

EXECUTIVE BOARD

At a meeting of the Executive Board on Thursday, 24 October 2024 in The Boardroom, Municipal Building

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

Apologies for Absence: Councillor Thompson

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: G. Cook, S. Young, M. Reaney, E. Dawson, S. Wallace-Bonner, Z. Fearon, G. Ferguson and J. Rosser

Also in attendance: M. Bennett and D. Lyon (Mersey Gateway) S. Scott and D. Trust Dickinson (Halton Housing)

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER POWERS AND DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

EXB35 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2024, were taken as read and signed as a correct record.

LEADER'S PORTFOLIO

EXB36 URGENT ITEMS

The Board received a report from the Chief Executive, which provided information on 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 Director Finance and/or the Director Legal and Democratic Services, where necessary.

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

Action

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

CORPORATE SERVICES PORTFOLIO

EXB37 DISCRETIONARY NON-DOMESTIC RATE RELIEF

The Board received a report from the Director – Finance, which presented two applications for discretionary non-domestic rate relief, under Section 47 of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, for consideration.

It was noted that under the amended provisions of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, the Council was 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.

The report outlined details of the two applications, in relation to their respective addresses. Appended to the report was the potential annual cost to the Council of granting the discretionary rate relief.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the application for 15% discretionary top up relief from Community Integrated Care, be rejected for the reasons outlined within the report; and
- 2) the application for discretionary rate relief from Runcorn Amateur Boxing Club, be approved at 90%

Director of
Finance

HEALTH AND WELLBEING PORTFOLIO

EXB38 HOMELESSNESS FUNDING GRANT ALLOCATION

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director – Adult Services, which outlined the homelessness grant funding allocated by Central Government to reduce and prevent homelessness within the Borough for the period 2024/25. The Council had been allocated £369,000 and the report set out in appendix 1 and 2, proposals for the allocation of the grant for the period.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the Board note and consider the content of the report; and

Executive Director
of Adult Services

- 2) approve the recommendations for expenditure against the grants as described in Appendices 1 and 2.

COMMUNITY SAFETY PORTFOLIO

EXB39 GYPSY TRAVELLER WARDEN CONTRACTS - KEY DECISION

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director – Adult Services, that advised on a proposal to continue with the existing service provision provided by two Romani Traveller Wardens at two sites at Riverview, Widnes and Canalside, Runcorn. The report set out the advantages of employing site wardens and the service they provided which had proven successful.

The two warden contracts would be initially for three years, with an option to extend by a further two years, subject to performance and would be renewed annually. The combined contract value for the two wardens would be £48,876 annually and a combined cost of £244,380 across the five-year period.

Reason(s) for Decision

The proposal to extend the wardens employment contract will ensure a consistent approach and stability across the three traveller sites within Halton. As the wardens are situated on site, this offers an out of hours service.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Due to previous issues raised, it would not be advisable to consider further service options or employing none traveller wardens, as this would prove more costly and could result in serious issues across the three sites.

Implementation Date

The contract implementation date will be 1 November 2024 for a period of three, plus one, plus one years.

RESOLVED: That the Board

- 1) approve the proposed employment contract for the two Traveller Wardens; and
- 2) agree that the in house wardens will continue to provide site management and support across the

Executive Director
of Adult Services

three Council owned sites.

ENVIRONMENT AND URBAN RENEWAL PORTFOLIO

EXB40 ADDITIONAL HIGHWAY MAINTENANCE ALLOCATIONS

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director – Environment and Regeneration, which sought approval to accept capital funding from the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) in compliance with Standing Orders.

It was noted that in addition to the current capital funding arrangements through the LCRCA, the Council had received two Highways and Improvement Grants for £306,781.20 each and a Traffic Signal Maintenance and Improvement Grant for £44,394.12. The cost of works undertaken as part of these grant funding agreements would be met entirely from the approved budget allocations for this additional capital funding.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the Board approves the Director Planning and Transportation, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder Environment and Urban Renewal, be delegated to accept the Grant Funding Agreement and enable timely delivery of the agreement; and
- 2) the Director Planning and Transportation in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Environment and Urban Renewal, be delegated to deal with any matters relating to procurement and operation of this agreement.

EXB41 A STRATEGY FOR HALTON'S TREES AND WOODLANDS

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director – Environment and Regeneration, which sought approval of an updated Halton Trees and Woodlands Strategy. A review of the Strategy had recently been undertaken as one of the Council's Climate Change Action Plan objectives ES10.

The Board was advised that there had been no material changes to the Council's Policy since the adopted Trees and Woodland Strategy was approved in 2018. A summary of the primary updates to the Strategy was detailed in the report and a copy of the Strategy was attached as Appendix 1.

RESOLVED: That the Board approve the updated Trees and Woodland Strategy attached as Appendix 1 to the report.

Executive Director
Environment &
Regeneration

N.B. Councillor Wharton declared a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in the following item of business as he is a Non-Executive Director of Mersey Gateway Crossings Board and left the meeting for the duration of the item.

COUNCILLOR NELSON IN THE CHAIR

EXB42 MERSEY GATEWAY

The Board considered a report of the Director – Legal and Democratic Services, that advised on the requirement to replace the existing Road User Charging Scheme Order (RUCSO) with a new RUCSO to reflect the need to increase toll charges on both the Mersey Gateway Bridge and the Silver Jubilee Bridge. The report also included details on proposed changes to Blue Badge Holders, Penalty Charge Notices and Local User Discount Scheme, which would all be subject to consultation which would run for six weeks in November and December 2024.

It was noted that both bridges are described as being operated as tolled crossings, however motorists pay in the form of a road user charge under the Transport Act 2000. The charges are anticipated to remain on the crossing until the Mersey Gateway Bridge, improvements to the Silver Jubilee Bridge and other associated highway network improvements are paid for.

Since the tolls were introduced in 2017, they had remained unchanged and there was now a need to increase the tolls by 20% to ensure that they were in line with the original proposals and the project remained financially robust without the need for additional local or central funding beyond that already agreed.

It was noted that the Mersey Gateway Project had continued to operate with a financial loss and had required Central Government grants. Details of the income and expenditure of the scheme from October 2017 to March 2024 were outlined in Appendix 2 of the report.

Following the consultation period a report would be taken to a meeting of the Council and if approved, the updated RUCSO would come into effect from 1 April 2025.

Following a discussion, the Board agreed that the

reference to proposed changes for Blue Badge holders would be deleted in the updated RUCSO before the document is subject to consultation.

RESOLVED: That the Board should

- 1) consult on making an updated RUCSO based on the working draft enclosed at Appendix 1 on the basis prescribed in this report, subject to the removal of the reference to changes for Blue Badge holders;
- 2) after full and proper consideration to any responses received, and having taken them into account, recommend the Council to make the updated RUCSO based on the working draft enclosed at Appendix 1 and delegate to the Director – Legal and Democratic Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, the authority to make any non-material or consequential amendments as are necessary to give it effect; and
- 3) authorise the Director – Legal and Democratic Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder, to take all necessary steps to bring the RUCSO into effect, provided that any material amendments or considerations shall be considered by the Council and subject to its determination before the RUCSO is brought into effect.

Director, Legal
and Democratic
Services

EMPLOYMENT, LEARNING AND SKILLS AND COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENT AND URBAN RENEWAL PORTFOLIOS

EXB43 PLAYING PITCH STRATEGY UPDATE REPORT 2024

The Board received a report of the Executive Director – Environment and Regeneration, which sought approval of Halton's Playing Pitch Strategy (PPS) update report. The 2024 update report was prepared by Knight Kavanagh & Page, in consultation with partners including Halton Sports Partnership, Sport England and the National Governing Bodies of relevant sports. A copy of the *Halton Borough Council Playing Pitch Strategy Update Report August 2024 and Action Plan*, was appended to the report.

The update report set out the changes in demand for and supply of playing pitches in Halton since the previous annual update was conducted in 2023. The report also provided an audit of the quality, quantity and accessibility of playing pitches, current levels of demand and whether pitches were being over/under used.

It was noted that the report was an enabling document and did not commit the Council or any other body to funding any of the actions identified.

RESOLVED: That the Board approves the Playing Pitch Strategy Update Report 2024, including the updated site action plan. This is based upon consultation undertaken by sports provision consultants Knight Kavanagh & Page in 2024.

Executive Director
Environment &
Regeneration

CLIMATE CHANGE PORTFOLIO

N.B. Councillor Wright declared a Disclosable Other Interest in the following item of business as she is a member of Halton Housing Trust Board. Councillor Harris declared a Disclosable Other Interest in the following item of business as a tenant of Halton Housing Trust.

EXB44 HALTON HOUSING ANNUAL REPORT

The Board received the Halton Housing (HH) Annual Report, which provided an update on their activities since the last report to Executive Board.

The Chair welcomed Sam Scott, Group Chief Executive and colleague Debbie Trust Dickinson, who jointly presented the report to the Board – *Annual Report to HBC Executive Board, October 2024.*

The report outlined the key achievements over the past year which included:

- implementation of a new Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, customer portal and a Customer Support Hub;
- introduction of a central complaint handling team;
- the Listen, Learn, Act tracker had been implemented, capturing learning from complaints and customer feedback surveys;
- repairs service delivery is improving, the number of jobs completed in target time had increased and average repair wait times had reduced;
- continued delivery of the development programme as set out in the three-year plan. In total, 309 homes (44% of the programme) had been delivered and 66 homes (9% of the programme) were currently on site.

Following a discussion the Board requested that the following be considered by Halton Housing:

- installation of sprinkler systems be considered as part

- of the retro fit programme of works or new builds;
- Neighbourhood Managers make contact with their Ward Councillors;
- Halton Housing magazine which is distributed to tenants should be shared with all Councillors;
- The presentation to be circulated to all Councillors; and
- Halton Housing representatives to attend a future meeting of the relevant Council Policy and Performance Board.

RESOLVED: That the Board thanked Halton Housing for the presentation and noted the report.

EXB45 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 paragraphs 1 and 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PORTFOLIO

EXB46 DIRECT AWARD OF THE HALTON 0-19 (+25 SEND) HEALTHY CHILD PROGRAMME, PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE CONTRACT 2025 - KEY DECISION

The Board considered a report of the Director of Public Health, which sought approval to proceed with a procurement process to grant a direct award to Bridgewater Community Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (Bridgewater) for the delivery of 0-19 (+25 SEND) Healthy Child Programme (0-19 HCP) for the period 1 April 2025 – 31 March 2030, with the option of 2 x plus 1-year, pre-determined extension periods up to 31 March 2032.

Reason(s) for Decision

The justification to use the Provider Selection Regime Process C to direct award to Bridgewater was set out in the report.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

The alternative option is to undertake a full competitive tender exercise. This was rejected for the reasons mentioned in section 10.

Implementation Date

It is intended that the process to provide a direct award would be undertaken following Board approval, with the new contract to commence on 1 April 2025.

RESOLVED: That the Board

- 1) note the Local Authority's statutory responsibility for commissioning Public Health services for children and young people aged 0 to 19 years (Health and Social Care Act 2012); and
- 2) approves the use of the new procurement regime for selecting providers of healthcare services in England: The Provider Selection Regime (PSR) to direct award to Bridgewater.

Director of Public Health

EXB47 CHILDREN'S SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMME FUNDING - WORKFORCE STABILISATION - KEY DECISION

The report considered a report of the Executive

Director – Children’s Services which provided an update on the progress to develop a programme around the stabilisation and redesign of Children’s Social Care following the Inspection Local Authority Children’s Service in May 2024 and subsequent report in July. The aim of the redesign was to develop and implement transformation of the system in a sustainable manner.

A detailed business case around each element of the programme funding request was presented and the report sought Board approval to proceed with the requested investment.

Reason(s) for Decision

The decision to take this approach is based on:

1. Supporting the ambitions of the Corporate Plan;
2. Delivering the ambitions and vision of the Children & Young Peoples plan;
3. Transforming the Children’s Services system to an early intervention and prevention system whilst addressing the financial sustainability of the local system;
4. Doing the right things for the children and families at Halton; and
5. And ensuring the right support is available at the right time.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

Work has already begun through the transformation programme to stabilise and transform Children’s Services. It had identified requirements and work is in progress.

The pace and impact is severely hampered due to time, cost and resource constraints across the Council, not just in Children’s Services.

Progress was being made but not at the scale and pace required to improve services in the manner and pace required by the inspecting bodies.

It was decided early on that to not invest is not an option due to the potential additional impacts/ramifications financially, operationally and reputationally for the Council, and most of all the pace and change needed for the children, young people and their families of Halton.

Implementation Date

Should approval be given on by the Executive Board on 24th

October 2024 then the Implementation programme will commence following the completion of the call-in period, from 1st November 2024.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) Council be asked to approve the investment as defined in the report for improvement programme funding; and
- 2) delegated authority to approve the expenditure of the programme budget is given to the Executive Director of Children's Services, in consultation with the lead Member for Children and Young People.

Executive Director
of Children's
Services

MINUTES ISSUED: 30 October 2024

CALL-IN: 6 November 2024 at 5.00 pm.

Any matter decided by the Executive Board may be called in no later than 5.00pm on 6 November 2024.

Meeting ended at 3.37 p.m.