three months of the arrears starting. Ex-traders debt at Widnes Market should continue to reduce with an annual 5% reduction.

Footfall Figures

Year	Annual Figures	Comments
2017	4,011,118	
2018	3,747,299	Reduction of 6.5% from previous years
2019	3,444,739	Reduction of 8% from previous years
2020	1,939,401	Reduced numbers due to COVID lockdowns March-June and November 2020
2021	2,085,640	Reduced numbers due to COVID lockdowns Jan-April 2021

As can be seen from the figures above, there has been annual reduction in footfall from 2017 to 2018, 2018 to 2019 of 6.5% and 8% respectively, and this can be put down to the customers change in shopping habits, such as on line ordering.

During 2020 and 2021 these figures cannot be used for comparison due to the COVID lockdowns and then the slow return of the customer back into the shops. However, the latter half of 2021 the numbers were picking up slightly and showing signs of improvement.

For 2022 the early months were encouraging as there was slight increases from the previous months, as can be seen from the figures below.

However, car parking meters were installed in April 2022 on the car park opposite Widnes Market by the new owners, with fines being issued to customers from May 2022, and this had a significant impact on the footfall figures.

2022	Monthly figures	Comments
January	186,511	
February	188,729	1% increase from previous month
March	198,994	5% increase from previous month
April	225,119	13% increase from previous month
May	252,623	12% increase from previous month
June	189,786	25% reduction from previous month
July	205,226	8% increase from previous month

8.0 Conclusions

Widnes Market's heritage and reputation has held it in good stead for a number of years

Overall, the Business Plan establishes that Widnes Market is financially viable and generates a profit. However, the Business Plan recognises that our market needs to continue to be commercially and financially viable, whilst providing a valuable service to visitors and the residents of the borough. The role of marketing is going to be vital in re-engaging shoppers and visitors.

However, there are external factors which will also impact the future of Widnes Market, such as the car parking meters which have been installed on the car park opposite Widnes Market. These have been installed by the new owners which is having a significant impact on the numbers of customers visiting the market. Also, currently there are bus strikes which is also preventing the customers from visiting Widnes Market. Both these situations are beyond the control of Halton Borough Council.

Widnes Market occupancy rates of not less than 90% will be the target for 2022-2023.

Our sole aim should be to promote this vital community hub, using all the tools at our disposal. We look forward to celebrating Widnes Market for many years to come.

REPORT TO:	Corporate Policy & Performance Board
DATE:	1 November 2022
REPORTING OFFICER:	Operational Director – Finance
PORTFOLIO:	Leader
SUBJECT:	Household Support Fund Extension 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023
WARD(S):	Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To provide a progress update regarding delivery of the Government's Household Support Fund from 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023.

2.0 RECOMMENDED: That progress with delivery of the Household Support Fund be noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 On 6th September 2022 the Board received a report which provided an update regarding delivery of the Government's Household Support Fund between 1 April 2022 and 30 September 2022. The report also outlined that the Government had announced an extension of the Household Support Fund, covering the period 1 October 2022 to 31 March 2023. The Fund is intended to support vulnerable households with the pressures caused by the significantly rising cost of living.
- 3.2 Subsequently, guidance was received regarding the operation of the Scheme and Halton was awarded grant funding of £1,297,880. Any unspent grant as at 31 March 2023 must be returned to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP).
- 3.3 The DWP has made a number of changes to its guidance for the new scheme. The main change is that there will be no ring fence of any proportion of funding for any particular cohort of people. The second key change is a requirement for councils to operate at least part of their scheme on an application basis ie. Residents should have the opportunity to come forward and request support.
- 3.4 In order to meet the requirement to operate part of the scheme on an application basis it is proposed to allocate £178,000 to the Discretionary Support Scheme, which has an existing telephone application process.

- 3.5 The DWP guidance states that the new Household Support Fund is intended to cover a wide range of low income households in need, including families with children, pensioners, and people with disabilities.
- 3.6 In order to provide assistance to vulnerable households with children it is proposed to allocate funding to low income families with children by issuing free school meal vouchers of £12 per week during the school holidays, which it is estimated will cost approximately £540,000.
- 3.7 To support vulnerable pensioner households, it is proposed that all pensioners currently receiving council tax reduction will be provided with an award of £100. It is estimated that this will cost £430,000.
- 3.8 The Benefits Division will co-ordinate use of the grant on behalf of the Council. In order to maximise the benefit of the grant funding for the Borough and ensure it is fully utilised, discussions have been held with colleagues across the Council. A Spending Plan has been prepared as set out in the Appendix, regarding how the grant funding might be utilised via a combination of Council departments and the Voluntary Sector to deliver help and assistance to vulnerable households over the six month period.
- 3.9 The Spending Plan is intended to provide clarity as to what actions are required of the relevant Council departments and partner organisations, with lead officers being identified. It will also provide a basis for monitoring spending against the grant, to ensure it is fully utilised in accordance with the grant guidance by 31st March 2023.
- 3.10 The Board agreed on 6 September 2022, that the new Scheme and Spending Plan once prepared, should be approved by the Operational Director, Finance in consultation with the Chair. Thereafter, given the need to procure and distribute free school meal vouchers in time for the Autumn half term holidays, the Chief Executive approved the Scheme and Spending Plan utilising urgency powers.
- 3.11 Progress with delivery of the Household Support Fund will continue to be reported to the Board.

4.0 POLICY AND OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 None.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

5.1 Children and Young People in Halton

None identified

5.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

None identified

5.3 A Healthy Halton

None identified

5.4 A Safer Halton

None identified

5.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

The delivery of support from the Household Support Fund to the Borough's vulnerable households, has the potential to support all of the Council priorities.

6.0 RISK ANALYSIS

6.1 If the grant allocation from the Household Support Fund, is not fully utilised in accordance with the DWP guidance by the deadline date of 31 March 2023, any remaining grant funding will be clawed back by the DWP. The Spending Plan presented in the Appendix is intended to ensure that the grant funding is fully utilised by the deadline.

7.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

7.1 None.

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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Household Support Fund Allocations and Guidance	DCLB Stadium	Paul Garnett Divisional Manager Benefits

**Household Support Fund
Spending Plan 1st October 2022 – 31st March 2023**

Total grant allocation	1,297,880
Less administration costs (5%)	64,894
Available grant funding	1,232,986
1. Vulnerable Households with Children	£540,000
<p>Free school meal vouchers for school holidays: Autumn half term 24th – 28th October 2022 (1 week) Christmas holidays 22nd Dec 2022 – 3rd Jan 2023 (2 weeks) Spring half term 20th – 24th February 2023 (1 week) Easter holidays 3rd – 14th April 2023 (2 weeks)</p> <p>Based on 7,500 children entitled to FSM Paid for 6 weeks £12 voucher per week</p>	
2. Vulnerable Pensioner Households	£430,000
<p>Number of pensioners on council tax reduction = 4,300 Award £100 per pensioner</p>	
3. Discretionary Support Scheme	£177,986
By application	
4. Other Vulnerable Households	£85,000
<p>Distributed via;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAB £40,000 • Widnes Food Bank £10,000 • Runcorn Food Bank £10,000 • Holiday Activity Fund £5,000 • Affordable Warmth – Energy Projects Plus £10,000 • Halton Voluntary Action £10,000 	