

EXECUTIVE BOARD

At a meeting of the Executive Board on Thursday, 14 November 2024 in The Boardroom, Municipal Building

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

Apologies for Absence: Councillor P. Nolan

Absence declared on Council business: None

Officers present: G. Cook, S. Young, M. Reaney, E. Dawson, G. Ferguson, W. Rourke, D. Nolan and B. Holmes

Also in attendance: Councillors C. Loftus, K. Loftus and Philbin

ITEMS DEALT WITH UNDER POWERS AND DUTIES EXERCISABLE BY THE BOARD

	<i>Action</i>
EXB48 MINUTES	
The Minutes of the meeting held on 24 October 2024 were taken as read and signed as a correct record.	
LEADER'S PORTFOLIO	
EXB49 URGENT DECISIONS	
The Board received a report from the Chief Executive, which provided information on an urgent decision 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.	
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

EXB50 TAXI LICENSING MATTER

The Board considered a report of the Director of Legal and Democratic Services which provided details on amendments to the current taxi licensing policy/conditions.

Director, Legal
and Democratic
Services

The amendments set out in Appendix 1 had been submitted by the Taxi trade following a consultation exercise. The Regulatory Committee had previously considered the proposed changes and had recommended the position set out in Section 2 of the report.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the Vehicle Age Policy is to be amended to remove the minimum age requirement from 5 years to 7 for a standard vehicle and maximum from 10 to 12 years and keep the minimum age of 13 years for a wheelchair accessible vehicle, whilst increasing the maximum to 18 years. (maintaining the same testing conditions as two per year);
- 2) the proposal for card readers to become mandatory be rejected (so no change in conditions);
- 3) the proposal to change the colour of purpose-built wheelchair vehicles be rejected (so no change in conditions);
- 4) the proposal to amend the condition for a spare wheel/space saver to be adopted (to remove the current policy requirement for a space saver/spare wheel in the vehicle, with the implication that the manufacturers specifications apply);
- 5) the proposal to remove the fire extinguisher be rejected (so no change in conditions); and
- 6) the age of Electric Vehicles to remain the same as the current age policy.

EXB51 TREASURY MANAGEMENT 2024-25 HALF YEAR UPDATE

The Board considered a report from the Director of Finance, which presented the Treasury Management Half Year Report as at 30 September 2024.

Director of
Finance

These reports updated Members on the activities undertaken on the money market during the first half of the financial year to 30 September 2024, as required by the Treasury Management Policy.

The report provided supporting information on the economic outlook, interest rate forecast, short term borrowing rates, longer term borrowing rates, borrowing and investments, budget monitoring, new long term borrowing, policy guidelines and treasury management indicators. It was noted that no debt rescheduling had been undertaken during the quarter.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

EXB52 2024/25 SPENDING AS AT 30 SEPTEMBER 2024

The Board received a report from the Director of Finance, advising of the Council's overall revenue and capital net spending position as at 30 September 2024, together with a 2024/25 forecast outturn position.

Director of
Finance

Appendix 1 presented a summary of spending against the operational revenue budget up to 30 September 2024 and Appendix 2 provided detailed figures for each individual Department. It was reported that in overall terms the net Council spend as at 30 September 2024 would be over the approved budget by £8.864m. The outturn forecast for the year estimates that net spending would be over budget by £20.642m if no corrective action was taken. Appendix 3 presented the Capital Programme as at 30 September 2024, highlighting the schemes which had been revised. Appendix 4 detailed the Council approved savings covering 2024/25 and 2025/26, together with information on progress to date.

It was clear that Council reserves would not be sufficient to meet this pressure, and urgent corrective action should be taken as soon as possible across all Council services to identify spend reductions. It was recommended that the Council submit an application for the Government Exceptional Financial Support, to assist with funding the forecast overspend and future budget setting.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) all spending continue to be limited to only absolutely essential items;

- 2) Executive Directors identify reductions to their directorate forecast outturn net spend position and urgently implement them;
- 3) Council be asked to agree to submit an application for Exceptional Finance Support to cover the deficit position for the year, as recommended within the Medium Term Financial Strategy report elsewhere on the agenda; and
- 4) future reports be submitted for information to all Council Boards.

EXB53 MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 25/26 - 28/29 KEY DECISION

The Board considered a report from the Director of Finance, which presented the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for the period 2025/26 to 2028/29.

Director of Finance

The MTFS sets out a three-year projection of the Council's resources and spending and was based on information that was currently available. The MTFS financial year sat outside the period of time covered by the most recent Public Sector Spending Review, published in October 2021. The Chancellor had commissioned a new Spending Review which was intended to set Government departmental limits over a three-year period. The Review was set to conclude in Spring 2025, which would not be in time to inform 2025/26 budgets. Details of the 2025/26 Local Government Finance Settlement are expected to be released in December 2024 on a provisional basis with a final settlement expected in January 2025.

The Board was advised that the uncertainty regarding 2025/26 financial resources meant the financial information included within the MTFS was based on a large number of assumptions and best estimates. The financial forecast would be updated as and when further information was known. Appendix 1 therefore detailed the MTFS from 2025/26 – 2028/29 using a prudent estimate of the financial conditions over the course of the next four years. Appendix 2 presented the Reserves and Balances Strategy and Appendix 3 outlined Approved Budget Savings for 2025/26.

Reason for Decision

To seek approval for the Council's MTFS for 2025/26 to 2028/29.

Alternative options considered and rejected

The alternative option of not maintaining a MTFS has been considered. However, this would not follow good financial management practice, as the MTFS is a key element in informing the Council's financial planning and budget setting processes.

Implementation date

The MTFS 2025/26 to 2028/29 will be implemented from 1 April 2025.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the Medium Term Financial Strategy be approved;
- 2) the 2025/26 base budget be prepared on the basis of the underlying assumptions set out in the Strategy;
- 3) the Reserves and Balances Strategy be approved;
- 4) the award of Council Tax Support for 2025/26 remains at the 2024/25 level of 21.55%; and
- 5) Council approve the submission of an application to Government for Exceptional Finance Support.

EXB54 DETERMINATION OF COUNCIL TAX BASE 2025/26 - KEY DECISION

The Board considered a report of the Director of Finance, on the requirement for the Council to determine the Council Tax Base for its area and the Council Tax Base for each of the Parishes.

Director of Finance

The Council Tax Base was the measure used for calculating Council Tax and was used by both the billing authority (the Council) and the major precepting authorities (Cheshire Fire Authority, Cheshire Police and Crime Commissioner and the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority), in the calculation of their Council Tax requirements. It was arrived at in accordance with a prescribed formula which represented the estimated full year number of chargeable dwellings in the Borough expressed in terms of the equivalent Band 'D' dwellings.

Taking account of all the relevant information and applying a 97% collection rate, the calculation for 2025/26 gave a base figure of 36,936 for the Borough as a whole.

The Council Tax Base figure for each of the Parishes was noted.

Reason for Decision

To seek approval for the Council Tax Base for the Borough and also the Council Tax Base for each of the Parishes.

Alternative options considered and rejected

The Council is required to determine annually the Council Tax Base and to notify the Cheshire Fire Authority, the Cheshire Police & Crime Commissioner, Liverpool City Region Combined Authority, the Environment Agency and Parish Councils.

Implementation date

The Council Tax Base 2025/26 will be implemented from 1 April 2025.

RESOLVED: That Council be recommended to approve:

- 1) setting the 2025/26 Council Tax Base at 36,936 for the Borough and that the Cheshire Fire Authority, the Cheshire Police and Crime Commissioner, Liverpool City Region Combined Authority and the Environment Agency be so notified; and
- 2) setting the Council Tax Base for each of the Parishes as follows:

Parish	Tax Base
Hale	674
Halebank	546
Daresbury	301
Moore	344
Preston Brook	373
Sandymoor	1,645

EXB55 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.

CORPORATE SERVICES

EXB56 DISPOSAL OF LAND TO THE REAR OF GUSSION TRANSPORT AT DITTON ROAD WIDNES

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director Environment and Regeneration, which sought approval for the disposal of land to the rear of Gussion Transport, Ditton Road, Widnes.

Executive Director
Environment &
Regeneration

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the disposal of the freehold interest in land to the rear of Gussion Transport, Ditton Road, Widnes is approved on the terms reported in 3.4;
- 2) authorises the Director of Economy, Enterprise and Property, to arrange for all required documentation for the transactions to be completed to the satisfaction of the Director Legal and Democratic Services, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services; and

- 3) delegated authority be given to the Executive Director Environment and Regeneration, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services, to undertake further negotiations with the company to seek reasonable recompense for the preceding period when the company occupied the site.

EXB57 LEGAL SERVICES TRANSFORMATION REPORT - KEY DECISION

The Board considered a report of the Director Legal and Democratic Services, which outlined a Transformation Report that presented the most cost effective way in which to deliver Legal Services across the Council and options to alternate operating models.

Director, Legal and Democratic Services

Reason for Decision

Legal Services had gone through several years of overspend particularly in respect of Social Care (Children and Adult). The Transformation Report considered the most cost effective way in which to deliver Legal Services across the Council and options for alternate models.

Alternative options considered and rejected

The report provided three options and option three was recommended as the most effective means of delivery.

Implementation date

March 2025.

RESOLVED: That the Board

- 1) adopts Option Three within the Legal Services Transformation Report:

Interim structure with enhanced efficiency and effectiveness in service delivery moving towards consideration of viability around options of:

- Outsourcing;
 - Formation of a collaboration/shared service with another Local Authority;
 - Wholly owned subsidiary Legal Company.
- 2) Council be requested to approve the necessary funding set out in paragraph 5 of the report.

COMMUNITY SAFETY PORTFOLIO

EXB58 REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT SUPPORT CONTRACT FORWARD PROCUREMENT ARRANGEMENTS - KEY DECISION

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director Environment and Regeneration, which sought approval for the award of a contract for the re-settlement support contract.

Executive Director
Environment &
Regeneration

Reason for Decision

To provide consistency in support for refugees arriving in Halton. The contract incurs expenditure and has a significant impact on both Halton's new and established communities. The integration of new cohorts and diverse communities had the potential to generate community tensions, the resettlement support is an approach to mitigate this.

Alternative options considered and rejected

The alternative would be to conduct an options appraisal to identify preferred options and progress appropriate procurement arrangements however, there is no capacity available currently to support a procurement process within timescales before the expiry date.

Implementation date

1 April 2025 to 31 March 2027.

RESOLVED: That the Board approve a VEAT (Voluntary Ex-ante Transparency) notice to enable the Council to directly award a two-year contract to the incumbent provider for the re-settlement support to ensure continuity of care in compliance with Procurement Standing Order 1.5.8.

ADULT SOCIAL CARE PORTFOLIO

EXB59 DOMICILIARY CARE SERVICE TENDER: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONTRACT AWARD - KEY DECISION

The Board considered a report of the Executive Director Adult Services, which sought approval to award contracts to providers for the provision of a Domiciliary Care Service across Halton.

Executive Director
of Adult Services

Reason for Decision

The report relates to a service which is statutorily required. The value of the contract is above £5m. The decision impacts on all wards and communities within the Borough.

Alternative options considered and rejected

There are no alternative options. The Council must award contracts to providers for the supply of a Domiciliary Care Service in compliance with its regulatory duties, to ensure continuity of service once the current contract ceases on 1 April 2025.

Implementation date

The proposed contract will be for an initial five years commencing 7 April 2025 until 6 April 2030 with the option to extend by 2 x 12 month periods, 7 April 2030 until 6 April 2031 and 7 April 2031 until 6 April 2032.

RESOLVED: That

- 1) the report be noted;
- 2) the Board approves the recommendations for the award of contracts in relation to the provision of a Domiciliary Care Service across Halton, as per section 3.11 of this report; and
- 3) the Board approves an extension to the current contract as per section 3.12 and 3.13 of the report.

MINUTES ISSUED: 19 November 2024

CALL-IN: 26 November 2024 at 5.00 pm.

Any matter decided by the Executive Board may be called in no later than 5.00pm on 19 November 2024.

Meeting ended at 3.17 p.m.