

CORPORATE POLICY AND PERFORMANCE BOARD

At a meeting of the Corporate Policy and Performance Board on Tuesday, 21 January 2025 in the Civic Suite, Town Hall, Runcorn

Present: Councillors Gilligan (Chair), Philbin (Vice-Chair), Davidson, V. Hill, Hutchinson, Leck, Logan, A. Lowe, N. Plumpton Walsh and Thornton

Apologies for Absence: Councillor McDonough

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: E. Dawson, M. Reaney, S. Riley, J. Yates and K. Butler

Also in attendance: None

ITEM DEALT WITH UNDER DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

Action

CS22 MINUTES

The Minutes from the meeting held on 5 November 2024 were taken as read and signed as a correct record.

CS23 PUBLIC QUESTION TIME

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

CS24 EXECUTIVE BOARD MINUTES

The Board was presented with the minutes relating to the Corporate Services Portfolio, which had been considered by the Executive Board since the last meeting of the Board.

CS25 MEMBER DEVELOPMENT GROUP NOTES

The Board considered the minutes of the Member Development Group meeting held on 26 September 2024.

RESOLVED: That the minutes be noted.

The Board received a report from the Director of ICT and Support Services which provided an update on the department's programme of work.

The report outlined the different workstreams of the programme which included delivery of Microsoft365; Customer Journey Transformation; the Business Analysis Programme and Artificial Intelligence (AI) and details of each were described in the report. These were big projects but once completed they would bring many benefits, including cost savings.

Digital poverty was quite high in Halton and so the One Stop Shops remained an essential aspect of the front door into the Council for many, with increased footfall along with violent incidents and abuse experienced by staff. Approximately 428,00 cases were dealt with each year in the One Stop Shops.

Members were advised that the programme of work would also link to the partnership with NHS led Halton Health Hubs. Options were being explored to increase the number of Council services within the locations bringing services into the community on a face-to-face basis. Digital poverty meant that not all interactions could be digital.

Members of the Board scrutinised the report and the following additional information was provided in response to questions:

- with regards to AI, as owners of information, the Council would be responsible for any breach of data. However, a lot of AI was a base of knowledge and the type of AI the Council would hold would be kept onsite;
- there were in-house opportunities for AI, although it would be a big piece of work to analyse the data;
- it was suggested that digital poverty and those with literacy problems could be frustrated with new systems, however, it was noted that 80% of people contacted the Council via mobile phones and access would be tailored to mobile access.

The Board thanked officers for an interesting and reassuring report and appreciated that in-house talents would be used to move the Council forward.

RESOVLED: That the Board supports the ongoing programme of work.

CS27 CLIMATE CHANGE UPDATE

The Board received a report from the Assistant to the Chief Executive which provided an update on related activities aimed at reducing the Council's impact on the environment and CO2 emissions from Council activities.

Since it started to measure its carbon emissions in 2006/2007, overall emissions had reduced in the Council's operations from 26,338 tonnes of CO2 to 7,987 tonnes.

In 2017, the Government reset the baseline in the expectation that public bodies would reduce their carbon emissions by 50% by 2031. In 2017, the Council's baseline was 14,811 carbon tonnes and in 2023/24, it had managed to reduce its emissions to 7,987; a reduction of 53.9% in total and an annual reduction of 8.6%.

The report outlined a number key activities which had been completed or commenced during 2024 which included:

- Improvements to Council buildings, including solar power schemes and solar farms at different sites;
- Installation of Electric Vehicle Chargers;
- UKSPF funding;
- Procurement – published tenders to include environmental measures; and
- Continued awareness raising of climate change across the Council e.g. e-learning training courses for Officers and Members and establishment of a Climate Change Advisory Group.

Following discussions it was noted that:

- Feedback from a Liverpool City Region meeting which indicated that funding would continue across the region for the installation of further electric vehicle charging points;
- A query was raised about the electric vehicle charging point at Runcorn Town Hall which was located behind the locked gate and whether an additional one could be installed for public use; and
- It was confirmed that the cost of solar panels and installation totalled £2.27m.

RESOLVED: That the report and the ongoing work be noted.

Assistant to the
Chief Executive

CS28 CORPORATE COMPLAINTS

The Board considered a report which provided a statistical analysis of the Corporate Complaints received during the 2023-24 financial year.

The report outlined the two stage procedure to deal with corporate complaints; a corporate complaints trend analysis from 2022-23; the nature of those complaints received; and outcomes. The data showed that the Council had received 83 corporate complaints, reduction from the 112 that had been received in the previous year. Given the challenges the Council had faced it was considered a fair outcome.

At present, the Council aimed to respond to complaints at stage 1 of the procedures within 10 working days and those at stage 2 within 28 working days. More complaints had been considered at stage 2 compared to the previous year but the response time had marginally dipped.

The report also provided a summary on complaints and queries that had been received by the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) during 2023-24. It was noted that the Ombudsman had made 32 decisions during the year and upheld 4 complaints.

Members were advised that the complaints process would be reviewed in due course to identify any improvements that could be made and thereafter, an update report would be presented to the Board.

RESOLVED: That the content of the report be noted.

CS29 COUNCILWIDE SPENDING AS AT 30 NOVEMBER 2024

The Board received a copy of a report, which was presented to the Council's Executive Board on 16 January 2025. The report outlined the Council's overall revenue and capital spending position as at 30 November 2024, together with the latest 2024/25 outturn forecast. The report also described the reasons for key variances from budget.

The Executive Board had requested that a copy of the report be shared with each Policy and Performance Board for information, to ensure that all Members had a full appreciation of the Councilwide financial position, in addition

to their specific areas of responsibility.

In response to the queries from Members of the Board, the following additional information was provided in response to questions:

- Page 51 – employers expenditure was the overall spending on employees and this was over budget. However, the current position was better than at the end of September 2024 and the main reduction had been in staffing within the Children’s Directorate;
- Page 71 – Members queried the staffing costs in Legal Services and it was confirmed that this was due to a high number of Locums over the past few years and as a result of a huge increase in workload and difficulties in recruitment due to salaries. A report was presented to Council in December 2024 and there was a workstream within the Transformation which was due to be completed in February 2025. Members were advised that the Legal Department had struggled for the past few years with no changes to the structure or increase in budgets;
- Page 75 – Members queried what expenditure “agencies – addition to establishment” meant and it was confirmed that this was an additional post to the normal establishment structure, most likely due to a response from the Ofsted inspection. Temporary posts had been created in services which had been criticised and needed to improve;
- Members acknowledged that whilst the Council must be cost effective, services carried out both in Children’s and Adult Services was about the care of human beings. Particularly in Children’s Services, private companies were being allowed to charge Council’s significant amounts money and take advantage of vulnerable situations; and
- Page 76 – Community and Greenspaces – Members asked if anyone was looking at how food provision was being spent in Community Centres and an example about how Murdishaw Community Centre was using a supplier from Blackpool rather than a local supplier was provided. There was also a query about how the new kitchen at the community centre had been tendered. Officers agreed to look into these queries and report back in due course.

RESOLVED: That the Councilwide financial position as outlined in the report be noted.

Director of
Finance

Meeting ended at 7.48 p.m.