



Executive Board

**Thursday, 19 October 2023 2.00 p.m.
The Boardroom, Municipal Building**

S. Young

Chief Executive

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

PART 1

Item	Page No
1. MINUTES	1 - 10
2. DECLARATION OF INTEREST	
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 or voting on the item.	
3. LEADER'S PORTFOLIO	
(A) URGENT DECISIONS	11 - 13

*Please contact Gill Ferguson 0151 511 8059 or
gill.ferguson@halton.gov.uk for further information.
The next meeting of the Committee is on Thursday, 16 November 2023*

Item	Page No
4. ENVIRONMENT AND URBAN RENEWAL PORTFOLIO	
(A) HALTON HOUSING TRUST ANNUAL REPORT	14 - 25
5. DEPUTY LEADER'S PORTFOLIO	
(A) LIVERPOOL CITY REGION INVESTMENT ZONE - KEY DECISION	26 - 32
6. CORPORATE SERVICES PORTFOLIO	
(A) TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME UPDATE	33 - 37
(B) RE-TENDERING OF COUNCIL INSURANCE POLICIES	38 - 41
(C) DISCRETIONARY NON-DOMESTIC RATE RELIEF	42 - 46
7. ADULT SOCIAL CARE PORTFOLIO	
(A) FLOATING SUPPORT SERVICE PRELIMINARY ESTIMATE REPORT	47 - 49
(B) AMENDED ALLOCATIONS POLICY	50 - 54
8. COMMUNITY SAFETY PORTFOLIO	
(A) REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT SERVICE CONTRACT	55 - 61
9. SCHEDULE 12A OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972 AND THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985	
PART II	
<p>In this case the Board has a discretion to exclude the press and public and, in view of the nature of the business to be transacted, it is RECOMMENDED that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, having been satisfied that in all the circumstances of the case the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item(s) of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Act.</p>	
10. DEPUTY LEADER'S PORTFOLIO	
(A) DISPOSAL OF LAND LOWLANDS ROAD RUNCORN	62 - 66

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.

EXECUTIVE BOARD

At a meeting of the Executive Board on Thursday, 14 September 2023 in The Boardroom, Municipal Building

Present: Councillors Wharton (Chair), Dennett, M. Lloyd Jones, J. Lowe, T. McInerney, Nelson, P. Nolan, Thompson and Wright

Apologies for Absence: None

Absence declared on Council business: Councillor Harris

Officers present: G. Cook, S. Young, M. Reaney, E. Dawson, S. Wallace-Bonner E. Dunne, R Marr and G. Ferguson

Also in attendance: None

**ITEMS DEALT WITH
UNDER POWERS AND DUTIES
EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD**

Action

EXB23 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2023 were taken as read and signed as a correct record.

LEADER'S PORTFOLIO

EXB24 REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT 2000 ("RIPA") & INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT 2016 ("IPA") UPDATED POLICY AND USE

The Board considered a report of the Operational Director – Legal and Democratic Services, that sought approval of the Council's updated Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA) and the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 (IPA) Policies and accompanying Employee Guides. These Policies covered the use of covert surveillance and the acquisition of communications data.

The report also provided members with an update on the Council's written response to the Investigatory Powers Commissioner's Office (IPCO). The written response provided information of the Council's use and compliance with RIPA and IPA.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the revised RIPA policy and accompanying Employee Guide be approved;
- 2) the revised IPA Policy and accompanying Employee Guide be approved; and
- 3) the Board note the recent response to the IPCO.

Operational
Director, Legal
and Democratic
Services

EXB25 URGENT DECISIONS

The Executive Board received a report from the Chief Executive, which provided information on the urgent decisions taken since the last meeting of the Board.

It was noted that the Council's Constitution gave authority to the Chief Executive to take urgent decisions, in consultation with the Leader of the Council and the Operational Director Finance and/or the Operational Director Legal and Democratic Services, where necessary.

One urgent decision had been made since the last meeting of the Board and full details were published on the Council's website.

RESOLVED: That the urgent decision taken since the last meeting of the Executive Board be noted.

CORPORATE SERVICES PORTFOLIO

EXB26 2023/24 SPENDING AS AT 30 JUNE 2023

The Board received a report from the Operational Director – Finance, which reported the Council's overall revenue net spending position as of 30 June 2023, together with an initial forecast outturn position.

A summary of spending against the operational revenue and capital net spending position as at 30 June 2023 together with a 2023/24 forecast outturn position was presented in Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 and these provided detailed figures for each individual Department. In overall terms net spending as at 30 June 2023 was £2.023m over budget. The outturn forecast for the year estimated that net spend would be over the approved budget by £8.415m.

The report detailed a review of the Council General Reserve as at 31 March 2023. The current balance of reserves held was not sufficient to meet the current forecast outturn overspend position for the year and it was clear that there needed to be a significant reduction in spending by all

Departments over the coming months to reduce the forecast outturn overspend.

Council had previously approved the capital programme for 2023/24 at its meeting on 8 March 2023. Subsequently, new capital grant allocations had been received and slippage to capital projects for 2022/23 had been rolled forward to the current year. Appendix 3 presented the Capital Programme as at 30 June 2023 and reported on the Council's total planned Capital Programme expenditure over the next three years. Appendix 4 outlined the saving measures against the budget for the three year period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2026 together with information on action to date to achieve the target saving.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) all spending continues to be limited to only absolutely essential items;
- 2) Strategic Directors take urgent action to identify areas where spending could be reduced or suspended for the remainder of the current financial year, or additional funding secured; and
- 3) Council be requested to approve the 2023/24 to 2025/26 Capital Programme as set out in paragraph 3.18 and Appendix 3.

Operational
Director - Finance

EXB27 TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME UPDATE

The Board considered a report of the Corporate Director: Chief Executive's Delivery Unit, which provided an update on the progress made within the Council's Transformation Programme. Work had continued to define the scope of additional projects within the Programme and the schedule of projects set out in Appendix A of the report had been updated to reflect this.

The Board noted that:

- early benefits had been realised within the 'A clear, affordable and appropriate SEND offer' project with cost avoidance of in excess of £300,000 identified;
- the realignment of Administrative Support services, which formed part of the 'Simplifying the Customer Journey' project was expected to realise savings in Quarter 3;
- there had been a refocusing of programme support provided to Children's Social Care, which was

coinciding with the appointment of the Director of Children's Services; and

- the estimated savings for the programme which were set out in Appendix B of the report.

RESOLVED: That the Board noted the contents of the update.

ADULT SOCIAL CARE PORTFOLIO

EXB28 HBC & NHS CHESHIRE & MERSEYSIDE JOINT WORKING AGREEMENT (BETTER CARE (POOLED) FUND) - KEY DECISION

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director – Adult Services, that sought approval of the updated two year Joint Working Agreement (JWA) between Halton Borough Council (HBC) and NHS Cheshire & Merseyside (CM), taking effect from 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2025. The JWA replaced the previous one year JWA which was agreed by Executive Board on 16 March 2023.

It was noted that since March 2023, national guidance had been issued in respect of the Better Care Fund (BCF) Plan and discussions had also taken place between HBC and NHS CM regarding the governance arrangements in respect to the Pooled Budget. This had resulted in the establishment of a Joint Senior Leadership Team (JSLT) between HBC and NHS CM. The JSLT would be responsible for the direction, oversight and monitoring of the BCF Plan and associated Pooled Budget. The JSLT would be supported in this duty by the Better Care Commissioning Advisory Group.

The new governance arrangements along with links to the two year BCF Plan had been reflected in the new JWA.

As the JWA was currently being progressed through NHS CM's associated governance channels, it was requested that delegated authority be given to Executive Director – Adult Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care, to finalise the new JWA.

Reason(s) for Decision

Approval of the agreement will continue to support both the HBC and NHS CM in developing our integrated

approach to service delivery and transformation to improve the Health and Wellbeing of Halton residents.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Allow the JWA to cease.

Implementation Date

The two year JWA takes effect from 1 April 2023.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the contents of the report and associated Appendix be noted; and
- 2) the Agreement be approved, with delegated authority to the Executive Director – Adult Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Adult Social Care, to finalise the new Joint Working Agreement (JWA)

Executive Director
of Adult Services

HEALTH AND WELLBEING PORTFOLIO

EXB29 CHESHIRE AND MERSEYSIDE CARE PARTNERSHIP

The Board considered a report of the Operational Director – Legal and Democratic Services, that sought authority for the Council to become a member of the new statutory Integrated Care Partnership for Cheshire & Merseyside, to be known as the Cheshire & Merseyside Health and Care Partnership (C&M HCP). The Partnership is a statutory joint committee and formed part of the overall structure of the new Integrated Care System set out in the Health and Care Act 2022. The report set out the statutory functions of the C&M HCP, its role and membership. A copy of the terms of reference was also included as Appendix 1.

RESOLVED: That it be recommended to Council that

- 1) the Council become a member of the Cheshire & Merseyside Health & Care Partnership;
- 2) the terms of reference of the Cheshire & Merseyside Health & Care Partnership, set out at Appendix 1, be adopted and that the Operational Director – Legal & Democratic in consultation with the Portfolio Holder – Health and Wellbeing, be authorised to make minor changes to the final version if necessary;

Operational
Director, Legal
and Democratic
Services

- 3) the Portfolio Holder - Health and Wellbeing be nominated to be the Council's representative on the Cheshire & Merseyside Health and Care Partnership; and
- 4) authority be delegated to the Chief Executive to nominate an Executive Director / Director of Public Health to be a member of the Committee if considered appropriate.

ENVIRONMENT AND URBAN RENEWAL PORTFOLIO

EXB30 HOUSES IN MULTIPLE OCCUPATION - AMENITY STANDARDS FOR LICENSED PREMISES

The Board considered a report of the Director of Public Health, which sought approval to adopt the Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licensing requirements and Amenity Standards Policy.

Over the past 12 months some Members had expressed concern about the proliferation and standards of HMO properties in certain parts of the Borough. Subsequently the Environment and Renewal Policy and Performance Board (PPB) had agreed to establish a working party to agree a set of HMO amenity standards and explore options for additional control of HMO's. The working party had met on a number of occasions and developed an action plan which was approved by the PPB in February 2023. Details of the plan were outlined in the report.

Following a progress report on the action plan to the PPB in June 2023, the Board had endorsed the proposal to submit the HMO Property Standards Policy to the Executive Board for adoption. A copy of the Policy document was attached to the report.

RESOLVED: That the adoption of the Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMO) Licensing Requirements and Amenity Standards Policy be approved.

Director of Public Health

EXB31 PRELIMINARY PROCUREMENT NOTIFICATION - PORT OF WESTON, SURFACE ACCESS IMPROVEMENTS

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director – Environment and Regeneration, which provided notification of the intention to undertake a procurement exercise to appoint a specialist multi-disciplinary team to prepare pre-development design and feasibility work for surface access improvements to Port Weston, Runcorn. The

contract was to be funded through the Liverpool City Region Freeport Seed Investment Fund, subject to securing a Grant Funding Agreement with the Combined Authority.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) Members noted the intention to undertake a procurement exercise via the SCAPE Public Sector National Consultancy Framework, with the purpose of securing a specialist multi-disciplinary team to undertake design and feasibility work for surface access improvements to Port Weston; and
- 2) delegated authority is provided to the Executive Director Environment and Regeneration, to enter into a Grant Funding Agreement(s) with the Combined Authority to access the Liverpool City Region Freeport Seed Investment Fund.

Executive Director
Environment &
Regeneration

EXB32 PRELIMINARY ESTIMATES FOR LIQUID ROAD FUEL CONTRACTS – SUPPLY OF DIESEL, KEROSENE, HVO AND AD BLUE

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director – Environment and Regeneration, that sought approval for the Council to be included in a national procurement exercise in order to award contracts for the supply of Liquid Road Fuels to Council sites.

The Council currently had a Liquid Road Fuel contract and a contract for the provision of Ad Blue in place with a total expenditure in the region of £733,000 per annum. These contracts were both awarded under a national Framework Agreement procured by Crown Commercial Services (an executive agency sponsored by the Cabinet Office that provided commercial services, including buying services for the public sector). Both contracts would expire on 31 March 2025.

RESOLVED: That the Board approves the use of Procurement Standing Order 1.4.1 to allow the Council to use a Framework Agreement procured by a Central Purchasing Body (Crown Commercial Services) in compliance with the Public Contracts Regulation 2015.

Executive Director
Environment &
Regeneration

ENVIRONMENT AND URBAN RENEWAL AND HEALTH AND WELLBEING PORTFOLIOS

EXB33 REVOCATION OF HALTON'S AIR QUALITY MANAGEMENT AREAS IN WIDNES TOWN CENTRE

The Board received a report of the Director of Public Health, which sought approval for the revocation of Halton's Air Quality Management Areas in Widnes Town Centre.

In 2011, the high levels of Nitrogen Dioxide measured 49µg/m³ against the UK legal limit of 40µg/m³. Since then, a number of developments have resulted in a significant improvement in air quality. These included improvements in vehicle emission technology and the opening of the Mersey Gateway Bridge in 2017, which resulted in reduced traffic congestion in Widnes Town Centre. Levels of Nitrogen Dioxide in those areas were now consistently below the UK legal limit.

The Environment and Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board (PPB) had previously endorsed a report which set out the rationale for revoking the air quality management in Widnes Town Centre and the proposal for the public consultation (Minute EUR32 refers). In June 2023, the PPB received a further report which set out the results of the public consultation and the Board endorsed that the report be submitted to Executive Board to seek approval for the revocation.

The air quality management areas would need to be revoked by way of an Order of the Council under the Environment Act 1995 and a copy of the draft Order was attached as Appendix 2.

RESOLVED: That the Board approve the revocation of:

- 1) the Halton Borough Council Air Quality Management (Widnes No.1) Order 2011; and
- 2) the Halton Borough Council Air Quality Management (Widnes No. 2) Order 2011.

Director of Public Health

EMPLOYMENT, LEARNING AND SKILLS AND COMMUNITY PORTFOLIO

EXB34 LIBRARY STRATEGY 2023/28

The Board received a report of the Executive Director – Environment and Regeneration, which provided a copy of the draft Library Strategy for 2023-28 and gave an update on the work of the Library Service for 2022/23.

The Board was advised that the current Library Strategy would expire in 2023 and a new draft Strategy

document had been produced. A copy of the Strategy document was appended to the report for consideration.

The new Strategy had previously been considered and endorsed by the Employment, Learning and Skills and Community Policy and Performance Board at its meeting on 19 June 2023.

RESOLVED: That the Library Strategy be adopted.

Executive Director
Environment &
Regeneration

EXB35 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.

DEPUTY LEADER'S PORTFOLIO

EXB36 PROPERTY AND ACCOMMODATION REVIEW

The Board considered a report of the Executive

Director – Environment and Regeneration, which provided an update on the review of the Council’s property (buildings), feedback from the Members’ working group and information on the proposed next steps to be undertaken. The group had met on two occasions and the notes from these meetings were appended to the report.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the update provided be noted;
- 2) Members confirmed that they were content with the actions and next steps being proposed; and
- 3) a further report will be provided with options once the survey work outlined in the report is completed.

Executive Director
Environment &
Regeneration

MINUTES ISSUED: 19 September 2023

CALL-IN: 26 September 2023 at 5.00 pm.

Any matter decided by the Executive Board may be called in no later than 5.00pm on 26 September 2023.

Meeting ended at 2.50 p.m.

REPORT TO: Executive Board
DATE: 19 October 2023
REPORTING OFFICER: Chief Executive
PORTFOLIO: Leader
SUBJECT: Urgent Decisions
WARDS: Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To bring to the attention of Executive Board urgent decision/s taken since the last meeting.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the report is noted.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The Council's Constitution gives authority to the Chief Executive to take urgent decision/s which are required before the next formal meeting of Executive Board.

These must be made in consultation with the Leader of the Council where practicable, and with the Operational Director – Finance and/or Operational Director – Legal and Democratic Services, where necessary. They must also be reported for information to the next practically available meeting of the Board.

3.2 More information on each can be found on the Council's website:

<http://councillors.halton.gov.uk/mgDelegatedDecisions.aspx?bcr=1>

3.3 The urgent decision/s taken since the last meeting of Executive Board:

Date Decision taken	Decision details
11 September 2023	<p>Market Sustainability & Improvement Fund (MSIF) – Workforce Fund 2023/24</p> <p>The recruitment and retention of sufficient social care staff with the appropriate skills, knowledge and behaviours is critical to improving adult social care capacity.</p> <p>The DHSC have strongly encouraged local authorities to work closely with providers to use this additional funding to grow workforce capacity and they expect growth in workforce capacity to support more local authorities to cope with potential winter challenges in the short-term.</p> <p>The main challenges currently within the Halton adult</p>

	<p>social care sector are Older People Care Home capacity (Residential and Nursing), with a number of units closed due to lack of staffing capacity, along with Domiciliary Care staffing capacity.</p> <p>It is therefore proposed that this funding is allocated to Older People Care Homes (External and Internal Care Homes) in the Borough, along with Halton’s contracted Domiciliary Care provider, to support workforce capacity.</p> <p>It is anticipated that improving workforce capacity in these areas will also have a positive impact on hospital discharge pathways and associated waiting times.</p> <p>NB. This decision applies to the 2023/24 funding only.</p> <p>The reason why this decision needs to be made is that the DHSC require confirmation of how the monies are to be spent by the end of September, so there is not the opportunity to present to Executive Board in advance of this.</p>
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4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are none other than the constitutional requirement to report urgent decisions for information.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1 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

7.1 The report is for information, and there are no risk issues arising from it.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 None.

9. CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 There are no climate change implications.

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

10.1 No background papers were used in the preparation of this report. Further information on the decision/s taken is available from the link in Paragraph 3.2.

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 19 October 2023

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director Environment & Regeneration

PORTFOLIO: Environment and Urban Renewal

SUBJECT: Halton Housing Annual Report

WARD(S): Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 This report provides an update on Halton Housing's activities since the last report to Executive Board on the 20 October 2022.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That Executive Board note the report.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Sam Scott, Group Chief Executive, will attend the meeting to present the report. He will be accompanied by other members of the Halton Housing Executive Team and Board.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 There are no policy implications arising from this report.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 None identified.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

None identified.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

Halton Housing is a major employer in the Borough, employing around 320 staff.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

A quality, affordable, and safe home plays a key part in the health of individuals.

6.4 A Safer Halton

Halton Housing has a key role to play in the management and resolution of anti-social behaviour (ASB) and works in partnership with the Council and other bodies to address issues.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

Halton Housing is an active developer of new homes within the Borough. It is also a member of the Runcorn Town Board and is actively involved in the regeneration of Runcorn town centre.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 Regular meetings between the Halton Housing and the Council take place to discuss a range of issues and to explore risks.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 Halton Housing provides homes for people who cannot purchase their own home or rent from the private sector. It also supports the Council in its aim of reducing homelessness.

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

None identified.



Annual Report to HBC Executive Board

October 2023

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The operating environment in which we are working is increasingly challenging. Recent challenges include a more volatile economic environment because of Brexit, the Covid pandemic and the war in Ukraine. All these events have led to higher rates of interest and inflation and a cost-of-living crisis.
- 1.2 The housing sector is under scrutiny more so than ever with recent events such as the Grenfell fire and the death of Awaab Ishak shining a spotlight on the sector the like of which we have not seen before.
- 1.3 Our three-year Corporate Plan outlines our commitment to our customers and the wider borough. Our purpose at HH is “improving people’s lives.” We want to provide customers with a safe place to call home, and the opportunity to lead happier, healthier, and more fulfilled lives.
- 1.4 Our key organisational achievements for 2022/23 include:
- A total of 20 of our maintenance technicians have received additional training to enable them to multi skill. This should result in improved productivity, better job satisfaction and better customer satisfaction.
 - We have supported 853 households, securing over £2m of additional income, by providing support to customers to apply for under claimed benefits and by raising awareness of disability benefits.
 - Successful delivery of our first on site retro fit project on time to budget which has improved the EPC rating of the homes D to A.
 - Our response to damp and mould issues has been strong including a business wide call to action, a new policy, organisational wide awareness training, established a project group to oversee response, revised processes, and procedures, satisfied regulatory requirements. We are also piloting property condition checks as part of the gas servicing process.
 - Hardship fund has delivered over £30k of crisis funds targeting food and fuel poverty as well as temporary income shocks.

- Working with Cheshire Police, the neighbourhood safety team has played a fundamental role in the granting of a Property Closure Order for one of our highly problematic customers.
- Secured Homes England grant allocation for Sewell Street, Runcorn.
- Completed our single largest development scheme – the independent living scheme (Hazlehurst) in Runcorn.
- Achieved IIP Investing in People Gold and Investing in Wellbeing Silver.
- Achieved Carbon Literacy Gold which means that over 50% of colleagues have received carbon literacy training.

1.5 Our key priorities over the next two years until 2025 include:

- Improve our customers' experience by building on our strengths and tackling recurring and consistent themes driving dissatisfaction.
- Improve the level of customer engagement to set the foundations for a more impactful, representative, and diverse approach.
- Improve the standard of our homes.
- Develop as many new homes as possible and continue to evaluate our priority regeneration plans across Halton.
- Maintain the G1/V2 status, remain financially strong and comply with all legal and regulatory standards.
- Increase our profile, reputation, and influence in our unique and core areas of activity and expertise.
- Be an exemplary employer by developing a competitive employee offer and engendering a positive and proactive workplace culture.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 Whilst we continue to perform and manage our finance well, there have been changes to the operating environment, such as the rent reductions announced in 2015, changes to building and fire safety regulations, recommendations from the Better Social Housing Review, upcoming changes to consumer regulations, Brexit in 2019, the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic in 2020/21 and 2021/22 and the invasion of Ukraine by Russia in 2022, which have added to mounting concerns of a sharp global slowdown, higher inflation and debt, and an increase in poverty levels. The economic impact has also disrupted supply chains.
- 2.2 All these external events have resulted in higher inflation and higher interest rates which have led to a widely reported cost of living crisis for individuals and businesses. HH and its customers are not immune from the adverse impacts of these external events. Additionally, the government announced in its Autumn Statement on 17th November 2022 a rent cap for social housing of 7% for 2023/24.
- 2.3 The Housing Ombudsman wrote to all RPs in late November 2022 highlighting the complaint management for damp and mould and recommending RPs self-assess against the recommendations from its spotlight report on damp and mould. The work that we have undertaken will carry into our 2023/24 property condition transformation programme. The main area of focus being on improvements to our systems, communications, and processes. We will continue to seek insight from our customers in relation to their experience and we will continue to track developments of 'Awaab's Law' along with recommendations and best practice from the Housing Ombudsman.
- 2.4 As the environment changes, we will continue to monitor performance to gain assurance that the impact of those changes is being effectively managed and mitigated.

3. Corporate Plan 2022 to 2025

3.1 Our three-year Corporate Plan outlines our commitment to our customers and the wider borough. Our purpose at HH is “improving people’s lives.” We want to provide customers with a safe place to call home, and the opportunity to lead happier, healthier, and more fulfilled lives.

3.2 Our five themes are summarised below:

1. **Customer:** Customers are our priority. By listening and being easy to deal with, we will support them to make a success of living in their home.
2. **Homes:** Our homes will be safe, warm, and secure, supported by a reliable repairs service. Using innovation, we will make homes as efficient as possible and minimise our carbon footprint.
3. **Place:** Working with customers we will create thriving neighbourhoods, and tackle issues that matter. Working with partners, we will create opportunities that improve our customers' health and wellbeing.
4. **Business:** We will run our business well, providing best value for money for customers. Our social purpose remains at our heart. Our services will be delivered by engaged and empowered colleagues.
5. **Development:** As a key developer in the borough, working with partners, we will build homes across the whole range of tenures, to meet the needs of people at all stages of life.

3.3 For more information about our Corporate Plan 2022 to 2025 use the link in Appendix 1.1: <https://www.haltonhousing.co.uk/about-us/corporate-plan>.

4. Key Achievements 2022/23

4.1 A right first-time repairs service

- Project Refresh Phase 1. A total of 20 of our maintenance technicians have received additional training to enable them to multi skill. This should result in improved productivity, better job satisfaction and better customer satisfaction.

- We have reduced work in progress (WIP) by 40%. This means that customers are not waiting as long for us to complete their repairs.
- Improved leadership across repairs and environmental service teams, leading to reduced absence, increased colleague morale and greater colleague engagement.

4.2 Improved customer experience

- Extensive customer and stakeholder communications included dedicated webpage and new damp, mould, and condensation leaflet.
- Our Welfare, Money and Benefits Advice Team have supported 853 households, securing over £2m of additional income, by providing support to customers to apply for under claimed benefits and by raising awareness of disability benefits.

4.3 You said, we did – ensuring the customer voice is heard and acted upon

- Listen, Learn, Act Framework has been launched with associated "You Said We Did" communications on website and included in customer REACH magazine.
- We have completed a trial of the regulator's Tenant Satisfaction Measures and completed our preparations for their introduction from April 2023.

4.4 Delivering against the Government's decarbonisation targets

- Successful delivery of our first on site retro fit project on time to budget which has improved the EPC rating of the homes D to A.

4.5 Investing in our current homes

- Customer safety and compliance with landlord health and safety requirements is good (including compliance with new alarm regulations from October 2022).

- Our response to damp and mould issues has been strong including a business wide call to action, a new policy, organisational wide awareness training, established a project group to oversee response, revised processes, and procedures, satisfied regulatory requirements. We are also piloting property condition checks as part of the gas servicing process.
- Delivery of planned investment improvement programmes

4.6 Continuing the roll out of neighbourhood plans

- Cost of living action plan delivered to target fuel and food poverty.
- Customer insight model developed to target "keep warm, keep well" welfare packs to customers that needed them the most.
- Hardship fund has delivered over £30k of crisis funds targeting food and fuel poverty as well as temporary income shocks.
- Supported customers to downsize to more affordable homes, reducing arrears and freeing up under occupied properties for those more in need.
- Grangeway community garden.
- "Spruce up your streets" initiative launched.
- Events held at independent living schemes to target loneliness (Yoga, quiz, knit & natter and crafts).

4.7 Tackling anti-social behaviour (ASB)

- Customer Scrutiny Panel review of ASB
- Working with Cheshire Police, the neighbourhood safety team has played a fundamental role in the granting of a Property Closure Order for one of our highly problematic customers.

4.8 Other significant achievements during the year include:

- Chartered Institute for Housing contacted us asking to feature our "Reach Out" Magazine as an example of best practice in supporting customers through the cost-of-living crisis.
- New data model established that will help us as a business to understand which of our customers are most likely to be impacted by the cost-of-living crisis.

- Completed 1,435 stock condition surveys between April 2022 and March 2023. This means that 75.8% of our homes have had a survey within the last five years, ensuring decisions for future planned investment is based on robust data.
- Continued to support customers through the ongoing cost-of-living action plan - providing both direct support and signposting to partner agencies.
- A project with Travis Perkins and Citizens Advice Halton has provided school uniforms for over 150 school children from low-income families across Halton.
- In July we partnered with Cheshire Police for ASB Awareness Week 2022.
- Entered contract with Homes England for the latest Affordable Housing Programme.
- Secured Homes England grant allocation for Sewell Street, Runcorn.
- Second cohort of Thrive commenced in September. 10 colleagues from across the business are part of the programme which has started with a deep dive into the business and sessions from the Leadership Team.
- We have retained the certification required for the Cyber Essentials+ scheme which helps show how we deliver cyber security.
- First year of new external audit with RSM. No adverse findings or recommendations. Accounts all completed and submitted on time.
- Successfully developed and delivered a significant element of the plan to mitigate the adverse financial impact of the rent cap and high inflation. The number of colleague redundancies was kept relatively low.
- Completed our single largest development scheme – the independent living scheme (Hazlehurst) in Runcorn.
- Good start on CRM project. Excellent engagement from business users who are supporting the project and motivated to bring in the changes to working practices that the solution will offer.
- Achieved IIP Investing in People Gold and Investing in Wellbeing Silver.
- Achieved Carbon Literacy Gold which means that over 50% of colleagues have received carbon literacy training.

- Recruited six new apprentices and one of our apprentices has been nominated for apprentice of the year at the forthcoming Halton Business Awards.
- New EDI strategy developed and approved.
- Preparation is underway for our third regulatory IDA.

5. Main Challenges

5.1 Our main challenges include:

- Increasing number of customer complaints
- Increased media spotlight and general negative sentiment around the sector
- Changing consumer regulatory framework
- Continued budget pressures across repairs and maintenance, asset management and customer safety.
- Increased focus on property condition and understanding our homes.
- Systems and processes being fit for purpose to support colleagues.
- Impact of the cost of living and the increasing demand for crisis support.
- Low levels of customer engagement with community initiatives.
- Increased need for partnership working to develop a more joined up approach to tackling neighbourhood issues.
- Identifying a solid pipeline of development schemes at an affordable cost
- Construction market and contractor solvency
- Talent retention in competitive markets both inside and outside of sector
- Continuing data quality focus across all areas of the business to increase data confidence.

6. Key Priorities

6.1 Our key priorities over the next two years until 2025 include:

- Improve our customers' experience by building on our strengths and tackling recurring and consistent themes driving dissatisfaction.
- Improve the level of customer engagement to set the foundations for a more impactful, representative, and diverse approach.

- Improve the standard of our homes.
- Develop as many new homes as possible and continue to evaluate our priority regeneration plans across Halton.
- Maintain the G1/V2 status, remain financially strong and comply with all legal and regulatory standards.
- Increase our profile, reputation, and influence in our unique and core areas of activity and expertise.
- Be an exemplary employer by developing a competitive employee offer and engendering a positive and proactive workplace culture.

6.2 The delivery of most of these objectives will require additional investment of some kind. We need to create additional financial capacity to meet this requirement and review our headroom/golden rules to increase our financial resilience in the event of future economic shocks.

6.3 We cannot deliver on our objectives alone and will need rely on the support of key partners. Likewise key partners will need to rely on HH to deliver their objectives. We need to be clear on what our strategic partnerships are, their purpose, expected outcomes and who is taking the lead role in developing each relationship.

REPORT TO:	Executive Board
DATE:	19 th October 2023
REPORTING OFFICER:	Executive Director – Environment & Regeneration
PORTFOLIO:	Major Projects
SUBJECT:	Liverpool City Region Investment Zone – Key Decision
WARD(S)	Daresbury, Moore & Sandymoor

1.0 **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek approval for Halton to become part of the Liverpool City Region (LCR) Investment Zone (IZ). The IZ will include a tax site for occupier benefits which will operate for 5 years from April 2024 alongside business rates retention for a period of 25 years. The site will sit within the existing Enterprise Zone and will be used to promote the delivery of the Sci-Tech Daresbury masterplan.

2.0 **RECOMMENDED: That**

- 1) the report be noted;
- 2) the Board supports the progress made on the Investment Zone and approves the Council entering into a Memorandum of Understanding with LCR Combined Authority as required;
- 3) the Board gives delegated authority to the Executive Director for Environment & Regeneration, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Major Projects to take the necessary steps to participate in the LCR Investment Zone;
- 4) the Board approves the sign off of the allocation of Sci-Tech Daresbury as part of the LCR Investment Zone; and
- 5) the Board authorises the Operational Director Finance to enter into and manage the processes required to facilitate the Business Rates Retention and Tax Increment Financing processes.

3.0 **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 **Investment Zones Announcement**

As part of the Spring Budget, the Government announced plans to enter discussions to host twelve high growth Investment Zones across the UK. Liverpool City Region Mayoral Combined Authority was identified as one of eight places in England invited to develop an IZ.

3.2 IZs are designed to harness local sector strengths to drive productivity and leverage the bottom-up energy of local talent, knowledge and networks to deliver sustainable growth that benefits local communities. Government expect the IZs to be a partnership between central government, local government, research institutions and the private sector.

3.3 Government expect IZs to have a key sectoral focus, and the Liverpool City Region, in collaboration with stakeholders, identified the health and life science sector as its focus.

3.4 IZs will be able to access £80m Government investment through direct grant and tax incentives for occupiers from April 2024. These tax incentives are expected to support Stamp Duty Land Tax relief, business rates relief for businesses locating within an Investment Zone, Enhanced Capital Allowances for plant/machinery and Employer National Insurance Contributions.

3.5 **Sci-Tech Daresbury Enterprise Zone & LCR Investment Zone**

Sci-Tech Daresbury was designated as an Enterprise Zone in 2012, with 5 years rates relief for occupiers running from 2013-2018 and 25 years rate retention until 2038. To date this has enabled the growth of the campus and attracted new companies to site. Halton Borough Council has utilised the Tax Increment Financing mechanism to support borrowing for the delivery of new office and laboratory space on campus.

3.6 A Rates Reinvestment Policy was established in partnership with the Sci-Tech Daresbury Joint Venture Board. This allowed for the development of a business case by the JV and approval by Halton's Executive Board on a case-by-case basis for any borrowing. To date we have invested in both physical development, infrastructure and on a number of talent & skills programmes to support the growth of the campus. We have delivered 120,000 sq ft of new office and lab space, seen the number of people employed by campus companies grow from 330 to 1,300.

3.7 In the LCR proposals, Sci-Tech Daresbury is identified as a tax site, offering incentives to new occupiers for 5 years from April 2024 and as a rates retention site providing 100% of the rates uplift for reinvestment until 2049. This effectively extends the period of retention and builds on the success of the Enterprise Zone in enabling the delivery of the Sci-Tech Daresbury masterplan.

- 3.8 The LCR Investment Zone was announced as the second Investment Zone on July 26th, 2023. The CA is currently negotiating with DLUHC to progress through 5 'Gateways' of the business case. The process is anticipated to conclude in October with an announcement in the Autumn Statement. The five gateways are:
- Vision and Inception - agreed in April 2023, confirming the life sciences focus.
 - Sector and Geography - agreed May 2023, setting out the sector context and locations/opportunities.
 - Governance – presented June 2023 and to be agreed in August – presenting the proposals for the integration of governance arrangements with the existing CA, Freeport Board and addressing links between partners.
 - Interventions – submitted August 2023, providing further detail on the programme and projects, outputs and expenditure profiles.
 - Delivery –delivery plan submitted by end September to allow for an approval in October. This will lead to the production of an MOU and allows for the flexible grant and other levers to be available from April 2024.

3.8 Investment Zone Funding

The LCR has allocated funding from the flexible funding pot to support the core resource for programme management and to cover the cost of occupier tax incentives. The remaining funding is provisionally allocated to a number of capital and revenue projects. Sci-Tech Daresbury's next phase has been provisionally allocated £9.5m of grant from the flexible funding pot by LCR, subject to a SIF Business Case process. This removes the requirement to utilise Enterprise Zone rates borrowing as identified in the Exec Board report Project Violet Phase 2 in July 2023.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Sci-Tech Daresbury is allocated as a Strategic Employment Location within the 2022 Halton Delivery and Allocations Local Plan.
- 4.2 In the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Plan Plus, Sci-Tech Daresbury is a key priority in the wider development and investment opportunities, and the Investment Zone creates an opportunity for continued focus on the area for growth and investment.
- 4.3 The implementation of an Investment Zone requires a memorandum

of understanding with the LCR CA in relation to the delivery of the agreed priorities and ongoing monitoring. Governance arrangements are still to be agreed and this MOU will set out reporting mechanisms and oversight of the Investment Zone.

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 The IZ is a £320 million scheme that includes government funding in the initial 5 years, private sector match and a commitment to the utilisation of the tax incremental financing process to support the delivery of the scheme.

5.2 The IZ status enables Halton to access initial grant funding for the delivery of the first phase of the IZ which, as reported in the Executive Board Report July 2023 (Project Violet Phase 2) this replaces the requirement for further borrowing against EZ rates.

5.3 The allocation of Sci-Tech Daresbury as an IZ rates retention location means that Halton will retain the rates uplift for a period of 25 years which unlocks the ability to utilise Tax Incremental Financing to support Council borrowing. Initial estimates by the LCR's IZ advisers suggest the planned developments at Sci-Tech Daresbury could support the delivery of the masterplan through approximately £37m of Tax Increment Financing. As with Enterprise Zones, the Council would establish an Investment Strategy and Rates Reinvestment Policy. The investment strategy will detail the priorities for delivery of the masterplan and other delivery priorities and any borrowing undertaken to support the IZ would be considered on a case by case basis following the necessary affordability assessment and due diligence.

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

6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

None

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

The Investment Zone will support the delivery of the Sci-Tech Daresbury masterplan, building on the success of the existing Enterprise Zone and accelerating delivery of new employment space in the borough. The IZ will also benefit from a range of Talent & Skills programmes through the LCR and as part of the Sci-Tech Daresbury JV.

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

Providing additional opportunities for local people and providing access to local employment increases the potential for healthier living.

- 6.4 **A Safer Halton**
None

- 6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**
The Investment Zone is a significant opportunity in building on the success of the Enterprise Zone and accelerating the delivery of the Sci-Tech Daresbury Masterplan which provides a significant proportion of the employment land allocation within the local plan.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

- 7.1 The Liverpool City Region Investment Zone has the potential to attract not only the initial injection of Government funding but also future investment into key growth sectors of health and life science.
- 7.2 The funding available can support the viability gap for Project Violet Phase 2, reducing the reliance on Enterprise Zone borrowing and ensuring the timely delivery of much needed lab space in the LCR. Sci-Tech Daresbury can maximise impact through access to this additional grant funding as well as future TIF potential.
- 7.3 The TIF process has risks associated with it in terms of affordability of any borrowing but this would be managed through a due diligence process which is already in place for the Enterprise Zone. The effective extension of time to 25 years means that the cost of borrowing could be more affordable in comparison to the Enterprise Zone.
- 7.4 There is a risk that, under the existing Enterprise Zone terms, there is a limit to the capacity of the borrowing in the time remaining which impacts on the ability of the JV to deliver the full masterplan. Investment Zone status provides an opportunity to accelerate delivery.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

- 8.1 The Investment Zone will support the delivery of the Sci-Tech Daresbury masterplan and the facilities will be fully accessible for all; as such, there are no equality and diversity issues.

9.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 9.1 The Investment Zone encompasses land that has been identified in the Local Delivery and Allocations Plan as allocated for employment land. All development and expansion of the campus would have due

regard to the climate change commitments made by Halton Borough Council, in particular in relation to the network of biodiversity and mitigation against the effects of climate change. The developments will be designed to deliver sustainable growth, adopting best practice in sustainable design and construction. Any proposals would need to have an integrated approach to sustainable development incorporating climate change resilience and carbon management measures, such as meeting BREEAM excellent rating.

9.2 The JV is committed to reducing its environmental footprint and sustainability is embedded into the management and operation of the campus.

10.0 REASON(S) FOR DECISION

A decision is required to enable the Council to enter into the necessary legal agreements to facilitate the Investment Zone and associated Tax Incremental Financing processes

11.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

Consideration was given to Sci-Tech Daresbury remaining an Enterprise Zone and not becoming an Investment Zone. On balance it was felt that the opportunity to access additional grant funding and tax incentives through the Investment Zone was more likely to accelerate the next [phase of delivery and provide potential for future investment and Tax Incremental Finance that could support the requires land acquisition and infrastructure to deliver the masterplan.

12.0 IMPLEMENTATION DATE

A Memorandum of Understanding is expected to be signed ahead of the commencement of Investment Zone status in April 2024.

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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
Liverpool City Region Combined Authority submitted maps for tax site boundary at Daresbury	Municipal Building, Widnes	Helen Roberts
Enterprise Zone Rates Retention Policy		

REPORT TO:	Executive Board
DATE:	19 th October 2023
REPORTING OFFICER:	Corporate Director: Chief Executive's Delivery Unit
PORTFOLIO:	Corporate Services
SUBJECT:	Transformation Programme Update
WARDS:	Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 To provide an update on progress made within the Council's Transformation Programme.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the Executive Board note the contents of the update.

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Work continues to develop the projects outlined in Appendix A, as well as the associated delivery plans, which will provide a framework to assess project feasibility. Where projects are to be taken forward, trajectories will be set for both financial and non-financial outcomes, against which progress will be monitored.
- 3.2 During September there has been a focus on engaging employees in the programme through both a series of 'values and behaviours' workshops and 'chats about change'. The input from these sessions will provide a valuable source of information which will be helped to shape the ongoing work in the 'Employer of Choice' projects and wider programme of activity.
- 3.3 In August 2023, there was a refocusing of programme support provided to Children's Social Care, which is coinciding with the Council's appointment of a permanent Director of Children's Social Services. The identification and recruitment of transformation resources to support this work has now been undertaken and arrangements are in place for the arrival of the new appointments.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

At this stage no requirement for new or amended policies has been identified.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The estimated savings for the programme are outlined in Appendix B. This is a replication of the table in the report in June 2023, but will be replicated on a monthly basis as this must remain the Council's primary focus in the current financial climate.
- 5.2 The purpose of the Transformation Programme is to achieve these savings and progress against these targets. As savings start to be tracked and realised, they will be included in this monthly Board report.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

The Transformation Programme is designed to deliver activity to support the effectiveness of the Council that will cut across all priorities.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

The Transformation Programme is designed to deliver activity to support the effectiveness of the Council that will cut across all priorities.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

The Transformation Programme is designed to deliver activity to support the effectiveness of the Council that will cut across all priorities.

6.4 A Safer Halton

The Transformation Programme is designed to deliver activity to support the effectiveness of the Council that will cut across all priorities.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

The Transformation Programme is designed to deliver activity to support the effectiveness of the Council that will cut across all priorities.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

Governance arrangements will include a detailed risk register. These will be closely monitored throughout the course of each project and measures put in place to mitigate any risks arising. Any significant risks requiring action outside of the programme will be escalated accordingly.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

Equality Impact Assessments to be undertaken for each of the projects or components of projects where specifically required.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE

Impacts on climate change will be considered for each of the projects where required. There are no identifiable impacts on climate change at this stage.

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

None under the meaning of the Act.

APPENDIX A**TRANSFORMATION PROJECTS**

Adults Directorate	<p>Enabling greater independence and flexibility for adults <i>Areas of work now in progress include;</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Supported Living - Review of service delivery model and accommodation provision for ALD - Supported Living - Pilot with PossAbilities to explore Individual Service Funds (ISFs) - Supported Living - Pilot with CIC to explore models of care which Support Independence Through Technology (SITT) - Review the suitability of Nursing care provision for ALD
Chief Executive's Directorate:	<p>Becoming an employer of choice <i>Areas of work now in progress include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developing a Values and Behaviours Framework - Developing an Employee Review Process - Creating an Employer Brand for Halton - Developing a new approach to engaging and managing Casual workers - Developing a suite of Workforce Reports to enable corporate oversight - Creating a programme of Reward Benchmarking - Reduction of Agency Spend – Care Homes - Reduction of Agency Spend – exploring new options for a managed service - Developing an Employer Value Proposition for Halton <p>Simplifying the customer journey <i>Areas of work now in progress include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Realignment of Administrative Support services - Simplifying the Customer Journey - Supporting the Council's Digital Journey
Children's Directorate	<p>A stable, sustainable service that is improving outcomes for children, young people and families <i>Areas of work currently being scoped in response to the refocusing of resources.</i></p> <p>A clear, affordable and appropriate SEND offer</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review of service operations (process, decision making, policy and use of data) - SEND Transportation
	Maximising outcomes and opportunities

Environment & Regeneration Directorate	<p><i>Areas of work now in progress include:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developing the Leisure offer - Brookvale Recreation centre feasibility study - Developing the Leisure offer – (Sub-projects to be identified) - Stadium - Commission a commercial review - Reducing the Cost of Waste - Increase recycling and reduce contamination - Reducing the Cost of Waste - Optimising Waste Operations - Reducing the Cost of Waste - The development of an enforcement strategy
	Accelerating growth – <i>sub projects in development</i>

APPENDIX B**ESTIMATED SAVINGS**

	2023/24 (£)	2024/25 (£)	2025/26 (£)
Adults / Adults with Learning Difficulties	1,034,802	4,139,208	5,174,010
Children's Services	301,959	1,207,835	1,509,793
Special Educational Needs	100,000	400,000	500,000
Accelerating Development & Growth Income & Asset Realisation	100,000	400,000	500,000
Optimised Services	463,239	1,852,957	2,316,197
Totals	2,000,000	8,000,000	10,000,00

REPORT TO:	Executive Board
DATE:	19 October 2023
REPORTING OFFICER:	Operational Director - Finance
PORTFOLIO:	Corporate Services
SUBJECT:	Re-Tendering of Council Insurance Policies
WARD(S)	Borough wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The current contracts for a range of insurance services are due to expire on 31 March 2024. This is a preliminary estimates report in compliance with Procurement Standing Order 1.3.5. The report seeks approval from the Executive Board to commence a procurement process to re-tender the insurance policies that are due to expire.

Based upon current premium levels, the total cost of the services is expected to exceed £1,000,000 over the maximum contract duration of five years.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS: That

- (i) **Approval be given to commence a procurement exercise for the following Council insurance policies:**
- **Combined Liability**
 - **Medical Malpractice**
 - **Engineering and inspection**
 - **Property**
 - **Motor**
 - **Computer**
- (ii) **The Operational Director - Finance, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services, be delegated to deal with any matters relating to the procurement of this contract.**

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Following a procurement process, in April 2019, the Council entered three-year contracts for insurance policies relating to combined liability, medical malpractice, and engineering (including engineering inspections). The contracts included options to extend for up to a further two years. These contracts end on 31 March 2024 and no further pre-determined contract extensions are

available. A new procurement process therefore needs to be commenced to renew these policies.

- 3.2 In April 2021, the Council entered three-year contracts for its property, motor, and computer insurance policies. These contracts are due to expire on 31 March 2024. Contract extension options are available; however, after consultation with the Council's insurance broker, it is felt that the Council may achieve a better overall outcome by tendering all its main insurance policies at the same time.
- 3.3 The Council's personal accident and crime policies are available for renewal with the current insurers and will not form part of the proposed procurement.
- 3.4 The new contracts will run from 1 April 2024. The contract durations will be for three years with an option to extend for up to a further two years.
- 3.5 The aggregate annual value of the contracts to be tendered is currently over £500,000. The tender process will therefore be conducted in compliance with the Public Contract Regulations 2015 and be supported by the Procurement Team.
- 3.6 Prior to the procurement process, a review of the Council's insurance programme will be completed, and relevant alternatives considered to establish the most appropriate programme for the Council. This will include reviewing components such as extent of cover, levels of self-insurance, and indemnity limits.
- 3.7 It is proposed that the procurement will be undertaken by accessing a framework agreement for insurance services managed by the Yorkshire Purchasing Organisation. Policies will be split into specific lots. Each lot will be awarded based on the most economically advantageous tender based on an assessment of both quality and price.
- 3.8 The Council's insurance broker will support the tender evaluation process by completing a comprehensive evaluation of tender submissions on behalf of the Council and make recommendations.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Council's approach to purchasing external insurance is set out in the Risk Financing and Insurance Strategy.
- 4.2 The proposed method of procurement is consistent with the Council's procurement policies and procedures.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are a range of factors that will influence the financial outcome of the procurement. These include the Council's claims experience, the current market conditions, and any changes to the structure of the Council's insurance programme. The extent to which the market perceives the Council to be an attractive proposition from a risk perspective is also particularly important.
- 5.2 Competition in the public sector insurance market is restricted to a small number of insurers. The Council's insurance broker has advised that the insurance market remains challenging. Insurers are continuing to adopt a conservative approach due to ongoing uncertainty related to inflation, rising loss costs, global tensions, and a slow supply chain recovery.
- 5.3 The 2023/24 aggregate budget for the policies being tendered is approximately £449,000. The cost of the Council's premiums for 2023/24 is forecast to be approximately £521,000. The £72,000 budget shortfall is principally due to inflationary pressures and insurers imposing annual rate increases since the policies were last retendered.
- 5.4 The outcome of the procurement exercise is unlikely to be known before 2024/25 budget setting. The Council's broker has advised that it would be prudent for the Council to budget for increases of between 5% and 10% on 2023/24 premiums, if cover is placed like for like. This would require increasing the insurance budget by between £98k and £124k.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children & Young People in Halton

External insurance cover helps prevent the need to redirect financial resources away from the Council's priorities in the event of a significant financial loss. As such, it forms a key part of the Council's financial management arrangements and therefore contributes to the delivery of all the Council's priorities.

6.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton

See 6.1

6.3 A Healthy Halton

See 6.1

6.4 A Safer Halton

See 6.1

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

See 6.1

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 External insurance cover helps to improve financial certainty by smoothing year on year fluctuations in the cost of claims and losses. It also provides financial protection against spikes in costs due to large losses and/or aggregate costs.

7.2 Failure to procure external insurance cover would leave the Council exposed to significant financial risk.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 None

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None

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

None under the meaning of the Act.

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 19 October 2023

REPORTING OFFICER: Operational Director, Finance

SUBJECT: Discretionary Non-Domestic Rate Relief

PORTFOLIO: Corporate Services

WARD(S): Borough-wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to consider three applications for discretionary non-domestic rate relief, under Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS: That;

- (i) The application for 15% discretionary rate relief from the Steve Morgan Foundation in respect of premises at Bridgemere House, with effect from 1 April 2022, be approved;**
- (ii) The application for 15% discretionary rate relief from the Have a Heart Foundation in respect of premises at 103-104 Chadwick Road, with effect from 1 April 2022, be approved;**
- (iii) The application for 15% discretionary rate relief from the Have a Heart Foundation in respect of premises at 110-111 Runcorn Shopping Centre, with effect from 1 April 2022, be approved.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Under the amended provisions of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, the Council is able to grant discretionary rate relief to any business ratepayer. This relief had previously only been available to organisations that were a registered charity, a community amateur sports club or a not-for-profit organisation.

3.2 From 1 April 2017 the Council became responsible for meeting the full cost of all mandatory and discretionary relief granted, as part of the Liverpool City Region 100% Business Rates Retention Pilot Scheme.

3.3 Three applications for discretionary rate relief have been received as outlined below. The Council's policy is to only provide 15% top-up

discretionary rate relief, with the organisation themselves meeting the remaining 5%.

- 3.4 Currently, where discretionary rate relief has been granted to registered charities and non-profit organisations, it has been provided until 31 March 2025 to provide the organisations with some degree of certainty.

The Steve Morgan Foundation
2nd Floor, Bridgemere House, Chester Road, Runcorn

- 3.5 The Steve Morgan Foundation is a registered charity. The organisation provides charitable support in the form of grants to organisations in Halton and also across Merseyside, Cheshire and North Wales, which specialise in assisting young people, the disabled, the homeless and the disadvantaged.
- 3.6 The grants to individuals and organisations can be for education or training, the advancement of health, supporting disability, the prevention or relief of poverty, housing, economic/community development or employment.
- 3.7 The organisation operates from premises on the 2nd floor of Bridgemere House in Runcorn.
- 3.8 As a registered charity the organisation automatically qualifies for 80% mandatory rate relief. They have now applied for an additional 15% discretionary rate relief with effect from 1 April 2022.
- 3.9 The following are the annual costs of both mandatory and discretionary rate relief;

Cost of 80% mandatory relief 2022/23	£13,209.60
Cost of 15% discretionary relief 2022/23	£2,476.80
Cost of 80% mandatory relief 2023/24	£15,213.53
Cost of 15% discretionary relief 2023/24	£2,852.54

Have a Heart Foundation
103-104 Chadwick Road, Astmoor Industrial Estate, Runcorn

- 3.10 The Have a Heart Foundation is a registered charity who raise money to distribute defibrillators and other lifesaving equipment to the local community. The organisation also provides help and support for people suffering with heart disease and training for the use of defibrillators, first response and first aid training.
- 3.11 As a registered charity, the organisation automatically qualifies for 80% mandatory rate relief. They have now applied for an additional 15% discretionary rate relief with effect from 1 April 2022.

3.12 The premises at 103-104 Chadwick Road is used to store furniture and household goods that can then be sold to retail customers to raise money for their charitable objectives.

3.13 The Have A Heart Foundation previously received discretionary rate relief in respect of their former premises at 47 Runcorn Shopping Centre.

3.14 The following are the annual costs of both mandatory and discretionary rate relief;

Cost of 80% mandatory relief 2022/23	£6,144.00
Cost of 15% discretionary relief 2022/23	£1,152.00
Cost of 80% mandatory relief 2023/24	£7,143.60
Cost of 15% discretionary relief 2023/24	£1,339.43

Have a Heart Foundation
110-111 Runcorn Shopping Centre, Runcorn

3.15 The Have a Heart Foundation have also applied for 15% discretionary rate relief with effect from 1 April 2022, in respect of their premises at 110-111 Runcorn Shopping Centre.

3.16 These premises are used by the organisation to sell furniture to retail customers to raise money for their charitable objectives.

3.17 The following are the annual costs of both mandatory and discretionary rate relief;

Cost of 80% mandatory relief 2022/23	£11,878.40
Cost of 15% discretionary relief 2022/23	£2,227.20
Cost of 80% mandatory relief 2023/24	£9,420.80
Cost of 15% discretionary relief 2023/24	£1,766.40

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The Board is required by the Regulations to consider each application on its own merit. Any recommendations provided are given for guidance only, are consistent with Council policy and, wherever possible, previous decisions.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Appendix presents the potential costs to the Council of granting rate relief for the 2022/23 and 2023/24 financial years.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

Both charities assist young people

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

Both charities assist in learning and skills

6.3 A Healthy Halton

Have A Heart Foundation promotes knowledge of heart disease and heart failure and provides defibrillators to the community and training in their usage. The Steve Morgan Foundation promotes the advancement of health.

6.4 A Safer Halton

None.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

None.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 There are no key risks associated with the proposed action.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 The applicants offer their services to all sections of the community, without any prejudice.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None

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

10.1	Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
	Application forms	DCBL Stadium, Lower House Lane, Widnes	Adel Tomkins Senior Rating Officer – Business Rates

APPENDIX

Ratepayer	Address	Annual Rates Liability 2022/23 £	Mandatory Rate Relief Awarded 2022/23 £	Annual Cost of Mandatory Rate Relief to HBC 2022/23 £	Disc. Rate Relief	Annual Cost of Disc. Rate Relief to HBC 2022/23 £	Annual Rates Liability 2023/24 £	Annual Cost of Mandatory Relief to HBC 2023/24 £	Annual Cost of Disc. Rate Relief to HBC 2023/24 £	Total Cost of Mandatory & Disc. Relief 01.04.22 to 31.03.24 £
The Steve Morgan Foundation	2nd Floor, Bridgemere House, Chester Road	16,512.00	80%	13,209.60	15%	2,476.80	19,016.91	15,213.53	2,852.54	33,752.47
Have A Heart Foundation	103-104 Chadwick Road, Astmoor Industrial Estate	7,680.00	80%	6,144.00	15%	1,152.00	8,929.50	7,143.60	1,339.43	15,779.03
Have A Heart Foundation	110-111 Runcorn Shopping Centre	14,848.00	80%	11,878.40	15%	2,227.20	11,776.00	9,420.80	1,766.40	25,292.80

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 19th October 2023

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director Adult Services

PORTFOLIO: Adult Social Care

SUBJECT: Preliminary Procurement Notification –
Proposed Tender of a Floating Support Service

WARD(S) Borough wide

1.0 **PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 This is a Preliminary Estimate Report to seek approval from Executive Board to commence a new procurement process for the supply of a Floating Support Service. The proposed contract will be for an initial three years (plus 2 x 12-month extension periods), commencing 1st April 2024 until 31st March 2027, in compliance with Procurement Standing Order 1.3.5.

2.0 **RECOMMENDATION: That Executive Board**

- 1) **note the contents of the report; and**
- 2) **approve this Preliminary Estimates Report to commence a new procurement process for a Floating Support Service in compliance with Procurement Standing Order 1.3.5.**

3.0 **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 In 2019 Halton Borough Council tendered for a Floating Support Service and the current contract is due to end on 31st March 2024.

3.2 The Halton Floating Support Service delivers housing related support. The aim of the service is to support vulnerable adults/families to maintain a sustainable tenancy. The service provides person-centred support across all client groups in line with assessed needs, including (but not limited to):

- People at risk of homelessness
- People with mental health problems
- People with substance misuse problems
- Offenders or people at risk of re-offending
- Vulnerable families
- Older people
- People with social care needs, including learning disabilities, physical disabilities and physical health

problems

- People from BAME communities

- 3.3 Halton Borough Council currently makes provision for a Floating Support Service. Annually, approximately 650 vulnerable adults access the current Floating Support Service.
- 3.4 The contract was awarded for a five-year contractual period (2019 – 2024). This covered the initial 3-year contract term and the enactment of 2 x 12-month contract extension periods. There are no further extension periods available.
- 3.5 As the current contract is due to expire on 31st March 2024, Officers have been undertaking work to prepare to re-tender the service, commencing from 1st April 2024.
- 3.6 The proposed contract term is for a three year period (1st April 2024 – 31st March 2027) with an option to extend the contract for 2 x 12-month extension periods until 31st March 2029.
- 3.7 The estimated value of the contract is £1,870,000 over the five year lifetime of the contract. The Annual contract value is estimated at £374,000 per annum.
- 3.8 The estimated cost is inclusive of an inflationary uplift of 10% on the current contractual value (£340,000). No uplift has been applied to the contract value in the last two financial years and the current provider has evidenced that there has been an impact on the cost of the delivery of the service resulting from increases in inflation in that two-year period, resulting in higher costs to deliver the service.
- 3.9 The proposed uplift would be applied at the commencement of the initial three year term of the contract. Officers will review the contract value at the end of the initial three year term and in advance of any contract extension periods being applied. This will evaluate if a further uplift would be required.
- 3.10 It is proposed to undertake a full open tender procurement exercise to comply with Procurement Standing Order 1.5.2.

4.0 **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 None identified at this stage.

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The estimated total life cost of the contract for the three year term plus 2 x 12 month extension periods is £1,870,000. The estimated Annual contract value is £374,000 per annum.

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

6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

None identified at this stage.

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

None identified at this stage.

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**

The provision of the Floating Support Service will contribute to improving the Health and Wellbeing of Halton Residents.

6.4 **A Safer Halton**

None identified at this stage.

6.5 **Halton's Urban Renewal**

None identified at this stage.

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 The risk to the Council in not re-commissioning the service would result in a significant gap in service provision for vulnerable adults in the borough who require additional support to sustain their tenancy. This would impact the outcomes achieved by individuals and could also result in an increase in homelessness presentations within the borough.

7.2 Approval by Executive Board to proceed with an open tender exercise will ensure appropriate action is taken to procure provision of the Service once the current contract comes to an end and to mitigate the risks outlined in 7.1.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 None identified at this stage.

9.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 None identified at this stage.

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

None under the meaning of the Act.

REPORT TO:	Executive Board
DATE:	19 October 2023
REPORTING OFFICER:	Executive Director, Adults
PORTFOLIO:	Adult Social Care
SUBJECT:	Amended Allocations Policy
WARD(S)	Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The Report is to inform Executive Board of the amendments to the Property Pool Plus (PPP) Allocations policy.

The aspiration remains that the Local Authorities continue to facilitate a single lettings approach for scheme partners and customers when allocating and letting social housing across the city region. The PPP Policy was approved in March 2022, however, further amendments have been made to ensure the policy is current and meets legislative guidelines.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- 1) the report be noted; and
- 2) the Board approve the amended Property Pool Plus Allocations Policy

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 A report was submitted to Executive Board in February 2011, to approve the Common Choice Based Lettings and Allocations Policy for the 5 participating Local Authorities. The allocations scheme has been known as the Property Pool Plus scheme (PPP) and is a partnership between the aforementioned local housing authorities, plus numerous private registered providers of social housing. PPP provides a common procedure and approach to allocating social rented housing, using a choice-based method to let homes.
- 3.1.2 PPP provides a single point of access for customers/applicants to apply for social housing, complete a single application process, and join a single housing register. It also provides local authorities with a single means to provide nominations, including for homeless applicants. This requires the participation of all, or the vast majority, of housing associations, and their willingness to let their available properties via PPP. The aspiration remains that the local authorities continue to facilitate a single lettings approach for scheme partners and customers when allocating and letting social housing across the city region.
- 3.1.3 Property Pool Plus (PPP) is a sub-regional Choice Based Lettings social housing

allocation scheme covering the local authority areas of Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton and Wirral. The PPP service went 'live' in July 2012, following the introduction of a suitable IT system (provided by Civica).

- 3.1.4 The participating local authorities and housing associations wish to ensure that the allocations policy is fit for purpose and supports strategic city region wide aspirations around access to social housing. Some of the principal drivers for undertaking a policy review include ensuring that the policy:
- Is legally compliant with relevant Government legislation, in particular the recent introduction of the Homeless Reduction Act 2017, Codes of Guidance, statutory obligations and also has regard to best practice and current case law;
 - Incorporates aims and principles which remain appropriate and relevant;
 - Helps support and deliver good customer service and
 - outcomes and ensures any proposed changes improve the customer journey;
 - Supports wider system change for homeless people, maximising the number of people in housing need who are successfully housed;
 - Is informed by housing association partner organisation's operational and business needs, in order to promote current and future co-operation and participation in the allocation scheme.
- 3.1.5 The Property Pool Plus (PPP) Housing Allocations Scheme which is administered across the five Local Authority areas of Halton, Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton, and Wirral has recently undergone a review process in line with statutory requirements for Social Housing Allocations.
- 3.1.6 One of the review recommendations was for the PPP scheme to implement a revised Housing Allocations policy, which was subsequently drafted, consulted upon, and approved for adoption by all five scheme member Local Authorities in spring / summer 2022.
- 3.2 **Policy Changes**
The revised policy incorporates a significant number of changes to various elements of the scheme including the qualification, criteria and the priority banding system.
- 3.2.1 The banding priority system will be reduced from six bands to four. Band A will remain a high priority banding for priority clients, e.g. homelessness, health and welfare etc.
- 3.2.2 A procurement exercise was therefore undertaken which completed in September 2022. This resulted in the existing IT provider being re-contracted to supply an upgraded version of the existing IT system which is being configured to meet the specific requirements to administer the revised policy.
- 3.2.3 The upgraded system will also offer an improved customer experience with the addition of a module for customers to interrogate property availability by area including indicative waiting times, a communications module for customers to view

correspondence sent to them, and a document upload facility to allow customers to upload verification documentation and supporting evidence direct to their accounts.

3.3 **Project Timescales**

The key dates and timescale for each of the main elements of the IT implementation are set out in the table below:

Element	Projected Timescale
Configuration completed	25/05/2023
IT Development	July and August 2023
User Acceptance Testing	04/09/2023 to 13/10/2023
IT delivery preparation	16/10/2023 to 03/11/2023
New Policy and IT Launch	Monday 06/11/2023

3.4 **Change Preparation**

3.4.1 In addition to the work on the IT development, the PPP Local Authorities and Scheme Administrators have begun planning and preparing for the transition.

3.4.2 There is a need to ensure that the existing data currently held within the IT system is as accurate and up to date as possible in relation to housing register applications, property adverts and associated shortlists, before the launch of the revised scheme to assist with a smooth transition.

3.4.3 There will be an additional requirement to re-assess existing housing applications against the revised policy criteria, which will involve gathering additional data for some cases, notifying applicants of the outcome of any change to their status for rehousing, and providing information and support to those who are impacted by the change.

3.5 **Request for a pause in scheme activity**

3.5.1 Due to the scale of the change and required preparatory work, both the Local Authority representatives and Scheme Administrators are requesting approval for a break in some elements of the PPP scheme activity for a short period in the lead up to the launch of the revised scheme.

3.5.2 It is suggested that the scheme should be closed to new applications for a period of one month before the launch of the revised scheme. This will allow for staff resource to be diverted to dealing with the required preparation work and supporting customers, whilst at the same time this will present a clear definition to customers between the existing, and the revised scheme. Without such a pause there will be new applications being submitted under the existing rules, using the existing application form up until the day before the transition. These applicants would subsequently need to be contacted to collect additional data to allow their cases to be assessed under the revised scheme.

3.5.3 It is also recommended that there should be a two week period prior to the launch of the revised scheme where there will be a pause in property advertising. This will allow partner Housing Association landlords to spend time updating property

shortlists under the existing scheme rules. This recommendation is subject to discussion and approval by partner Housing Association landlords.

3.6 **Mitigation**

3.6.1 Whilst Local Authority representatives and Scheme Administrators are recommending a short pause in some scheme activity as described above there will be mechanisms in place for dealing with urgent rehousing cases, as follows:

- Communications via a robust marketing plan regarding the forthcoming changes including advice that contact should be made direct to Administration Teams and / or Homeless Teams for urgent housing need cases.
- Facility for a new application to be submitted by the back office i.e., by an Officer on behalf of the applicant in urgent situations.
- The facility to direct match properties to urgent cases will be made available.
- Shortlists for properties previously advertised will continue to be processed.

4.0 **POLICY CHANGES**

4.1 The social housing allocations scheme is a core service and the amended Allocations Policy and Procedures for Property Pool Plus are up-to-date and reflect the latest legislation.

4.2 LAs must adhere to the law regarding the allocation of Social Rented Housing, as set out in the Housing Act 1996, Part 6 Allocation of Housing Accommodation. Every local housing authority in England must have a scheme (their “allocation scheme”) for determining priorities and as to the procedure to be followed, in allocating housing accommodation. For this purpose “procedure” includes all aspects of the allocation process, including the persons or descriptions of persons by whom decisions are taken.”

5.0 **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

5.1 There are no resource implications arising from the recommendations of this report. There are existing revenue budgets in place to fund the operation of an allocations service, which is currently performed by Halton Housing. There is an existing revenue budget to fund the annual operation of an IT system.

5.2 There are no direct revenue costs arising from the recommendations of this report. The Review exercise was funded by the LCR Combined Authority.

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

6.1 **Children & Young People in Halton**

6.1.2 Protect the most vulnerable households, as many rely on accessing

suitable social housing to meet their housing needs.

6.1.3 Facilitate confident and resilient communities with the provision of suitable secure tenancies with social landlord’s supports community stability.

6.2 **Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton**
None at this stage

6.3 **A Healthy Halton**
None at this stage

6.4 **A Safer Halton**
Facilitate sustainable economic prosperity:

6.5 **Halton’s Urban Renewal**
None at this stage

7.0 **RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 None at this stage.

8.0 **EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 The equality Implications have been identified and mitigated.

9.0 **CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 None at this stage.

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

10.1

Document	Place of Inspection	Contract Officer
PPP Housing Allocations Policy. Housing Allocations Policy can be found at the Property Pool Plus website. https://www.propertypoolplus.org.uk/content/About/OurPolicies	Runcorn Town Hall	Principal Manager Homelessness

REPORT TO:	Executive Board
DATE:	19 October 2023
REPORTING OFFICER:	Executive Director Environment & Regeneration
PORTFOLIO:	Community Safety
SUBJECT:	Refugee Resettlement Service Contract
WARD(S)	Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The Report is to seek approval from Executive Board to arrange for the Resettlement Contract to be delivered in house.

The Refugee Resettlement Contract was first issued in 2019 and is due to expire on 31st March 2024. Plus Dane are the commissioned provider who deliver services to a number of diverse clients groups, including Refugee, Ukraine and asylum seeker households.

The report is to request that the upon expiry of the existing Resettlement contract, the service be transferred and delivered in house, which will involve TUPE arrangement process for the existing staffing Team.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- (1) the report be noted; and**
- (2) the Board consider that upon expiry of the Resettlement Contract in March 2024, the service be transferred back In-house within the agreed Local Authority directorate.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Background information

Refugees resettled through the UK Government's humanitarian relief programmes are those where it has been determined that resettlement is in their best interests – principally (but not limited to) the Vulnerable Persons Resettlement Scheme (VPRS) whose purpose is to resettle 20,000 Refugees to the UK, who have fled conflict within their own countries. Also, the Vulnerable Children's Resettlement Scheme (VCRS) whose purpose is to resettle up to 3,000 Refugees, specifically children at risk and their families, from

Turkey, Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, and Egypt.

- 3.1.2 The Local Authority commissioned Plus Dane Group in partnership with SHAP in 2019, to deliver the Refugee Resettlement service contact, which is due to expire on 31st March 2024.
- 3.1.3 The original service was set up as part of Halton's involvement in the VPRS Syrian resettlement scheme alongside our commitment to resettle 100 individuals from a wider Liverpool City Region pledge
- 3.1.4 The scheme has grown, and Halton pledged a further 80 individuals in 2019. Unfortunately, the pandemic resulted in a delay in achieving full resettlement, with 28 pledges remain outstanding.
- 3.1.5 However, since then Halton has become a Dispersal Area for asylum seekers and now has responsibility for a large initial assessment facility for asylum seekers.
- 3.1.6 There are ongoing commitments under Homes for Ukraine and widening responsibility to consider. As well as several areas of mounting tension across the world such as Libya, and Sudan. It is likely that Halton will continue to make further pledges to support refugees to integrate into Halton as part of the ongoing commitment to diversity Halton alongside our LCR Partners for years to come.
- 3.1.7 During the last three years the Government has requested further commitment from Local Authorities, to resettle a number of different diverse client groups, including Ukraine and Afghan families and asylum seekers with granted leave to remain. This has placed additional pressure upon all statutory and none statutory services.
- 3.1.8 Plus Dane have successfully delivered a valued service to the above client groups and instrumental in introducing new support services across the Borough.

3.2 Legal Requirements

Government policy has altered recently with the Illegal Migration Act 2023. This means that as the government is rolling out attempts to reduce contracts held with Hotels currently being used as Contingency Accommodation. The Home Office are also seeking to legally deport new migrants arriving to the UK to Rwanda.

- 3.2.1 The Home office currently is looking to focus on safe and legal routes for asylum and refugee resettlement. However, there is currently a backlog of 7.000 cases nationally.

3.3 Core Business Flexibility

The original program was set up with a clear timeline plan, however the needs of the cohort have changed dramatically with a further increase in demand.

3.3.1 There is a need for some in-built flexibility to respond to changes in policy and demand to reduce pressures on other front-line services. The current contract has been adapted to provide some flexibility to deal with high-risk asylum seeker cases, which this has been utilized on several occasions.

3.3.2 The Homes for Ukraine crisis meant a huge increase in capacity of caseloads with over 16 individuals arriving in the first two weeks and over 30 by the three-month stage with a total of 63 arriving in total.

3.3.3 The refugee services needed an element of flexibility in order to meet the demand, which was facilitated by the quality and willingness of the staff team. However unlike many other areas across the northwest Halton avoided having to contract for a further standalone service, as the contract provider was able to pull in additional resources within the existing team to meet demand.

3.4 Current Operational Issues

Currently the team consists of three full time staff members, two of which who are permanently employed by Plus Dane Group and one member who is employed permanently by their contracted partner SHAP. This has led to some confusion for the staff team which effects employment terms and conditions, as well as working across two different IT a software systems.

3.4.1 As the contract is due to end, it would be necessary to pursue the procurement process and commission a provider to manage the agreed future contract award. The uncertainty of the future of the service moving forward would likely dissuade providers from bidding for a short term contract.

3.4.2 The option to bring the service back into the Local Authority would offer a range of services, including translation in delivering a quality service.

3.5 Contract Proposal Options

A number of proposal options have been identified as detailed below.

- **Link in with General Tenancy support contract**
Both the Generic Tenancy Support and Resettlement contracts are delivered by the same housing provider, Plus Dane.

Both contracts run parallel and expire March 2024. The procurement for the general support contact is underway, however, there is a reluctance to lock the Resettlement Contract in for a further three years.

- **Tender process via procurement for 1-2 years,**
Option to offer a short term contract for upto two years is a consideration. However, there are concerns that a short term contract would not attract the right provider. This would also prove difficult and challenging for the new provider to fully meet the contractual requirements, which was an issue with the first contract issued to an external provider.
- **Waiver Process**
Option to request a waiver for the existing contract for a further year upto 31st March 2025. This would allow the Local Authority additional time to bring the service back in house.
- **In House Service in accordance with TUPE**
Bringing the service back into the Local Authority is the preferred option, which would give added value to the service delivery and prove more cost effective and beneficial to many of the Local Authority statutory services.

If agreeable, the service transfer and TUPE process would need to commence with immediate effect to meet the existing contract expiry.

3.6 Preferred Option

The preferred option is to have an in-house Resettlement service, which would offer many benefits to the Local Authority;

- Bi-lingual case workers that can work across both Adult and Children`s services
- Flexible service provision to meet the changing Home Office demands
- Stability and security to existing team
- Minimal disruption to clients
- Cost effective service with added value.
- The team could make better use of local facilities, using community centres and other hot desk locations to meet with clients to further integrate them within the communities they live in.

3.7 Service Transfer

Transferring the service in-house would require further discussions with the Plus Dane Group about the transfer of assets. The process should be straightforward, as the only assets being transferred would be the actual Staff team and access to files and data.

- 3.7.1 The service provider initially held paper files, however, all case records are held in a sharepoint document. There are a small number of active case records, which could be registered with the Local Authority, using Eclipse.

- 3.7.2 The in house service would offer substantial savings, given the present contract value. All savings would be transferred back into the Refugee Resettlement budget and utilised to increase and improve services across the Borough.
- 3.7.3 The existing Staff are a small team, consisting of three members, who, in accordance with employment law arrangements, would be subject to being transferred back into the Local Authority.
- 3.7.4 Presently there is a disparity around salaries, given that the caseworkers are employed by the two partnership agencies. The recommendation would be to bring staff in house and align salaries in line with Local Authority pay scales.
- 3.7.4 It is a Home Office requirement to provide Face to Face translation support in the first six weeks of arrival The present service provider contracts a bank of Self-employed translators who offer Face to Face and telephone-based translation – Predominantly Arabic but including, Russian, Kurdish, Farsi, Dari and Tigrinya.
- 3.7.5 The Local Authority could apply the same process by adding the translators to the HBC supplier list and they can be used when required,

3.8 Efficiencies

The in house service indicates that there would be savings in the longer term. The annual cost of out-sourcing the Refugee Resettlement contract service is 186,305 per annum. However, there has not been an increase in value over the past three years, which would indicate that there would be additional costs going forward to cover cost of living and salary increase costs.

- 3.8.1 The in- house service would sit within the agreed directorate, whereby, it could be managed more efficiently, with control around budgets forecasts for both short and long term service planning. The service would enable the Local Authority to be more proactive when bidding for future funding streams, which will seek to benefit front line services for the this cohort and also the wider community.
- 3.8.2 If approved, the Local Authority would take a proactive approach in communicating their plan with the present provider and seek to make the transition streamlined for all involved, with limited impact on the existing contracts and commitments.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 None

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 As the programme is Home Office funded, there are no direct financial implications for the Local Authority. The proposal to bring the service in house would be more cost effective and efficient. The present contract value is due to increase substantially, whereby, the in house service would offer savings in excess of £100,000

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children & Young People in Halton

- 6.1.2 Halton's participation in the UK Resettlement Schemes is seeing a change in its demographic, particularly in its schools with over 100 young refugees under the age of 18 now living in Halton who come from a variety of different countries, cultures and who don't have English as a first language.

- 6.1.3 Within the grant funding there is a separate education tariff to support those schools who have provided places to the refugee children

6.2 Employment, Learning & Skills in Halton

- 6.2.1 As Halton's demographic changes - it's seen as a positive thing for the people of Halton to actively interact with people from different backgrounds, ensuring they are equipped with the skills and experiences to engage with the wider communities...

- 6.2.2 There are many statutory and voluntary agencies involved with this cohort of clients, to ensure they have access to education and employment to support them in their learning process to achieve positive career pathway plans

6.3 A Healthy Halton

- 6.3.1 Whilst there have been some additional challenges around health related issues – these have been effectively managed by staff and partners, with regular meetings to ensure any issues are addressed as quickly as possible.

- 6.3.2 The Resettlement Team are actively involved with Health professionals to ensure clients are fully supported and all health issues are reported and addressed accordingly.

- 6.3.3 The provision of the in house Refugee Resettlement Service will contribute to improving the Health and Wellbeing of Halton

Residents.

6.4 A Safer Halton

None identified at this stage

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 The identified risks are those related to housing stock, capacity across Halton and community cohesion or tensions. Officers, working with Partners, are confident that if and when issues arise – they can be managed effectively, to ensure there is minimal negative impact upon either of the refugees or local residents

7.1.2 To pursue the option to procure and tender the service externally, there is a risk that a different provider may be appointed for a two /three year period, which may not be in the best interests of the existing vulnerable service users.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

An EIA is not identified for this report

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None identified at this stage

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

None under the meaning of the Act.

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted